

For Immediate Release

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

Students Show Substantial Academic Progress Across the Board

Accelerated Learning Academies Deliver on Their Mission, Significantly Outpacing Strong Overall District Gains

PITTSBURGH, July 24, 2008 – District students made remarkable progress in Reading and Mathematics *proficiency* on 13 of the 14 exams in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in the 2007-08 school year. Noting the importance of strong gains in *proficiency* across all grade levels, Superintendent Mark Roosevelt also highlighted increases in *advanced* Reading and Mathematics on 12 of the 14 PSSA exams at today's community leadership briefing at Pittsburgh CAPA High School. Roosevelt emphasized that District goals and ambitions for student achievement exceed compliance with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which focuses on moving students to proficiency. Another one of the District's goals is reducing the number of students performing at the *below basic* level. This year students showed substantial progress in moving out of *below basic* on 11 of 14 PSSA exams.

Increases in PSSA scores bode well for ensuring that students will reap the benefits of The Pittsburgh Promise. "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."

PSSA results provide evidence that the District's systemic initiatives to raise student achievement levels are taking hold. Over the past two years, the District put into place the core elements for raising student achievement, which include the following:

- A new rigorous curriculum;
- A nationally recognized system – Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System of Excellence (PULSE) – to train, support, evaluate and reward principals;
- An aggressive, comprehensive and ongoing professional development for all instructional personnel;
- The use of diagnostic assessments to get help to students quickly; and,
- Instructional coaches in every school to deepen the work.

"There's no doubt that our children are learning more," stated Roosevelt. He added "With an ongoing commitment to the initiatives we have put into place and a deepening of our efforts, I am confident that we will see continued gains in student achievement at all levels for many years to come in Pittsburgh."

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 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 released AYP information or statewide PSSA data for 2008.

-more-

Accelerated Learning Academies Accelerate Student Achievement

Students attending the District’s Accelerated Learning Academies (ALA’s) achieved percentage point increases in *proficiency or above* at a rate 2.5 times greater than the District overall in Reading and 1.4 times greater in Mathematics this past school year. Additionally, students in ALA’s posted a 3.1 percentage point increase in *advanced* Reading and a 5.4 percentage point increase in *advanced* Mathematics over last year. ALA students also posted percentage point reductions in *below basic* 3.0 times greater than the District overall in Reading and 1.8 times greater in Mathematics.

Students from Pittsburgh Arlington PreK-8, an Accelerated Learning Academy, posted the largest increase in 3rd grade reading proficiency district-wide. Pittsburgh Arlington is among nine elementary schools that increased by more than 10 percentage points from last year to this year in 3rd grade Reading *proficiency or above*. The other eight schools include Pittsburgh Vann K-8, Pittsburgh Manchester PreK-8, Pittsburgh Weil PreK-8, Pittsburgh Sunnyside K-8, Pittsburgh Beechwood PreK-5, Pittsburgh King PreK-8, Pittsburgh West Liberty K-5 and Pittsburgh Fulton PreK-5.

PSSA Results Over Three Years

At today’s briefing the Superintendent highlighted progress in student achievement on key District priorities over the past three years. In 3rd grade Reading, the percentage of students demonstrating *proficiency and above* went from 58.7% in 2006-07 to 64.0% in 2007-08, an increase of 5.3 percentage points. Over three years, the percentage point increase was 15.3.

With an intent focus on high school readiness and preparation for education beyond high school, the Superintendent specifically noted PSSA results for grade 8 and 11.

- The percentage of students demonstrating *proficiency or above* in 8th grade Reading increased from 57.4% in 2006-07 to 66.2% in 2007-08 or 8.8 percentage points in one year. Over three years, the percentage point gain was 12.7.
- This year the percentage of 11th grade students demonstrating *proficiency or above* in Mathematics increased from 43.9% to 52.5% or 8.6 percentage points over last year. Over three years, the percentage point increase was 14.2. The one exam out of 14 PSSA’s in which results remain flat over three years is 11th grade Reading at 51.4% in 2007-08. Roosevelt commented, “We are a learning organization and must use this data to focus intently on areas that need improvement. Eleventh grade reading has been particularly stubborn and will require even deeper analysis and intervention.”

Another District priority is reducing the academic disparity between African-American and White students. The District made progress in reducing the disparity on 10 of the 14 PSSA exams. Over the past three years, the most progress was made in grades 8 and 11. In grade 8, the Reading disparity decreased by 13.1 percentage points and the Mathematics disparity decreased by 12.4 percentage points. In grade 11, the Mathematics disparity decreased by 3.0 percentage points.

Overall the District has shown dramatic progress in advancing student achievement over the past three years. The Superintendent acknowledged the positive role that everyone has played in promoting high expectations and focusing on student learning, from the Board, teachers, principals and the District staff to parents, families, the community and most importantly the students themselves. Roosevelt concluded, “The key to sustaining student achievement will be to constantly examine and deepen our work together. We are united in a common goal to improve opportunities for all children in Pittsburgh and I appreciate all of you who came together today to publicly renew this commitment.”

For More Information

For a complete listing of district-level PSSA results by grade level, please visit the Pittsburgh Public Schools website at www.pps.k12.pa.us, 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.

###