

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

Introduction and Goal

This report presents the Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS) progress toward increasing 12th-grade four-year cohort graduation rates, a key metric of the District's mission to prepare students for college, career, and life. The goal for the 2025–2026 school year is to achieve an 85.1% cohort graduation rate, up from the 81.5% baseline established in 2020–2021. As we await the cohort graduation data for the 2025 school year, this report evaluates cohort graduation rates from the 2020–2021, 2021–2022, 2022–2023, and 2023–2024 school years to assess trends and guide our efforts toward meeting the 2025–2026 target.

This monitoring report introduces the tools we utilize to support and progress monitor graduation rates, such as , the Graduation Tracker tool, the Act 158 Dashboard, Counselor Connect, and Promise Coaches in select schools (Carrick, Perry, Westinghouse) for targeted support. It provides an analysis of district-wide trends, evaluates the performance of various subgroups, interprets the data, and outlines strategic responses aimed at improving four-year cohort 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.

Graduation represents the culmination of years of academic, social, and emotional development. Ensuring that students successfully reach this milestone is central to PPS' equity agenda and long-term strategic vision. By prioritizing graduation outcomes, the District affirms its responsibility to remove systemic barriers and create pathways to opportunity for all learners.

Promise Coaches Supporting Graduation Goals

Through a generous donation from the Pittsburgh Promise, Promise Coaches are now helping students in three high schools based on graduation data and needed supports (Carrick, Perry, and Westinghouse) to stay on track to graduate. These coaches work with students beginning in 9th grade to guide them through important steps such as exploring careers, understanding their strengths, and identifying resources to support their success.

Promise Coaches support students by helping them recognize their skills and interests, connecting them to financial and emotional supports, exploring career and postsecondary options, and navigating workforce opportunities. They collaborate closely with school counselors and teachers to ensure students receive coordinated and responsive support.

This model is particularly impactful for students who face additional challenges, including African American students, English Language Learners (ELLs), and students with IEPs. With the addition of Promise Coaches, more students are positioned to persist through high school and successfully transition to postsecondary pathways.

Counselor Connect

The District has invested in Counselor Connect as a centralized PPS developed platform to strengthen graduation monitoring and intervention efforts. Counselor Connect supports counselors and school leaders through the following functions:

- **Graduation Progress and Status:** Tracks students' academic standing, credits earned, and remaining coursework.
- **Real-Time Academic Insights:** Monitors grades, attendance, and key academic indicators for early intervention.
- **Identification of Barriers to Graduation:** Allows counselors to document and address personal, social, or economic challenges impacting student success.
- **Family Engagement:** Auto-generates personalized progress reports for parents and guardians, enhancing communication and support.

By integrating academic, behavioral, and engagement data into a single system, Counselor Connect strengthens the District's ability to intervene early and coordinate supports around individual student needs.

Monitoring Tools

As a district, PPS relies 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 when students fall behind.

The Act 158 Dashboard complements Graduation Tracker by tracking progress across Pennsylvania's 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.

Key Features of Graduation Tracker

1. **Credit Accumulation Tracking:** Provides information on credits earned, credits required, and credits still needed for graduation.
2. **Collaborative Access:** Allows counselors, school administrators, and district leaders to access shared data for coordinated support.

Enhanced Monitoring Through Supplemental Reports

To address Graduation Tracker's limitations, the District invested in Counselor Connect to create district-generated reports that are sent to students and families that provide updates on the student's graduation status. Counselors and administrators are to regularly review the Graduation Report, which provides a comprehensive view of each student's progress toward meeting graduation benchmarks. These tools are used collaboratively to develop targeted interventions and ensure students remain on track.

Act 158: Expanding Pathways to Graduation

Act 158 of 2018 is a Pennsylvania law that transformed graduation requirements by offering students multiple ways to demonstrate readiness. This flexible approach accommodates diverse student strengths and learning pathways.

