



New assessment shows fuller picture of Pa. schools

Over 70 percent of public schools received positive scores

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By Eleanor Chute and Mary Niederberger / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The release of the remaining new School Performance Profiles completes a picture showing a wide variation in how the state's public schools and their students are doing.

Most of the School Performance Profiles -- which for the first time give each school a single academic score based on test scores, growth of test scores, graduation rates and other factors -- were released in October.

However, the state suppressed the scores of more than 620 schools -- mostly high and middle schools -- after concerns about accuracy.

The state Wednesday released all of the profiles, including information on how each was computed and statewide test scores.

Overall, 2,181 schools -- nearly 73 percent of public schools -- received an academic score of 70 or higher. In Allegheny County, about 71 percent did so.

Acting state Education Secretary Carolyn Dumareshq earlier described 70 as a "mark of moving toward success," although she noted that even schools in the 90s "may have an area that needs improvement."

In a statement Wednesday, Ms. Dumaresq said, "The majority of public schools across the commonwealth are doing well and preparing their students to be successful adults."

In Pittsburgh Public Schools, just 36 percent of schools reached or exceeded the 70 mark.

School Superintendent Linda Lane said it's a "wake-up call," adding, "It's not that it hits you because it's a surprise. It hits you because you realize the depth of the problem and how much of a struggle it's going to be."

In suburban Allegheny County, about 82 percent of schools operated by school districts met or exceeded the 70 mark.

Of bricks-and-mortar charter schools in Allegheny County, including the city, about 39 percent scored 70 or better.

The state delayed the release of some scores because of concerns over whether the amount of student growth over a school year had been calculated correctly.

Among those concerned was Ron Sofo, CEO and principal of City High Charter School, Downtown, who saw his school's score go from 68.5 to 81.2 once the state accounted for growth and recent test scores.

The state also released statewide test scores showing that overall 73 percent of students are proficient or advanced in math and 70 percent in reading.

The statewide figure for an unduplicated group of historically underperforming students -- including special education, economically

Statewide test results

The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state tests varies by subject and grade. The state Wednesday released the statewide results of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests given in grades 3-8 in reading and math and in grades 4 and 8 in science. It also provided figures for the new end-of-course Keystone Exams given in grade 11.

Percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced:

PSSA	MATH	READING	SCIENCE
Grade 3	77	73	
Grade 4	77	66	78
Grade 5	69	61	
Grade 6	73	65	
Grade 7	76	70	
Grade 8	74	77	60
KEYSTONE EXAMS			
Grade 11	64	75	45

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

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disadvantaged and English language learners -- is significantly lower, 57 percent proficient or advanced in math and 52 percent in reading.

The overall statewide test scores include the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment in grades 3-8, the new Keystone Exams in grade 11 and PASA, an alternate exam given to severely retarded or physically limited children in grades 3-8 and 11.

The completed profiles show that Mt. Lebanon High School's academic score of 99.5 is the highest in Allegheny County.

The top in the state is Downingtown STEM Academy in Chester County at 101.4, thanks to extra credit that pushed the score above 100.

The lowest academic score at a regular public school in Allegheny County is 36.3 at Wilkinsburg High School.

The lowest score in the state is 11.4 at the Philadelphia Learning Academy-South.

In Wilkinsburg, the profile showed that about 13 percent of its high school students scored proficient or advanced in Algebra 1, about 18 percent in literature and about 3 percent in biology.

The profile said the school failed to move students ahead one academic year in all three subjects and had a graduation rate of 68.35 percent.

The district offers no Advanced Placement courses and had no students scoring high enough on college entrance exams, so it didn't get any points in those categories.

Wilkinsburg superintendent Lee McFerren could not be reached for

comment.

On the other end of the scale was Mt. Lebanon High, whose profile showed about 92 percent of proficient or advanced in Algebra 1, 95 percent in literature and 83 percent in biology.

The school moved students ahead by more than an academic year in all three subjects, had a graduation rate of nearly 97.5 percent and received full points for meeting the college entrance exam benchmark and for offering 21 AP courses.

"This is a validation of all of the wonderful things that we've been doing at Mt. Lebanon High School not just for the last year but for many years now," said principal Brian McFeeley.

Pennsylvania this year received a waiver from the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act so it could use the new accountability system.

While some school officials are pleased the new system considers multiple measures, not all school officials find the new system fair.

Alexis Trubiani, spokeswoman for the Clairton School District, said some of the performance measures stack the system in the favor of more affluent school districts with a multitude of AP courses and high college-going rates.

Clairton officials were disappointed with their academic score of 58.2 at Clairton Middle School/High School, which put it in the bottom 10 percent of Title 1 schools even though middle and high school students moved ahead by more than one academic year in Algebra 1 and literature.

"If you look at everything they measure here, there are some things we can

control and some things we can't. We can work at improving math and science. But you can't make a student take the SAT. Not everyone here goes to a four-year college," she said.

Ms. Trubiani said Clairton officials are hoping their efforts to align the curriculum with the Pennsylvania Core curriculum, upon which the Keystone Exams are based, will help improve test scores and the academic profile.

The profiles can be found at paschoolperformance.org.

Additional information on test results is at www.esaefedreport.com.

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