



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

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**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

Many will ask how do we pay for a quality education. Here is the current reality – the School District spends roughly \$129 million to operate 19 consistently underperforming schools. With approximately 200,000 students in the school district, the average cost to educate a student is \$12,500 per year. Only \$6,000 per year, however, is spent on each student. Where is the delta going? It is being taken from students to manage the City's non-education related financial challenges.

The City is in a difficult position given that the Commonwealth holds the purse strings and that non-Philadelphia Pennsylvanians resent their tax dollars being

directed at underperforming Philadelphia schools. Worse yet, they don't believe that any money that might be appropriated would make it to classroom. In this climate, we can't count on funding from the state. Even as we continue to push for a fair funding formula out of Harrisburg, Philadelphia may need to make tough funding decisions to educate our children.

As Mayor, I will consider all options for increasing funding for our Philadelphia schools including modifying the tax abatement program, reevaluating the PILOT program, increasing property taxes, looking to collect the City's delinquent taxes, and possibly selling City assets that would alleviate some of the City's pension challenges and in turn free up more funding for schools. I will give preference to those options that do not require the sale of a City asset or increasing taxes for our working families.

### 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. 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

Given the poor quality of education Philadelphia students currently receive, it is evident that a significant change needs to be made. Excessive testing and test

preparation takes much needed class time away from students. Our focus should be on developing an appropriate curriculum and maximizing the time available to teach that curriculum.

### **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-Marín 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

In order to properly educate our children, changes must be made to establish standards that every Philadelphia school – public and charter – is required to meet. Those managing our schools also have to be held accountable for education outcomes.

As Mayor, I will institute aggressive intervention policies to deal with underperforming Philadelphia public and charter schools. These policies will include putting a performance improvement plan in place for schools that underperform in any single academic year and changing the management of schools that fail to meet standards for two consecutive years. When necessary, new, experienced management and good teachers will be drawn from high-performing schools and placed into failing schools.

Both public and charter schools have been known to pick and choose students and enroll selected students to boost their performance metrics. Students with behavioral issues, learning differences or who come from low-income households, on the other hand, are funneled to underfunded and therefore ineffective public schools. Philadelphia schools must educate all Philadelphia children, without fear or favor.

With regards to our teachers, I support their right to organize. Unions have played a significant role in our country's history by protecting the rights of workers to fair wages and decent working conditions. I recognize the importance of unions in protecting workers and in seeking to secure jobs for their members.

### **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

People tend to get distracted by the public vs. charter debate. Our sole focus needs to be on creating school environments – public and charter – that foster positive educational outcomes for all students. Currently, there are too many public and charter schools where performance is mediocre at best and a disservice is being done to kids. This cannot continue. In order to provide every

child in Philadelphia with a quality education, the City needs to have fully-functioning, high-performing school in every neighborhood.

The School Reform Commission (SRC) currently has responsibility for managing the Philadelphia School District. After decades of failing Philadelphia students, it is evident that a shift must be made in the role of the SRC. Initially, I believe the Mayor should appoint three SRC board members, while the Governor should appoint the two remaining board members. This enables lines of accountability to be maintained with the City and State and aligns the interests of the Superintendent and the governing authority. Most importantly, I believe that the SRC should function as a regulator rather than as an operator. The SRC's core responsibility should be clear and unequivocal: ensuring that no school in the City of Philadelphia – public or charter – is ineffective and enforcing change when needed.

### **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 support the concept of keeping public schools public and using the community concept to create community schools. In order to fix what ails the Philadelphia public school system, it will be necessary to have the support of all stakeholders – City government, teachers, families and communities. Children should have access to a quality education, preferably in their neighborhood.

I also believe that the City can better leverage the services and resources of other City departments (i.e., Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Human Services, Parks and Recreation) for the benefit of our schools.

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