

# PERFORMANCE AUDIT

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## Plum Borough School District Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

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June 2021



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Dr. Brendan Hyland, Superintendent  
Plum Borough School District  
900 Elicker Road  
Plum, Pennsylvania 15239

Mr. Michael Devine, Board President  
Plum Borough School District  
900 Elicker Road  
Plum, Pennsylvania 15239

Dear Dr. Hyland and Mr. Devine:

We have conducted a performance audit of the Plum Borough School District (District) for the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objective, and methodology section of the report. We evaluated the District's performance in the following areas as further described in Appendix A of this report:

- Bus Driver Requirements
- Administrator Separations
- Financial Stability

We also evaluated the application of best practices and determined compliance with certain requirements in the area of school safety, including compliance with fire and security drill requirements. Due to the sensitive nature of school safety and the need for the results of this review to be confidential, we did not include the full results in this report. However, we communicated the full results of our review of school safety to District officials, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and other appropriate officials as deemed necessary.

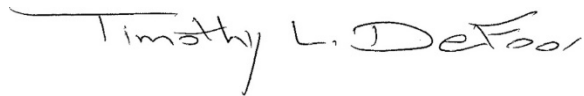
The audit was conducted pursuant to Sections 402 and 403 of The Fiscal Code (72 P.S. §§ 402 and 403), and in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Our audit identified internal control deficiencies in the areas of bus driver requirements and administrative separations that were not significant but warranted the attention of District management and those charged with governance. Those deficiencies were verbally communicated to District management and those charged with governance for their consideration. Finally, we found that the District performed adequately in the area of financial stability.

Dr. Brendan Hyland  
Mr. Michael Devine  
Page 2

We appreciate the District's cooperation during the course of the audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Timothy L. DeFoor  
Auditor General

June 10, 2021

cc: **PLUM BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT** Board of School Directors

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## Background Information

School Characteristics 2019-20 School Year*	
County	Allegheny
Total Square Miles	29
Number of School Buildings	5
Total Teachers	226
Total Full or Part-Time Support Staff	203
Total Administrators	19
Total Enrollment for Most Recent School Year	3,586
Intermediate Unit Number	3
District Career and Technical School	Forbes Road Career & Technology Center

\* - Source: Information provided by the District administration and is unaudited.

## Mission Statement\*

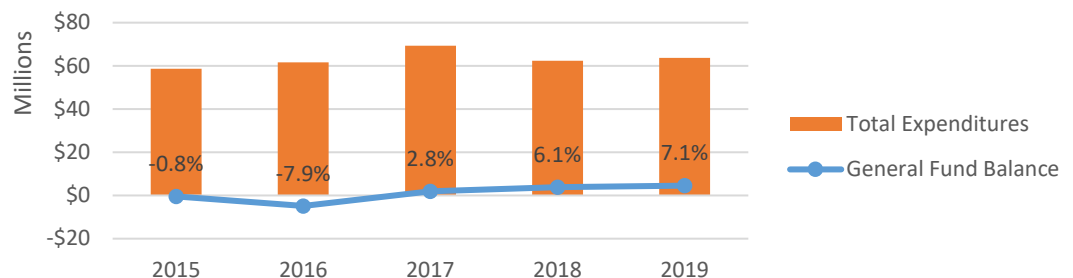
To be a top performing school district by increasing levels of academic rigor and student achievement through the development and execution of best practices, accountability, the highest ethical standards, and an unrelenting commitment by ALL to embrace excellence and pride in everything that we do.

## Financial Information

The following pages contain financial information about the Plum Borough School District obtained from annual financial data reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and available on PDE's public website. This information was not audited and is presented for **informational purposes only**.

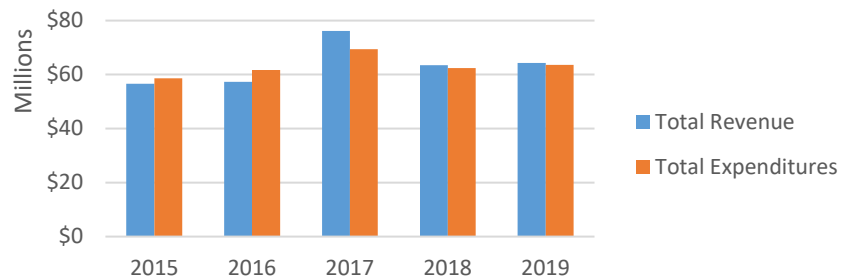
### General Fund Balance as a Percentage of Total Expenditures

	General Fund Balance
2015	(\$453,840)
2016	(\$4,857,284)
2017	\$1,965,844
2018	\$3,820,665
2019	\$4,542,743



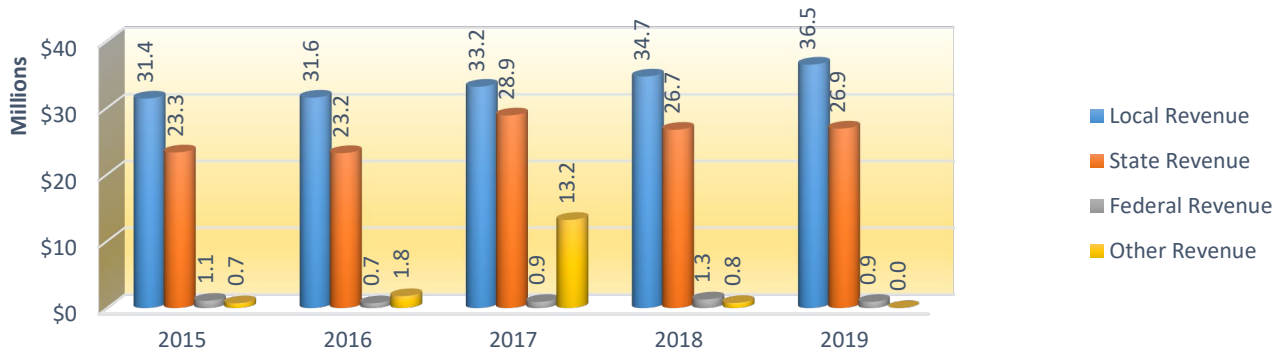
### Revenues and Expenditures

	Total Revenue	Total Expenditures
2015	\$56,548,728	\$58,611,786
2016	\$57,284,540	\$61,687,986
2017	\$76,185,970	\$69,362,844
2018	\$63,514,035	\$62,393,540
2019	\$64,342,572	\$63,620,494

