Executive summary 2020

This executive summary provides data and an analysis of trends across Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), based on data in this and previous A+ Schools reports. Our goal is to provide readers with a picture of the district overall, and also to point to how the system is designed to get its current outcomes. Over this past year, many people have heard the term "systemic racism" in reference to social institutions. Our schools and districts also are structured in ways that privilege some students and disadvantage others. We hope to help readers understand the systemic issues that lead to unequal outcomes for children—and to motivate you to take action. You can use this summary as a starting point for conversations with your school board member, school leader, and other concerned community members. Working together, we can support schools to improve year over year.

With systemic inequity as our lens, this summary includes discussions of:

- Student and teacher demographics, and enrollment trends
- Chronic absence (missing 10% or more of the school year)
- Student suspensions
- "Gifted" identification
- Advanced Placement course taking
- School trends on state tests and exams
- Graduation rate

We also highlight **bright spots** across the district—schools and programs that are getting better outcomes by doing something in a different way. For links to research, see "References/For more information" on page 36.

What are the PSSA tests and Keystone exams?

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, or PSSA, is the state test for 3rd through 8th graders. Testing takes place in the spring.

PSSA content area	Grades tested
English Language Arts (ELA) & Math	3-8
Science	4, 8

The **Keystones** are state end-of-course exams, given at various times throughout the school year in Algebra I, Literature, and Biology. Students may take the exams more than once.

Scores for both PSSA tests and Keystone exams are rated "Advanced" (above grade level), "Proficient" (at grade level), "Basic" (not consistently at grade level), or "Below Basic" (below grade level).

A small number of students who receive special education services take an alternate test.

Please note: the state did not administer the PSSA or the Keystone in 2020.

Key takeaways

The system is designed to get the outcomes it gets.

- The current gifted identification process privileges higher socioeconomic status and White students, leading to disparities in access to more rigorous courses in high school.

- Black students have higher rates of suspension and chronic absence as early as kindergarten. The disparate treatment of Black students contributes to gaps in student achievement that are seen in 3rd grade (the first year of state testing) and beyond.

- Entrance requirements at PPS selective magnet schools create schools with lower rates of students living in poverty and with disabilities and higher numbers of students who do not need extra supports or interventions (see page 112 for an in-depth discussion).

- Most PPS students are Black. Most PPS teachers are White. Research shows that Black students who have at least one Black teacher by 3rd grade are more likely to attend college.

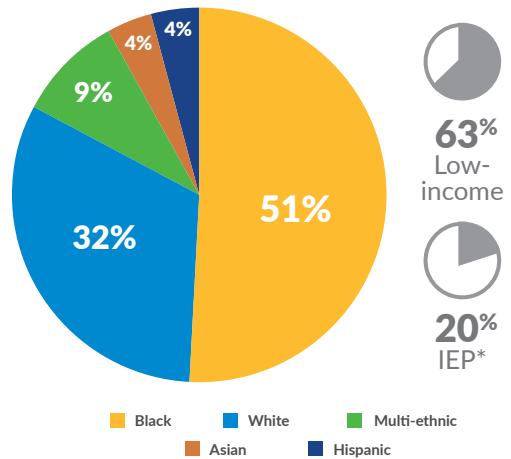Bright spots exist within Pittsburgh to show the way.

- By the time schools closed on March 13, no students had been chronically absent at Manchester Academic Charter School and Schiller 6-8.

- Dilworth's "push-in" gifted model allows access to gifted supports for a greater number of students, with test scores reflecting greater success for all students.

- See the "Rising up" section in this report, beginning on page 6, and ourschoolspittsburgh.org, for more stories of schools that are growing student achievement and addressing inequities.
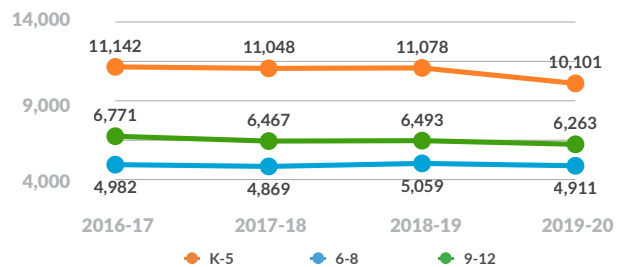
Enrollment

We report on district demographics to look at who is being educated in our schools, and changes in the overall enrollment over time to provide one data point for the state of the district's "health." Factors contributing to enrollment include local birth rate, availability of affordable housing, school options, and school quality (as determined by parent, teacher, and student perceptions; school achievement outcomes; and offerings).

