

Pittsburgh Public Schools Goal Monitoring Report: 12th Grade Cohort Graduation Rates

Introduction and Goal

This report presents the Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS) progress toward increasing 12th-grade graduation rates, a key metric of the District's mission to prepare students for college, career, and life. The goal for the 2024-2025 school year is to achieve an 84.4% cohort graduation rate, up from the 81.5% baseline established in 2020-2021. As we await the cohort graduation data for the 2024 school year, this report evaluates cohort graduation rates from the 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 school years to assess trends and guide our efforts toward meeting the 2024-2025 target. This monitoring report introduces the tools we utilize to support and progress monitor graduation rates, such as promise coaches, intentional financial investments, the Graduation Tracker tool and the Act 158 Dashboard. It provides an analysis of district-wide trends, evaluates the performance of various subgroups, interprets the data, and outlines strategic responses aimed at improving graduation outcomes.

Why Focus on 12th Grade Graduation Rates?

High graduation rates demonstrate a school district's ability to support students in completing their K-12 education while equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities necessary to thrive in their next phase of life, whether it be college, career, or community contributor. Beyond academic milestones, graduation rates reflect our commitment to fostering well-rounded, prepared individuals ready to succeed in an ever-changing world.

Supporting and Enhancing Graduation Progress

Pittsburgh Public Schools prioritizes high school graduation achievement through focused supports. The District leverages Promise Coaches and makes intentional financial investments to ensure graduation achievement increases on a yearly basis. Promise Coaches provide personalized guidance in key high schools, helping students navigate challenges and stay on track for graduation, while intentional financial investments have improved counselor availability, ensuring students receive the individualized attention needed to meet their goals and prepare for life beyond high school.

Promise Coaches Supporting Graduation Goals

Through a generous donation from the Pittsburgh Promise, Promise Coaches are now helping students in four high schools based on graduation data and needed supports (Carrick, Milliones, Perry, and Westinghouse) to stay on track to graduate. These coaches work with students in 9th grade to guide them through important steps like exploring careers, understanding their strengths, and finding resources to support their success. They help students by identifying their skills and interests, showing them resources for financial and emotional support, exploring career and education options, and navigating opportunities in the workforce. Promise Coaches work alongside school counselors and teachers to make sure students get the help they need to overcome challenges both in and out of school. It is especially helpful for students who face extra challenges,

such as African American students, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. With the addition of Promise Coaches, more students have a better chance to graduate and succeed after high school.

Financial Investment

The district has invested in hiring more school counselors to get closer to the recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1, suggested by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Right now, the district's average is 350 students for every counselor, but many of our high schools already meet the goal of 250 students per counselor. This investment helps counselors give students the focused support they need to meet graduation requirements and plan for their future. It also shows the district's commitment to helping all students succeed.

Monitoring Tools

As a district, we rely on **Graduation Tracker** and the **Act 158 Dashboard** to support students on their journey to graduation. Graduation Tracker provides data on critical factors such as credit requirements and accumulation, enabling counselors, staff and administrators to intervene promptly with additional support if needed. The Act 158 Dashboard complements this by tracking progress across Pennsylvania's new five graduation pathways, allowing counselors and administrators to guide students toward personalized and achievable goals. Together, these systems ensure that every student's journey to graduation is actively monitored and supported.

Graduation Tracker

Graduation Tracker is the District's central tool for monitoring high school students' progress toward graduation and is implemented across all schools. While it provides valuable support, its limitations necessitate the use of supplemental reports for a more comprehensive approach to progress monitoring. To enhance this process, the District is actively exploring additional tools to better support efficient and effective tracking of students' graduation readiness.

Key Features of Graduation Tracker:

1. **Credit Accumulation Tracking:** Graduation Tracker provides information on credits earned, credits required, and credits still needed for graduation, allowing counselors and administrators to quickly identify students at risk of falling short.
2. **Collaborative Access:** Graduation Tracker allows counselors, school administrators, and district leaders to access shared data, ensuring consistent communication and coordinated support for students nearing graduation.