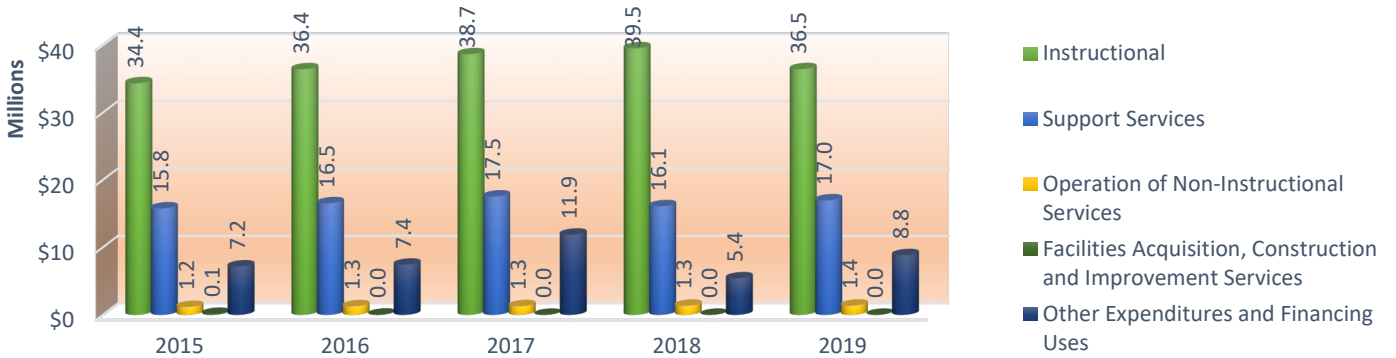


## Financial Information Continued

### Revenues by Source

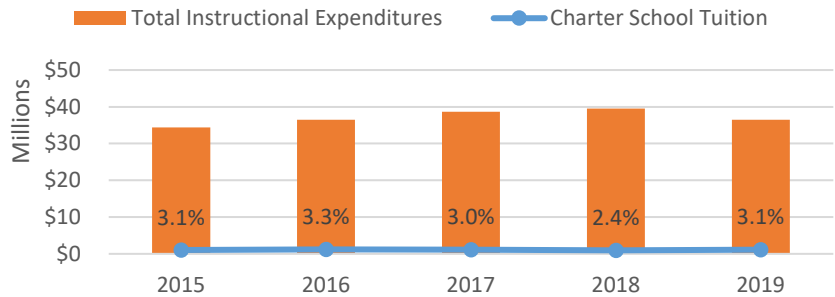


### Expenditures by Function

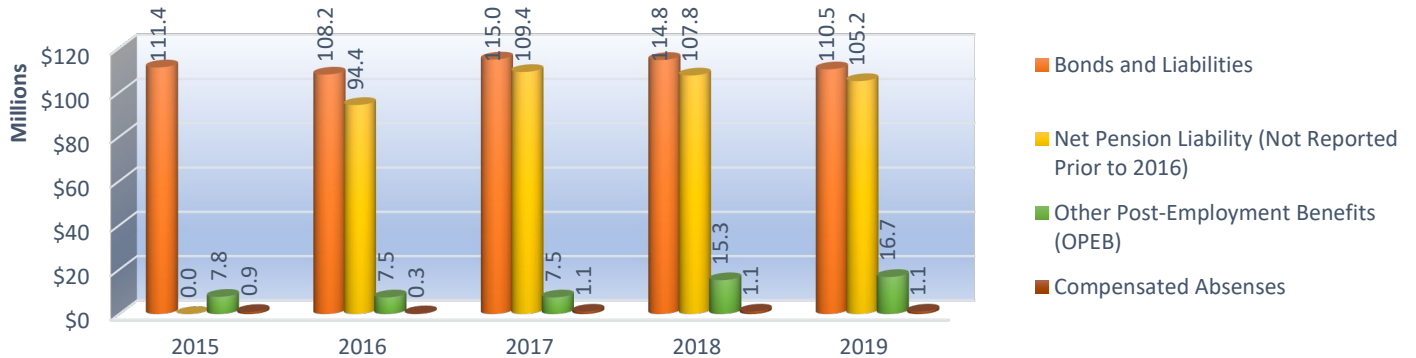


### Charter Tuition as a Percentage of Instructional Expenditures

	Charter School Tuition	Total Instructional Expenditures
2015	\$1,065,176	\$34,360,621
2016	\$1,211,309	\$36,439,707
2017	\$1,141,487	\$38,672,056
2018	\$956,277	\$39,546,686
2019	\$1,145,649	\$36,455,300



### Long-Term Debt

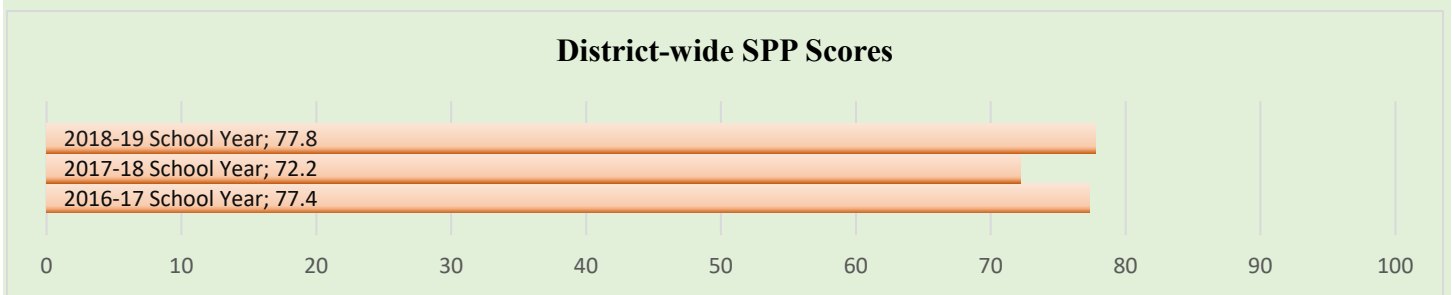


## Academic Information

The graphs on the following pages present the District-wide School Performance Profile (SPP) scores, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores, Keystone Exam results, and 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates for the District obtained from PDE's data files for the 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 school years.<sup>1</sup> The District's individual school building scores are presented in Appendix B. These scores are provided in this audit report for **informational purposes only**, and they were not audited by our Department.

