



To all Mayoral Candidates:

As we all know, education is a critical issue in Philadelphia -- now, and always. As a city-wide coalition of teachers and education allies, Teacher Action Group represents thousands of votes. We would like to know your views on education policy in Philadelphia

To those ends, we have created a poll that we are sending to all candidates running in 2015. Your answers will be shared with the public, and could lead to an endorsement from our group.

As the voting public, we need our candidates to be crystal clear on their viewpoints and approach towards public education in Philadelphia. The future of our city depends on it.

Sincerely,

The Teacher Action Group Candidate Report Card Team

[www.TAGPhilly.org](http://www.TAGPhilly.org) / Twitter: @TAGPhilly / TAGPhilly@gmail.com

## **Teacher Action Group's 2015 Education Final Exam**

***Please circle your opinion on the statements below. We encourage you to explain your answer in the space below.***

### **Funding**

While Governor Wolf has proposed increased funding to education, much uncertainty still remains for Philadelphia schools. While much of the problem lies with Harrisburg's inability to create a fair funding formula, the city of Philadelphia must look to contribute. According to the Philadelphia Public School Notebook, Philadelphia only contributes 30% of the District's budget -- significantly lower than neighboring municipalities and even lower than some of the poorest areas in the state.

Many of us live in Philadelphia and understand the trouble with raising taxes. As parents, teachers, librarians, and students, we want to know if Philadelphia's next Mayor will consider any and all options for funding our schools.

**1. At the city level, excellent school funding requires politicians revisiting tax abatements, PILOTS (Payments in Lieu of Taxes), and increasing the city's contribution to the Philadelphia public schools.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   **Agree**   Strongly Agree

**2. Although schools will always need to adapt, fully funded education is a Constitutional and moral right. Funding for basic needs should never be predicated upon "reforms".**

Strongly Disagree   **Disagree**   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

Fully funded public education is a constitutional right at the state level, but not at the federal level. Indeed, schools are our most important asset and we must find the local resources to fund them.

First, I will accelerate efforts to collect delinquent property taxes that in turn will go directly to the School District by effectively using outside counsel. In the first four months of 2014, the city collected over \$45M in delinquent property taxes, and cut the number of tax-delinquent properties by about 30,000 – a 25 percent reduction. Per law, the City can collect 100% of delinquent taxes through using outside counsel. By shifting more accounts to outside counsel, the City can use its limited resources to focus on selling properties on behalf of the Land Bank, which will lead to increased property tax revenue for schools. The City can also focus on strengthening existing tax collection to deter new delinquent accounts, and increase School

District revenue immediately.

Second, I will convene the largest tax-exempt landholders in Philadelphia to quantify their current financial and non-financial contributions to the School District versus what their tax burden would be. Using this data, we can push for a fair but necessary multi-year plan to begin "payments and services in lieu of taxes." As Mayor, I will insist that these institutions partner with the city agencies and the School District to identify reasonable ways to give every child access to an equal educational opportunity.

Third, I will partner with City Council to unlock the value of city-owned assets like PGW and the Airport through public-private partnerships and joint ventures that create dedicated revenue streams to reduce pension obligations. This will free up general fund dollars for public education in a sustainable way.

Finally, I will work with City Council to increase the share of local property taxes for schools. Currently, 55 percent of property taxes is allocated to schools. I will propose increasing it to 60 percent, which is estimated to garner between \$60M-\$75M in annual revenue.

## Testing

Research by the Council of the Great City Schools revealed that between pre-K and 12th grade, students take 113 standardized tests on average. The National Education Policy Center promotes the consensus that "standardized tests are ineffective and even counterproductive when used to drive educational reform." Moreover, the NEPC found that No Child Left Behind and its associated "test-driven accountability policies" have not closed the achievement gap for low-income students and children of color.

Standardized test preparation further narrows school curriculum: the American Federation of Teachers concluded that in high-stakes testing grades, students can waste up to 110 hours per year on test preparation activities, often at the expense of art, music, and the creative arts.

**1. High-stakes testing is absorbing too many resources, including teacher time, learning time, and real dollars from schools in high-poverty areas. Testing should be reduced and not used to compare resource-starved schools against their wealthier counterparts.**

Strongly **Disagree** Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

**2. Parents and students have the right to opt-out of High Stakes Tests without fear of reprisal or intimidation or loss of opportunity. Teachers have the right to educate students and families of their right to opt out.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral **Agree** Strongly Agree

Tests serve many purposes – they show progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and help professionals reach competencies in their careers. It is important that we know what areas our students are succeeding in and where they need more support. Furthermore, every single

civil rights organization is for these high stakes tests. They support them because they understand the important role data shows in identifying where systems fail poor and minority students, thus calling attention to the problem and forcing officials to solve them. While I believe the test should not be the end game, I do believe they serve a very important role in helping shape and refine how we educate our students.

