

APPENDIX A

Definitions and Index

Academic standards – All public schools must follow the same state academic standards. See page 20.

Accommodations – Accommodations are changes in testing conditions that allow the test to accurately measure the student’s knowledge and skills. See the box on page 33.

Achievement gap – In this action report, the achievement gap is defined as the difference between -- (1) current student performance on the PSSA at advanced and proficient levels; and (2) 100% advanced and proficient scores. The goal is for all students (100%) to pass the PSSA, demonstrating that they have the core knowledge and skills expected for their grade level. See page 7.

Funding for public education – School funding often strongly affects school quality. See pages 40-41.

Graduation requirements – PSSA results are part of the state graduation requirements. See page 25.

Hispanic – This report uses the term “Hispanic” to refer to individuals of Latin American descent. We use this term because it is most commonly found in the PSSA reports issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education since 2001.

Internet links – Use the links throughout the report and on pages 48 and 51 to find more information.

National Assessment of Educational Progress – NAEP is required for all states receiving federal Title I funding. About 100 schools in Pennsylvania give the NAEP every other year in reading and math at grades 4 and 8. In each school, about 30 students for each grade are randomly selected to take the reading and math exams. NAEP tries to select schools and students that represent the diversity of Pennsylvania public schools. You can review the NAEP data for Penna. at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>.

NCLB – NCLB is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. See Appendix C on page 49.

PASA – The PASA is the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment. See page 32.

PSSA – The PSSA is the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. See pages 18-20.

PSSA passing rate – The PSSA passing rate is the percentage of students scoring at the advanced or proficient levels. See pages 18-20.

Report cards about local schools – See the box on page 12.

School improvement programs in Pennsylvania – See the box on page 11.

Scholastic Assessment Test – The SAT is provided for a fee by the College Board, a nonprofit corporation. The SAT measures the critical thinking, mathematical reasoning, and writing skills that students need for college-level work. You can review the SAT data for Penna. at (see link near bottom of page) <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/pas/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=95497&pasNav=|6150|&pasNav=|>

Standardized test – A standardized test covers the academic knowledge and skills that schools are expected to teach. Students in each grade across the state answer the same test questions, based on state-approved standards. Pennsylvania currently has two standardized tests for student achievement, the PSSA and the PASA. See pages 18-20.

Title I funding – See the box on page 15.

APPENDIX B

Resources for more information and ideas about closing achievement gaps:

There is almost limitless discussion on the Internet about the achievement gap and both successful and unsuccessful attempts to close it. Here are a few of the websites that parents and community leaders might find to be good initial sources of information and ideas:

www.elc-pa.org This is the website for the Education Law Center. You can download this action report and look at the data used to create the report.

<http://www.goodschoolspa.org/> This is the website for Good Schools Pennsylvania, which mobilizes parents, students, and concerned citizens for comprehensive public education reform.

<http://www.eplc.org/index.html> This is the website for the Education Policy and Leadership Center, which focuses on developing improved education leadership and state-level policies.

www.paayp.com This is Pennsylvania's official website for PSSA results in every public school and district.

www.schoolmatters.com This is a national website containing achievement, funding, and community information about Pennsylvania schools at the state and local level.

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/a_and_t/cwp/browse.asp?a=3&bc=0&c=27525&a_and_tNav=|633|&a_and_tNav=| This page contains all of the spreadsheets for PSSA data on the website of the Pennsylvania Department of Information.

www.page1inpa.k12.pa.us This is the "PAGE 1 Project", a special program for reducing achievement gaps in selected schools, sponsored by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

www.nc4ea.org This is the website for the National Center for Educational Accountability, which provides state by state analysis and a discussion of best practices for reducing achievement gaps.

<http://www.ctredpol.org/> This is the website for the Center on Education Policy, which contains good publications on many school improvement topics.

Resources for Parent and Community Involvement

www.elc-pa.org This is the website for the Education Law Center. You can read tools and fact sheets, review model parent involvement policies, and use links to find more information.

<http://www.pta.org/homepage.html> -- National PTA

<http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/default> -- The Education Trust

<http://www.publiceducation.org/index.asp> -- The Public Education Network

<http://www.pacer.org/> -- Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights

APPENDIX C

What do federal and state laws say about achievement gaps?

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

NCLB is a federal law requiring public schools to narrow achievement gaps for all groups of students, including students who are disabled, of color, poor, migrants, English language learners, or Native American.

NCLB requires public schools to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.”

Many questions have been raised about the impact of NCLB. For example: How much influence should the federal government have over local schools? Does NCLB provide the best way to improve struggling schools? Are the goals of NCLB realistic for all students and all schools?

Basic Facts About NCLB

- NCLB is the best known federal school reform law. Pennsylvania receives about \$800 million in federal funding for NCLB programs.
- Another name for NCLB is the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (ESEA).
- ESEA has existed for decades. It was renamed “NCLB” in 2001.
- Title I is a part of NCLB, addressing the needs of students from low-income families.
- NCLB is an extensive law with hundreds of pages containing rules and funding for:
 1. Overall school reform;
 2. Reading, math, and science programs;
 3. Professional development for teachers;
 4. School technology;
 5. Improving education for disadvantaged students; and
 6. Parent involvement rights.