### What is a SPP score?

A SPP score serves as a benchmark for schools to reflect on successes, achievements, and yearly growth. PDE issues a SPP score annually using a 0-100 scale for all school buildings in the Commonwealth, which is calculated based on standardized testing (i.e., PSSA and Keystone exam scores), student improvement, advance course offerings, and attendance and graduation rates. Generally speaking, a SPP score of 70 or above is considered to be a passing rate.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> PDE is the sole source of academic data presented in this report. All academic data was obtained from PDE's publicly available website.

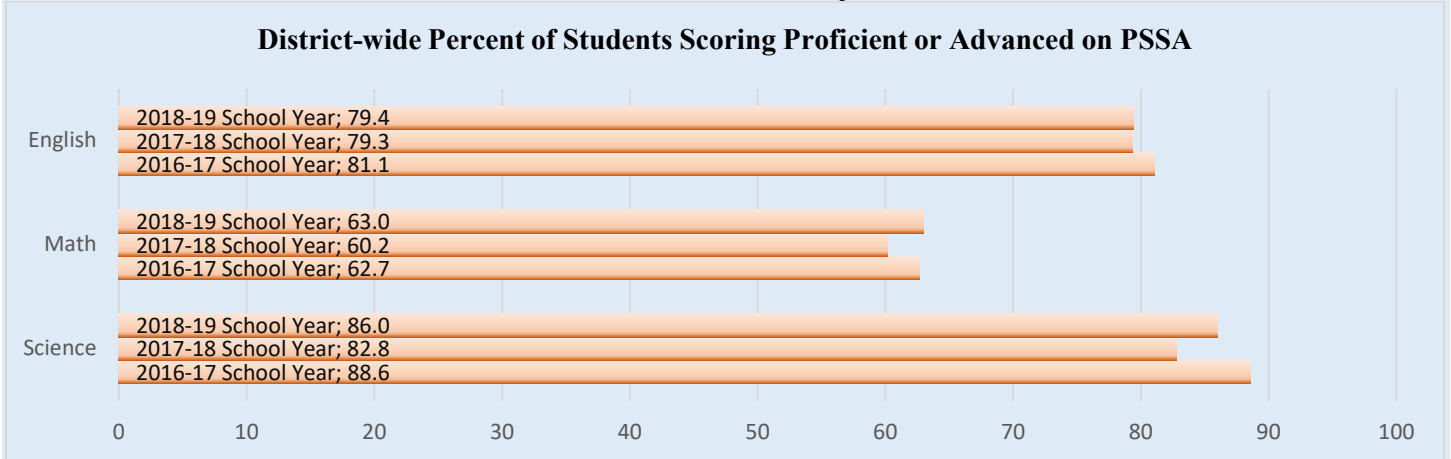
<sup>2</sup> PDE started issuing a SPP score for all public school buildings beginning with the 2012-13 school year. For the 2014-15 school year, PDE only issued SPP scores for high schools taking the Keystone Exams as scores for elementary and middle scores were put on hold due to changes with PSSA testing. PDE resumed issuing a SPP score for all schools for the 2015-16 school year.

## Academic Information Continued

### What is the PSSA?

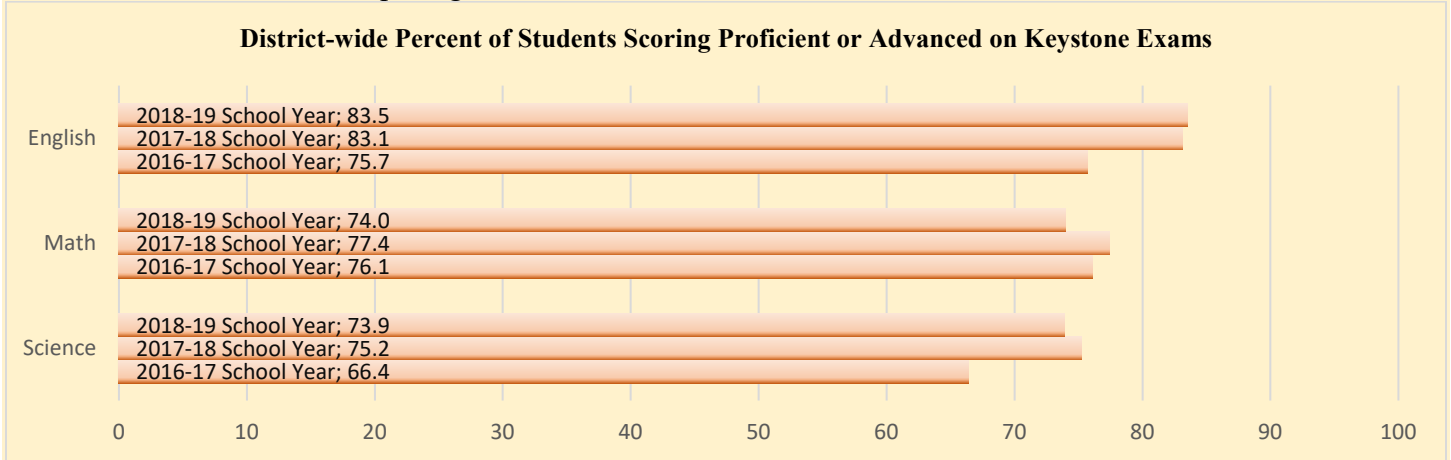
The PSSA is an annual, standardized test given across the Commonwealth to students in grades 3 through 8 in core subject areas, including English, Math and Science. The PSSAs help Pennsylvania meet federal and state requirements and inform instructional practices, as well as provide educators, stakeholders, and policymakers with important information about the state's students and schools.

The 2014-15 school year marked the first year that PSSA testing was aligned to the more rigorous PA Core Standards. The state uses a grading system with scoring ranges that place an individual student's performance into one of four performance levels: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The state's goal is for students to score Proficient or Advanced on the exam in each subject area.



### What is the Keystone Exam?

The Keystone Exam measures student proficiency at the end of specific courses, such as Algebra I, Literature, and Biology. The Keystone Exam was intended to be a graduation requirement starting with the class of 2017, but that requirement has been put on hold until the 2020-21 school year.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the exam is still given as a standardized assessment and results are included in the calculation of SPP scores. The Keystone Exam is scored using the same four performance levels as the PSSAs, and the goal is to score Proficient or Advanced for each course requiring the test.



