

## Achievement Plus

*A partnership to transform underachieving schools*

Achievement Plus is a partnership between the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation and the Saint Paul Public Schools to improve the academic achievement of low-income children in Saint Paul urban schools. Developed in 1997, Achievement Plus integrates the school community, families, and the resources of public and private organizations to ensure academic achievement for all students. It has three core components:

- Standards-based curriculum and instruction
- Extended learning opportunities for students
- Learning supports for students and families

### Schools and student demographics

Schools participating in Achievement Plus have high numbers of students of color and are located in high-poverty areas of Saint Paul. Three schools currently participate:

- Dayton’s Bluff elementary school (original participant)
- John A. Johnson elementary school (joined in 2000-2001)
- North End elementary school (new in 2008-2009)

#### STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH

DAYTON'S BLUFF	JOHN A. JOHNSON	NORTH END	SAINT PAUL DISTRICT	STATE OF MINNESOTA
91%	92%	90%	70%	36%

### How it works

While the original program focused on student and family supports, early program evaluations showed no clear, consistent patterns of school success, pointing to the need for a stronger curriculum and instructional program. Over the next few years, a standards-based instructional program was implemented which has now been adopted throughout the Saint Paul school system.

Key elements of this curriculum include:

- Instruction and assessment that is consistent from one grade level to the next in reading, writing, and math
- On-going professional development to assist teachers in implementing Reader’s and Writer’s workshops and the math program
- Summer programs in literacy and math for students needing additional academic assistance

Extended student learning is integral to the program. Through a seamless transition from the school day, after-school activities offer a combination of academic and enrichment opportunities for students.

A core belief of Achievement Plus is to serve as a community hub. Partnerships with community organizations provide on-site services for students and community members that range from one-on-one tutoring to dental care to mental health services. On-site family resource centers help with basic needs such as adult English language classes, housing support, and emergency food and clothing. The East YMCA is attached to John A. Johnson school; a city of St. Paul recreation center is located adjacent to Dayton’s Bluff school.

Implementation of Achievement Plus looks different across the schools. John A. Johnson was designed as an Achievement Plus school and started its efforts from scratch. Dayton’s Bluff implemented the program in 1997, and restarted its efforts in 2001-2002 with the introduction of a more rigorous and standards-based curriculum, and a cadre of new teachers committed to the model. North End, the newest Achievement Plus school, provides gender-specific classes, along with programs targeted to raise achievement levels for African-American males. In addition, the school is focused on making certain that every student will graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education.

*continued*

## Results

### Academic performance

Dayton's Bluff is a clear success story. Combined MCA (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment) test scores (reading and math) rose from just 12 percent of students testing proficient in 2000 to slightly over 60 percent in 2007 and 2008. Test scores from spring of 2009 show gains in both reading and math, with students performing close to state levels in spite of a much higher poverty rate (91% vs. 36% free and reduced lunches). An "apples to apples" comparison of students with similar race, language status, and income characteristics finds most Dayton's Bluff students outperforming their statewide peers.

Johnson results are more mixed. When the program began in 2001, students didn't have as far to go — 37 percent tested proficient on combined (reading and math) MCA test scores. After an initial dip, scores improved to 60 percent, and then fell to 33 percent in 2006. In 2007 and 2008, scores showed positive gains, with 51 percent of students testing proficient. However, 2009 again showed mixed results. While reading scores were up slightly, math scores declined.

North End, in just its second year as an Achievement Plus school, continues to show positive academic progress. Reading scores were up 6 percentage points in 2009, while math scores increased an impressive 17 percentage points.