In the past four years, K-12 enrollment in PPS has declined from 22,895 in 2016-17 to 21,275, a drop of 7%. From 2017 to 2019, the average per pupil spending for students in PPS rose from $24,433.44 to $26,909.02, a 10% increase.

2019-20 District enrollment by race/ethnicity

- 51% Black
- 32% White
- 9% Multi-ethnic
- 4% Asian
- 4% Hispanic

63% Low-income

20% IEP*

Enrollment change by grade level

|	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
K-5	11,142	11,048	11,078	10,101
9-12	6,771	6,467	6,493	6,263
6-8	4,982	4,869	5,059	4,911

Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special education, excluding students identified as "gifted"

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Teacher demographics

According to a 2018 report by Research for Action, only 5.6% of Pennsylvania's teachers were people of color in 2016-17. Compared to state averages, Pittsburgh has higher rates of teachers of color (see graph), yet there is still a significant lack of representation compared to student demographics. Research has shown the importance of Black teachers for Black students. One large-scale study showed that **Black students who'd had just one Black teacher by 3rd grade were 13% more likely to enroll in college—and those who'd had two were 32% more likely to enroll**.

PPS student and teacher demographics
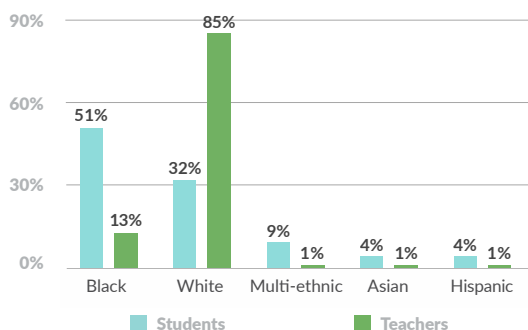
☀ **Bright spot:** The District's "Para to Teacher" program is attempting to increase the number of teachers of color by supporting current paraprofessionals to get the additional education they need to become certified teachers.
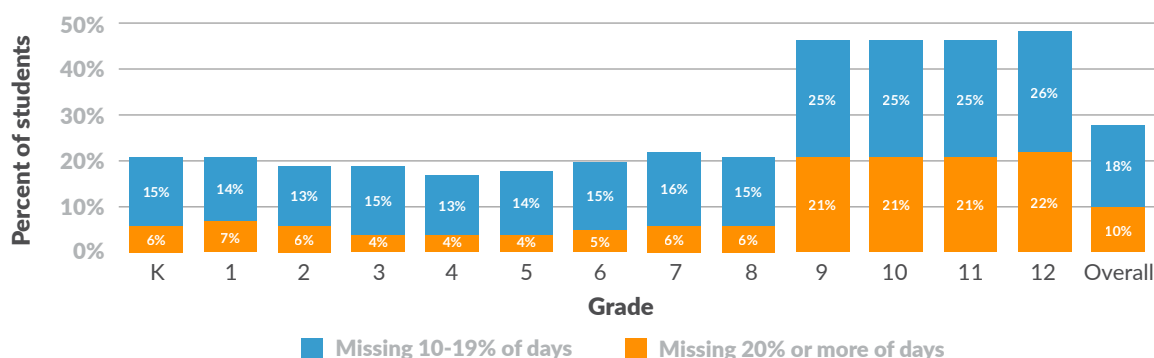
Chronic absence

Chronic absence is defined by Attendance Works as missing 10% or more of school days for any reason (excused and unexcused absences). **This equates to only 2 days a month during the school year**. **Chronic absence in kindergarten impedes a child's ability to master reading by the end of 3rd grade**. Moreover, absenteeism is highly predictive of whether a student will graduate or not, with one study showing that a student is **7.4 times more likely to drop out if they are chronically absent any year between 8th and 12th grade**. Finally, absenteeism not only influences chances for graduating but also completing college, with a study from Rhode Island finding that **only 11% of chronically absent students who graduated from high school made it to a second year of college**.

