2010 Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh
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How to use this report

This report is intended to help you define questions and identify areas where you need more information about the Pittsburgh Public Schools and/or the city’s charter schools. Here are some ways that you can use the information presented here, as a parent or guardian and/or a concerned citizen.

1. If you have a child in school, ask your principal or a teacher for more information about the data reported here. You might ask:
   - How do you monitor student achievement data for the school?
   - How much did my child’s grade grow in achievement according to PVAAS last year? Did all students at all achievement levels (Advanced, Proficient, Basic, or Below Basic) make at least a year’s worth of growth? (PVAAS is the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System: see page 11.)
   - What strategies are in place to make sure that students make at least a year’s worth of growth?
   - What extra supports are available to children in areas where they struggle academically?
   - What can be done to increase student attendance?
   - How does the school keep students on track for the Pittsburgh Promise?
   - Which students have access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses?
   - What kinds of supports are available for students to help them plan for post-secondary education and training?
   - How can we encourage our students to participate in more academic competitions, service projects, community leadership opportunities, and arts events and competitions? Which students have access to information about these opportunities?
   - What parent organization can I join to be more involved in the school? (If the school doesn’t have one, then start one!)

2. If you work for a community organization, consider how you can contribute to the success of a school. Ask the principal or a teacher about the school’s overall goals and its plans to raise student achievement. Compare the plan to the information in the report. Does the plan appear to address school needs? Are there gaps that your organization could fill?

3. Connect with a school near you to find opportunities to mentor, tutor, or volunteer in other ways.

4. Discuss the report with your school board representative, and ask about ways that the district’s leadership is working to address student achievement.

Call A+ Schools at 412-697-1298 if you need help interpreting this report, to discuss school improvement strategies, or to request a presenter or facilitator for a parent or community meeting.

Mailed copies of the report include a postage-paid feedback form which you can use to comment on any aspect of the report. If your copy does not include a feedback form and you would like to share your views, please contact us at 412-697-1298 or info@aplusschools.org. If you find this report valuable, please let us know! Your interest will help us raise resources to continue its publication.
Introduction

What do you need to know about Pittsburgh’s schools—the ones your children attend, the ones in your neighborhood or near your workplace, the schools in our city?

Each year, A+ Schools publishes a Report to the Community with information about Pittsburgh’s public schools. From the responses of participants at our presentations and from feedback forms, we know that the report has both answered questions for readers and prompted new questions. What do we know? What do we need to know? Now that we know, what are we going to do about it?

One of the most challenging questions is this: why do students have such different experiences and outcomes, sometimes even within the same school? Our overarching concern for equity—in particular, the racial achievement gap—has led us to focus on this issue, and to ask further questions as we search for solutions. How well do schools and the district respond to the unique strengths and needs of each student? Are there structural inequities? How might the district reallocate resources and change policies to support better outcomes for all students?

To address these questions, we’ve developed a complementary process for gathering and analyzing data, known as School Works. Last year, trained School Works volunteers interviewed high school and middle school principals in the Pittsburgh Public Schools about available resources and opportunities for their students. A+ Schools analyzed the compiled information. Through public discussions and polling, a broad group of city residents reviewed the issues and established priorities. (See page 78 for more information about the issues and priorities.)

School Works is an ongoing process that both informs and is informed by the Report to the Community. As the district moves forward with its reform agenda, A+ Schools will continue to invite community participation in initiatives such as School Works, and to publish accessible school and district data in the report.

The report continues to evolve as we select current, relevant information. This year, we’ve made changes that reflect the district’s changing demographics. Previous reports have shown achievement information for the state test, the PSSA, for students who are black, white, and “other”—multi-ethnic, Asian, or Hispanic. In response to readers’ requests, we now report the “other” subgroups separately, when the number of students in that subgroup meets the reporting threshold of 10. For example, a school where 11 Asian fifth graders took PSSA tests now shows bar graphs for Asian students instead of grouping them within “other.” (See box for more information on the PSSA.)

Student enrollment information also reflects this change.

For district high schools and Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12 (the only 6-12 school with a full complement of grades), we no longer report “seniors planning to attend college” because such information doesn’t truly reflect college preparation. (At this time, the district doesn’t track graduates’ college acceptances, which we would prefer to publish.)