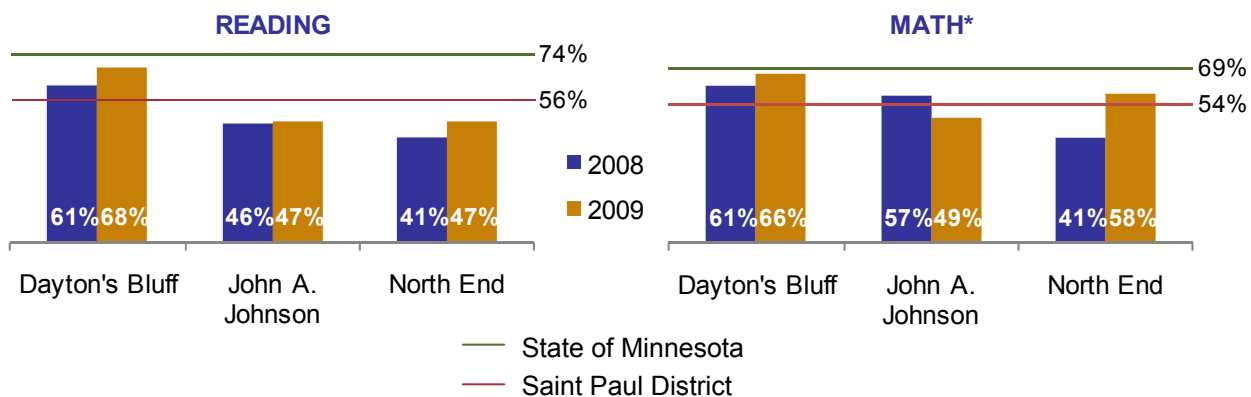
### School staff ratings

Ratings by teachers show continued improvement in order and discipline at both Dayton's Bluff and Johnson schools. Between 2001 and 2005, ratings at Dayton's Bluff climbed from about 2 to 3.7 on a 5 point scale. The national norm is about 3.5. Teacher ratings at Johnson increased from 3.1 in 2001 to almost 4 in 2005.

### Lessons Learned

- Improving academic achievement requires explicit and high academic standards and rigorous instruction. Support services alone will not have a substantial, school-wide effect on student achievement.
- Frequent assessment and close examination of test scores is essential.
- Success requires continued strong leadership and support of the model.
- Intensive professional development for all staff is essential.
- Extended learning opportunities must be targeted to the specific gaps in the children's knowledge and be tightly aligned with the school curriculum in order to show any effect on student achievement.
- Leadership in many urban public school systems is often short term. Private sector partners can provide a strong source of stable leadership to help make certain that reform initiatives can be sustained.

### STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN READING AND MATH: MCA-II RESULTS IN SPRING 2008 AND SPRING 2009 (grades 3-6 combined)



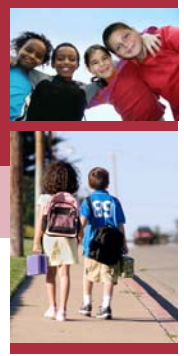
\* Includes students who took the MCA-II or the MTELL.



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## Achievement Plus

### Community schools partnerships

Achievement Plus is a partnership between the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation and the Saint Paul Public Schools to develop and strengthen community schools in order to improve the academic achievement of low-income children in Saint Paul urban schools. Started in 1997, the program currently includes three K-6th grade schools: Dayton’s Bluff, John A. Johnson and North End.

A core belief of Achievement Plus is to serve as a community hub. Partnerships with community organizations provide on-site services for students, their families, and community members. The schools offer extended hours and have an on-site coordinator who integrates services and facilitates communication among partners, school staff, and others.

Research indicates that providing such services as part of the community school program increases access and may contribute substantially to student achievement. However, it is important to note that research also clearly shows when services are not accompanied by a strong instructional program they are unlikely to boost achievement.

### Community partners

Achievement Plus seeks long-lasting partnerships with organizations that fill a need identified by school staff or neighborhood residents; focus on low-income families or communities; have a collaborative approach; and work to improve children’s academic achievement. Currently there are nine Achievement Plus partners; most have been in place for five or more years. Several partners serve all three schools, but other partners serve one or two schools.