READ MORE ABOUT NCLB AT www.elc-pa.org

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

IDEA is the main federal law for students with disabilities. IDEA requires public schools to narrow achievement gaps and ensure that children with disabilities receive a high-quality education. Pennsylvania public schools receive over \$900 million in annual state and federal funding for special education.

U.S. Civil Rights Laws.

U.S. civil rights laws prohibit public schools from giving educational benefits or advantages to one group of students and not to others based on race, nation of origin, disability, or gender. This means that schools cannot discriminate against students when providing quality teachers, facilities and technology, academic programs, and other resources and services that could help to narrow achievement gaps.

State action required by federal law.

Federal law requires Pennsylvania to narrow achievement gaps by taking the following actions:

1. Set the *same* academic and achievement standards in math, reading or language arts (and eventually science) for *all* public elementary school and secondary school students.
2. Have one testing system to measure student achievement in these subjects.
 - Limited exceptions for #1 and #2 are allowed for students with the most severe disabilities.

3. The state, local school districts, and schools must make *adequate yearly progress* (“AYP”) toward helping all students meet the state’s academic standards.
4. The state’s definition of AYP must have specific objectives to measure the improvement of poor students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students who do not speak English as their first language.
5. The ultimate goal is to *narrow the achievement gaps for all students*. By law, all students must meet or exceed the state’s academic achievement standards for proficiency by the end of the 2013-14 school year.
6. The state must help districts and schools to improve education for all children. The state must intervene and require improvements in schools that continue to fail year after year.

Local action required by federal law.


If they receive federal Title I funding, local school districts and individual public schools – including charter schools – must narrow achievement gaps by taking the following actions:

1. Review the results of the state achievement tests each year and determine whether its schools and students are making progress.
2. Give information about student achievement and AYP to parents, teachers, principals, schools, and the community so they can help their schools improve the academic achievement of all students. *See page 33 for information about PSSA accommodations.*
3. Tell parents about their rights to: (a) meet with teachers and use test results to make academic support plans for their children; (b) observe instruction in their children’s classes; (c) review the qualification of the teachers for their children; and (d) participate in local teams to make decisions about school improvement.
4. Identify schools that fail to make AYP for two years in a row for “school improvement” and notify parents about what this identification means for them and their children.
5. Initially, students in failing schools can receive extra educational services (like tutoring) and request transfers to other schools that have not been identified for school improvement.
6. When a school fails to make AYP for more than three years in a row, the district must impose harsher consequences on the school such as replacing staff or changing the curriculum. Union contracts may restrict local personnel options under NCLB.
7. Ultimately, the district can turn the operation of failing schools over to the state or to a private management company.

These options for students and consequences for schools are intended by law to close achievement gaps. Not everyone agrees on whether the laws really improve education.

Pennsylvania law also requires public schools to narrow achievement gaps.

Pennsylvania has adopted many laws and regulations that conform with or implement NCLB, IDEA, and civil rights laws. The state versions of these laws do not change the basic federal requirements, but help state and local governments to implement the U.S. laws. Pennsylvania’s public education laws are contained in Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code (state regulations) and in Title 24 of the Pennsylvania Statutes (the Public School Code).

 *Are your local schools following the requirements of federal and state laws for reducing achievement gaps? How can you investigate, document, and solve these potential problems?*

APPENDIX D

Who controls Pennsylvania's public schools?

Federal Government

- U.S. President and Congress. *Pass the federal budget and federal education laws.*
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/> and <http://thomas.loc.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Education. *Implements the federal laws and distributes federal funding.*
<http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>

State Government

- Governor. *Nominates the Secretary of Education and State Board of Education members. Proposes the budget.* <http://www.governor.state.pa.us/>
- General Assembly. *Approves the budget (proposed by the Governor) and passes education laws.* <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>
- State Board of Education. *Passes regulations affecting public education.*
http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/site/default.asp?g=0&pde_internetNav=/
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. *Headed by the Secretary of Education. Implements state and federal laws.* http://www.pde.state.pa.us/pde_internet/site/default.asp

Local Government

- School board of directors. *Passes policies to run the local school district. Elected by local residents. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association is at* <http://www.pdba.org/>.
- Superintendent. *Hired by the local school board. Manages the district. The Pa. Association of School Administrators is at* <http://www.pasa-net.org/>.
- School principal. *Hired by superintendent. Manages the school. The Pa. Assn. of Elementary and Secondary School Principals is at* <http://www.paessp.org/>.
- Charter schools. *Independent public schools operating under a "charter" conferred by the local school district. Information available at*
http://www.pde.state.pa.us/charter_schools/site/default.asp
- Intermediate Units (IUs). *The 29 regional IUs are jointly run by the school districts in each region. IUs provide services for children with disabilities and offer training and consulting to districts. The Pa. Association of Intermediate Units is at* <http://www.paiu.org/>.