Enhanced Monitoring Through Supplemental Reports

To address Graduation Tracker's limitations, additional district-generated reports are utilized. For instance, counselors and administrators can evaluate individual student data using the Graduation Requirement Report. This report provides a comprehensive view of a student's progress, showcasing their alignment with graduation benchmarks.

Counselors use these tools collaboratively to develop strategic interventions, ensuring students stay on track for graduation. For a closer look at what counselors see when evaluating a student's profile, refer to the [Graduation Requirement Report example](#).

Act 158: Expanding Pathways to Graduation

Act 158 of 2018 is a Pennsylvania law that has transformed graduation requirements by offering students multiple ways to demonstrate readiness. This flexible approach ensures that diverse student needs are accommodated, particularly for those who excel in non-traditional assessments or career-based education. ([See PPS Act 158 Infographic](#))

The five pathways under Act 158 include:

1. **Keystone Proficiency:** Achieving passing scores on all three Keystone Exams—Algebra I, Biology, and Literature.
2. **Keystone Composite:** Attaining a combined average score across the three Keystone Exams.
3. **Career and Technical Education (CTE) Concentrator:** Completing a CTE program aligned with career readiness standards.
4. **Alternative Assessment Pathway:** Meeting graduation requirements through qualifying scores on the SAT, ACT, or ASVAB.
5. **Evidence-Based Pathway:** Completing a combination of career-focused experiences such as internships, service learning, or post-secondary coursework

At PPS, counselors and transition specialists actively work with students to identify and pursue the pathway that best aligns with their goals and strengths.

The Data

District Graduation Trends

After evaluating the district's two most recent data sets, we notice that the graduation rate increased from 83.8% in 2022 to 86.1% in 2023, reflecting the district's dedication to ensuring students successfully graduate. While this year's goal is set at an 84.4% graduation rate, we recognize that this target has already been surpassed in 2023.

Subgroup Performance

While district-wide graduation rates show an increase from 83.8% to 86.1% from the 2022 school year to the 2023 school year, subgroup analysis reveals persistent disparities that require targeted interventions. When analyzing subgroup graduation rates for the 2023 school year, white students outperformed other subgroups, with a graduation rate that was an average of 16 percentage points higher than all other groups.

When comparing graduation rates from the 2022 school year to the 2023 school year, African American students experienced a slight improvement, with graduation rates rising from 81.2% to 83.3%. Despite this progress, the gap between African American students and their white peers remains pronounced, as white students continued to graduate at a higher rate of 91%, signifying a

7.7% gap in graduation achievement. English Language Learners (ELL) were the only subgroup to show a slight decrease in graduation rates, dropping from 72.9% to 72.3%, indicating that current strategies to address ELL graduation achievement may need refinement. Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) achieved an increase from 71.7% to 75.7%. These trends underscore the need for enhanced supports, particularly for African American students, ELL students and those with IEPs, to ensure equitable access to graduation pathways and post-secondary opportunities. [SEE ATTACHMENT A](#)

Graduation Tracker Monitoring

Counselor-reported data, combined with analytics provided by Graduation Tracker, have been instrumental in identifying trends and addressing gaps in student progression towards graduation. As of November 18, 2024, 83.8% of seniors are projected to be "on track to graduate" based on credit completion alone. As it currently stands, Pittsburgh Allderdice and Pittsburgh CAPA have the highest number of seniors on track, while others, such as Pittsburgh Perry and Pittsburgh Westinghouse, have more significant percentages of students identified as "not on track." [SEE ATTACHMENT B](#)

This data underscores the effectiveness of Graduation Tracker in ensuring the progression of student's credit completion. For example, Pittsburgh Allderdice, with 324 students on track out of 361, demonstrates a strong alignment between credit completion and graduation readiness. However, schools such as Pittsburgh Milliones, where 31 out of 65 seniors are not on track, emphasize the critical need for continued monitoring and individualized support. By leveraging Graduation Tracker insights, counselors and educators can focus their efforts on ensuring all students, particularly those at risk, are given the tools and guidance necessary to reach graduation.

