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**A+ Schools Endorses District's "Empowering Effective Teachers Plan,"  
Encourages Measures to Ensure Best Possible Instruction for Neediest Students**

***"Tools, Rules & Schools" Study Shows Changes Needed to Support Teaching in Vulnerable Schools***

PITTSBURGH, PA – January 11, 2010 – A+ Schools today endorsed the Pittsburgh Public School District's "Empowering Effective Teachers Plan" — recently funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation — and encouraged administrators to focus attention on vulnerable schools to ensure the best possible instruction for the district's neediest students.

A+ Schools, Pittsburgh's community alliance for public education, urged both the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, which collaborated on the plan, to focus their efforts on:

- Changing the hiring process to give candidates and schools more time, information and freedom of choice;
- Establishing a core team of highly effective and committed teachers at the most vulnerable schools; and
- Addressing specific needs at vulnerable schools to provide teachers with the learning environment and resources they need to deliver quality instruction.

"Our students, especially our neediest students, need teachers who have sufficient support and want to stay and make a positive difference," said Carey Harris, executive director of A+ Schools.

"This gives teachers the opportunity to build relationships with the community, parents and other teachers. It creates a culture where people — including students — feel they are part of something important and that what they do matters," Harris added.

The recommendations are the result of a 15-month study of "Tools, Rules and Schools" conducted by A+ Schools and its partners at the Learning Policy Center at the University of Pittsburgh. The study, which focused on elevating the quality of teaching in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, examined teacher distribution and movement as well as the staffing rules and working conditions influencing these trends. In their report, researchers identify "vulnerable schools" as those with the highest percentage of low-income students, higher number of disciplinary incidents and lower student achievement.

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## **Tools, Rules, Schools**

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Harris applauded the district's "Empowering Effective Teachers Plan" developed by the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, saying, "It's a fundamental shift in the way teaching is viewed. It says that teaching is a profession and it matters."

Harris said a number of specific initiatives contained in the district's plan were developed apart from — but substantiated by — the Tools, Rules and Schools research. She urged community members to support administrators and federation leaders in taking the following specific actions:

- Post job openings earlier and fill vacancies by July 1 to allow more time to prepare for the school year.
- Offer information to teacher candidates regarding a school's strategic plan, leadership team and existing teacher support.
- Conduct additional research to determine what added qualities and skills are needed to teach effectively in the most vulnerable schools and how to select those teachers during the recruiting and hiring process.
- Screen teacher candidates for their passion for teaching high-needs students and ability to effectively teach these students in a highly vulnerable school.
- Discontinue the late-summer placement of teachers in open positions in schools based solely on their seniority or displacement status.
- Establish a core team of highly effective teachers in every Pittsburgh public school and allow the core team to participate in the hiring of new teachers.
- Provide leadership development support for the core team to help them learn how to socialize and train new teachers, including introducing them to the school's students, community and culture, holding meetings and mentoring them over the school year.
- Give teachers the extra support needed to teach effectively in more vulnerable schools.
- Institute an efficient and fair process for dismissing teachers who are not teaching effectively.

"We are confident that the district's ambitious plan — which includes our recommendations — can lead to empowering effective teachers in our most vulnerable schools and making these schools a place where teachers want to stay," Harris said.

*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](http://www.aplusschools.org).*

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