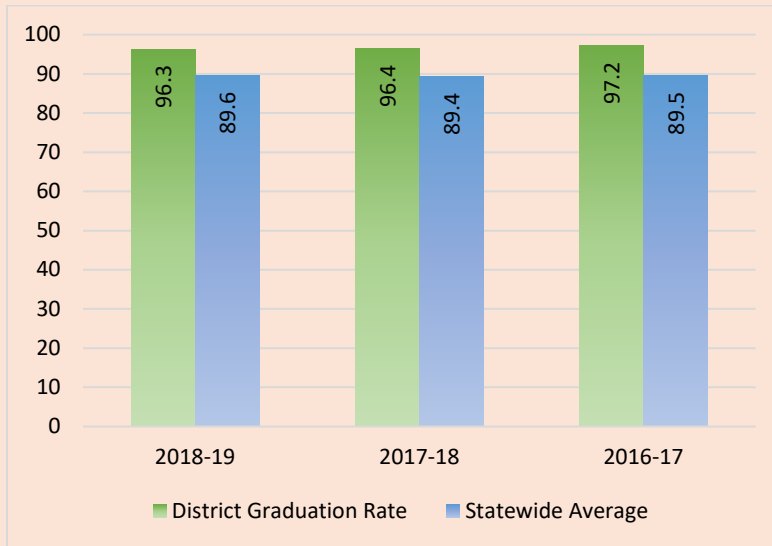
<sup>3</sup> Act 158 of 2018, effective October 24, 2018, amended the Public School Code to further delay the use of Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement until the 2021-22 school year. See 24 P.S. § 1-121(b)(1). Please refer to the following link regarding further guidance to local education agencies (LEAs) on Keystone end-of-course exams (Keystone Exams) in the context of the pandemic of 2020: <https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/Pages/Keystone-Exams.aspx>



## Academic Information Continued

### What is a 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate?

PDE collects enrollment and graduate data for all Pennsylvania public schools, which is used to calculate graduation rates. Cohort graduation rates are a calculation of the percentage of students who have graduated with a regular high school diploma within a designated number of years since the student first entered high school. The rate is determined for a cohort of students who have all entered high school for the first time during the same school year. Data specific to the 4-year cohort graduation rate is presented in the graph below.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> PDE also calculates 5-year and 6-year cohort graduation rates. Please visit PDE's website for additional information: <https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/CohortGradRate/Pages/default.aspx>.

## Findings

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For the audited period, our audit of the Plum Borough School District resulted in no findings.

## Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

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Our prior audit of the Plum Borough School District (District) released on May 19, 2016, resulted in one finding, as shown below. As part of our current audit, we determined the status of corrective action taken by the District to implement our prior audit recommendations. We interviewed District personnel and performed audit procedures as detailed in each status section below.

### Auditor General Performance Audit Report Released on May 19, 2016

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**Prior Finding:** **The District's General Fund Decreased by Over \$4.5 Million from June 30, 2010 Through June 30, 2014, Due to Persistent Operating Deficits**

Prior Finding Summary: During our prior audit of the District, we found that that the District is in a declining financial position. Between fiscal years ending 2010 through 2014, the District's General Fund decreased by over \$4.5 million. Financial industry guidelines recommend that a fund balance should range between 5 percent and 10 percent of annual expenditures. In the District's case, the \$1.6 million fund balance at the end of 2014 represented only 2.8 percent of expenditures of approximately \$57 million for that year. In addition, the independent auditors of the District's financial statements noted material internal control weaknesses.

Prior Recommendations: We recommended that the District should:

1. Implement a business model where operational expenditures are monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that they remain within budgeted limits and remain in line with budgeted revenue.
2. Develop a long-range financial plan, to be evaluated annually, to address deteriorating General Fund balance, declining liquidity, and increased long-term debt. Items for consideration should include, but not be limited to, the establishment of minimum required General Fund balance. Develop a long-term debt management strategy and a strategy for the increasing Public School Employees' Retirement System contributions.
3. Develop and publicly approve written policy and procedures to deal with noted internal control weaknesses. These procedures need to clearly define assigned roles of responsibility to ensure best practices are being followed and should include provisions for regular review and verification.

Current Status: We found that the District fully implemented our first two recommendations made in the prior audit report. The District monitors expenditures and revenues on a monthly basis and instituted a long-term financial plan to increase the District's General Fund balance. These recommendations helped the District increase its General Fund balance over our audit period. As of June 30, 2019, the District's General Fund balance increased to over \$4.5 million. Additionally, the District partially implemented our third recommendation. While the District has developed procedures

to address the internal control weaknesses identified, these procedures were not publicly approved.

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## Appendix A: Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

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School performance audits allow the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General to determine whether state funds, including school subsidies, are being used according to the purposes and guidelines that govern the use of those funds. Additionally, our audits examine the appropriateness of certain administrative and operational practices at each local education agency (LEA). The results of these audits are shared with LEA management, the Governor, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), and other concerned entities.

Our audit, conducted under authority of Sections 402 and 403 of The Fiscal Code,<sup>5</sup> is not a substitute for the local annual financial audit required by the Public School Code of 1949, as amended. We conducted our audit in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit.

Our audit focused on the District's effectiveness and/or compliance with applicable statutory provisions and related regulations in the areas of Bus Driver Requirements, Administrator Separations, Financial Stability, and School Safety, including fire and security drills. The audit objectives supporting these areas of focus are explained in the context of our methodology to achieve the objectives in the next section. Overall, our audit covered the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019. The scope of each individual objective is also detailed in the next section.

The District's management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal control to provide reasonable assurance that the District's objectives will be achieved.<sup>6</sup> *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* (also known as and hereafter referred to as the Green Book), issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, provides a framework for management to establish and maintain an effective internal control system. The Department of the Auditor General used the Green Book as the internal control analysis framework during the conduct of our audit.<sup>7</sup> The Green Book's standards are organized into five components of internal control. In an effective system of internal control, these five components work together in an integrated manner to help an entity achieve its objectives. Each of the five components of internal control contains principles, which are the requirements an entity should follow in establishing an effective system of internal control. We illustrate the five components and their underlying principles in Figure 1 on the following page.

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<sup>5</sup> 72 P.S. §§ 402 and 403.

<sup>6</sup> District objectives can be broadly classified into one or more of the following areas: effectiveness of operations; reliability of reporting for internal and external use; and compliance with applicable laws and regulations, more specifically in the District, referring to certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, and administrative procedures.