From the beginning of the 2019-20 school year until March 13, when schools closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, chronic absence rates across PPS ranged from a low of 17% in 4th grade to a high of 48% in 12th grade. Thirty-one percent of Black kindergartners (265 students) were chronically absent (three times more than White kindergartners), and 56% of Black 9th graders (482 students) were chronically absent (1.7 times more than White 9th graders).

☀ **Bright spot:** Manchester Academic Charter School and Schiller 6-8 reduced their rate of chronically absent students to 0%. Banksville, Montessori, and West Liberty elementary schools showed a rate of 4%.

PPS students missing 10% or more of school year, by grade
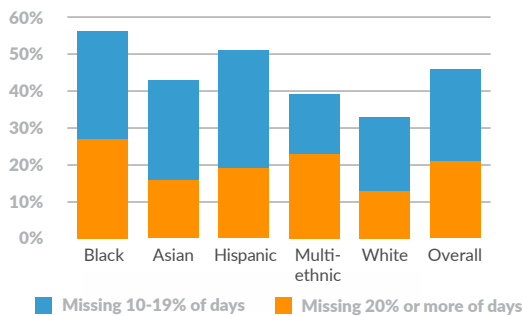

Data represent the first day of school in 2019 through March 13, 2020.

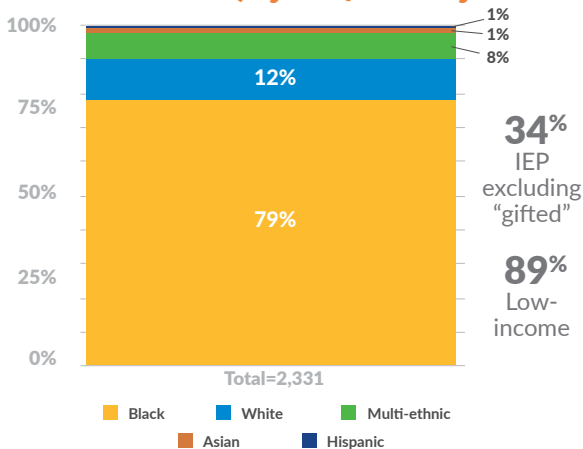## PPS kindergartners missing 10% or more of school year, by race/ethnicity

Missing 10-19% of days ■ Missing 20% or more of days
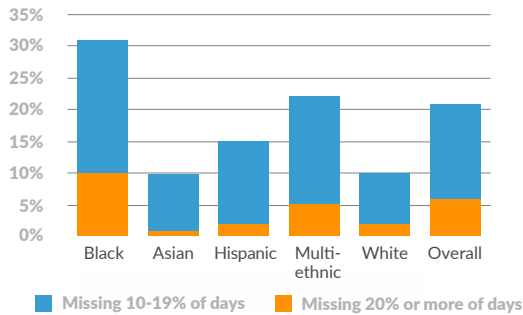
PPS 9th graders missing 10% or more of school year, by race/ethnicity

Missing 10-19% of days ■ Missing 20% or more of days

Suspensions

Student suspensions are much less frequent in PPS today than they were four years ago, yet they still are used as a discipline tool. Again this past year, the 2,331 students who were suspended could have almost filled Heinz Hall.

2019-20 PPS students suspended at least once, by race/ethnicity

34% IEP excluding "gifted"

89% Low-income

Total=2,331

■ Black ■ White ■ Multi-ethnic
■ Asian ■ Hispanic

Various studies have sought to understand the efficacy and impact of suspensions on students. One study out of Philadelphia found that "students who are suspended for any offense experience a decrease in achievement, measured by standardized test scores and proficiency levels, and each subsequent day of suspension has an additional, negative effect" (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018).

In the 2019-20 school year, Black students made up 79% of the total number of students that were suspended, though they were only 52% of the total student population. This racial disparity is slightly greater than it was the previous year.

Out-of-school suspension rates range from a low of 0% at Banksville and Montessori elementary schools to a high of 37% at Milliones 6-12. The graph below shows average rates of suspension by school configuration type.