### Effectiveness of community partnerships

Key informant interviews with partners, school principals, and school staff were conducted by Wilder Research. There was overall agreement that Achievement Plus has developed a clear vision; successfully engaged a broad base of partners to meet student, family and community needs; developed strategies for coordinating and linking services; and regularly communicates with all partners.

PARTNERSHIPS	SERVICES
<b>Dayton’s Bluff / John A. Johnson / North End</b>	
Children’s Dental Services Eastside Family Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multi-lingual dental services</li> <li>- Assistance with basic needs including housing. Services/classes related to parenting and life skills</li> <li>- Mental health services. Early intervention services: Primary Project (K-3) and KOFI (African American males)</li> </ul>
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	
<b>Dayton’s Bluff</b> — <i>additional services</i>	
Big Brothers/Big Sisters St. Paul Parks & Recreation Center (attached to school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentoring</li> <li>- After school program</li> </ul>
<b>John A. Johnson</b> — <i>additional services</i>	
Eastside Learning Center Goodwill/Easter Seals St. Mary’s Health Clinic East YMCA (attached to school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One-on-one tutoring in reading</li> <li>- Job skills training; adult mental health services</li> <li>- Health services</li> <li>- Physical education classes. Future Leaders program</li> </ul>
<b>North End</b> — <i>additional services</i>	
Eastside Learning Center Goodwill/Easter Seals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One-on-one tutoring in reading</li> <li>- Job skills training; adult mental health services</li> </ul>

## Benefits of Achievement Plus

Community partners believe that Achievement Plus contributes to children's school success by eliminating or reducing barriers to learning, or by providing supports for children to learn. They cited a number of benefits to their organization, including space at the school site to provide services, guidance and assistance in operating within the school (e.g., information about school procedures and logistics of delivering services), opportunities to raise awareness of their services and access to referral sources, and better coordination in the provision of services.

*Our staff are able to connect families with services they need through other community partners at the school (the school building is like a community center). Having community partner services in close proximity helps us accomplish our mission.*

Community partners see the Achievement Plus coordinator at the school as critical to ensuring the effectiveness of their partnership with the school, with one partner referring to the coordinator as the “glue” that holds the school-community partnership together successfully.

Those who provide services at other schools reported that, in comparison, they felt more included and involved in the Achievement Plus school (e.g., serving on school committees), and more supported by the school. Awareness and understanding of their services by school staff tended to be higher at Achievement Plus schools.

Principals also saw the school-community partner relationship as stronger at Achievement Plus schools. They felt that there was a greater sense of shared purpose with partners and emphasized the important role Achievement Plus plays in strengthening the relationship between the school and families. One principal stressed that the community partnerships help the school accomplish its academic goals.

Teachers and other staff believe Achievement Plus provides easy access to needed services for both students and their families. Some noted that by meeting these needs, community partners help students succeed in school.

*We have a really high needs population. It has been incredible for families that receive these services.*

## Issues to consider

Overall, Achievement Plus has succeeded in developing strong partnerships that meet student and family needs at the school sites. This comment from a teacher reflects the positive attitude staff have of the program:

*I have been in the Saint Paul schools for 20 years. It's only my second year here but I can see the difference this program makes.*

However, there is concern about maintaining the level of services. Several staff at Dayton's Bluff mentioned cutbacks in services offered by Achievement Plus, including mental health and dental services, and in the amount of programming.

In addition, there is an ongoing challenge to maximize the benefits of community partnerships to help students succeed academically. To realize such benefits fully, the relationships teachers have with community partners are important, especially in ensuring alignment in partners' services with the school's academic achievement goals. Teachers' knowledge of and engagement with community partners seems to vary within and across schools. (The teachers we interviewed were generally more knowledgeable and involved with community partners than other teachers or staff in the school.) Continuing to develop strong collaborative relationships between teachers and community partners seems crucial. Strong collaboration among community partners within the school is also helpful in meeting the needs of students and families effectively.



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