

State Wide Education Funding Reform Is Urgently Needed to Help Students in Philadelphia and Other Districts Have an Equal Educational Opportunity.

1. Instead of reducing class size in elementary grades this year, the number of students in Philadelphia class rooms have increased. Philadelphia already had the highest class sizes in the region, and they will be even greater this year because of the district's financial situation. CEO Vallas estimates that it will cost \$250 million for "significant" class size reduction in the district.

2. If Philadelphia had the same amount to spend as the average of the top 100 school districts in the state (equivalent to the standard adopted by the New Jersey courts), it would receive \$2,709 more per student or \$571.6 million each year. If the City had the same amount as the average district in the Philadelphia region, it would get \$2,125 more per student or \$448.4 million per year. (Six districts are spending over \$5,000 per student more than Philadelphia!!) These are two measures of how underfunded is the Philadelphia School District.

3. Education Week calculates that Pennsylvania ranks among the most unequal states in the nation—43rd worst out of 50. More than three-quarters of the state's school districts (380) have gaps greater than \$2,000 in what they can spend compared to the average for the top 100 districts, and more than half (270) have gaps greater than \$3,000 per student. This is \$90,000 per classroom of 30 students. The median gap in the state is \$3,109 per student.

4. Other school districts in similar straits as Philadelphia are: Allentown, which has a \$4,804 per student gap with the average of the top 100 districts; Erie \$3,586; Lancaster \$3,325; Wilkes-Barre \$3,071; York \$2,689 and Reading \$5,363. Locally, Southeast Delco, Centennial, Upper Darby and Upper Merion school districts all have gaps as great as Philadelphia's. In Allegheny County minority school districts are paying school taxes 40 to 110 percent higher than the state average. The school boards, superintendents, state representatives and state senators from these districts are all potential allies. A complete list of Districts, their gaps and tax rates is available at www.pilcop.org/efq.mpl.

5. The funding problem lies in Harrisburg not providing poor districts with the resources necessary for successful schools, not in the local school districts tax policies. The state provides only 36 percent of the cost of public schools. Only Nebraska provides a lower percentage.

6. The City also underfunds its schools. Although City taxpayers are among the most highly taxed in the state, less of those taxes goes to support schools than the state average because of the cost of other services borne by City taxpayers such as county court and prison systems and welfare expenses. It would take \$55 million additional City aid to schools for local support to be at the statewide median.

7. Rep. Nicholas Micozzie has a bill—the Successful Schools Bill— which would distribute a foundation amount to districts **based on the cost of school districts which are currently successfully meeting high state standards**. Other principled solutions are possible.

8. The state can and should insist that any new money go to practices which have been

shown to increase student performance: smaller class size, pre-school for all, smaller school size, additional class time (summer classes, tutoring), adequate books, supplies and classrooms, additional training for classroom teachers.

9. The local property tax reform passed in Harrisburg this June will do nothing to end the widespread inequality in school funding between districts in wealthy communities and in poor communities. The local property tax reform act locks in place the great differences in spending between districts because it requires referendums before additional amounts may be raised and spent by the low spending districts trying to catch up with the higher spending districts.

10. Pennsylvania's system of distributing state tax dollars continues to discriminate against districts with high levels of minority students. Surprisingly, if you control for students in poverty, the more minority students in a district the fewer state dollars the district gets. There are now 17 school districts in which students of color are in the majority and in almost all unequal funding is a problem.

11. It is time for both the Philadelphia delegation and state representatives from other underfunded areas to say that statewide education funding reform is their priority and they can't –won't– help with other votes that people come to them for until something is done on this issue. This is a matter of urgency for the economic health of the City in order to upgrade its work force and for the future well-being of every child who is going through 12 years of schooling with larger class size, fewer counselors, fewer advanced courses, little music and art, and generally less of everything than students in the well funded districts receive.

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