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Champions for Quality Public Education

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**School Reform Commission
Testimony on
The Education First Compact & Philadelphia Cross City Campaign
Teaching Effectiveness Platform**

March 18, 2009

Good morning Commissioners and Dr. Ackerman,

My name is Brian Armstead, Director of Civic Engagement for the Philadelphia Education Fund and convener of the Education First Compact. The Compact is a diverse group of organizational representatives committed to improving public education in Philadelphia. We have worked with the parent and student organizing groups of the Philadelphia Cross City Campaign for School Reform to produce a platform entitled ***Effective Teaching for All Children: What It Will Take***.

The following statement is from the platform summary. Although we plan to formally release the platform later this month, we wanted to begin making a presence in front of the SRC and plan to do so, consistently, over the next few months to keep the primacy of enhancing teaching effectiveness foremost in everyone's minds. You will note there is substantial alignment with items in the draft strategic plan. However, there are recommendations that are not currently in the plan. Moreover, in light of the tremendous need for reform and limited resources, we strongly urge the District to prioritize 'effective teaching' as the critical path in the strategic plan.

As one of Dr. Ackerman and the District's core beliefs states: "Victory is in the classroom and facilitated by a strong instructional leader." We believe that by implementing the recommendations contained in the full platform, we can make this core belief a reality.

(Summary Statement from ***Effective Teaching for All Children: What It Will Take***.)

"All children in Philadelphia have the right to have consistently effective teaching in every content area and at every grade level, Pre-K through 12.

In too many of our schools, however, the level of teaching and learning does not meet student needs and does not ensure student graduation or postsecondary success. Furthermore too many inexperienced teachers are concentrated in high-poverty and needy schools where they stay only briefly. Subsequently, poor and minority children have the least chance of being taught by a stable, talented combination of effective new and veteran teachers. This teacher "gap" contributes greatly to the District's stark achievement gap.

To ensure that all children achieve the basic student right of consistent, quality instruction, we urge that the School District of Philadelphia recruit, reward, and retain talented school staff; distribute teachers equitably; and effectively support their development in every school.

Two imperatives guide this platform:

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

We believe that in order to translate these basic imperatives into reality, the District must do the following:

- 1. Distribute experienced and effective teachers equitably across District schools.**
- 2. Create performance standards for teachers and principals that are aligned with student success, and implement them consistently district-wide.**
- 3. Create an effective professional development strategy that is guided by teacher input and creates a “culture of collaboration” in schools.**
- 4. Give school leaders the tools & resources to hire and create teams of effective teachers.**
- 5. Create a “deep bench” of applicants for teaching positions.**
- 6. Open school with NO teacher vacancies.**

We believe that this is a crucial moment to demand change on these issues. The opportunities to make significant changes--right now—are heightened because of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman’s commitment to eliminating the achievement gap, the District’s current strategic planning process, the re-negotiation of the contract between the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and the additional funding available from the Commonwealth and from federal grants, including “economic stimulus” aid.

We believe in the power of education to change lives and have joined together to address the urgent need for effective teachers and stable staffing patterns in all of our city’s schools. Our children have waited long enough. We implore School District, teacher and principal union, civic, and business leaders along with parents, students and all community residents to add their voices to ours, to make Philadelphia a city where education comes first and where good teaching and school leadership is expected and supported.”

As I said, over the next few months you will see many different people representing many different sets of stakeholders addressing different aspects of the platform. Today, you will also hear from Betsey Useem, from Research For Action. She will be talking about the first plank in our platform, “teacher equity.”