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**A+ Schools says closing gaps in opportunity and achievement for Pittsburgh's students is possible, points to positive outliers as a starting point for learning how to improve**

**PITTSBURGH, PA – Nov. 11, 2019** – Pittsburgh's public district and charter schools continue to struggle in closing gaps in achievement and opportunity, like in so many cities across the country. A+ Schools, Pittsburgh's community advocate for equity and excellence in public education, is taking a deeper look at schools that consistently achieve better results with their students in this year's annual *Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh*, which was released to the public today.

"We believe all students can learn and achieve at high levels if we tap into the unlocked potential of the people in our schools and this community," said James Fogarty, Executive Director at A+ Schools. "The educational system--like so many of our systems from health to economics--does not serve all children well. This year we are taking a closer look at six schools to understand how they, year in and year out, are helping all students get better than average results."

A new section in A+ Schools' annual *Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh*, called "Rising up: Stories from our schools" looks at how these schools [two district magnets, two district neighborhood schools, one partial district magnet school, and one charter school] are changing the narratives about what is possible:

- While chronic absence, missing 10% or more of the school year or eighteen or more days, exceeds 20% in most Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), Schiller 6-8 has gotten its number of students chronically absent down from a high of 36% in 2012-13, to 3% in 2019.
- Pittsburgh Dilworth has for the last four out of five years had a suspension rate of 1%, compared to the District's average of 4% for K-5 schools in 2019.
- Pittsburgh Allegheny Traditional Academy and Dilworth schools both consistently rank near the top of the number of African-American students in their schools reading at grade level by third grade with 75% reading at grade level in 2019 at Allegheny and 58% at Dilworth. In 2019, 38% of PPS African-American third graders were reading at grade level districtwide.
- Creating a workplace where teachers feel they are given the support they need to succeed is not an easy task, yet at Pittsburgh Beechwood, educators consistently report that their school is a good place to work and learn, with 97% in 2019 making that claim.
- Exceeding state student learning growth predictions happens from time to time at many PPS schools. At Pittsburgh Arsenal 6-8, it has become a common occurrence with scores in the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System for the last six years ranked near the top of all schools in Pennsylvania. Their hard work has led to math proficiency for African-American students (30% proficient or advanced in 2019) that is over 3 times greater than the District's average of 8% in grades 6-8.
- City Charter High School was founded by two former PPS educators to create a new design for a high school that could ensure all students graduate ready for college or career. Compared to the national average of 27% of high poverty schools whose graduates complete college or trade school in six years, City High's rate of 41% is showing that they are moving the needle for their

graduates (96% of whom graduated in four years in 2018, the most recent year for which there is data).

- Pittsburgh Brashear has entrusted its student leaders to help lead the change. Leon Blair, former student body president, tells his story working with his principal to improve his alma mater.

“What you’ll find in our Report this year are stories of hard work, dedication, and most of all an unrelenting belief in our students. These stories should not substitute for deeper research and learning,” said Fogarty, “but we hope they inspire students, parents, teachers, principals, researchers, and community leaders to learn with us to support all schools to better serve all of our children. Over the next few months we’ll be engaging schools, community organizations, and partners in conversations about how to get at the root cause of problems that are impeding learning. We believe we have everything we need to succeed. Let’s get to work.”

Joining Fogarty to reflect on the lessons in the Report were parents (Stacy Powell, Shallegra Moye), students (Dominic Victoria, Morrison Young, and Griffin Shea-Wood), the Chief Academic Officer of Pittsburgh Public Schools, Ms. Minika Jenkins, and the President of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, Ms. Nina Esposito-Visgitis.

Prior to his presentation on the school data, three teachers, Jason Boll (Perry HS), Michael Varlotta (Perry HS), and Kelley Gavlik (Brashear HS) were recognized by A+ Schools and TeenBloc leaders who had nominated them for the honor of A+ Schools Educational Leadership Award. These teachers exemplify what it means to lead change from the classroom and to support students reach their fullest potential.

The full report – and information about school options for families– can be accessed online at [ourschoolspittsburgh.org](http://ourschoolspittsburgh.org), a new resource built out to accompany this year’s Report. A+ Schools has mailed the report directly to 15,000 city households with children enrolled in Pittsburgh Public Schools. In addition, the report will be available in local libraries, city schools and at elected officials’ offices. Community members are urged to review the report as a tool to ask questions and seek information about the quality of schools. Members of A+ Schools’ staff are available to present the report to any organization interested in learning more – please call 412-697-1298 to request a presentation.

*A+ Schools is the community advocate and leader for educational equity and excellence in Pittsburgh’s Public Schools. Its vision is a city where every child has access to the education they need to be successful in college, career, and life. For more information, contact A+ Schools at 412-697-1298 or visit [aplusschools.org](http://aplusschools.org).*

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