

### Strongest and weakest high schools in Allegheny County

**Introduction:** The picture of the strongest and weakest high schools in Allegheny County is a one of two vastly different situations.

The 634 Pennsylvania high schools ranked academically by [SchoolDigger](#) © by average standard test scores as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, shows nine Allegheny County schools ranked in the top 30 or top 5 percent. Meanwhile, 11 county high schools ranked in the lowest 20 percent with four in the bottom 10 percent. Scores are based on combined results of three Keystone exams (math, literature and biology) taken by 11<sup>th</sup>-graders in school year 2021-2022.

#### *Top ranked*

By way of background, the highest ranked school in the state was Seneca High in Erie with a score of 97.2; the lowest ranked was The Workshop School in Philadelphia with a score of 1.2, a range spread of 96 points. Using district averages for the schools, Seneca High's current expenditures per student were \$17,373 while The Workshop School spending was \$17,158 per student. Interestingly, the very best and the very worst performers had nearly the same spending levels. All spending data is from the [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#).

#### *Allegheny County's best performing high schools*

School	State Rank	Average Score	Per-pupil Expenditures
Mt. Lebanon	6	94.1	\$17,524
Upper St. Clair	14	91.4	\$19,381
Thomas Jefferson	16	90.8	\$15,297
South Fayette	19	90.3	\$15,306
Pine Richland	23	90.2	\$17,122
Fox Chapel	24	90.0	\$21,973
North Allegheny	25	89.9	\$18,298
CAPA-Pittsburgh	26	89.7	\$26,402
Bethel Park	27	89.5	\$20,264
<b>Average</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>90.6</b>	<b>\$16,956</b>

As the sixth-ranked high school, Mt. Lebanon’s score was only 3 points below the highest-ranked in the state. All of Allegheny County’s top-ranked schools had scores at or close to 90. One Pittsburgh Public Schools high school made the list—CAPA—a magnet school that is by far the best high school in the city. Unfortunately, CAPA’s per-pupil spending at \$26,402 brings the average for the top schools (\$16,956) well above what it would be (\$15,775) if CAPA’s spending was more in line with the other schools

*Allegheny County’s lowest ranked high schools*

School	State Rank	Average Score	Per-pupil Expenditures
Carrick	509	25.8	\$26,402
West Mifflin	511	25.5	\$20,879
Penn Hills	520	21.8	\$17,738
Cornell	527	20.6	\$24,930
McKeesport	530	19.8	\$16,091
Woodland Hills	531	18.1	\$20,623
East Allegheny	550	14.2	\$19,025
Brashear	581	7.3	\$26,402
Perry	601	4.6	\$26,402
Sto-Rox	613	3.4	NA
Academy at Westinghouse	619	3.1	\$26,402
<b>Average</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>\$22,489</b>

Note that several schools that have traditionally been poorly ranked are not included in the list. For example, Wilksburg, Duquesne and Clairton are not shown because of insufficient data reporting to qualify for ranking. Note that Wilksburg high schoolers attend Westinghouse and Duquesne students are at West Mifflin and East Allegheny.

Four of the lowest 11 are Pittsburgh Public Schools with three in the bottom four. In any case, all the poorly ranked schools have completely inadequate scores for the amounts of money being expended on education.

Indeed, many of these schools are perennially among the lowest achieving schools in the county. This represents a massive failure of the state as well as local school officials. The presence of so many strong performers in the county should be a strong impetus to do better. Long running, seemingly intractable failures to improve these schools should have long since led to personnel and policy changes led by the state’s governors and Legislatures.

Very few graduates of these horrendously performing schools are likely to go to college and, if they do, they will need massive remedial education. Even technical schools require basic reading and math skills. What kind of job can one expect to get with so little math or language skills? Indeed, years ago the state instituted the passing of the Keystone tests as a requirement for graduation but, year after year, awful scores on the exams have essentially permanently forestalled the imposition of passing the Keystone exams as a graduation requirement.

These failing high schools are exhausting enormous amounts of resources to no avail. It is so bad that the question must be asked by school officials: Why are we asking taxpayers to waste such enormous sums of money and effectively mislead young people that they are being educated?

The truly sad part is that just over 200 hundred of the 634 high schools (including special schools such as charters) in Pennsylvania posted average scores of 50 or less. It is not because children cannot learn; there are good schools in less well-off neighborhoods.

Windber High (Somerset County) students scored 75.9 percent advanced or proficient, despite spending only \$13,476 per student in school year 2020-21. That amount is about half of the amount spent per student in Pittsburgh and \$8,000 less than the average spent by the 11 very poorly performing Allegheny County schools and \$4,000 under the state average. Windber's test score puts it in the top 30 percent of the 634 schools.

Even more impressive is the Loyalsock High School in Lycoming County. With expenditures per student of just \$13,593, half of the Pittsburgh Public Schools spending and \$4,000 (21 percent) below the state average of \$17,358, the high school posted an average score of 89.3, which ranked 31<sup>st</sup> highest of 634 schools. It is an amazing payoff per dollar spent compared to the 11 poorly performing Allegheny County schools.

Indeed, Loyalsock and Windber, to a lesser degree, put the lie to the argument that more resources—i.e. more money—are needed to achieve good academic results.

No. What is needed is commitment to achieving high-quality results—from school boards that put superintendents, principals and teachers in place to do what is necessary. And that's achieved through discipline in the classroom, attendance requirements and enforcement and teacher quality measured by results, not degrees and years of teaching.

All this will require legislation in Harrisburg that puts punitive measures in place for districts or schools that do not meet minimum standards of accomplishment. Indeed, the state should have the power to place superintendents in failing districts that show no progress. School boards in failing districts have already shown they cannot fix the problems.

It will require pulling some of the power back from the unions. There can be no more strikes on penalty of huge fines. Superintendents have to be given authority to dismiss poor teachers and administrators. And it's past time to quit kowtowing to disruptive students.

The need is now. The years of talk and promises and enormous waste of money must end.

None of this will happen, of course. Governors and Legislatures have seen and watched the failure of many districts to educate the majority of their students for decades and have done little but throw money at the problems. The entrenched power of forces opposed to real reform is simply too strong for significant progress to happen.

*Conclusion*

The state has many examples of very good schools operating at reasonable costs. Learn from them. Make real and effective changes. The taxpayers deserve better, the students in these miserably failing schools deserve better.

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