<sup>7</sup> Even though the Green Book was written for the federal government, it explicitly states that it may also be adopted by state, local, and quasi-government entities, as well as not-for-profit organizations, as a framework for establishing and maintaining an effective internal control system. The Green Book is assessable at <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-14-704G>

**Figure 1: Green Book Hierarchical Framework of Internal Control Standards**

Principle	Description
<b>Control Environment</b>	
1	Demonstrate commitment to integrity and ethical values
2	Exercise oversight responsibility
3	Establish structure, responsibility, and authority
4	Demonstrate commitment to competence
5	Enforce accountability
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	
6	Define objectives and risk tolerances
7	Identify, analyze, and respond to risks
8	Assess fraud risk
9	Identify, analyze, and respond to change

Principle	Description
<b>Control Activities</b>	
10	Design control activities
11	Design activities for the information system
12	Implement control activities
<b>Information and Communication</b>	
13	Use quality information
14	Communicate internally
15	Communicate externally
<b>Monitoring</b>	
16	Perform monitoring activities
17	Evaluate issues and remediate deficiencies

In compliance with generally accepted government auditing standards, we must determine whether internal control is significant to our audit objectives. We base our determination of significance on whether an entity’s internal control impacts our audit conclusion(s). If some, but not all, internal control components are significant to the audit objectives, we must identify those internal control components and underlying principles that are significant to the audit objectives.

In planning our audit, we obtained a general understanding of the District’s control environment. In performing our audit, we obtained an understanding of the District’s internal control sufficient to identify and assess the internal control significant within the context of the audit objectives. Figure 2 represents a summary of the internal control components and underlying principles that we identified as significant to the overall control environment and the specific audit objectives (denoted by an “X”).

**Figure 2 – Internal Control Components and Principles Identified as Significant**

Principle →	Internal Control Significant ?	Control Environment					Risk Assessment					Control Activities			Information and Communication			Monitoring	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
General/overall	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Bus Drivers	Yes										X		X			X	X		
Administrator Separations	Yes										X				X				
Financial Stability	No																		
Safe Schools	No																		

With respect to the principles identified, we evaluated the internal control(s) deemed significant within the context of our audit objectives and assessed those controls to the extent necessary to address our audit objectives. The results of our evaluation and assessment of the District’s internal control for each objective is discussed in the following section.

## **Objectives/Scope/Methodology**

In order to properly plan our audit and to guide us in selecting objectives, we reviewed pertinent laws and regulations, the District’s annual financial reports, annual General Fund budgets, and the independent audit reports of the District’s basic financial statements for the July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019 fiscal years. We conducted analytical procedures on the District’s state revenues and the transportation reimbursement data. We reviewed the prior audit report and we researched current events that possibly affected District operations. We also determined if the District had key personnel or software vendor changes since the prior audit.

Performance audits draw conclusions based on an evaluation of sufficient, appropriate evidence. Evidence is measured against criteria, such as laws, regulations, third-party studies, and best business practices. Our audit focused on the District’s effectiveness in four areas as described below. As we conducted our audit procedures, we sought to determine answers to the following questions, which served as our audit objectives.

### **Bus Driver Requirements**

- Did the District ensure that all bus drivers transporting District students are board approved and had the required driver’s license, physical exam, training, background checks, and clearances<sup>8</sup> as outlined in applicable laws?<sup>9</sup> Also, did the District adequately monitor driver records to ensure compliance with the ongoing five-year clearance requirements and ensure it obtained updated licenses and health physical records as applicable throughout the school year?
  - ✓ To address this objective, we assessed the District’s internal controls for maintaining, reviewing, and monitoring required bus driver requirements documents. We determined if all drivers were approved by the District’s Board of School Directors. We selected all 59 drivers transporting students as of April 28, 2021, and reviewed documentation to ensure the District complied with the requirements for those 59 drivers. We also determine if the District had monitoring procedures to ensure that all drivers had updated clearances, licenses, and physicals.

**Conclusion:** The results of our procedures for this objective did not disclose any reportable issues. However, we did identify internal control deficiencies that were not significant to our objective, but warranted the attention of District management and those charged with governance. Those concerns were verbally communicated to District management and those charged with governance for their consideration.

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<sup>8</sup> Auditors reviewed the required state, federal, and child abuse background clearances that the District obtained from the most reliable sources available, including the FBI, the Pennsylvania State Police, and the Department of Human Services. However, due to the sensitive and confidential nature of this information, we were unable to assess the reliability or completeness of these third-party databases.

<sup>9</sup> PSC 24 P.S. § 1-111, CPSL 23 Pa.C.S. § 6344(a.1), PSC (Educator Discipline) 24 P.S. § 2070.1a *et seq.*, State Vehicle Code 75 Pa.C.S. §§ 1508.1 and 1509, and State Board of Education’s regulations 22 *Pa. Code Chapter 8.*

## **Administrator Separations**

- Did the District ensure that all individually contracted employees who separated employment from the District were compensated in accordance with their contract? Also, did the contracts comply with the Public School Code<sup>10</sup> and were the final payments in accordance with Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) guidelines?
  - ✓ To address this objective, we assessed the District's internal controls over the process to determine final payouts for administrator separations. We reviewed the board meeting minutes, employment contracts, settlement agreements, and payroll and leave records for the four individually contracted administrators who separated employment from the District during the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2019. We reviewed the documentation to determine if the individuals were compensated in accordance with the terms of their contracts and confirmed only eligible wages were reported to PSERS. We verified that the Board complied with Section 508 of the Public School Code by voting to approve each administrator's separation from employment with the District.

**Conclusion:** The results of our procedures for this objective did not identify any reportable issues. However, we did identify internal control deficiencies that were not significant to our objective, but warranted the attention of District management and those charged with governance. These deficiencies were verbally communicated to District management and those charged with governance for their consideration.

## **Financial Stability**

- Based on an assessment of financial indicators, was the District in a declining financial position, and did it comply with all statutes prohibiting deficit fund balances and the over expending of the District's budget?
  - ✓ To address this objective, we reviewed the District's annual financial reports, General Fund budgets, and independent auditor's reports for the 2015-16 through 2018-19 fiscal years. The financial and statistical data was used to calculate the District's General Fund balance, operating position, charter school costs, debt ratio, and current ratio. These financial indicators were deemed appropriate for assessing the District's financial stability. The financial indicators are based on best business practices established by several agencies, including Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, the Colorado Office of the State Auditor, and the National Forum on Education Statistics.

**Conclusion:** The results of our procedures for this objective did not disclose any reportable issues.

## **School Safety**

- Did the District comply with requirements in the Public School Code and the Emergency Management Code related to emergency management plans, bullying prevention, memorandums of understanding with local law enforcement?<sup>11</sup> Also, did the District follow best practices related to physical building security and providing a safe school environment?

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<sup>10</sup> 24P.S. § 10-1073 (e)(2)(v).

