

## Every Neighborhood Should Have a Quality District School

### What Kids Need

No other institution is more important to the future of Philadelphia than our public schools. For families moving to or within Philadelphia, having a quality District school within their reach is a factor they consider when deciding where to settle. They want to be sure their child can attend a great local school. Yet, families across the city too often find dilapidated, understaffed schools with antiquated approaches to community engagement and student learning.

The root cause of this conundrum is years of underfunding, disinvestment and bad policies that have wreaked havoc, picking apart the local schools that historically served as the bedrock of communities. As a result far too many students are unable to attend an appropriately resourced district-run public school in their neighborhood. There are no shortcuts to quality public education. It requires enough professional, caring adults—teachers, counselors, reading specialists, and many more—to provide every child with the level of support they need to reach their fullest potential in the community in which they live.

#### ***The next Mayor must:***

- Make the funding of District schools a priority in every budget cycle so that Philadelphia public schools have the resources they need to provide students in every neighborhood a quality education.
- Increase the city's contributions to the District in the event of economic downturns to avoid painful cuts. The City must be the District's fiscal backstop in the event that state funding falls short.
- Ensure that at least \$1 billion of the City's capital resources are used for school construction and renovation in their first term.
- Ensure that the District and other City agencies that work with children employ proven strategies that boost the share of students reading on grade level by the time they enter fourth grade.
- Advocate vociferously at the state level for the state to fund school districts equitably and adequately across the Commonwealth.

#### ***Within the school district, the next Mayor must work with the school board they appoint to:***

- Train school staff so that they are able to educate students in ways that understands a given neighborhood, embracing its assets and compensating for challenges. Such training would include delivering trauma-informed care and how to meet the language needs of Philadelphia's immigrant children and families.
- Build relationships with parents and community members to connect schools to their neighborhoods in meaningful ways that promote learning and school/community pride.
- Make every school a great school where students encounter an affirming environment and quality curriculum for all students, regardless of disability, first language, country of origin, gender identity, sexuality, race, religion, or sex.

### Why This Matters To Kids, Parents and, The City

Philadelphia can be a great place to raise a family if population trends are a bellwether. Up until the pandemic, the city's population has generally grown due to an influx of immigrants and rising birth rates, reversing decades of decline.

Yet, the city's growth cannot be taken for granted. As many as 60,000 residents leave the city every year and half the movers are between the ages of 18 and 34. Though people's reasons for leaving Philadelphia vary, the fact that they might not find quality District schools in their neighborhood is a consideration for whether they stay or go.

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Within the age group most likely to leave, at least 21% say they left Philadelphia so their children can go to better schools, and this desire for good schools only grows when households include school-aged children. In fact, households with school-aged children were more likely to enroll in traditional public schools after their move. Whereas 47% of children from households who moved went to traditional public schools while living in Philadelphia, 75% of the same children entered public schools in their new homes. Such findings show that people want good District schools in every neighborhood and that having such an anchor in their community can be a reason people come – and stay – in the city. Of the people who left Philadelphia, many considered schools to be improving. They thought the city was on an upward trajectory. **The next mayor must continue building on this trend so that good schools not only keep Philadelphia residents but attract more.**

## The Details

Philadelphia is the only district in the state that is unable to raise its own local revenue directly. Instead it relies on the mayor and City Council to enact budgets that provide the revenues for its operation. It is \$1 billion short of a state benchmark for adequate funding—nearly \$5,000 per student—and it ranks 473rd out of 499 school districts in current spending relative to its students' needs.

The cumulative impact of the Philadelphia school district's chronic underfunding on children is clear. Just 28% of 3rd graders tested proficient in reading last year and only 6 out of 216 schools have a library staffed by a librarian. 57% of students report feeling safe in their school hallways and 21,000 district students need special education support. Many other students need tutors and mental health services. The average district building is 70 years old, and the district has \$4.5 billion in deferred maintenance, which translates into the lack of physical spaces where quality education can take place.

Put simply, Philadelphia students lack the resources that promote learning and struggle to see that they matter. As students graduate to join the ranks of residents contributing to Philadelphia's well-being, only 15% of 18-year-olds are registered to vote. Yet, receiving a quality public education is a fundamental right, a right that the next mayor must uphold in action at multiple levels. Within the District, the mayor must work with the school board to deepen the District's connection to the city's residents. Curriculum should reflect the experiences of the diverse student population and should include input from a student's network, which includes their families, community affiliations, and, most importantly, students themselves. Strategies to increase school safety should be implemented with an eye towards restorative justice practices so that students who make mistakes can stay in school.

At the state level, the mayor must push lawmakers to fund the district at levels that allow for adequate staffing, robust mental health services, thoughtful professional development for all levels of District staff, and a wide array of supports to advance literacy and STEM education.

**The mayor must demonstrate the importance of public schools to the city.** That is, they must prioritize school funding in the city budget every year. Even if the District projects budget deficits, District funding, which allows it to provide a quality education for every student, should never be curtailed to accommodate fiscal shortfalls. Rather, in times of economic stress, the city's contributions to the District must increase to assure Philadelphia students that their future prospects do not shift with changes to politics and the economy. In this way, the next mayor can build a network of District schools that provides quality education in every neighborhood.

## 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](http://www.thekidscampaign.org).