Students who were suspended at least once, by school configuration
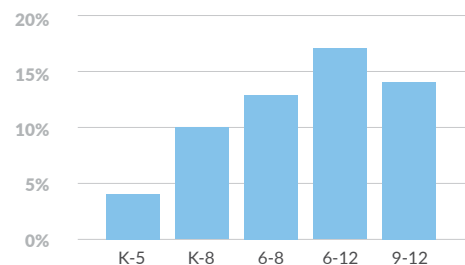
Black Girls Equity Alliance Report

The Black Girls Equity Alliance has reported on another racial disparity—in who is arrested for school infractions and who is not. Earlier this year, they reported that **"Black girls are 10 times more likely than White girls, and Black boys 7 times more likely than White boys, to be referred to juvenile justice"**—in other words, to be entered into the juvenile justice system ("Understanding and Addressing Institutionalized Inequity: Disrupting Pathways to Juvenile Justice for Black Youth in Allegheny County," Black Girls Equity Alliance, 2020). They found that PPS school police were the source of the greatest number of juvenile justice referrals for Black girls, and the second highest source of juvenile justice referrals for Black boys.

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Black girls were referred to the juvenile justice system by PPS school police three times as often as they were referred by City of Pittsburgh police.

To address these inequities, the Alliance calls for changes in school policy to eliminate disorderly conduct as an infraction in schools' codes of conduct, and the elimination of school police. **To learn more about their efforts and to get involved, visit gwensgirls.org/bgea**.

Gifted identification

Gifted identification and students' economic disadvantage

Percentage of students identified as gifted (y-axis: 0% to 40%)
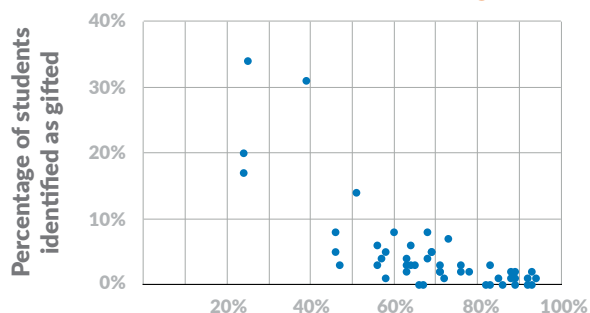
Percentage of economically disadvantaged students in the school (each dot represents a PPS school) (x-axis: 20% to 100%)

The Pennsylvania State Code defines "mentally gifted" as "Outstanding intellectual and creative ability the development of which requires specially designed programs or support services, or both, not ordinarily provided in the regular education program." As you can see from the scatterplot graph above, the percentage of students identified as gifted in a given school is highly correlated with family income. Moreover, the vast majority of students identified as gifted (66%) are White, with only 18% of Black students identified. Gifted identification in the lower grades provides automatic access to more rigorous courses in high school, which has been shown to be a powerful predictor of college enrollment, persistence, and success.
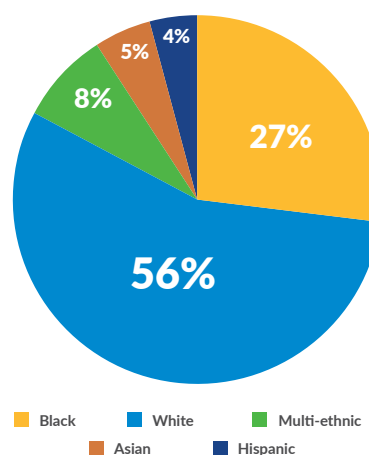
Bright spot: Dilworth PreK-5 provides services for students identified as gifted at the school. Some of the activities are open to all students.
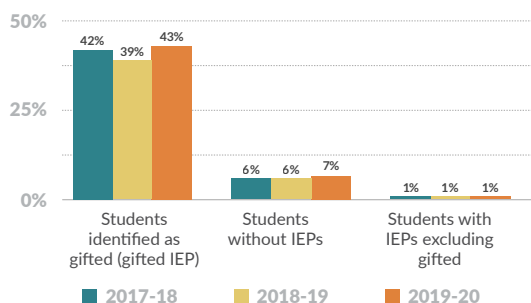
Advanced Placement (AP) course taking

Compared to their identification as gifted in grades K through 8, more Black students take AP courses in high school. However, the imbalance between Black student participation in those courses and White participation persists.

