

**For Immediate Release**

Contacts: Ebony Pugh 412-622-3616  
Lisa Fischetti 412-622-3603

## **Pittsburgh Public Schools Makes History Becoming Largest District in State to Achieve AYP**

PITTSBURGH, August 10, 2009 – A group of civic leaders, community partners, school board directors and District staff gathered today at a historic place for a historic moment as Superintendent Mark Roosevelt announced the good news – Pittsburgh Public Schools is the largest school district in the State to have ever achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The announcement by the Superintendent at the Senator John Heinz History Center marked a first for the District and highlights the substantial progress Pittsburgh Public Schools is making. By achieving AYP, the District has met state and federal targets set under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This is the first time the District has made AYP in the seven school years since NCLB was signed into law in January 2002. As a result, the District will move into the Making Progress status under NCLB.

“Three years after launching *Excellence for All*, our plan for increasing student achievement, the District has made AYP for the first time in its history,” said Roosevelt. “I want to applaud the hard work and accomplishments of our teachers, principals and all of our staff at every level. It is an honor to thank you on behalf of all of our students and their families.”

Roosevelt made a special point of acknowledging the progress made by the Pittsburgh School Board and said, “I want to thank our school board. Our progress would not be possible without their firm commitment to advancing student achievement and their recognition that we must focus our efforts, attention *and* resources on that objective. You have cast very hard votes and shown great courage. You deserve the community’s thanks.”

Noting the tremendous support the community has shown for the District’s reform initiatives and the many civic leaders and community partners represented at the event, Roosevelt stated, “We have been able to move our reform agenda while still cutting nearly \$50 million from our budget – and thus holding the line on taxes – due to the amazing support of so many of our community partners. We have been able to keep our momentum for children going while still making brutally hard decisions thanks to the community’s willingness to give us the benefit of the doubt as we closed schools and opened new programs. All of that is now bearing fruit for our children and will continue to do so for years to come. So thank you all again for your ongoing support of our work and your commitment to making the lives of Pittsburgh’s children better. Pittsburgh has what it takes to be great again because we have all come together around a common goal – the needs of our children and the future of our City.”

The Superintendent added, “This is what we have done in four years – which would have been great – but thanks to an extraordinary act on the part of the region’s largest employer, UPMC, and the additional generosity of many others, this community has done far, far more. You have eliminated money as an obstacle for our children. Think about that and give thanks again to UPMC and all those who are making The Pittsburgh Promise possible.”

*-more-*

## **Page 2 – PPS Makes History Becoming Largest District in State to Achieve AYP**

The dramatic progress of the District was underscored by a statement read by the Superintendent, which he received from Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education Gerald L. Zahorchak:

"Pittsburgh's students and educators have done a remarkable job in recent years reaching new heights in academic achievement. Six years ago, it appeared as though Pittsburgh schools were in an irreversible downward spiral, but they have reversed course in an impressive fashion. This progress is the direct result of a shift towards stronger leadership and teaching practices. As the Commonwealth's Secretary of Education, I am just as proud as any educator or student in the Pittsburgh schools of this tremendous improvement. While challenges remain, I'm confident the students will rise to those challenges and stay on the course to greater gains."

School Board President Theresa Colaizzi surprised the Superintendent with a special award to commemorate the District's first-time achievement of AYP. Said Colaizzi, "On behalf of the School Board, I want to thank you for your courage and leadership in doing what it takes so every child will achieve excellence and graduate with the prospect of a brighter future. You dream big, you work hard, you get results. You envisioned The Pittsburgh Promise and you are ensuring that our students, and all of us, are on the right path to getting there. Our children are better for it and our school district and City are better for it. Thank you for your love of Pittsburgh. Thank you for being you."

### ***What It Takes to Achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)***

Achieving AYP for 2008-09 means that the District has met all of its targets on each of three standards—high school graduation, test participation and academic performance. To meet the targets for the third component of AYP—academic performance—a district must have at least 63% of its students score *proficient* or *advanced* in Reading (compared with 54% in 2007) and at least 56% score *proficient* or *advanced* in Mathematics (compared with 45% in 2007) on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams. Additionally, in order to meet the performance targets, a district must meet these Reading and Mathematics targets for all students and all student subgroups in at least one grade band. Grade bands consist of grades 3-5, 6-8 and 11.