<sup>11</sup> Safe Schools Act 24 P.S. § 13-1301-A *et seq.*, Emergency Management Services Code 35 Pa.C.S. § 7701.



- ✓ To address this objective, we reviewed a variety of documentation including but not limited to, District safety and emergency plans, training schedules, safety committee meetings, anti-bullying policies, and memorandums of understanding with local law enforcement.

**Conclusion:** Due to the sensitive nature of school safety, the full results of our review for this portion of the objective are not described in our audit report, but are shared with District officials, PDE’s Office of Safe Schools, and other appropriate law enforcement agencies deemed necessary.<sup>12</sup>

- Did the District comply with the fire and security drill requirements of Section 1517 of the Public School Code?<sup>13</sup> Also, did the District accurately report the dates of drills to PDE and maintain supporting documentation to evidence the drills conducted and reported to PDE?

- ✓ To address this objective, we obtained and reviewed the fire and security drill documentation for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years. We determined if security drills were held within the first 90 days of starting the school year for each building and if monthly fire drills were conducted in accordance with requirements. We also obtained the *Accuracy Certification Statements* that the District filed with PDE and compared the dates reported to the supporting documentation.

**Conclusion:** The results of our procedures for this portion of the school safety objective did not disclose any reportable issues.

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<sup>12</sup> Other law enforcement agencies include the Pennsylvania State police, the Office of the Attorney General, and local law enforcement with jurisdiction over the District’s school buildings.

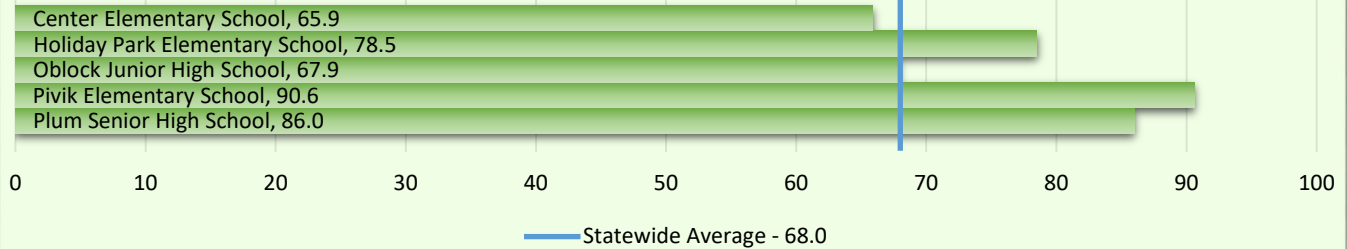
<sup>13</sup> Public School Code (Fire and Security Drills) 24 P.S. § 15-1517.

## Appendix B: Academic Detail

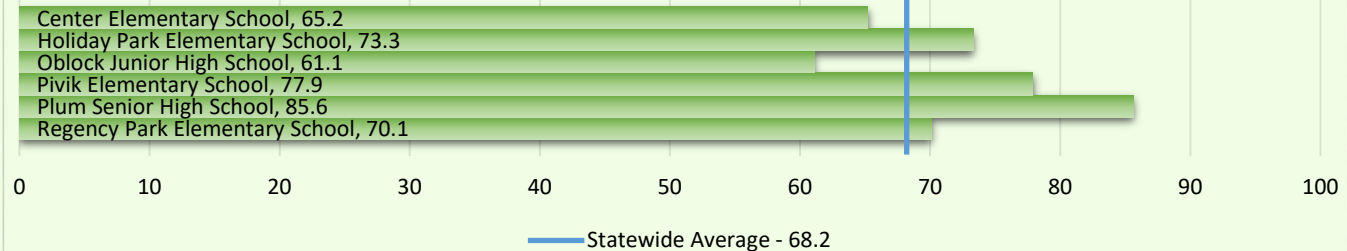
Benchmarks noted in the following graphs represent the statewide average of all public school buildings in the Commonwealth that received a score in the category and year noted.<sup>14</sup> Please note that if one of the District's schools did not receive a score in a particular category and year presented below, the school will not be listed in the corresponding graph.<sup>15</sup>