Students who took at least one AP course, by race/ethnicity

- Black: 27%
- White: 56%
- Multi-ethnic: 8%
- Asian: 5%
- Hispanic: 4%

Students who passed an AP course and scored 3 or higher on an AP exam, by IEP

	Students identified as gifted (gifted IEP)	Students without IEPs	Students with IEPs excluding gifted
2017-18	42%	6%	1%
2018-19	39%	6%	1%
2019-20	43%	7%	1%

Moreover, as the graph shows, rates of AP exam passage (scoring a 3 or higher) are much higher for those who are identified as gifted than for those who aren't. ("IEP" stands for Individualized Education Plan.)

Students who passed an AP course and scored 3 or higher on an AP exam, by race/ethnicity

Legend: ■ 2017-18 ■ 2018-19 ■ 2019-20

White: 21%, 20%, 23%
Asian: 16%, 18%, 13%
Multi-ethnic: 9%, 9%, 11%
Hispanic: 8%, 10%, 5%
Black: 1%, 1%, 1%
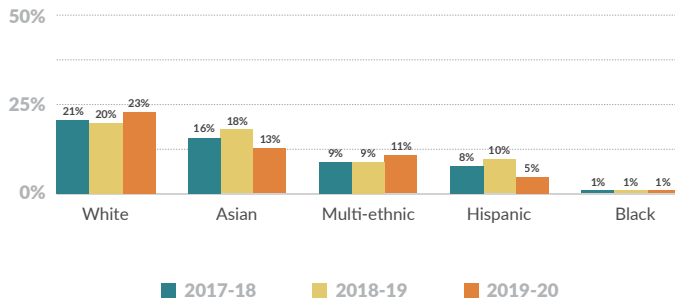
State test score trends

Because of Covid-19, no tests were given statewide to measure academic performance in 2020. Therefore, on the school pages, we provide a combined average of three years of data (2017-19) for the 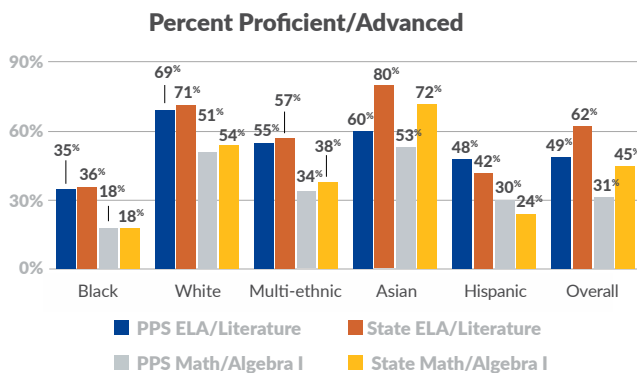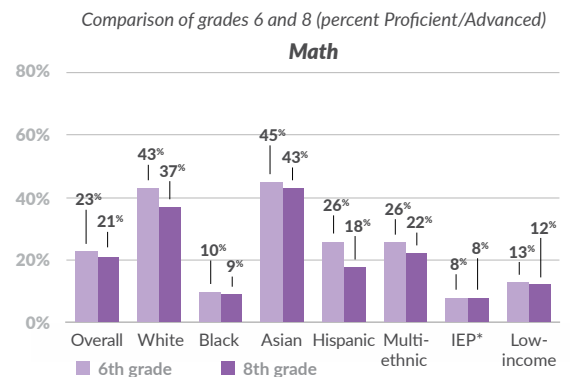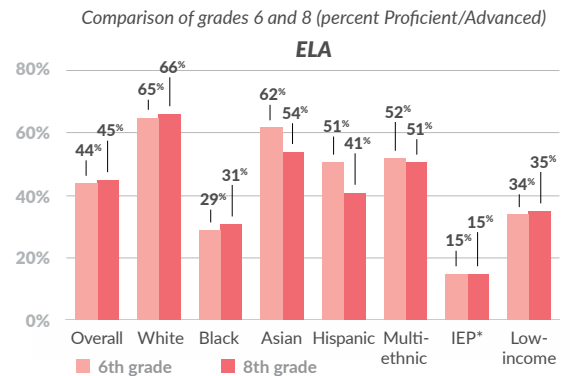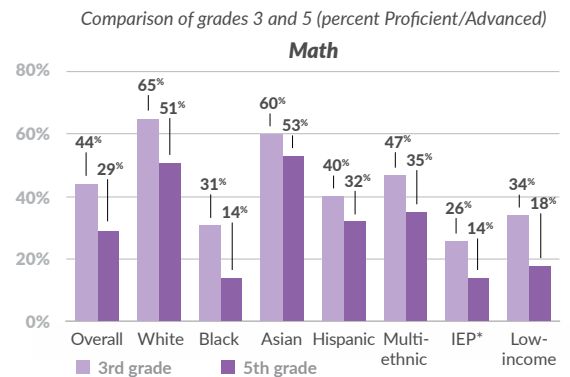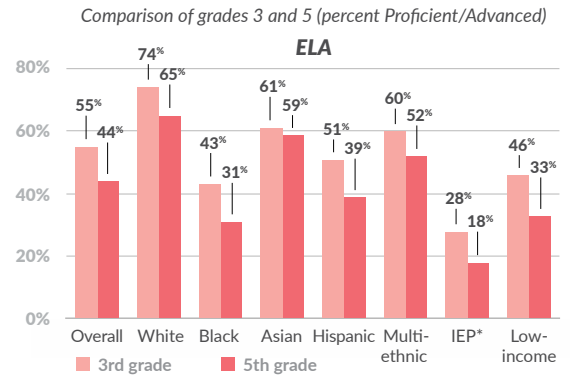PSSA tests and the Keystone exams. The graph below shows 2019 data for PPS and the state. PPS outcomes on standardized test scores are in line with state averages except in two cases. Hispanic students in PPS scored higher than state averages for Hispanic students, and Asian students in PPS scored lower than state averages for Asian students.

