



Mayoral Candidates Respond to The Kids Agenda

How will you, as Mayor, make sure every neighborhood has a quality District school?

HELEN GYM

I am the only mayoral candidate who will not only prioritize our public schools but has a plan to deliver the quality school that every child in every neighborhood needs. The City cannot reach its potential if it leaves its children further behind in our school system. Because Philadelphia is the only municipality in the Commonwealth without an elected and taxing empowered school district, it is the Mayor's responsibility to bring the School District under the wing of the city government and for the city government to be accountable to the public schools.

As Mayor, my top priorities are improving literacy K-12, ensuring quality pre-K and broadening access to affordable child care, and addressing mental health and restorative supports in schools to help children and families address the trauma of the last several years. I intend to expand on the school safety zones I advocated for as a Councilmember, and focus on safety on public transit and safe routes to and from school. And finally, I am going to focus on at-risk youth and truancy to re-engage young people year round in order to see them through graduation.

As state teaching certifications plummet, I am Philadelphia's loudest cheerleader for recruiting and retaining teachers and educational professionals. I have long supported grow your own programs for hiring and retention, and I want to put the full force of the city's college, Community College of Philadelphia, to use on this front.

And finally, I am on a mission to modernize our public schools. I am proud to have led a clean water campaign that kickstarted a massive \$500 million infrastructure investment in upgrading schools, but that must only be the start. Philadelphia's population growth has been driven by new birth rates and immigration, both of which make public schooling a necessary and essential part of the City's growth strategy. A major investment in school modernization is a promise to Philadelphia families and a new generation that we are looking to our future.

CHELLE PARKER

It has been my life's work and personal passion to close the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots.' While I grew up poor, access to a quality education exposed me to many opportunities throughout my life. It's why I started out as a teenage organizer and went on to become a teacher.

Underfunding, school closures, layoffs, and mismanagement have hurt students, teachers, staff, and the entire community.

It is unconscionable that we ask anybody, but especially children, teachers, and other workers to go to buildings with environmental, structural, and other issues. I've said this before at my public appearances:

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many of our school buildings need immediate attention but some are too far gone and need to be torn down, period. While the school district is already implementing an improvement plan, it's not happening quickly enough for kids and parents who don't have options, and for the first time in my experience, the money is there to get it done. Until we do these things, it will be difficult for the School District of Philadelphia to be viewed nationally as a prime destination for teachers.

A great example of the type of leadership I am talking about is when I was serving as a State Representative and Chair of the Philadelphia Delegation. I took on one of the worst financial crises the Philadelphia School District had faced: The state had cut education funding and the Superintendent of the school district of Philadelphia was looking at a monumental budget shortfall. It was so bad, they had already mailed pink slips to 3,783 school district employees. I worked with Democrats and Republicans – including Republican leadership in the state House and a Republican Governor – to find a new dedicated funding source for the school district, saving those jobs and saving schools from closing. Building this consensus wasn't easy, especially with other elected officials that I had had spirited policy disagreements with, but it was what was necessary to get things done.

As we look to the future of childhood education in the city, I am excited to see the details of the legislation that comes from the state following the Commonwealth Court ruling that will ensure that all Pennsylvania schools are funded equitably. There is almost no scenario where the Philadelphia School District does not receive more funding, and I am excited to tackle the problem of workforce development with increased funding.

REBECCA RHYNHART

As a public school parent with a daughter in seventh grade, this issue is personal to me and is one I would take ownership of as Mayor. We need a school board that puts kids first. I'll appoint school board members who are in lockstep with my vision for a long-term transformation of our school system and the high-quality education that all of Philadelphia's students deserve, especially focusing on correcting the racial injustices and disinvestment of the past and present.

Of course, I'll fight for Philadelphia's fair share of funding in Harrisburg. Still, I believe the city can best provide opportunities for our students and our teachers with investments and support from city agencies in our school building and our neighborhoods.

I'll ensure that our city agencies provide services in the schools to ensure safety within the building and classrooms and mental health and other wraparound services.

I'll also make sure that we're dedicating the resources necessary to expand operating hours and programming at our libraries, parks and recreation centers so that our kids have a safe place to be outside of school hours that supports their academic success. On staffing, the school board needs to improve its systems to hire talented staff in a timely manner. Currently, schools in impoverished neighborhoods are struggling to find and retain staff. Our team is looking into ways to train current support staff at these schools to fill the teaching openings. Extra attention must be given to schools in our most impoverished zip codes

A Note from The Kids Campaign: Responses are as of March 27, 2023. Warren Bloom Sr., Amen Brown, Jeff Brown, Allan Domb, and David Oh did not respond to the candidate questionnaire. James DeLeon responded late and did not directly respond to each and every question.

RESPONSES AS OF MARCH 27, 2023

