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**A+ Schools Releases 2009 Report on School Progress
*Improvements Continue but Racial Achievement Gap Persists***

PITTSBURGH, PA – Nov. 9, 2009 – A+ Schools, Pittsburgh's community alliance for public education, today released its *Fifth Annual Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh*. The report provides parents, community leaders and others interested in public education with a fair and comprehensive look at the progress of each school in the Pittsburgh Public School District.

"Overall, we see some improvement in schools across the district. We have good examples of district and charter schools that are beating the odds and educating all students to high levels. But much work needs to be done to improve our school system so that for every child, in every school, school works," said Carey Harris, A+ Schools executive director.

According to Harris, more students are scoring in the advanced or proficient ranges in both reading and math compared to four years ago. However, high schools experienced the least progress, with 11th grade scores showing a dip in reading and a modest increase in math.

Harris said she is still troubled by the racial achievement gap — the difference between black and white students who scored proficient or advanced on the PSSAs. Since 2005, the gap narrowed in mathematics for all but third grade, but widened in reading for students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6 and 11. This is opposite of the state trend, where the achievement gap has narrowed for both reading and math at all grade levels over the same time period. In addition, a smaller percentage of black students had the grade point average needed to qualify for a Pittsburgh Promise scholarship, she said.

"We are particularly concerned by the persistent racial achievement disparity, especially in our high schools, and the implications for student readiness for job training and college and eligibility for the Pittsburgh Promise," Harris said. "Too few black students are eligible. We need to rectify that."

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Other findings in the report include:

- Overall, magnet schools (whole school magnets and schools with magnet programs) outperformed other schools in the district.
- Black students scored higher in some magnet schools and charter schools.
- Schools with more stable populations are more likely to have higher achievement.
- Student attendance has a direct impact on student achievement.

The A+ Schools *Report to the Community* is published yearly to provide information on PSSA achievement based on the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS), which analyzes whether or not selected grade levels in a school have made at least a year's worth of progress, regardless of the starting point. The A+ report also shows how students performed across the four PSSA score ranges by race, family income status and special education status.

"We hope this report motivates people to become tutors, mentors, classroom volunteers and advocates. Our students need help to prepare for life beyond high school," Harris said.

Harris urged the Pittsburgh community to review the report as a tool for asking questions and seeking information about the quality of city schools. A+ Schools will mail the report this week directly to 20,000 city households with children enrolled in the Pittsburgh Public Schools and children ages 5 and under. In addition, the report will be available in local libraries, city schools and at elected officials' offices, or by calling A+ Schools. The report also can be accessed online at www.aplusschools.org.

Opportunities to Learn More

A+ Schools is offering tailored presentations to school and community groups interested in learning more about the report and how to use it. To arrange a presentation, contact A+ Schools at 412-258-2660, or visit the A+ Schools Web site at www.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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