



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 / Twitter: @TAGPhilly / TAGPhilly@gmail.com

Responses from Jim Kenney

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**

The Real Estate tax abatement program has been integral in fostering development in Philadelphia, although mostly contained to Center City and the near surrounds. I believe that the abatement program should continue, but I do believe that those benefiting from the abatement can pay more. For the majority of homes, the total assessed value under Mayor Nutter's AVI program has been set with the land value as only small percentage of the total assessed value. For some larger developments, like the Comcast Center and Ritz-Carlton Residences, this amount is 5% or less of the total assessed value. Since this is the only taxable portion on fully abated properties, the amount of taxes paid is artificially low. As Mayor I will push to raise the land value to a higher percentage so recipients of the tax abatement will pay a fairer share of taxes, while not inhibiting development by eliminating the abatement entirely.

Former Mayor Ed Rendell was successful in negotiating with the City's non-profit and educational institutions to develop PILOT payments during the 1990's. As Mayor I will revive this process and ask these institutions to contribute either through PILOTs or SILOTs (Service in Lieu of Taxes) to help fund our public schools and service programs.

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**

I completely agree that a fairly and fully funded education system is a constitutional and moral right. Many of our teachers work in difficult environments and take money out of their own pockets to pay for needed supplies, but are paid less than their suburban colleagues. As Mayor, I will work with teachers, principals, counselors, and nurses to make sure that every school is getting the resources and services they need from the City. Where possible, the City will also replace or supplement services that the School District is currently contracting for, so that those funds can instead be spent in the classroom where they are needed most.

Section 2

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**

Using testing results as a basis for school funding allocation creates a vicious circle in which struggling students are penalized rather than given the resources they need to succeed. Even in high-performing schools, over-testing takes away valuable instruction time and demands expensive instruction methods. We should not be testing students as often as we do now, and certainly not employing the high-risk testing that the Commonwealth currently requires.

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**

I fully support your group and others who have worked to educate parents on their ability to opt-out of testing. We also cannot tolerate our teachers being threatened with discipline for supporting these parents decision, as happened recently at Feltonville School of Arts and Sciences. I commend Dr. Hite for recommending that opt-out information should be shared with parents after all.

Section 3

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 pushes 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**

Our current charter school law is inherently flawed. The funding system neglects our district schools' fixed costs, and it overcompensates charter schools for special education services that they don't always provide. It was for that reason that I publicly opposed the Philadelphia School Partnerships' \$25 million donation to develop new charters, which ignores the District's fixed costs and covers a fraction of the nearly \$500 million required to enroll just 15,000 more students in charters.

As Mayor, I will work with our representatives in Harrisburg to push for a funding formula that accounts for charter schools and asks Harrisburg for full reimbursement for any expenses related to the establishment of a new charter school.

My administration will oppose unfettered expansion of charter schools and will work with the departments responsible for planning and economic development to make sure we have a long term approach to ensuring that every neighborhood has a strong community school in place as our first priority.

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

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree **✓ Strongly Agree**

Great neighborhood schools are absolutely essentially to the development and stability of

not only the students who attend, but the neighborhood as a whole. We shouldn't be placing new charter schools in neighborhoods with high-performing or improving neighborhood schools because those District schools will be stuck with less resources as a result. As Mayor I will focus on improving neighborhood schools, and developing community schools that provide wraparound services for students and parents with the goal as making our schools the focal point and hub of activity in every neighborhood.

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**

I wholeheartedly support the right of teachers to collective bargaining, and I recognize -- as do the teachers -- that all parties need to work together to build a system that fits our budget, protects our teachers, and provides our students with a high-quality education.

Section 4

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**

Ensuring that the money allocated to charter schools is tracked and spent correctly is absolutely essential. As Mayor, I will establish more accountability through collaboration between my administration and the District's oversight staff to monitor the finances and performance of charter schools. We will not promote failing charters or allow charter schools to grow in neighborhoods that already have high-quality public schools.

Moreover, I will work with City Council to ensure that the strong investigative and oversight powers that the Home Rule Charter grants the body are put to good use during the budget process. The City has continued to increase the amount of annual funding it provides the School District, which flows through to charter schools. Therefore, the City has a right to demand more transparency and accountability from those charter institutions that are receiving City generated tax dollars. As Mayor, I will work with City Council to

require the Charter Office to appear before City Council during public budget hearings so that there is more transparency and accountability in how charter schools are managed.

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

As Mayor, I will work to make our schools financially stable so that Harrisburg has no reason to continue to saddle Philadelphia with the SRC. If the SRC does vote to disband itself, I would welcome the new school board as an opportunity for parents to hold their elected officials responsible for the quality of our schools. And until that happens, the financial stability of our schools will be my top priority in education.

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**

As Mayor I commit to having an open and transparent process for both the City and School District's budget. Specifically pertaining to the School District, I will work to include input and participation from all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents and students.

Section 5

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**

The creation and development of Community Schools was one of the three priorities that I stressed in my announcement speech the day I started this campaign. I will make the development of community schools a top priority by working with educators to identify, align, and provide city services to support schools and develop them as centers of learning, support, and community in their neighborhoods. There are numerous resources that can be

aligned to meet the needs of

children and families and to strengthen schools as centers of their communities, including health and human services and educational and recreational resources. By supporting the physical, social and emotional needs of children, we can improve their chances of success both in and out of the classroom. Developing schools into centers of their communities will help strengthen neighborhoods and families. Furthermore, this collaboration will result in teachers being better supported in their jobs.

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

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree **✓ Strongly Agree**

This is absolutely correct, and this is why it imperative that the funding formula developed in Harrisburg account for the poverty rate in the District's allotment. Far too many students are hungry, thirsty, and have little to none of the support necessary outside of the classroom. In addition, it is impossible for teachers to teach, and also provide the additional support that students need. As Mayor I will work to develop community schools that provide these additional services during the school day for students, and also provide job training and other social service programs in the evening for parents that need them.

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