2019 PSSA tests and Keystone exams for PPS and state, by race/ethnicity

Percent Proficient/Advanced

Legend: ■ PPS ELA/Literature ■ State ELA/Literature ■ PPS Math/Algebra I ■ State Math/Algebra I

Black: 35%, 36%, 18%, 18%
White: 69%, 71%, 51%, 54%
Multi-ethnic: 55%, 57%, 34%, 38%
Asian: 60%, 80%, 53%, 72%
Hispanic: 48%, 42%, 30%, 24%
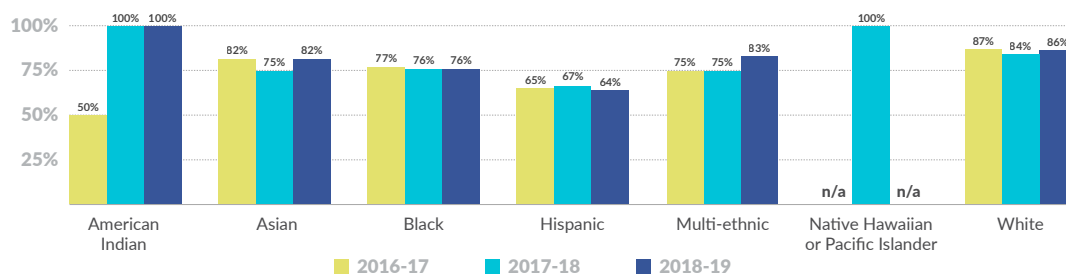Overall: 49%, 62%, 31%, 45%

This year, on the school pages, we also provide data for 3rd and 5th grade and for 6th and 8th grade over three years. In most schools (as the graphs on the right show) achievement declines for all subgroups of students as they advance, except for ELA in 6th to 8th grades for Black and White students. The improvements in achievement in those grades is a **bright spot** that should be explored further to understand what is contributing to the growth in proficiency.

Achievement THREE YEAR AVERAGE 2017-19 PSSA performance

Comparison of grades 3 and 5 (percent Proficient/Advanced)

ELA

Legend: ■ 3rd grade ■ 5th grade

Overall: 55%, 44%
White: 74%, 65%
Black: 43%, 31%
Asian: 61%, 59%
Hispanic: 51%, 39%
Multi-ethnic: 60%, 52%
IEP*: 28%, 18%
Low-income: 46%, 33%

Comparison of grades 3 and 5 (percent Proficient/Advanced)

Math

Legend: ■ 3rd grade ■ 5th grade

Overall: 44%, 29%
White: 65%, 51%
Black: 31%, 14%
Asian: 60%, 53%
Hispanic: 40%, 32%
Multi-ethnic: 47%, 35%
IEP*: 26%, 14%
Low-income: 34%, 18%