The comparison charts—which show how each school compares to district averages on reported indicators, and how schools were rated by the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System—have been moved to the front (the section begins on page 11). The first set of charts features a new indicator, enrollment gain or loss, which may raise questions about changing demographics in the city and the effects of school choice.

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What is the PSSA?

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, or PSSA, is the state test. Testing takes place from late winter through spring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content area</th>
<th>Grades tested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; Math</td>
<td>3-8, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4, 8, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>5, 8, 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scores are rated “Advanced” (above grade level), “Proficient” (satisfactory), “Basic” (unsatisfactory, but some answers were correct), or “Below Basic” (the student showed little or no understanding of the questions or didn’t try to answer them).

A small number of students who receive special education services take an alternate test.
Once again, all of the charter schools within the city have been included in this report. [Charter schools are free, public schools operated independently of school districts.] The charter schools section begins immediately after district high schools. We thank the schools that provided information.

Again this year, the report includes an executive summary which had been published separately in the past. The executive summary, beginning on page 4, is an analysis of some aspects of the reported data and an examination of trends.

The report also contains:
- Data about each school for the 2009-10 school year
- Comparisons of each school to district averages
- Achievement information: how each school measures up to the state standard, “proficiency” on PSSA tests, and whether proficiency levels are increasing or decreasing over time
- Information about each level (elementary, K-8, middle, 6-12, and high) on the cover page of each section, along with comparable state-level data

Information that reflects the current year as a service to readers includes:
- School names, names of principals/administrators, and contact information
- Special education services by school
- “English as a Second Language” program sites [new in this report]

Vann and Rooney schools have been closed, and therefore haven’t been included in the report. Other changes that took place in the current school year aren’t reflected here, however, because the report is based on the 2009-10 school year. Those changes include:
- Northview, previously an elementary school, is now a preK-8. Northview appears in the elementary section with its current name.
- Weil, previously a preK-8, is now an elementary school. Weil appears in the K-8 section with its current name.

Once again, we didn’t include any information about the district’s special education centers due to the lack of meaningful achievement indicators for groups of students with diverse special needs. (Test scores and proficiency levels that we report for each school include all students who took the tests, regardless of special education status.)

The indicators of school progress were originally selected by an A+ Schools’ committee headed by Dr. Alan Lesgold, dean of the School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. These indicators are based on the best data currently available from schools. We thank the Pittsburgh Public Schools for its cooperation in making data available to A+ Schools.

**No Child Left Behind**

The primary rating of schools today is by their “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) under federal “No Child Left Behind” guidelines, which indicates whether or not the overall performance of students in the school and the performance of various subgroups are meeting federal goals. We believe this one-dimensional “grade” is inadequate. AYP relies almost solely on PSSA results in reading and math. Although it’s based on two years of test scores, AYP is not the true measure of progress its name suggests because it fails to take into account where a school started. One school not making AYP may have made great progress, while a school surpassing the AYP threshold may be stagnating. Because our goal is to help identify educational effectiveness, and because we understand that is a complex matter, there is no reference here to a school’s AYP status.

**Reporting by race and family income**

Readers may wonder why we report some test results by students’ race and family income, when research has shown that the quality of teaching is the most important factor in whether or not a student succeeds. We draw these comparisons for two reasons. First, as is the case nationally, Pittsburgh has a large achievement gap between African-American and white students and between students from low-income families and other students. Yet the report shows that in some schools, African-American students and students from low-income families do better than city averages. Second, recent initiatives and interventions instituted by Superintendent Mark Roosevelt and the Pittsburgh Board of Education are designed to close the race and income achievement gaps and to raise achievement for students overall. Over time, we hope readers will be able to use information

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from these reports to judge for themselves whether or not these strategies are working.

Interpreting the report

Much of this report is based on test scores. However, we urge readers to approach test scores with caution. We report test results for selected grade levels, not for every grade in a school. Regardless of which tests or student groups we report on, test results may not adequately represent students’ achievement, due to personal factors such as students’ test anxiety, and/or technical reasons for score fluctuations including changes in the test itself.

This report isn’t a substitute for visiting schools and observing in classrooms. Many aspects of student learning and school quality can’t be translated into numbers. We urge readers to consider this report as a tool for framing further questions as they continue to seek information about the quality of our schools.

See pages 122 through 124 for more information about any indicator.

Executive summary

This executive summary provides an overall analysis of trends across public schools in Pittsburgh, based on data in this and previous A+ Schools reports. While this summary does not address every indicator, we hope it will help readers who want to take a closer look at progress.

