



# Achievement Plus

## *Stakeholder Views of Benefits and Future Needs*

Achievement Plus is a partnership between the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation and 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. Schools participating in Achievement Plus have high numbers of students of color and are located in high-poverty areas of Saint Paul. Three PreK-grade 5 schools currently participate: Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School, John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary School, and St. Paul Music Academy An Achievement Plus School. Almost all students in these schools (92-93%) were from lower income backgrounds (eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) in the 2016-2017 school year.

A core belief of Achievement Plus is to serve as a community hub. Partner community organizations provide on-site services for students, families, and community members that include one-on-one tutoring, mentoring, dental care, and mental health services. On-site family centers help with basic needs, such as housing support, emergency food, and clothing. The East YMCA is attached to John A. Johnson elementary school and a City of Saint Paul recreation center is located adjacent to Dayton's Bluff elementary school.

In 2017, Achievement Plus worked with Wilder Research to gather stakeholders' views on Achievement Plus' current status and future needs. Wilder Research conducted key informant interviews with community organization leaders, school principals, and a school district leader; focus group sessions with parents; and a survey with school staff. Achievement Plus would like to use the findings to inform their future work and strengthen collaboration with their partner organizations, parents, and school staff.

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## Community partners

Achievement Plus seeks long-lasting partnerships with organizations that fill a need identified by families or school staff and leaders; have a collaborative approach; and work to improve children’s academic achievement and well-being. Currently, there are 12 Achievement Plus partners; most have been in place for more than 10 years. Two partners serve all three schools, but other partners serve one or two schools.

Partnerships	Services
<b>All schools</b>	
Eastside Family Center/Neighborhood House	Assistance with basic needs, including housing, food, and clothing
Children’s Dental Services	Multi-lingual dental services
<b>Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School</b>	
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	Mental health services, including Project KOFI Family advocates
Big Brothers/Big Sisters	Mentoring
St. Paul Parks & Recreation Center	Afterschool program Rec Check
The Sheridan Story	Weekend food program
<b>John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary School</b>	
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	Mental health services
East Side Learning Center	One-on-one tutoring in reading
St. Mary’s Health Clinic	Health services
East YMCA	Afterschool program
HALO	Legal services
<b>St. Paul Music Academy An Achievement Plus School</b>	
Thad Wilderson	Mental health services
East Side Learning Center	One-on-one tutoring in reading
Book Buddies	Mentoring

There was overall agreement that Achievement Plus has successfully engaged community-based organizations as partners to address student, family, and community needs. School principals felt that the schools have appropriate partners. Community partners also felt that their services are aligned well with the needs of Achievement Plus students and families. However, community partners were less clear about whether the number of partners and amount of services in the schools were appropriate.

## Benefits of Achievement Plus

Community partners, school leaders, school staff, and parents viewed that having community partner organizations in the schools provides easy access to needed services and resources for students and families. Community partners and school staff mentioned that Achievement Plus contributes to children's school success by eliminating or reducing barriers to learning, or by providing supports for children to learn.



*I think it's a tremendous benefit for the children and the families because of the wraparound services—the multiple services that are available that keep children in school and provide children and parents the additional support they need to be more successful. – Community partner*

*Students can focus on learning because their basic needs are met. Better behaviors in class.  
– School staff*

Community partners also mentioned benefits to their organization, including space at the school site, supplies to provide services, guidance and assistance in operating within the school, opportunities to raise awareness of their services, access to referral sources, and better coordination in the provision of services.

Parents in the focus group session mentioned that they chose Achievement Plus school based on a sense of closeness or familiarity. No matter their reasons for choosing the school initially, parents at all three schools mentioned that they keep their children enrolled because of the welcoming environment to both parents and students.

*The teachers all know you. They keep in contact with you through email and phone calls. They know your children's other siblings and who their teachers are. – Parent*

*[The staff] are like family. Very respectful. I get along with the teachers. They can see where I am coming from. – Parent*

*We have different cultures in this school. I think it's beautiful. None of us gets treated any better than the other. And I like that. – Parent*

## Future needs and improvements

Stakeholders generally viewed Achievement Plus favorably and wished that Achievement Plus would continue. They also provided some suggestions for Achievement Plus improvement. Most commonly, stakeholders wanted more information about the community partners and their services. They wanted better collaboration and communication among community partner organizations and between partners and school staff. As part of improving cohesion and communication, school leaders and community organization partners wished for more opportunities for school staff and community partner organization staff to attend each other's meetings and trainings.

*I would like to see... a vibrant school, in that we truly all work together in the best interest of the child; we don't feel it's a different wing of the school. They're embedded in the school community, and we're embedded with them as well. – School principal*

Parents and school staff wished for more programs for students (e.g., tutoring, Book Buddies, and afterschool) and supports for families (e.g., transportation, health care, and counseling). Because the parent focus group sessions were conducted with a small number of parents who all spoke English, it seems important for Achievement Plus to conduct a needs assessment of parents, including those who do not speak English, to learn more about their needs and determine whether or not the current Achievement Plus services meet them. Finally, it seems important to share highlights of Achievement Plus with all stakeholders.

*I think it would be good to find time to get together and share some highlights we have from serving our families, so that the wins get spoken to and the positives strengthen the team. – School staff*

*I would like to see all partners and all the services aligned and for us to track the outcomes of the students and families who are getting services to see what the direct correlation of the educational benefits are. – School principal*

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### For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Current Status and Future Needs of Achievement Plus: Results of 2017 Stakeholder Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys*. For more information about this report, contact Edith Gozali-Lee at Wilder Research, 651-280-2676.

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