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Champions for Quality Public Education

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**School Reform Commission
Testimony on**

***Imagine 2014*
and
Teaching Effectiveness**

April 15, 2009

Good afternoon 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. First, I want to welcome Commissioners Archie and Irizarry to the School Reform Commission. We look forward to getting to know you, working with you and exchanging our opinions, perspectives, and recommendations with you.

As most of your colleagues know, the Education First Compact—along with the Philadelphia Cross City Campaign for School Reform—has developed a platform entitled: ***Effective Teaching for All Children: What It Will Take***. The recommendations, which would help significantly improve teaching quality and equity in Philadelphia, are built around two imperatives:

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

The diverse groups that developed this platform understand that some of our recommendations lie solely within the province of the administration, while others require the PFT and the District to agree to changes in the teacher union contract. We further see our duty as community to spotlight the essential issues of teaching quality and equity and to hold all of our leaders accountable as they move forward.

With that in mind I have several comments about the District's proposed strategic plan, *Imagine 2014*.

I first want to applaud the District for making several significant additions to the 1st draft of the strategic plan. Notably, the inclusion of the section on Instructional Best Practice, highlights the District's understanding that without a high-quality, intentional focus on professional development for teachers we will make very little progress. And we have full confidence that the forthcoming budget will further demonstrate this commitment.

A couple of other items that we were pleased to see are the commitment to offering AP classes in all high schools, and the decision to provide more opportunities for parents to participate in making decisions at schools.

There are a few areas of concern that remain, however.

- 1) **Small learning units should be included in the high school plan.** The middle school section lists “grouping students and staff into smaller learning communities” as one of its strategies for personalization. The same should be done for high schools where research says its most effective.
- 2) **Common planning time**, also mentioned as a middle school strategy, should also be included in the high school section.
- 3) **Explicitly link the planned applicant tracking system with the planned professional development and evaluation tracking system.** An integrated system is much needed, will carry us a long way forward and would be an excellent use of stimulus funds.
- 4) In the PD discussion under Great Staff, **explicitly tie evaluations to professional development and include teachers in the design of PD as well.** PD should be data driven with the end users participating in its design.
- 5) **Equitable distribution of teachers.**

This last point, teacher equity, is the most glaring omission of this plan. In your Theory of Change, you mention the need to ensure the “equitable allocation of all District Resources”. In the Quality Instruction section, you later cite a report from New York that credits “well-qualified teachers with reducing the achievement gap between schools serving the poorest students and those serving more affluent students.” And in other venues I have heard various Commissioners and members of your leadership team discuss teacher equity so I was perplexed that the issue was not formally addressed and committed to in *Imagine 2014*.

We, therefore, have several additional suggestions:

- 1) Explicitly state the equitable distribution of teachers as a goal in the strategic plan.
- 2) Develop a metric to report on this goal in your annual report card. As you also state in *Imagine 2014*, “what gets measured gets done.” The community has resoundingly stated that its time to get this done!
- 3) Include in *Imagine 2014* a set of strategies to address this issue. We have a set of strategies that we have developed (which are in the Teaching Effectiveness platform that I have included with this testimony) and I have heard Dr. Ackerman allude to other strategies.

As I mentioned earlier, we understand that some strategies lie within the administration’s control and others have to be mutually agreed upon by the District and the PFT. But the community is keeping a watchful eye on both paths.

- 4) Finally, one of the key strategies for developing teaching quality and equity is **full site selection**. The PFT has expressed concerns over full site selection, which include the potential for ineffective principals making poorly informed decisions or decisions based on cronyism. And the enactment of full site selection would require the administration to make some difficult changes as well. We feel these are legitimate concerns but solutions have been found in other school districts across the country. And we can resolve them here, too.

If full site selection can be accomplished in the nearby suburbs, in New York City, or in Cincinnati, for example, we can and must accomplish it here.

The community stands ready to assist both the PFT and the District in getting this done and remain committed to shining a light on this issue to hold all parties accountable for what is in the best interest of our children.

In fact, because these are such important topics to so many people—including a number of people in this audience—I would appreciate some response today about the District's thinking regarding site selection, specifically, or teacher equity, generally.

Thank you.