



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**

Adding new recurring revenues from City sources to Governor Wolf's \$160 million pledge to education in Philadelphia would go a long way to addressing the chronic underfunding of our schools. Our non-profit institutions provide significant benefits to our City and, as a result, I have significant concerns about PILOTS. I also believe that tax abatements, especially in areas just beyond the reach of development, are supportable.

- 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**

#### **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**

### **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

[Our school system needs fair and equitable funding from the state. Closing schools for the sole purpose of funding or advancing charter schools is not responsible.](#)

**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**

**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

Lynne envisions a school board that has a superintendent appointed by the Mayor, and a hybrid board structure comprised of both elected and appointed members. To get the structure right, Lynne will convene a committee of experts to recommend board structure, member qualifications, and proper checks and balances.

**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**

## 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

Poverty is a leading cause for poor school performance, but there are several factors, including the lack of full and fair funding, that also lead to poor school performance.

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