



Performance Uneven Among Students of Different Races Receiving Human Services

The gap in academic performance that separates students of different races in the Pittsburgh Public Schools sharply divides children who experience circumstances that involve them in human service interventions.

Consequences of this gap fall most heavily on African American students who account for 57 percent of city public school enrollment. As a group, they have a higher rate of human service involvement and lower academic performance rates on key measures than their white and multi-racial classmates. Those measures include a student's grade-point average and attendance, both of which are particularly important in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, where a Pittsburgh Promise scholarship of up to \$20,000 for post-secondary education might be at stake.

A data-sharing agreement between the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) now makes it possible to integrate and analyze student data from the schools, human services agencies, juvenile justice and other sources. A 2010 preliminary analysis of that data offers the most comprehensive statistical profile to date of city public school students receiving services, as well as students with prior service involvement.

More than 15,500 African American students are enrolled in the Pittsburgh Public Schools and 61 percent of them have prior involvement with human services compared to 43 percent of white students and 53 percent of the district's 1,488 multi-racial students. Within the last school year, 43 percent of African American students received services, as did 37 percent of multi-racial students and 25 percent of white students.

Among students who are or have been involved in human services race matters when it comes to reading proficiency, GPA and attendance. African American students as a group find themselves on the wrong side of the performance gap on each of those measures. Some 41 percent of African American students with prior human service involvement were proficient in reading on Pennsylvania System of State Assessment tests, for example, while 63 percent of white students with prior service involvement had proficient reading scores.

Only 32 percent of African American students with prior human service involvement had a 2.5 GPA or higher, which is required to qualify for Pittsburgh Promise scholarships. By comparison, 61 percent of white students with prior human service involvement have a GPA of at least a 2.5.

A similar gap is seen when looking at students with a 90 percent rate of attendance or higher – another key Pittsburgh Promise requirement. The 79 percent attendance rate among African American students with prior involvement in human services is lower than their white and multi-racial classmates with similar service involvement by 10 and 7 percentage points respectively.

One troubling consequence is the deep racial divide among high school students whose performance so far has them on track to earn Pittsburgh Promise scholarships. The highest rate is among white students with prior human service involvement, 56 percent of who are on pace for scholarships. By comparison, only 24 percent of African American students with prior involvement are performing at a level necessary to qualify for scholarships to further their education and secure a brighter future. This gap leaves more than \$16 million in Promise scholarship dollars on the table.

As such findings suggest, the ability to share and analyze Pittsburgh Public School and DHS data offers a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding students of mutual interest. Just as important, this new capacity presents opportunities to develop better-informed strategies and inventions to improve student outcomes.