Comparison of grades 6 and 8 (percent Proficient/Advanced)

ELA

Legend: ■ 6th grade ■ 8th grade

Overall: 44%, 45%
White: 65%, 66%
Black: 29%, 31%
Asian: 62%, 54%
Hispanic: 51%, 41%
Multi-ethnic: 52%, 51%
IEP*: 15%, 15%
Low-income: 34%, 35%

Comparison of grades 6 and 8 (percent Proficient/Advanced)

Math

Legend: ■ 6th grade ■ 8th grade

Overall: 23%, 21%
White: 43%, 37%
Black: 10%, 9%
Asian: 45%, 43%
Hispanic: 26%, 18%
Multi-ethnic: 26%, 22%
IEP*: 8%, 8%
Low-income: 13%, 12%

* Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special education, excluding students identified as "gifted"

PPS graduation rate over time, by race/ethnicity

Bar chart showing PPS graduation rate over time by race/ethnicity for 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19:

- American Indian: 50%, 100%, 100%
- Asian: 82%, 75%, 82%
- Black: 77%, 76%, 76%
- Hispanic: 65%, 67%, 64%
- Multi-ethnic: 75%, 75%, 83%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: n/a, 100%, n/a
- White: 87%, 84%, 86%

Legend: 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19

Bright spots:

Three year averaging of PSSA tests and Keystone exam scores show:

- At Greenfield PreK-8, 86% of Black 3rd graders and 84% of White 3rd graders scored Proficient or Advanced on the ELA PSSA.
- At Allegheny PreK-5, 75% of Black 3rd graders and 92% of White 3rd graders scored Proficient or Advanced on the ELA PSSA.
- Black students at Sci-Tech 6-12 outperformed the overall state average on all three Keystone exams.

Graduation rate

The ability of students to be able to access post-secondary education is predicated on their successful completion of school. Between 2017 and 2019 (the most recent data available) graduation rates have held fairly steady (see graph above). Most students of color in PPS are less likely to graduate within four years than their White counterparts, and more likely to be in schools with higher concentrations of students in poverty and with disabilities (see page 112 for further analysis).

Conclusion

An adage in systems thinking is that systems are designed to get the outcomes they get. The data and analysis in this summary suggest that there are aspects of this system that exacerbate inequities and limit opportunities for Black students. Deeper analysis of the barriers to success and the bright spots that are achieving great results is necessary to make targeted change that can make a difference in the lives of students.

We can fix this. Read the "Rising up" section beginning on page 6 and learn how specific school leaders and school communities are tackling problems of equity head on. Get involved in a school as a volunteer, tutor or mentor. And vote in every school board election with an eye towards what the candidates will do to redesign the system so that it is much more equitable.

Methodology

The executive summary analysis was conducted using data in the full report and previous reports, as well as additional public data from the PA Department of Education and data from PPS (see Definitions and sources" on pages 138-139). The executive summary findings were developed by Sean Caulfield, data analyst for the report. ⊕

References/For more information

Teacher/student demographics

"The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers" https://hub.jhu.edu/2018/11/12/black-students-black-teachers-college-gap/.

PPS Para to teacher program, a partnership with Point Park University: pointpark.edu/academics/Schools/Education/GraduatePrograms/Para2Teacher-Program

Chronic absenteeism

Attendance Works: attendanceworks.org

"Absences Add Up" attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Absenses-Add-Up_September-3rd-2014.pdf

How Schiller 6-8 reduced chronic absenteeism: ourschool-spittsburgh.org/rise-up-schiller

Suspensions

"Do Suspensions Affect Student Outcomes?" https://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/HR-feIzVGnbbYaWGq5IUb/full

Black Girls Equity Alliance: gwensgirls.org/bgea

"Understanding and Addressing Institutionalized Inequity: Disrupting Pathways to Juvenile Justice for Black Youth in Allegheny County" gwensgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/20-011-BGEA_JuvenileJustice-BlackYouth_v4.pdf

How Dilworth PreK-5 keeps suspensions low: ourschool-spittsburgh.org/rise-up-low-suspensions-dilworth

AP course taking

"Are AP Students More Likely to Graduate on Time?" eric.ed.gov/?id=ED556464