Act 158 Monitoring

We recently engaged in our first assessment of the Act 158 dashboard for the year. Counselors are monitoring student progress across all five pathways. As it relates to the Act 158 component of graduation alone, we notice that 57% of students are on track to graduate. Counselors and school leaders are monitoring student progress across all five pathways. The 57% completion rate demonstrates an upward trajectory from last year at this time (52% completion rate last year at this time), with the District on track to reach 100% Act 158 compliance by the end of the academic year, as achieved in the previous year. [SEE ATTACHMENT C](#)

The Interpretation

The data reveals steady district-wide improvements in graduation rates year-over-year, however, subgroup disparities remain a critical area for focus. African American and ELL students, while making some progress, continue to lag significantly behind their white peers. Similarly, students with IEPs show only incremental gains, underscoring the need for enhanced resources and differentiated support. The tools in place provide substantive insight, but further refinement to processes and expansion of interventions are essential to ensure that every student, regardless of their background, can graduate prepared for their next steps.

Strategic Response

1. Standardized Graduation Communication and Engagement Protocols

Objective: Ensure consistent communication about graduation expectations across all high schools.

Action Steps:

- Develop standardized presentations and materials for students, families and community partners, detailing key topics such as credit requirements (new for 9th graders), Act 158 pathways, and available support services.
- Create district-wide protocols for engaging students and families, including scheduled counselor meetings at critical checkpoints.
- Train school staff on delivering consistent messaging to ensure all high school students, regardless of school or grade, all receive the same critical information.

Outcome: Clear and consistent communication that empowers students, families and community partners to stay informed and engaged, reducing confusion and increasing preparedness for graduation.

2. Structured Documentation Process for Student-Counselor Engagement

Objective: Monitor and support student progress with actionable insights and transparency.

Action Steps:

- Implement a district-wide system for counselors to document interactions with students, including:
 - Interventions for students struggling in specific classes.
 - Celebrations of key milestones, such as credit recovery or meeting Act 158 pathway benchmarks.
 - Communication logs for counselor-family updates.
 - Exploration of alternative options, such as career readiness programs or tutoring.
- Utilize data collected in this system to provide regular updates to school leadership and tailor additional supports based on identified needs.
- Incorporate this process into professional learning to ensure counselors, student services staff and school leaders are equipped to guide and monitor implementation.

Outcome: A consistent documentation process for more targeted interventions, better tracking of student progress, and increased opportunities to celebrate successes, ensuring students remain on track to graduate.

3. Graduation Mentorship Program

Objective: To provide immediate, focused support for seniors, particularly African American students, English Language Learners (ELL), and students with IEPs, by fostering mentorship, engaging families, and celebrating progress.

Action Steps:

- Connect each senior, who is not fulfilling graduation requirements, with a mentor, like a teacher, counselor, staff, or school-based community partner, who will check in weekly to offer help, encouragement, and resources.

- Hold monthly workshops to teach students about graduation requirements, credit recovery, and success strategies. Include special sessions for African American students, English Language Learners, and students with IEPs to meet their unique needs.
- Reach out to families with clear information about graduation requirements and available help. Make sure ELL families have access to translated materials and support.
- Recognize student achievements, like passing a class or finishing credit recovery, through small incentives to keep them motivated.

Outcome:

By building strong student-mentor relationships, involving families, and celebrating progress, this plan will help more seniors stay on track to graduate, creating a noticeable difference in their confidence and success this year.

These strategies align with PPS's broader goal of achieving an 84.4% graduation rate by the end of the 2024-2025 school year. By embedding a continuous improvement approach and focusing on equity-driven solutions, the district is poised to enhance support for all students and address persistent gaps in graduation outcomes.

Conclusion

Pittsburgh Public Schools continues to make progress toward its graduation goals, with the support of tools like Graduation Tracker and the flexibility of Act 158 pathways. While overall trends are positive, persistent gaps among subgroups underscore the need for a sustained, equity-focused approach. By leveraging data-driven insights and expanding tailored interventions, PPS remains committed to ensuring that all students graduate and are equipped to succeed beyond high school.