This summary seeks to address the following questions.

- What are the characteristics of the district and its schools?
- Compared to past years, what has been the trend in academic achievement as measured by PSSA scores?
- What progress has been made in reducing the racial achievement gap?
- To what extent are students making growth as measured by PVAAS?
- To what extent are high school students being prepared for post-secondary education and training?

Findings for the 2010 Report to the Community

Characteristics of the district and its schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools snapshot

Enrollment

What do the numbers for enrollment, attendance, and stability show?

The table on page 5 describes the general student population within each type of school configuration in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). The stability rate tells us what percentage of a student body remained in a school for an entire school year, and the student attendance rate tells us how many students attended school on an average day. Not surprisingly, our analysis shows that schools with higher PSSA achievement had greater stability and higher attendance rates. What may
surprise readers is our finding that schools with higher percentages of students who receive free or reduced lunch generally have smaller populations (Pearson correlation, p<.01).

The chart to the right shows that the district experienced its greatest decline in enrollment between 2006-07 and 2007-08, with a loss of over 3,000 students. Since then, K-5 enrollment has risen slightly while other levels have continued to decline slowly. (Source: PDE.)

### Academic achievement as measured by the PSSA

**PPS compared to PA**

We looked at achievement trends for all PPS students and all students in Pennsylvania, from 2006-07 to 2009-10, in Reading, Math and Writing. The chart on page 6 shows:

- For grades 3-5 and 6-8, PPS made the same or greater gains than the state’s gains in all subjects.
- For grade 11, PPS declined in all subjects. While the state also declined in Writing during the same time period, it gained in Math and Reading.

When we looked at the achievement of black students in PPS and statewide, we found:

- Compared to all PPS students, black PPS students made greater gains.

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- Black students in the state made even greater gains than black PPS students, except in grades 3-5 Writing. Differences were most apparent at the high school level.
- The gap between black PPS students and white students in the state has narrowed. However, progress has been extremely slow.

PPS achievement by grade-level configuration

We looked at achievement by grade-level configuration—for example, how grades 3-5 in elementary schools performed compared to grades 3-5 in K-8 schools. The chart below shows that elementary, middle, and grades 6-8 in 6-12s are outperforming K-8 schools. (However, it should be noted that over time, K-8s have made greater progress than elementary and middle schools—see the “PVAAS” section on page 9).

Black achievement and the black/white achievement gap

District black students compared to district white students

The chart on page 7 shows the achievement gap for each grade-level configuration. This chart shows that the gap is smallest in middle schools and largest in high schools. This chart does not include 6-12 schools because there are too few schools at that grade-level.

Continued on page 8
Percentage of black Proficient/Advanced students compared to white Proficient/Advanced students at each grade-level configuration in 2009-10

Percentage points by which achievement gap has narrowed: State compared to PPS from 2007 to 2010
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grade-level configuration to note an overall trend.

Like last year, we are again reporting whether or not the black/white achievement gap narrowed at each grade level [the second chart on page 7].

District black students compared to PA white students
This year, we also include a look at the achievement gap across the district by comparing Proficient/Advanced white students and Proficient/Advanced black students. The charts below show the gap over time, with state trends as a comparison. The information represents all tested grade levels for all students across the district for each year from 2006-07 to 2009-10.

These charts show:

- The gap has narrowed in both Reading and Math.
- Black student achievement has increased.
- In PPS, the percentage of white students who were Proficient/Advanced in Reading declined slightly from 2009 to 2010, and the percentage of white students who were Proficient/Advanced in Math declined slightly from 2008 to 2009. These slight decreases contributed to a narrowing of the gap.
- The state has made greater progress than PPS in closing the gap.

Black students in schools compared to white students in the district
When we looked at individual schools, we saw that some have much smaller achievement gaps than others. The table at the top of page 9 shows the number of schools in each grade-level configuration with gaps of less than 10 percentage points and greater than 50 percentage points between Proficient/Advanced black students at the school and Proficient/Advanced white students across the same grade-level configuration. (Please note that here we compared students by grade-level configuration, unlike in the comparison charts, where we compared students by grade or grade span.) This table shows that at least a few schools at each grade-level configuration have gaps of less than 10 percentage points. It also shows that at some schools, the gap is quite wide. In our further analysis, we noted that 11th grade black students in one PPS school outperformed the district average for white students in Reading, and black students in one elementary school outperformed the similar average in Math.

