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Comparison of High School test scores 2015 to 2025

Introduction: A recent, *Policy Brief* reviewed the decline in scores on the state's Keystone exams (given to 11th graders) in Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and several area school districts. Even statewide, along with PPS, the average had substantial declines in test scores between 2015 and 2025 as measured by the percentages of test takers scoring proficient or advanced. Much of that drop is attributed to the education losses during COVID.

However, as was noted, PPS' combined percent proficient or advanced scores on math and literature had already fallen by just over 9 percent between 2015 and 2019. Statewide scores on math and literature were not significantly different in the two test years (2015 and 2025). However, both suffered major drops (about 30 percent each) in math scores between 2019 and 2025.

PPS operates 11 schools with 11th graders, each of which was in existence in both 2015 and 2025. The following table shows each school and its Keystone combined test scores of proficient or advanced for both 2015 test takers and 2025 test takers.

Combined percent scoring proficient or advanced

High School/Year	Math	Science	Literature
<i>Academy at Westinghouse</i>			
2025	8.0	14.1	29.2
2015	18.3	1.7	33.9
<i>Allderdice</i>			
2025	46.6	46.9	63.8
2015	66.3	50.4	82.6
<i>Brashear</i>			
2025	16.9	14.6	35.2
2015	47.2	22.6	50.8
<i>Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA)</i>			
2025	58.0	59.4	87.6
2015	81.7	55.3	96.5
<i>Carrick</i>			
2025	28.4	26.5	48.2
2015	50.5	27.3	71.0
<i>Milliones</i>			
2025	4.5	11.4	22.9
2015	31.7	8.7	33.3
<i>Obama</i>			
2025	26.4	30.9	55.7
2015	76.8	52.4	87.9
<i>Oliver</i>	Insufficient test takers to report		
<i>Online Academy</i>			
2025	16.7	22.2	61.1
2015	35.0	25.0	65.0
<i>Perry Academy</i>			
2025	11.5	6.9	25.3
2015	30.8	16.4	42.6
<i>Science and Technology Academy</i>			
2025	74.8	77.7	82.5
2015	86.1	66.3	95.4
<i>All Pittsburgh Public School District High Schools</i>			
2025	33.8	35.0	54.4
2015	52.4	32.2	64.6

District comparison

As shown in the above table, just 33.8 percent of PPS' 11th graders (all schools) in 2025 scored proficient or advanced in math, 35 percent in science (biology) and 54.4 percent in literature (English). Note that the Windber School District in Somerset County had 60.5 percent of their 11th grade Keystone test-takers score proficient or advanced in math, 57.9 percent in science and 68 percent in literature.

Windber, an old mining community has a population of about 3,900 and in 2023 had a per capita income of \$30,664 and median household income of \$52,560, according to U.S. Census reporting. At the same time, the City of Pittsburgh had per capita income of \$43,590 and median household income of \$64,137. Windber spent only \$16,741 per student in 2023-24.

By comparison, for the school year 2023-24, the latest official data from the state, puts PPS' spending per student at \$33,524. Estimated 2024-25 expenditures per student could be well over

\$35,000, depending on final enrollment count, when official expenditure data becomes available from the state.

Of course, a major difference in the two communities' ability to raise school funding revenues is that Pittsburgh has a large commercial property value along with its residential property. In 2025, Pittsburgh's assessed property value totaled \$20 billion, which is about half the actual market value. Thus, PPS can raise substantial school funding locally. And on top of that it receives nearly 40 percent of its over \$33,000 per student spending from the state.

Note too, that much better performing schools in Allegheny County and Washington County also had far lower spending per pupil than Pittsburgh in 2023-24. The Mt. Lebanon School District spent \$21,287, Pine Richland spent \$23,436 and Peters Township spent \$20,114. Each high school had far better academic performance than Pittsburgh as shown in the table of scoring percentages for 2025.

Combined percent scoring proficient or advanced

High School/2025	Math	Science	Literature
<i>Mt. Lebanon</i>	81.2	82.6	94.1
<i>Pine Richland</i>	80.2	84.9	89.4
<i>Peters Township</i>	84.6	84.4	88.7

Discussion

In light of the large drops in scoring percentages at many of the schools, it is surprising that the PPS district decline was not larger. It might be a weight issue as many of the better-performing schools could have larger numbers of test takers.

In any case, the decline in test scores at the already weak-performing schools is startling. Math scores were generally the hardest hit. The problem with math is that losing practically a year of instruction cannot easily be made up because of the principles that must be mastered all through kindergarten through the eighth grade.

But there is no getting away from the fact that there has been a huge academic setback due to the pandemic. It is quite bad for the already poorly academically prepared students and creates severe difficulties for the students' academic futures.

Students getting ready to graduate who are mathematically illiterate are a burden on potential employers and will have extreme difficulty doing college-level work.

Jake Haulk, Ph.D., President-emeritus

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Allegheny Institute for Public Policy
305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234
Phone (412) 440-0079
E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org
Website: www.alleghenyinstitute.org
X (Twitter): [AlleghenyInst1](https://twitter.com/AlleghenyInst1)