

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Pittsburgh Students Continue to Make Academic Progress on State Exams**

### ***Strongest Gains Seen in the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade***

#### ***Accelerated Learning Academies Continue to Accelerate Student Achievement***

PITTSBURGH, July 23, 2009 – Building on last year’s substantial gains, District students continue to show academic progress on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). Based on preliminary district-level results, students made gains in Reading and Mathematics proficiency on 11 of 14 PSSA exams. Community leadership gathered today at Pittsburgh Sunnyside K-8 as Superintendent Mark Roosevelt, along with District leadership, teachers and students, highlighted the District’s 2009 student achievement results. 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. Students additionally showed progress in moving out of *below basic* on 9 of 14 PSSA exams.

“We continue to see significant progress on District goals aimed at increasing student achievement, meaning more students are on course to being ‘Promise-Ready,’” said Roosevelt. “We will continue to deepen our ongoing work so that all students achieve at greater levels.”

Pittsburgh Public Schools released a complete listing of the preliminary district-level PSSA results by grade level and spotlighted categories and schools that represented accelerated progress based on District priorities. The PSSA measures individual student growth and determines the level to which students reach Pennsylvania Reading and Mathematics standards in grades 3 – 8 and 11. PSSA results are used to determine a district’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The State has not yet released AYP information or statewide PSSA data for 2009.

#### ***PSSA Results Over Four Years***

At today’s briefing the Superintendent highlighted student achievement progress within key District priorities over the past four years. District 8<sup>th</sup> graders are increasingly prepared to meet the challenges of transitioning to high school. Over the past four years, students in Grade 8 have made the most dramatic improvement, increasing 12.6 points from 50.3% to 71.4% *proficient or above* in Reading. Furthermore for Reading in 2008-09, 45.2% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders scored at the *advanced* level compared to 22.0% in 2004-05, which is an increase of 23.3 points over four years. In Mathematics, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students demonstrating *proficient or above* increased from 46.8% in 2004-05 to 59.4% in 2008-09, which is an increase of 6.9 points over four years.

“To take full advantage of the Pittsburgh Promise students need to enter the 9<sup>th</sup> grade ready for the rigorous curriculum and to be fully engage in the management of their own learning,” said Roosevelt. “That’s why the dramatic gains we are seeing in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade are tremendously encouraging.”

Pittsburgh Sunnyside K-8 was among those spotlighted today for ranking among the District’s top ten schools with the greatest improvements in *advanced* Reading in Grade 8. The school’s 8<sup>th</sup> graders posted large gains in *advanced* Reading, improving 29.5 points from 29.6% in 2007-08 to 59.1% in 2008-09.

This year, Mathematics proficiency in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade increased 5.2 points, which means students have improved 6.9 points over four years. Additionally, this year’s Reading proficiency in Grade 5 improved 9.5 points to 52.1%, up 22.3% from last year’s 42.6%. Last year’s substantial gains in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Reading dropped slightly to 62.3% compared the previous 64.1%. Despite this 1.8 point decrease, students have improved 12.6 points in grade 3 Reading over the past four years.

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### ***Making Progress Eliminating the Disparity***

A disproportionate number of the District's African-American students are not achieving at grade level, which makes the elimination of the academic disparity between African-American and White students one of the priorities of the District. The District made progress in reducing the disparity on 9 of the 14 PSSA exams. Since 2005-06, the most progress was made in grades 4, 5, and 8. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, progress was made in eliminating the disparity in Reading by 5.5 points and in Mathematics the disparity decreased by 4.3 points. In grade 4, the Mathematics disparity decreased by 4.6 points. In grade 5, the Mathematics disparity decreased by 6.8 points.

### ***Accelerated Learning Academies Continue to Accelerate Student Achievement***

Designed to increase and accelerate student achievement, the District's Accelerated Learning Academies (ALAs), posted increases at the *advanced* level in Reading that are 1.4 times greater than the remainder of the District and 3.5 times greater in Mathematics over last year. Additionally, students in the ALAs showed growth in proficiency equal to the remainder of the District in Reading and 2.3 times greater in Mathematics over last year. ALA students also posted percentage point reductions in *below basic* 2.0 times greater than the remainder of District in Reading and 2.1 times greater in Mathematic over last year.

"We are pleased to see accelerated gains in student achievement at the *advanced* level, while at the same time dramatically reducing the number of students performing at *below basic* levels at our ALAs," said Deputy Superintendent Linda Lane.

### ***Results Reaffirm the Need to Continue With Dramatic Changes at the High School Level***

Over four years, students in grade 11 have increased 5.0 points in Mathematics proficiency, while Reading has remained flat. This year, 50.7% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders demonstrated *proficiency or above* in Reading while Mathematics decreased from 52.3% to 43.3%. Strong gains were seen in both Reading and Mathematics at Pittsburgh Carrick High School, which was spotlighted at today's event. Students at Pittsburgh Carrick improved 14.3 points in Reading proficiency, 6.8 points in *advanced* Reading and 5.4 points in *advanced* Mathematics.

### ***Schools Led by Graduates of the District's Principal Leadership Program Show Substantial Progress***

One of the District's major reform efforts is its Pittsburgh Emerging Leadership Academy (PELA). PELA is a component of the District's Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System for Excellence (PULSE) accountability system to recruit, train, support, evaluate and compensate principals. The PELA program provides a corps of highly skilled administrators prepared to meet the District's needs.

In 2008-09, the first year of implementation for PELA, schools led by principals who graduated from the PELA program saw increases in Reading proficiency that exceeded District increases in six of the seven grades tested. Additionally, increases in Mathematics proficiency at schools led by PELA principals exceeded the District increases in five of the seven grades tested. For the 2008-09 school year, PELA principals were placed at Pittsburgh Arsenal K-5, Pittsburgh Peabody High School, Pittsburgh Schiller 6-8, Pittsburgh Rooney 6-8 and Pittsburgh West Liberty K-5. For the upcoming school year, an additional four PELA graduates will take the lead as principals at Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12, Pittsburgh Langley High School, Pittsburgh Morrow PreK-5 and Pittsburgh Westinghouse High School.

The District plans to provide the Board and the public with a full presentation of the 2009 PSSA results at the Board's August 11<sup>th</sup> Education Committee meeting.

### **For More Information**

For a complete listing of district-level PSSA results by grade level and to view a video of today's press event, please use this 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.

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