

**For Immediate Release**

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## **District's 2007 PSSA Test Scores Show Gains for Second Consecutive Year**

### ***3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency Increased from 52% to Nearly 60% in the Past Year***

PITTSBURGH August 16, 2007 – Today Superintendent Mark Roosevelt presented district-level results for the 2007 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams taken during the 2006-07 school year. Despite a challenging year, including the closing of 22 schools and the implementation of new academic initiatives, the Pittsburgh Public Schools showed a second consecutive year of test-score gains.

“All of these test results must be looked at in context. Last year was a year of extraordinary change with so many students going to new schools, the introduction of our new Accelerated Learning Academy school model, and the implementation of new curriculum at every grade level,” noted Superintendent Roosevelt at the morning press conference. “These PSSA results are much better than expected. And I’d like to thank the teachers, administrators and central office staff for staying focused on student achievement.”

The PSSA measures individual student growth and determines the level to which school programs enable students to reach Pennsylvania proficiency standards in reading and math. PSSA scores 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 2007.

With the 2005 PSSA data as the starting point, the *Excellence for All* plan set ambitious goals for increasing student achievement in reading and math over four years for grades 3, 5, 8 and 11. “The percentage of students who tested proficient went up, and the percentage who tested below basic went down,” said Roosevelt. “We are especially pleased to see the increase in proficiency for 3rd grade reading since this is an important marker in children’s lives and a major goal in *Excellence for All*,” he added.

#### 2007 PSSA Reading Results

Overall PSSA reading results for the combined grades of 3, 5, 8 and 11 saw an increase in proficiency from 48.9% in 2005 to 53.3% in 2007, for an overall gain of 9%. The percentage of students with below basic test scores continued to decline overall from 30.9% in 2005 to 26.4% in 2007, representing an overall decrease of 15%.

The *Excellence for All* plan highlights 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as a pivotal year for reading. Noting the importance of literacy as the primary building block for all learning, the Superintendent established a 2009 goal of having at least 80% of students reading at grade level by the end of grade 3. The 2007 data show that the greatest gains in reading proficiency were at grade 3, increasing from 49.1% in 2005 to 59.0% in 2007, for an overall 20% gain. More encouraging is the 14% increase in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency in just the past year, which grew from 51.6% in 2006 to 59.0% in 2007. Additionally, the percentage of students with below basic test scores declined from 29.4% in 2005 to 23.9% in 2007, for an overall decline of 19%.

While reading achievement has increased for both African-American and White students from 2005 to 2007, the achievement disparity persists with relatively no change over the same period. The 2007 PSSA data indicate a gap of 33.7 percentage points in reading proficiency for the combined grades of 3, 5, 8 and 11. The Superintendent noted, “The persistent achievement gap is a significant concern.”

As the District embarks upon its high school reform plan, *Excel.9-12*, the Superintendent is paying close attention to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA results. From 2005 to 2007, reading proficiency at grade 11 increased from 51.2% to 53.0%, representing a nearly 4% increase. Additionally, students with below basic test scores declined from 33.4% to 28.4%, for a decrease of 15%, over the same period.

#### 2007 PSSA Mathematics Results

Overall PSSA mathematics results for the combined grades of 3, 5, 8 and 11 saw an increase in proficiency from 51.9% in 2005 to 55.7% in 2007, for an overall gain of 7%. The percentage of students with below basic test scores continued to decline overall from 27.6% in 2005 to 23.2% in 2007, representing an overall decrease of 16%.

Similar to reading achievement, both African-American and White students continue to make gains in mathematics. However, the 2007 PSSA data show a disparity between the two groups of 32.8 percentage points.

At grade 11, proficiency in mathematics rose from 38.4% in 2005 to 43.9% in 2007, an increase of 14%. Dramatic declines are evident in the percentage of students who tested at below basic, with an 18% decrease from 43.3% in 2005 to 35.6% in 2007.

#### Longitudinal Analysis by School Type for Students Moving from Grade 7 to 8

Given the concerns around the middle grades, the Superintendent highlighted two-year longitudinal data showing the change in academic performance of students who advanced from grade 7 in 2006 to grade 8 in 2007. School types include 11 magnet schools, three comprehensive middle schools, nine new K-8s, five K-8 Accelerated Learning Academies and three existing K-8 schools.

#### Reading:

- Gains in reading proficiency were posted by students in all types of schools.
- The greatest gain in reading proficiency was made by the students who attended the existing K-8 schools, which include Pittsburgh Greenfield K-8, Pittsburgh Mifflin K-8 and Pittsburgh Sunnyside K-8. In 2007, 64.6% of students were proficient in grade 8 compared to just 55.5% who were proficient the prior year as 7<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Students who entered the five, new K-8 Accelerated Learning Academies as 8<sup>th</sup> graders also showed gains in reading proficiency. As 7<sup>th</sup> graders, just 37.6% of these students were proficient in reading. However, by the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade in their new learning environment, 44.5% attained reading proficiency. Especially encouraging were the gains made at the advanced level. As 7<sup>th</sup> graders, 10.1% were reading at the advanced level. In grade 8 at a K-8 Accelerated Learning Academy, 17.5% were reading at the advanced level.

#### Mathematics

- Gains at the advanced level in mathematics were seen in comprehensive middle schools, new K-8s, K-8 Accelerated Learning Academies and existing K-8s.
- The greatest gain in mathematics at the advanced level was made by the students who attended the comprehensive middle schools. In 2007, 28.2% of students were at the advanced level in grade 8 compared to just 19.6% who were at the advanced level as 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

The District plans to provide the Board and the public with a full presentation of the 2007 PSSA results at the September 11<sup>th</sup> Education Committee meeting. For a copy of today's presentation, please visit the Pittsburgh Public Schools website at [www.pps.k12.pa.us](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us). A copy can also be obtained by calling the **Parent Hotline at 412-622-7920** or visiting the Division of Communications, Room 204, Pittsburgh Board of Education, 341 South Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

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