



DIVISION OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING 341 S. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

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Contact: Ebony R. Pugh (412) 529-3616

Council of the Great City Schools Report Validates Superintendent's Efforts to Update Curriculum, Ensure Access to Accurate, Real-Time Data

Called the most objective, comprehensive look at PPS in recent history, 24 urban school executives, representing eight school districts, reviewed five areas; Superintendent creates data department, focused on increasing accountability, measuring program effectiveness and ensuring a data-driven across all levels

(PITTSBURGH, PA) January 10, 2016– Council of The Great City Schools (CGCS) Executive Director Michael Casserly today presented findings and recommendations in a report sought out by Pittsburgh Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Anthony Hamlet. The CGCS report seeks to clarify and enhance understanding of why past reform efforts have done little to boost student outcomes. The report will help guide key initiatives under way as the District – with extensive community and stakeholder input – creates its five-year strategic plan. The CGCS is the nation's only national organization composed of 70 large urban school districts formed to assist educational leaders in improving student achievement.

"This has been the most objective and comprehensive look at the Pittsburgh Public School system in my 40-year history with CGCS," said Casserly. "I applaud Dr. Hamlet for his direction in ensuring that instead of pointing fingers, the District finds the answers to the hard questions about what organizational barriers are hindering the District's ability to produce better results. By utilizing this report, the District will better understand how to move forward productively in order to improve outcomes for all students."

The analysis included feedback from 24 senior urban school executives, representing eight major city school districts, who were placed into four strategic support teams based on their expertise. They interviewed approximately 170 PPS staff and community members. Five key areas were examined: *Organizational Structure and Staffing; Instructional Programming and Alignment; Budget and Business Service; Data, Research, Evaluation and Assessment; and Disciplinary Procedures and Protocols.*

The 175-page report includes more than 100 recommendations.

"Two main areas of improvement – the lack of accurate data and inadequate curriculum – stood out during this extensive review, but we were impressed to learn that Dr. Hamlet and his team were already actively addressing this," Casserly said.

Dr. Hamlet has authorized the creation of a data department reporting directly to him, that will serve as the District's analysis team, giving educators information related to assessment, attendance, academic performance, absenteeism and other critical data.

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"It is essential we have accurate data that will show us real-time key indicators that correlate to predictive behaviors of student outcomes," said Superintendent Hamlet. "Our goal is to maximize every dollar we spend on professional development, curriculum and overall academic achievement – and to do this we must be constantly measuring and revising as necessary."

To lead this effort, Hamlet has created a position – Chief of Data, Research Assessment and Accountability which is currently posted on the District's website.

Other findings and recommendations include:

- *Organizational structure does not support schools, enhance staff work or assist effective collaboration across staffing units.* Key recommendation includes consolidating research, evaluation and data analysis functions under a new research office.
- *Instructional systems are weak and disjointed with little in place to build the District's capacity to improve student achievement.* Key recommendation includes fully aligning curriculum, assessment system, professional development, and RISE with PA Core Standards.
- *Financial and operations functions could be more effectively organized and strategically managed.* Key recommendations include reorganizing the finance, operations and business services functions and hiring a budget director to focus on long-term strategic financial and operational planning.
- *Overall lack of data systems, organizational capacity and program evaluations prevent teachers and principals from having the information they need to improve practice.* Key recommendations include enacting a data governance committee to draft policy and procedures around data collection. In addition, develop a District-wide balanced scorecard system to assess overall school system progress with results transparent to the public.
- *No system-wide strategy in place to address school climate and student discipline. Disciplinary actions fall disproportionately on students of color.* Key recommendations include expanding restorative justice practices and implementing a District-wide program that provides protocols for minimizing lost instructional time.

To view this evening's presentation or to download a copy of the full CGCS report visit the District's website at www.pps.k12.pa.us.

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 70 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations. The organization provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

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