### SPP School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages

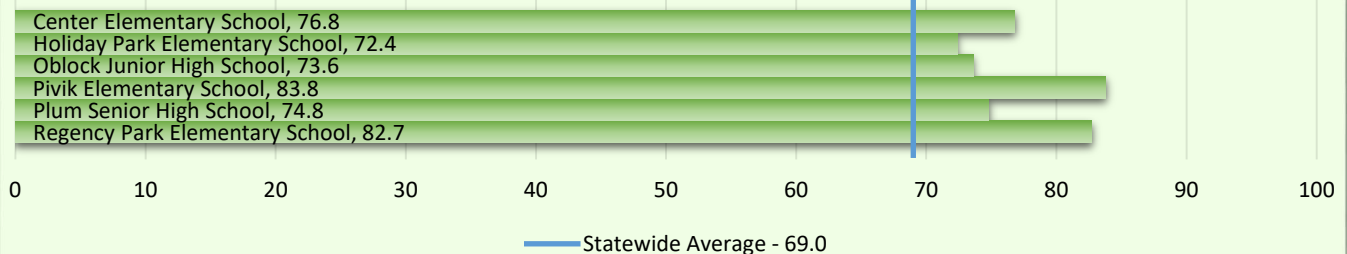
#### 2018-19



#### 2017-18



#### 2016-17

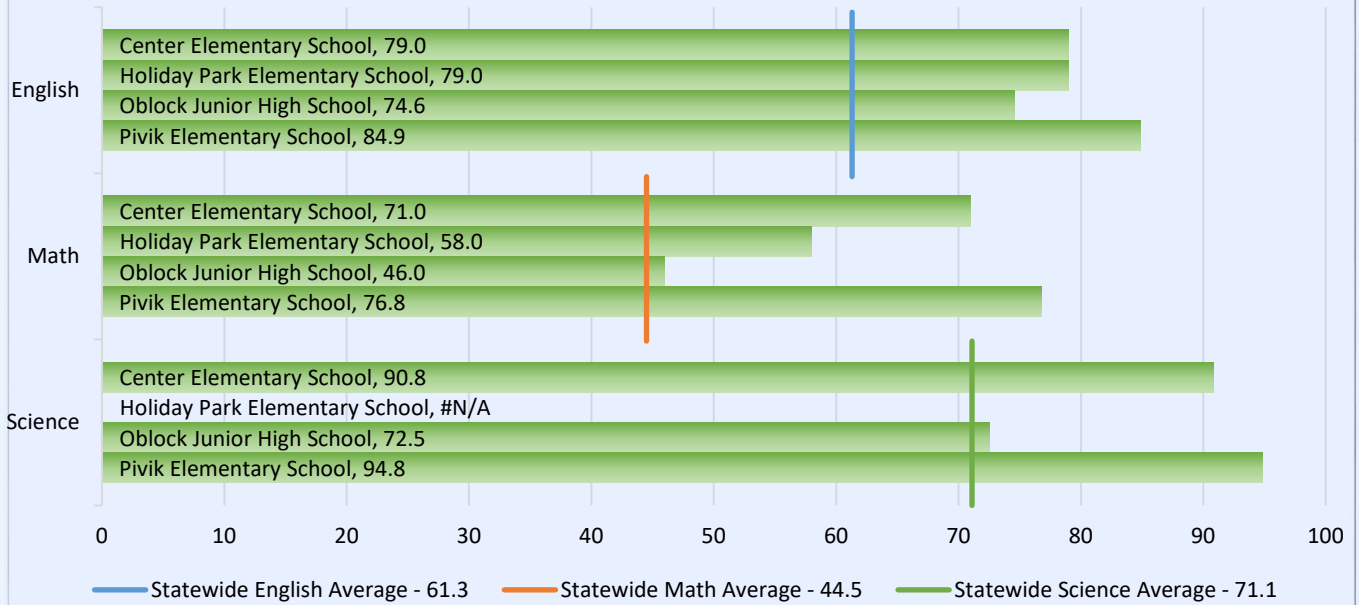


<sup>14</sup> Statewide averages were calculated by our Department based on individual school building scores for all public schools in the Commonwealth, including district schools, charters schools, and cyber charter schools.

<sup>15</sup> PDE's data does not provide any further information regarding the reason a score was not published for a specific school. However, readers can refer to PDE's website for general information regarding the issuance of academic scores.

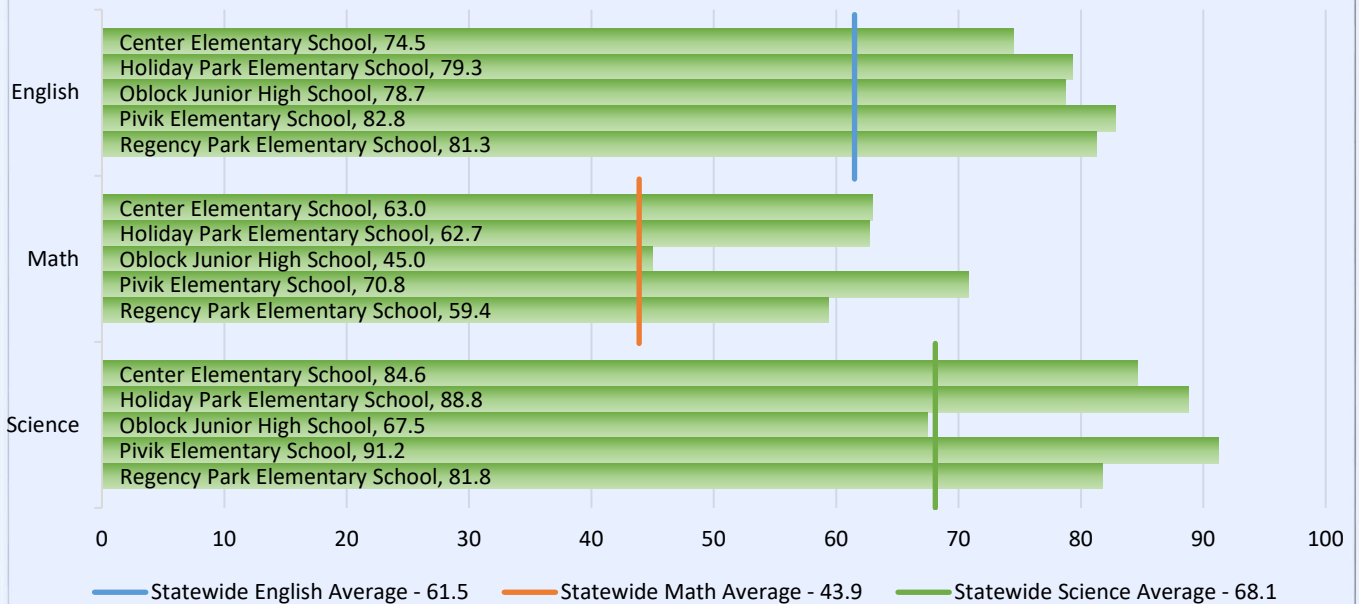
**PSSA Advanced or Proficient Percentage  
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages**

