



Philadelphia Education Fund
Champions for Quality Public Education

Seven Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Suite 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tel: 215-665-1400
Fax: 215-864-2494
www.philaedfund.org

**Philadelphia City Council
School Budget Hearings**

Testimony on Teaching Quality and Equity
May 12, 2009

Good morning Council President Verna and members of City Council.

My name is Brian Armstead. I am the Director of Civic Engagement for the Philadelphia Education Fund. I am here to encourage you to provide maximal support to the School District, while at the same time asking that you keep track of several significant events to ensure that we, the public, are getting the biggest return on our investment in the schools.

Two coalitions have joined together to produce the platform in front of you, entitled ***Effective Teaching For All Children: What It Will Take***. Together, the Education First Compact and the Philadelphia Cross City Campaign for School Reform represent a diverse group of organizations including parent and student grassroots organizing groups, education advocates, universities, researchers, businesses, professional education organizations, community groups, etc.

The platform is built on two imperatives:

**Every child deserves an effective teacher, and
Every school needs a stable workforce of effective teachers.**

Although there are a lot of good teachers in the system, this platform came about as a result of parents' frustration over teacher vacancies and a much lower quality of teaching than their children deserve. They are tired of too many classes where teachers do not know how to properly manage classrooms and where the children are not learning. Parents in high poverty and high minority schools are particularly frustrated because it seems like there is a never ending cycle of new and inexperienced teachers teaching their children, while other more affluent neighborhoods get strong, stable staffs.

Students said they are tired of sitting in some classes and literally falling asleep. One student explained that when "there is a high rate of teacher turnover, and too many first year teachers, students get discouraged, start cutting class, and eventually drop out (and that) what is going on, or not going on in the class can make the difference between whether or not a student is motivated to come to school every day." So, if we're serious about stemming the dropout rate, we've got to deal with teaching quality and equity.

At the same time, professionals said they are tired of seeing a mis-allocation of resources. It is a well-known fact that quality of instruction is the best way to close the achievement gap and to ensure that all our children succeed. Yet, Research for Action found that

students' in high-poverty and high-minority schools are more likely to have less experienced teachers year after year (and) these staffing practices help widen the achievement gap.

Other reports have shown that the District's professional development system is broken, their Human Resources system is in need of a serious overhaul, their teacher assignment system is tremendously outdated and they have no teaching standards to speak of nor are their teachers evaluated in a way that truly holds them accountable or makes it possible to actually help them improve.

The good news, however, is that the School District has begun to address some of these issues. But as you all are well aware, there is a tremendous difference between good intentions and a good beginning and the successful implementation of complex plans.

This is where Council can be especially important. We need you to be vigilant about teaching quality and equity issues. As you publically and privately question the District, this year and in coming years, specifically ask about these issues. The District's annual report to this body should include

- 1) Metrics about the distribution of teachers and a discussion of their plans and action steps to address the current inequity.
- 2) The number of teacher vacancies.
- 3) The number of applicants for teaching positions and how this compares to other major cities. (Include their recruiting efforts, status of hard-to-staff positions, diversity of new hires, etc.), and
- 4) The progress and creation of a new system of standards, evaluations, and professional development.

Finally, Council can also shine a spotlight on the contract being negotiated between the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The new contract must allow for changes that will significantly enhance teaching quality and equity in this city. If it does not do that, then we will consider the contract negotiation to have been a failure. We ask that you pick up this call and continue to remind both parties of this perspective over the next few months while they put together their new contract.

By assessing the new contract and monitoring the District's work on teaching quality and equity, Council can ensure that the city gets the biggest possible return on its education investment.

Thank you.