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**A+ Schools Issues First Semester Board Watch “Report Card”
*City School Board Begins Year on Positive Note, Earns a “Strong” B-***

PITTSBURGH, PA – November 23, 2009 – A+ Schools, Pittsburgh’s community alliance for public education, today issued its first 2009-2010 semester report card, giving the Pittsburgh Public School Board an overall grade of B-. Grades in five key areas — ranging from a C+ to a B+ — were based on observations from volunteers in its Board Watch program.

Although the latest report card showed the same overall grade of B- earned in the previously released year-end report card, the School Board’s grades actually improved in four areas, said Carey Harris, A+ Schools’ executive director.

“We are pleased to see the School Board continues to move in the right direction. Our grading system shows the School Board’s grade rose modestly from a weak to a strong B-,” Harris said. “It’s a positive start to the school year.”

Officially launched in January, Board Watch is a grassroots effort involving volunteers who are trained to observe Pittsburgh Public School Board meetings. So far, 80 volunteers have completed the required Board Watch training session.

According to Harris, the School Board earned the following grades: a B- in focus and mission (up from a C+), a B in conduct (up from a C+), a C+ in role clarity (up from a C) and a B- in competency (up from a C+). The School Board earned its highest grade for transparency, which remained a B+. (More details are available online at www.aplusschools.org)

Harris praised the School Board for continuing to welcome Board Watch volunteers and taking steps to improve public access — including the creation of a Board policy manual, which will be accessible, and searchable, online. Harris said she is hopeful the School Board will continue to act on recommendations made by A+ Schools in the report cards.

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In the current report card, A+ Schools made the following recommendations aimed at improving School Board accessibility and transparency:

- Provide better, even permanent, signage directing the public to meeting rooms.
- Move all agenda review and legislative meetings to the larger boardroom.
- Hold agenda review meetings before public hearings to improve opportunities for public comment.
- Create a deliberate process and time for tracking and addressing new and existing policy issues

“Our goal is to ensure public access and encourage public involvement. These are hallmarks of good governance,” Harris said. “Everyone benefits from an from an open, transparent, accountable and effective School Board, and an informed and engaged community.”

A+ Schools will continue to issue regular report cards during the 2009-2010 school year based on Board Watch reports. To ensure balanced observation and reporting, A+ requires at least three Board Watch volunteers to be present at all Agenda Review and Legislative meetings. The latest report card was compiled from 63 surveys taken by 30 volunteers. Attendance ranged from 3 to 10 volunteers, or an average of 6.4 observers per meeting, Harris said.

Board Watch volunteers are trained to observe and evaluate five specific indicators of effective Board governance. These indicators are:

- 1) **Focus and Mission:** Conversations and actions further district goals;
- 2) **Transparency:** Meetings and information are easily accessible to the public;
- 3) **Conduct:** Conflict is managed respectfully;
- 4) **Role Clarity:** Board provides policy leadership; and
- 5) **Competency:** Board members make informed decisions on behalf of all students.

Anyone interested in becoming a Board Watch volunteer should contact A+ Schools at 412-258-2660 or via e-mail at info@aplusschools.org.

A+ Schools is an independent community advocate for improvement in public education. Its vision is a community mobilized to improve public education to produce successive generations of young people who thrive and who build their families and futures in Pittsburgh. Its purpose is to be a community force advancing the highest educational achievement and character development for every public school student in Pittsburgh. For more information, contact A+ Schools at 412-258-2660 or visit www.aplusschools.org.

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