



Contact: Carey Harris, A+ Schools
(412) 258-2660
charris@aplusschools.org

A+ Schools Issues Year-End School Board “Report Card”
Pittsburgh School Board Shows Progress, Earns a B- through Board Watch Program

PITTSBURGH, PA – June 25, 2009 – A+ Schools, Pittsburgh’s community alliance for public education, today issued its second report card, giving the city 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 the new Board Watch program.

The latest report card shows an overall improvement over the C+ issued in the March report card. Officially launched in January, Board Watch is a grassroots effort involving volunteers who are trained to observe Pittsburgh Public School Board meetings. So far, 51 volunteers have completed the required Board Watch training session.

Carey Harris, A+ Schools’ executive director, said the School Board’s grade rose to a B+ in the area of transparency, but fell to a C+ in conduct and a C in role clarity. Grades for focus/mission and competency remained level at C+. (More details are available online at www.aplusschools.org.)

“We are pleased to see these latest scores indicate the School Board is making progress. This is the purpose of Board Watch,” Harris said. “We are hopeful that the structural changes we have recommended can help the School Board rise to the next level.”

Harris commended the School Board for accepting recommendations in the previous report card and taking action to improve transparency, or accessibility to the public. These measures include posting agenda packets online in advance and improving signage to welcome and direct the public.

“We applaud the School Board for taking these positive steps. As we’ve said before, ensuring public access and encouraging public involvement are hallmarks of good governance,” Harris said. “But there’s still much work that needs to be done. We urge School Board members to focus their governance on providing leadership and direction to the school district rather than managing and approving administrative details. “

— more —

Report Card Page Two

In addition to the report card, A+ Schools issued the following recommendations aimed at improving School Board conduct and role clarity:

- Remove routine administrative items from the School Board agenda.
- Concentrate School Board efforts on being a policymaking body focused on the district-wide reform strategy.
- Designate a specific time during meetings for proactive discussions about strategy, planning and policy review.
- Support a change to the state school code clarifying the Pittsburgh Public School Board's role as a policymaking body and eliminating administrative and managerial tasks.

Harris said these changes will help the School Board to function more effectively — and improve grades in those areas. “Observer ratings improve whenever they see the board is focused on district goals,” she said

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 44 surveys taken by 24 volunteers. Attendance ranged from four to 13 volunteers, or an average of 7.3 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. Current Board Watch partners include eight local and statewide non-profits that work to increase civic engagement. A complete list of partners can be found 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.

###