## **Stability and Equity**

Since 2013, the school district has closed 24 public schools in Philadelphia. 6,200 students were uprooted, and many left the district altogether. Families at Steele Elementary and Muñoz-Marin were thrust into tumultuous charter-public battles. The SRC unilaterally canceled the teachers' contract, knowing the threat of work-stoppage was real.

School district officials account that for every student that leaves a public school in the city to attend a charter school, the school district loses \$7,000. The financial and structural chaos push many families out of the city.

**1. The "zero sum game" in Philadelphia is destructive; Philadelphia should abstain from charter conversions or closings until a fair and equitable funding system is in place.**

Strongly Disagree **Disagree** Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

**2. School choice starts with great neighborhood schools able to serve all students.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral **Agree** Strongly Agree

**3. Strong schools need strong teachers; teachers should be supported with fair treatment at the bargaining table, and deserve the right to organize no matter what type of school in which they work.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree **Strongly Agree**

It is important that every child has access to a high quality school no matter where they live. However, it is unfair to tell parents to wait for a quality school while we attempt to work out a deal in Harrisburg and City Hall, particularly when we have charter providers with a proven record of success. I support higher salaries for all teachers, and will insist on a school culture and climate that treats teachers as professionals and public servants. As the son of a retired public school teacher, this is a priority for me.

## **Accountability**

Research by the Philadelphia City Controller (as reported by the Philadelphia Inquirer) reported that "there was a complete and total failure on the part of the Charter Office to monitor charter schools and hold them accountable for how they spend taxpayers' dollars."

Work by outside groups have unearthed back-door dealings with organizations like The Boston Consulting Group throws doubt on the honesty of our school system. The SRC continues to spend massive amounts of taxpayer dollars without any oversight or accountability to the public.

**1. The school district requires the resources and legal support to ensure charter school transparency and accountability.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree **Strongly Agree**

**2. Philadelphia needs a locally elected school board. As Mayor, anyone I would nominate to the SRC would support its dissolution.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral **Agree** Strongly Agree

**3. The Mayor's Office will be committed to transparency and public participation in its work relating to the school district.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree **Strongly Agree**

I believe in mayoral control of all public schools, and a board comprised of leading educators and parents with a stake in the future of the School District of Philadelphia. Based on my experiences in public service, I do not support an elected school board.

In addition to reinstating the public charter reimbursement at the state level which I am championing, we certainly need more robust charter school governance and oversight as well. The School District charter school office has eight staff to oversee 90 charters, and lacked the capacity to handle the influx of new charter applications. I recently called for strengthening accountability and transparency under the law for charter schools, examining cost savings to effectively staff oversight activities, requiring annual reports and financial assessments, and clarifying the law's vague language that led to lengthy and expensive legal challenges. Otherwise, we will continue to see crises and sudden school closures like the Walter D. Palmer charter school debacle, which left Philadelphians unemployed, and the School District and parents scrambling to find a place to provide their children with a thorough and efficient education - a right guaranteed by Pennsylvania's constitution.

**Community and Poverty**

As reported by the Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia is the poorest large city in America, with a deep poverty rate almost twice the national average. Public Citizens for Youth and Children state that eighty-four percent of children in the district are low-income.

A community school is both an academically rigorous public school and set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. The result is a neighborhood hub that brings together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities.

**1. Community schools that offer wraparound services from certified providers**

**should be the model for the Philadelphia public school system.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral **Agree** Strongly Agree

**2. Poverty is the number one driver of poor school performance.**

Strongly **Disagree** Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I believe that all students have the ability to learn no matter their race or family financial situation. Too often we look at poor kids and automatically count them out, lowering our expectations of them. My experiences have taught me that they have incredible determination, perseverance, and ingenuity. Their ability to learn is not predicated on their family's finances, and schools must be equipped with the learning supports for those who need individualized attention. When schools are used by the community during the evenings, weekends and the summer, they become a part of the fabric of that community. Crucial city services, such as mental health services, health evaluations, and adult education can also be provided at neighborhood schools, significantly increasing the accessibility of those services to community members. Additionally, schools can provide much needed space for after-school programs, youth sports, and enrichment programs for the entire community. Rental space fees, where appropriate, can also generate additional revenue for individual schools. As mayor, I will bring national best practices to Philadelphia around community anchors and neighborhood school partnerships, and partner with City Council, and the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors to provide comprehensive wrap-around and evidence--based supports for children, youth, and families.

*Thank you for participating. We all win when people talk about schools, so we look forward to continuing the conversation about education in Philadelphia.*