PSSA Reading: Black/white gap in % Proficient and Advanced

![Graph showing PSSA Reading: Black/white gap in % Proficient and Advanced](image)

PSSA Math: Black/white gap in % Proficient and Advanced

![Graph showing PSSA Math: Black/white gap in % Proficient and Advanced](image)
Where are more black students achieving?

**Magnet schools.** As we found last year, magnet schools (whole-school magnets) again had much higher percentages of Proficient/Advanced students overall, as well as much higher percentages of Proficient/Advanced low-income and black students. Overall, compared to black students in neighborhood schools with similar demographics, black students who attended magnet schools were significantly more likely to be Proficient/Advanced (p<.01 in linear regressions on black Proficient/Advanced students, taking into account magnet school, percent free/reduced lunch, and percent of black students in the school). Neighborhood schools that also contained magnets, however, did not have percentages of Proficient/Advanced students that were significantly different from other neighborhood schools.

**Charter schools.** Some charter schools also show smaller achievement gaps. Three charter schools have percentages of black Proficient/Advanced students that are less than 10 percentage points from the district average for white students for Reading and/or Math.

In fact, compared to PPS, charter schools generally have higher percentages of black students who are Proficient/Advanced in both Reading and Math (significantly higher for Reading). The comparison charts on pages 12 through 16 demonstrate that every charter school had percentages of black Proficient/Advanced students that were one standard deviation or more above similar districtwide percentages in Reading and/or Math.

Where are fewer black students achieving?

**High schools.** While scores for most schools have increased over time, high school scores have declined, and high schools have the largest achievement gaps in the district.

**Growth as measured by PVAAS**

While changes in percentages of Proficient/Advanced students show school and district-level change from year to year and
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provide important points for comparison, those changes do not show whether or not students have improved over time. PVAAS does provide this information by measuring the growth of groups of students from one year to the next. In the table on page 9, we show the percentage of schools at each grade-level configuration where students have demonstrated growth in Reading and Math according to their three-year-average PVAAS results. (Note: We report PVAAS for grades 4-8 only. 6-12 schools do not have three-year averages and so are not included here.)

The table indicates that more 6th-8th graders in K-8s showed growth than did their middle school counterparts. In our further analysis of PVAAS, we found that the majority of tested grades and subjects showed growth from 2009 to 2010. One elementary school has a three-year average of no growth in Reading and Math. Differences in PVAAS growth could not be explained by any of the variables in our analysis: demographics, stability, attendance, or school type.

Postsecondary readiness

We looked at four indicators to describe post-secondary readiness: graduation rate, SAT participation, percentage of students qualifying for the Pittsburgh Promise by grade point average, and percentage of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

- In 2008-09, the district graduation rate was 82.4%.
- 61% of the district’s seniors took the SAT. The average SAT combined score was 913, compared to the state average of 993.
- 55% of the district’s seniors earned grade point averages that qualified them for the Pittsburgh Promise (2.5). However, as the chart above shows, there is a large disparity between black and white students. More than 60% of white students were eligible for the Promise in every high school and CAPA 6-12 where white students attended. At least 60% of black students were eligible for the Promise in only one school.
- Districtwide, 12% of students enrolled in one or more AP course. However, in six of the district’s nine high schools, less than 10% of students enrolled in at least one AP course. Furthermore, 10% of black students enrolled in at least one AP course in only one 9-12 or 6-12 school.

Closing

Overall, we see progress across the Pittsburgh Public School district. We have a growing set of examples of district and charter schools that are educating students to high levels—we need to learn from all of them. We congratulate students, teachers, principals, families, and community service providers for the hard work that has produced great results.

There is much more work to be done to make sure that for every child, in every school, school works, regardless of family background or circumstances. The stubborn racial achievement gap continues to deserve our urgent attention—especially in our high schools. Gains made in earlier grades are disappearing in high schools, thus threatening our youths’ future prospects for achieving the Pittsburgh Promise; accessing college and career training; and for becoming thriving, independent members of our community. We hope this report motivates readers to act. Our children need your help to secure prosperous futures for themselves and our city. Please consider what you can do, by becoming a tutor, a 6th grade mentor, a classroom volunteer, an investor, and/or an advocate for change. Visit our Web site at www.aplusschools.org for more information on how you can get involved.