The five pathways include:

1. Keystone Proficiency
2. Keystone Composite
3. Career and Technical Education (CTE) Concentrator
4. Alternative Assessment Pathway
5. Evidence-Based Pathway

At PPS, counselors and transition counselors actively work with students to identify and pursue pathways aligned to their goals and strengths.

The Data

District Graduation Trends

After evaluating the district's two most recent data sets, the graduation rate increased from 86.1% in 2023 to 86.9% in 2024, reflecting the District's commitment to ensuring students successfully graduate. While the current goal is set at 85.1%, this target has already been surpassed in recent years, indicating sustained progress toward long-term graduation outcomes.

Subgroup Performance

While district-wide graduation rates show improvement, subgroup analysis reveals persistent disparities that require targeted intervention.

White students continued to outperform other subgroups, graduating at a rate of 91.1% in 2024. African American students experienced an increase from 83.3% in 2023 to 85.4% in 2024, reflecting progress while still demonstrating a notable achievement gap.

English Language Learners saw growth from 72.3% to 78.2% between 2023 and 2024. However, preliminary indicators suggest a potential decline in future outcomes, prompting targeted strategic responses. Students with Individualized Education Plans improved slightly from 75.7% to 75.9%.

These trends underscore the need for enhanced supports, particularly for African American students, ELL students, and students with IEPs. ([See Attachment A](#))

Graduation Tracker Monitoring

Counselor-reported data and Graduation Tracker analytics have been instrumental in identifying trends and addressing gaps in student progression. Pittsburgh Allderdice, Pittsburgh CAPA, and Pittsburgh Sci-Tech currently demonstrate the highest percentages of students on track, while other schools reflect larger populations of students identified as not on track. ([See Attachment B](#))

For example, Pittsburgh Allderdice, with 302 students on track out of 334, demonstrates strong alignment between credit completion and graduation readiness. Conversely, Pittsburgh Milliones, where 27 out of 42 seniors are on track, highlights the need for continued monitoring and individualized intervention.

These findings reinforce the importance of using Graduation Tracker data to focus resources on students at greatest risk.

Act 158 Monitoring

The District recently completed its first Act 158 dashboard review for the year. Counselors are actively monitoring progress across all five pathways.

As of December 31, 2025, 68% of students are on track to meet Act 158 requirements. This represents an upward trajectory compared to last year at this time (63%). The District remains on track to reach 100% compliance by the end of the academic year, consistent with previous performance. ([See Attachment C](#))

Counselor Connect Implementation and Monitoring Update

Since the beginning of the school year, the position of Director of Student Support Services, which is responsible for the supervision, development, and accountability of all school counselors—remained vacant. This vacancy limited the District’s ability to establish centralized monitoring structures, conduct regular implementation reviews, and provide coordinated professional learning focused on Counselor Connect utilization.

Despite this leadership gap, school-based counseling teams continued to use the platform to support students, document interventions, and engage families. However, the absence of district-level coordination resulted in variation across schools in the depth, frequency, and consistency of documentation and data utilization.

The District is pleased to announce the recent hiring of a new Director of Student Support Services, with an intended start date of late February to early March. This appointment marks a critical milestone in strengthening the District’s graduation support infrastructure.

Under the leadership of the new Director, PPS will implement a structured monitoring framework that includes: clear expectations for Counselor Connect usage and documentation, regular reviews of counselor and school-level data, targeted coaching and professional development and integration of Counselor Connect metrics into school leadership planning; all key components of the District’s first strategy to increase graduation rates.

Interpretation

The data demonstrate that PPS continues to make meaningful progress in supporting students toward graduation, as reflected in sustained district-wide gains. The consistent improvement from 2023 to 2024 indicates that systemwide investments in monitoring tools, counseling supports, and targeted interventions are yielding positive results.

However, subgroup disparities remain a central challenge. While African American and ELL students have shown improvement, achievement gaps persist. Preliminary concerns

regarding ELL graduation outcomes highlight the importance of proactive, culturally responsive supports.

