

Philadelphia Must be the Prime Destination for the Best Teachers in the Country

What Kids Need

Philadelphia students need a great teacher in the front of every classroom because the biggest factors contributing to student achievement are the quality of their teacher and reasonable class size.

Nearly a third of the District's students are likely to be taught by substitute teachers every day, indicating huge instability issues. Against this backdrop, 70% of the District's teachers are white while 82% of the students are Black, Hispanic, or Asian, hampering the ability of students to see themselves reflected in positions of authority or receive mentorship from people who understand their cultural experiences.

There is every reason to believe that students in parochial and charter schools suffer the same great teacher access challenges given the national shortage of teachers.

The next mayor must use the resources of the City to end the habitual teacher shortage and high teacher absenteeism, make Philadelphia the destination for diverse educators¹, and must:

- Accelerate school building repairs,
- Increase starting salaries for all school teachers,
- Decrease class sizes,
- Increase teacher safety on their commute to school,
- Make housing more affordable for teachers, and
- Empanel a corps of teachers to advise the mayor on ways to compete with other cities in recruiting and retaining great teachers.

Why This Matters To Kids, Parents and, The City

"Teachers matter more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling." That's not a quote from the teachers union, it's the conclusion of recent research produced by a very mainstream research company, the Rand Corporation.

Philadelphia's future is inextricably linked to the quality of our public schools. The most important ingredient in school quality is high-quality teachers, and the mayor should actively recruit good teachers with programs that show teachers their value to the city.

When we are a city where the best teachers are competing for our jobs in our schools, we know that Philadelphia is on the trajectory of becoming a great American City.

The Details

Teacher shortages, absences, and vacancies take a toll on student achievement. For instance, “losing a teacher during the school year is linked with a loss of between 32 and 72 instructional days,” which equates to one sixth to nearly half of the school year, according to recent research from Vanderbilt University.²

The likelihood that Philadelphia students have a good teacher in their class everyday is abysmally low. The District is plagued annually with teacher vacancies that have only grown worse due to the national teacher shortage. This year, the District was short 200 teachers at the start of the school year, which meant that more than 6,000 students missed critical instructional time and the opportunity to bond with a mentor. Add to that the fact that standing teachers miss at least 15% of the school year due to sickness or personal reasons, students are learning from 1,000 substitute teachers on any given day, which leads to interruptions in their learning.

The only way to address this problem is for the mayor to take responsibility for ensuring that the city and the school district work together to make Philadelphia the best place to be a teacher. A study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office reports that 20,000 teachers have left the profession to accept lower stress jobs in other sectors since the pandemic.³ One way to stem the loss of experienced teachers while recruiting new ones is to raise the starting salary. (The minimum starting salary for a teacher is only \$50,066.)⁴ Following federal trends, the mayor should increase the entire teaching salary scale by \$10,000 so that the starting salary for teachers is \$60,000.⁵

While pay certainly influences where a great teacher decides to work, teachers themselves report being respected, valued, and safe as important factors too.

- Philadelphia’s school buildings send the wrong message to teachers and students that Philadelphians don’t care about their health. The mayor must use city resources to accelerate repairs so that every school has working heating and air conditioning and a clear guarantee that they are free of mold and lead and remediated for other health hazards like asbestos.
- Teachers understand that they can make a bigger impact on student success when they teach classes that are small enough to support learning. Generally, teachers have more than 25 students in class and sometimes their classes swell to nearly 40 students. The mayor must find ways with the school board to add more teachers to the schools so that student to teacher ratios are low enough to retain great teachers and boost student learning.
- No teacher should fear for their personal safety while doing their job. Safe parking near schools has surfaced as a top issue for teachers. Where it is feasible to designate nearby, on-street parking at no cost to the teacher, the City must do so. Or, where designated options aren’t available, local police can and should be present to make sure teachers get safely to their cars.
- As housing in the city becomes increasingly unaffordable on a teacher’s salary, the next mayor must assemble developers to identify affordable home ownership and rental strategies that create real incentives for teachers to choose to work in Philadelphia.
- Finally, teachers go to communities and schools where they are valued. The mayor should create a task force of teacher leaders that meets throughout the year to offer suggestions for how the City can make teachers know they are invaluable ingredients in making Philadelphia the best place to raise a family.

About The Kids Campaign

The Kids Campaign is a coalition of 60 plus child-serving groups in Philadelphia. Our coalition formed to make sure that the next mayor of Philadelphia is ready to do whatever it takes to ensure a **S.E.C.U.R.E.** future for every kid – a future with Safety, an Education, Careers, Uplift, Recreation, and a healthy Environment. A non-partisan effort, the Kids Campaign will share information parents and voters need to determine which candidate will make every day safer than the one before for children and youth. Organizations and individuals can learn more and join the Kids Campaign at www.thekidscampaign.org.