For 2008-09, the District did meet all targets for the grade span 3-5 for both Reading and Mathematics across all of its eight student subgroups: White, African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Multi-Racial/Ethnic, Limited English Proficiency, Economically Disadvantaged and Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Special Education. Since it made AYP for 2009, the District's NCLB status will improve from Corrective Action II to Making Progress. The District must meet federal and state targets for a second consecutive year and achieve AYP in 2010 in order to be considered on track to meet the NCLB goal.

### ***District Increases Percentage of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Targets Met***

The State standards have been established so that districts and schools will continue to have to meet higher expectations over time in order to meet the federal requirement of 100% proficiency by the 2013-14 school year. Over the past four years, the District has increased the percentage of AYP targets it has met even as the number of targets continues to increase. The number of targets is based on the number of student subgroups. "What's amazing about the District making AYP in 2009 is that we did so as the complexity and difficulty of achieving AYP continues to increase," commented Roosevelt.

In 2005, when the only grades tested in Pennsylvania were 5, 8 and 11, the District met 50 of 70 AYP targets, or 71.4%. The addition of testing in grades 3, 4, 6 and 7 has increased the number of AYP targets the District must meet. The District's targets continue to increase because unlike many rural and suburban districts, urban districts have diverse student populations, resulting in a higher number of student subgroups. A subgroup is identified once there are 40 or more students that meet the definition of a subgroup.

In 2009, the District met 86 of 98 AYP targets, or 87.8%, as compared to 78 of 96 targets, or 81.3% in 2007, the first year that testing occurred across all grades 3-8 and 11.

-more-

***District Students Continue to Show Progress on State Exams***

Building on last year’s substantial gains, District students continue to show academic progress on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). For 2008-09, students made gains in Reading and Mathematics *proficiency* on 11 of 14 PSSA exams.

District students additionally exceeded No Child Left Behind (NCLB) expectations, which focus on students reaching the *proficient* level, as they showed progress moving to *advanced* in Reading and Mathematics on 10 of 14 exams. Some of the progress to the advanced level is an indication that the Pittsburgh Public Schools can advance student achievement to levels not usually seen in urban settings; for example in the critical eighth-grade year 45.2% of District students are *advanced* in Reading, a remarkable 105.5% increase over the last four years.

***District Initiatives Taking Hold***

Pittsburgh Public Schools student achievement results provide evidence that the District’s systemic initiatives to improve the academic performance are taking hold. Over the past three years, the District has put into place the core elements for improving student achievement, including:

- Implementing a new, rigorous PreK-12 curriculum;
- Launching The Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System of Excellence (PULSE), a comprehensive system to recruit, train, support, evaluate, improve and compensate principals in order to ensure strong school leadership;
- Providing ongoing training for instructional staff so that they continually enhance the engagement of students and teach the curriculum at a high level;
- Using diagnostic assessments to improve student learning;
- Providing instructional coaches in every school to deepen the work;
- Introducing the Positive Behavior Intervention Support program to establish common expectations for good behavior; and,
- Expanding early childhood offerings so a child’s school experience gets off to a better start when transitioning to Kindergarten.

Increases in student achievement bode well for ensuring that District students will reap the benefit of The Pittsburgh Promise™, a unique community commitment that eliminates money as a barrier to higher education. “We’re committed to improving our children’s life prospects,” said Roosevelt. “This means students need to dream big, work hard and be Promise-Ready so that they can receive Promise scholarships and pursue education beyond high school”

***For More Information***

To view a video of today’s press conference or for a complete listing of district-level PSSA results by grade level please use the link <http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/StudentAchievementResults> or visit the Pittsburgh Public Schools website at [www.pps.k12.pa.us](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us).

You may also call the **Parent Hotline at 412-622-7920** or visit the Division of Communications, Room 204, Pittsburgh Public Schools Administration Building, 341 South Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

###