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341 S. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

For Immediate Release

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Statement from Superintendent Anthony Hamlet, Ed.D, Related to Auditor General DePasquale Review of District-Provided Records

PITTSBURGH November 20, 2019 – I do believe that the best way for me to address these criticisms is by proving myself through my ongoing commitment to transforming the Pittsburgh Public Schools. And while nobody enjoys criticism, I do recognize that it is part of the territory when you have a job as important as overseeing the education of more than 23,000 children.

I also believe that information is power, because it allows us to base our decisions not on what we have always done in the past, but rather on what are proven best practices that will lead to the best possible outcomes for our children. That's why one of my first acts as superintendent was ordering the most objective look at the past and current practices at Pittsburgh Public Schools.

One result of that audit was a clear indication that we needed to upgrade our professional development significantly. Simply put, we need more people in our District to be better acquainted with cutting-edge theory and practice in public school education. We, therefore, expanded our professional development budget to allow for this type of development across a wider array of staff and administrators.

While we always seek opportunities to supplement professional development related travel utilizing grant funds whenever possible, our current spending amounts to .06% of the overall District General Fund expenditures. Furthermore, it is in line with what many comparable districts around the country are spending. The auditor's comparison to Philadelphia is clearly an attempt to make statistics work against the District. Philadelphia is a school district that was under state oversight for 16 years during which time all investments were minimal. Even so, a District survey in 2018, found overall travel expenses in Philadelphia totaled \$924,000 compared to the \$362,705 expended in PPS for travel-related professional development.

I recognize that any new spending is cause for concern in a District that is funded by taxpayer dollars. I also know that an investment in our staff development will pay dividends for years to come in improving the quality of public-school education in Pittsburgh.

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We cannot continue to follow the same practices that have led to stagnation or deficits in student achievement — sometimes, to achieve different results, change is necessary.

Regarding contracts:

It's worth noting that our procurement process for contract approval aligns with the Pennsylvania state code and federal grants guidance. Whether a contract is procured through a competitive or non-competitive process, we still use factors to evaluate the effectiveness of a service before presenting it to the Board for approval. Technology is one of the great equalizers in education. It allows us to more objectively assess how well we are reaching students and more closely identify areas to target for further improvement. For example, the Edmentum program for intervention uses data to help teachers and administrators make better instructional decisions and create a better curriculum based on objective evidence. The Naviance program, widely used in large public-school systems across the country, assists students with college and care.

I believe that it is my job to serve as a role model for the children in our District, just as all educators should view themselves as role models. And what I would like to show them is that even when you face challenges such as public criticism, you cannot allow that to get in the way of doing your job to the best of your abilities. You must be willing to look at yourself with an objective eye and ask: How can I do better? And then do that. Our continuous improvement model includes regular check-ins to ensure the practices we are putting in place are getting the results we seek for our children. We take the information we receive in all audits seriously. We will review the details of the auditor's findings to use them to get better.

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