Graduation Tracker and Act 158 data illustrate that credit accumulation and pathway completion remain strong predictors of on-time graduation. Variability across schools suggests that implementation fidelity and local capacity continue to influence outcomes.

Overall, the findings affirm the value of PPS' multi-tiered monitoring systems while emphasizing the need for deeper alignment, accountability, and equity-centered intervention strategies.

Continuous Improvement Approach (PDCA)

The District is using continuous improvement cycles grounded in the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) methodology to refine graduation strategies and respond to evolving student outcome data. This approach ensures that implementation is actively informed by evidence and that adjustments are made in response to challenges and successes identified through ongoing monitoring.

During the 2024–2025 school year, PPS used PDCA cycles to assess graduation trends, subgroup performance, and school-level implementation of monitoring tools. Through this process, the District identified three foundational strategies to strengthen graduation outcomes: standardizing graduation communication, strengthening documentation and monitoring practices, and expanding mentorship and engagement supports for seniors. These strategies were continuously reviewed and refined through data analysis, counselor feedback, and leadership monitoring.

The District will continue to rely on PDCA cycles throughout the 2025–2026 school year to sustain progress monitoring, identify emerging risks, and refine graduation supports. This same continuous improvement lens also shapes the District's strategy for 2025–2026, which is designed to strengthen accountability for monitoring tools, expand culturally responsive supports for English Language Learners, and reinforce student motivation and persistence through graduation.

Strategic Response and Implementation Progress for 2024–2025

During the 2024–2025 school year, the District initiated three core strategies to strengthen graduation outcomes: standardizing graduation communication, implementing structured documentation practices, and expanding mentorship supports for seniors. Each strategy reflected early learning from implementation and informed refinements in District practice.

Standardized Graduation Communication and Engagement Protocols

The District prioritized a unified approach to graduation communication to ensure that students and families received consistent, accurate, and timely information across all high schools. Standardized presentations, materials, and engagement protocols were developed to clarify credit requirements, Act 158 pathways, and available supports.

Counselors and administrators were trained to deliver consistent messaging during student meetings, family conferences, and school-wide events. Districtwide checkpoints were established to ensure students and families received critical information at key academic milestones.

Monitoring revealed that while communication improved across schools, variability remained in the depth of family engagement and the timing of outreach. In response, the District strengthened expectations for scheduled counselor-family conferences and expanded translated materials to improve accessibility.

Structured Documentation Process for Student-Counselor Engagement

To improve transparency and accountability, PPS implemented a structured documentation framework for counselor-student engagement. Counselors documented academic interventions, milestone celebrations, family communications, and alternative pathway planning using standardized templates and digital tools.

Professional learning supported counselors in using documentation to guide intervention planning and leadership reporting. School leaders incorporated documentation reviews into monitoring cycles to identify trends and gaps.

Implementation monitoring revealed uneven documentation practices across schools, particularly in high-need environments. As a result, the District refined professional learning supports and increased principal oversight of documentation quality.

Graduation Mentorship Program

Recognizing that academic monitoring alone is insufficient for many students, the District expanded mentorship supports for seniors at risk of not graduating. Targeted students were paired with trained mentors who provided weekly check-ins, academic support, and social-emotional guidance.

Monthly workshops reinforced graduation requirements, credit recovery options, and postsecondary planning. Family engagement efforts were expanded, including translated outreach and community partner involvement. Incentive and recognition systems celebrated student progress.

Monitoring indicated that mentored students demonstrated improved attendance, credit completion, and engagement. These findings informed the District's decision to strengthen mentorship and incentive structures moving forward.

These strategies collectively supported PPS's achievement of its 84.4% graduation goal in 2024–2025 and established stronger systems for monitoring, intervention, and engagement.

Looking Ahead: Strategy and Plan for 2025–2026

As the District continues to respond to graduation data, subgroup trends, and implementation evidence, the Superintendent and Executive Cabinet have developed a comprehensive strategy for 2025–2026 focused on strengthening accountability, equity, and persistence.