**2018-19**

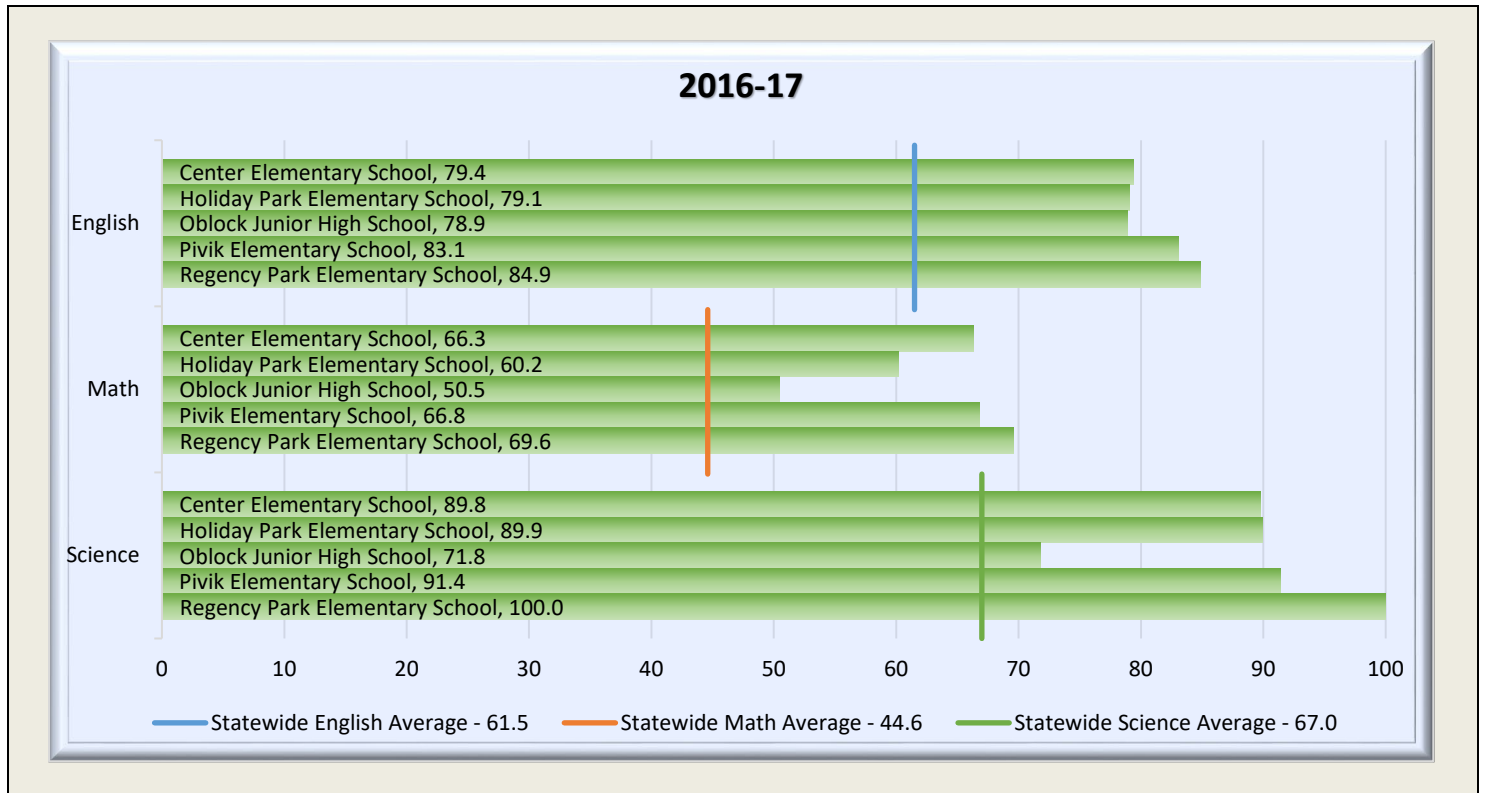


#N/A: Students in grades 4 and 8 are administered the Science PSSAs. The Holiday Park Elementary School is currently a grade 5 and 6 school; therefore, Science PSSAs are not administered to this school's students.

**2017-18**

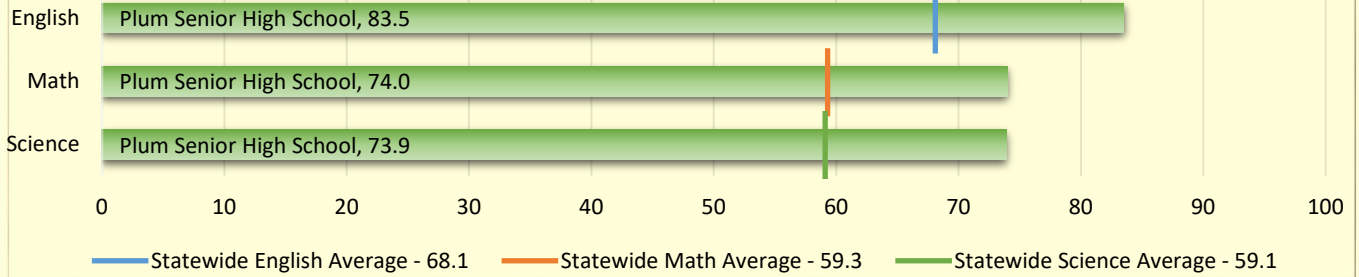


**PSSA Advanced or Proficient Percentage  
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages (continued)**

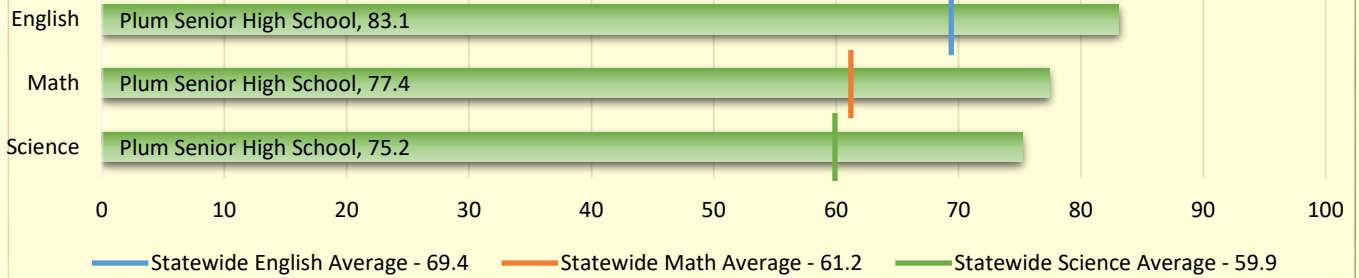


**Keystone Advanced or Proficient Percentage  
School Scores Compared to Statewide Averages**

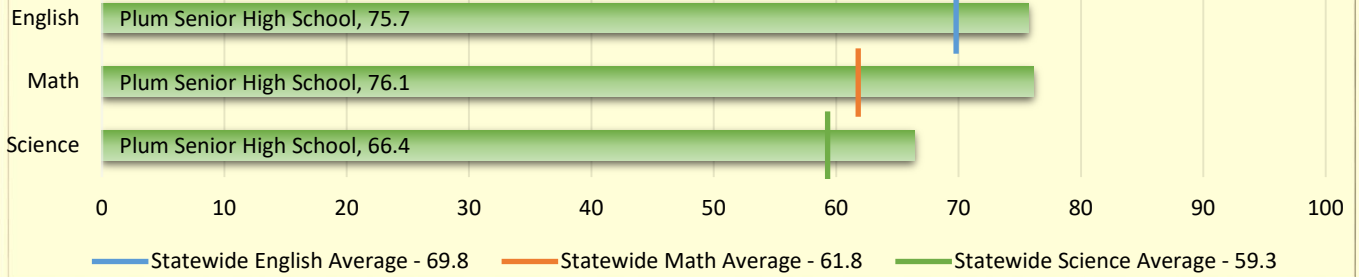
**2018-19**



**2017-18**



**2016-17**



## **Distribution List**

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This report was initially distributed to the Superintendent of the District, the Board of School Directors, and the following stakeholders:

**The Honorable Tom W. Wolf**  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

**The Honorable Noe Ortega**  
Acting Secretary of Education  
1010 Harristown Building #2  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126

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