

Learning about the Achievement Gap

Goals

Learn about the achievement gaps in your school district. Discuss ways to close the gaps.

Background

The “achievement gap” is one way of saying that all students are not reaching the same level of learning in school. Some students are doing better in school than other students. Many students are falling behind and aren’t learning the knowledge and skills for their grade level. These differences can be measured and explained. Parents and community leaders can find out about achievement gaps and use this information to improve their schools.

Pennsylvania has established, as its official goal, that all students will achieve at or above the “proficient” level on the PSSA exams. We refer to this as “passing” the PSSA. We define the achievement gap as the difference between this 100% goal, and the percentage of students currently passing the PSSA. For example: (Ach. Gap) = (100%) – (Current PSSA Passing Rate).

Plan of Action

(1) Complete the chart on the next page to keep track of achievement gap data for your local schools. The data for this chart can be obtained from the following sources:

- The district website, superintendent’s office, or individual principal’s offices
- www.paayp.com or www.schoolmatters.com (basic data about PSSA results)
- http://www.pde.state.pa.us/and_t/site/default.asp (click on “PSSA Results” on left)
- www.elc-pa.org (PSSA data for 2003-04 and changes in PSSA results since 2002)

(2) Examine the achievement gaps and discuss ways to close them. The following questions may serve as a helpful outline for your discussion:

- What do the achievement gaps look like in your district? Why do the gaps exist?
- Do all children in your school district receive a high quality education? Are any students being left behind?
- What is the best definition of the achievement gap for your district? Should the goal be higher than 100% proficiency? Should you compare different student groups?
- What can your district do to close the achievement gaps?

(3) Select changes that would best help your district to close the gaps. Draft policy proposals and submit them to the superintendent, the principals, and the school board. For help in writing policy proposals, please consult the ELC tool, “Drafting Policy Proposals.”

For More Information

From ELC’s Achievement Gap Report:

- What is the “achievement gap?” (page 7)
- Frequently asked questions about achievement gaps. (page 10)
- Understanding the PSSA. (page 18)

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

ACHIEVEMENT GAP DATA

Complete this table for your own district. Also complete copies of this table for state averages and to compare other districts.

	District-wide Totals	High School	Middle School #1	Middle School #2	Elementary School #1	Elementary School #2	Elementary School #3
Number of Students							
All Students							
White							
African American							
Latino							
Asian							
Other							
Low-income							
Migrant							
Special Education							
Limited English							
PSSA Results* for the most recent year							
All Students							
White							
African American							
Latino							
Asian							
Other							
Low-income							
Migrant							
Special Education							
Limited English							
Change in PSSA Results* over the last three years							
All Students							
White							
African American							
Latino							
Asian							
Other							
Low-income							
Migrant							
Special Education							
Limited English							

***Notes:**

- For PSSA results, “High School” corresponds to Grade 11, “Middle School” to Grade 8, and “Elementary School” to Grade 5.
- “PSSA Results” means the percentage of advanced scores plus the percentage of proficient scores. This is the total percentage of students passing the PSSA.
- “Change in PSSA Results” means the change in the percentage of students passing the PSSA over the past three years. You will need to calculate this based on PSSA scores from the most recent year and those from three years ago.
- You may want to complete a copy of this chart for PSSA math scores and another copy for reading scores.