This strategy centers on three interconnected priorities: systematizing Counselor Connect implementation, expanding targeted supports for English Language Learners, and sustaining senior-year motivation through community-based incentives.

1. Systematize Accountability for Counselor Connect

To ensure consistent, high-fidelity use of Counselor Connect, PPS will implement a districtwide accountability framework focused on strengthening counselor practice and leadership oversight.

Key components include:

- **Leadership Accountability and Oversight:**
Principals will monitor implementation through usage reports, structured counselor check-ins, and integration of Counselor Connect data into school improvement planning.
- **Data Monitoring and Documentation:**
Counselors will routinely document graduation progress, attendance, academic indicators, and identified barriers to ensure accurate, real-time student profiles.
- **Progress Reviews and Early Intervention:**
Schools will conduct regular senior progress reviews using Counselor Connect data to identify off-track students and implement targeted academic and social-emotional supports.
- **Family Engagement and Communication:**
Counselors will consistently use auto-generated communication tools to provide timely updates on credit status, Act 158 progress, and areas requiring intervention.

This strategy responds to evidence that inconsistent monitoring and documentation can delay critical supports. Through strengthened accountability, leadership oversight, and proactive family engagement, PPS will reduce last-minute credit deficiencies and increase on-time graduation.

2. Dedicated ELD Liaisons and Targeted Graduation Supports

To strengthen graduation outcomes for English Language Developers, PPS will implement culturally responsive, coordinated support structures centered on trusted relationships and targeted advising.

Key components include:

- **Dedicated ELD Graduation Liaisons:**
The District will establish dedicated liaisons or expand bilingual staff roles to serve as consistent contacts for students and families.
- **Graduation Advising and Advocacy:**
ELD students will receive targeted guidance on graduation requirements, credit planning, and system navigation.
- **Family Engagement and Outreach:**
Schools will expand language-accessible communication and community partnerships to build trust and sustain engagement.
- **Strategic Coordination:**
Liaisons will collaborate with counselors, teachers, and administrators to align academic and social-emotional supports.

This strategy responds to emerging indicators of risk among ELD students and addresses barriers related to access, communication, and system navigation. Through trusted relationships and intentional coordination, PPS will increase persistence and close subgroup graduation gaps.

3. Completion Incentives to Sustain Momentum Through Senior Year

To strengthen persistence and prevent late-year disengagement, PPS will continue and refine structured incentive programs aligned to graduation milestones.

Key components include:

- **Targeted Graduation and Completion Incentives:**
Schools will implement incentive programs tied to credit completion, attendance improvement, and Act 158 pathway completion.

- **Data-Driven Identification and Monitoring:**
Counselor Connect will be used to identify eligible students and track progress toward benchmarks.
- **Family Communication and Engagement:**
Automated communication will notify families when students approach milestones or require additional support.
- **School-Based Recognition and Culture Building:**
Schools will celebrate progress through assemblies, public recognition, and community events.
- **Community Partnerships:**
PPS will continue to partner with organizations such as Giant Eagle and other community stakeholders to provide sustainable incentives and celebrate student success.

District data indicate that incentives, when paired with adult support and monitoring, significantly increase engagement. By leveraging community partnerships and reinforcing a culture of celebration, PPS will sustain momentum through senior year.

Conclusion

This Goal Monitoring Report provides a comprehensive view of graduation performance across Pittsburgh Public Schools, highlighting sustained districtwide progress, persistent subgroup challenges, and emerging risks requiring targeted response.

The District's 2025–2026 strategy reflects a coherent, equity-centered approach grounded in accountability, cultural responsiveness, and student engagement. By strengthening Counselor Connect implementation, expanding supports for English Language Learners, and sustaining senior-year motivation through community partnerships, PPS is building the systems necessary to ensure consistent, high-quality graduation supports.

Through transparent data use, continuous improvement, and collaborative leadership, Pittsburgh Public Schools remains committed to ensuring that every student graduates prepared for college, career, and community success.