



EVERY CHILD DESERVES A GREAT EDUCATION

My Perspective

Our ability to educate our children in a safe, effective environment is going to define the limits of what this City can achieve. Children who feel empowered to pursue their dreams will grow up to be a positive driving force propelling Philadelphia forward to ever greater success. On the other hand, if we continue to take inadequate resources and spread them across an overburdened system, we will continue to see high dropout rates, decreased potential – individually and as a community – and a host of social challenges.

Every child in Philadelphia deserves a great education. This is both a policy and a fervently held personal belief rooted in my own life experience. I attended five different Philadelphia schools before starting ninth grade, transfers that were necessitated by school strikes and safety concerns, among other factors that included the fact that I was never successfully engaged in my own education. As a result, I became a child that struggled in and acted out at school. Had I remained in the Philadelphia school system through high school, I believe my biography would read much differently.

I was lucky, and benefited from having a strong advocate by my side – my mother. She was relentless in her efforts to find a good school for me, which eventually led to my enrollment in the Milton Hershey School, an independent school that prepares low-income students to lead productive lives. There, I benefited from the attention of caring teachers, a strong curriculum, and a safe environment. I was also, crucially, held accountable for my actions. My high-school experience was transformative; Milton Hershey School changed the trajectory of my life.

This experience has made me appreciate the power of child-focused education in shaping children's lives. But Philadelphia families should not have to send their children out of the City to receive a great education. A quality education should be available to them in their own neighborhoods. As mayor, I will be committed to improving the Philadelphia education system so that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Public vs. Charter... It's The Wrong Debate

People tend to get distracted by the public vs. charter debate. At the end of the day, our sole focus needs to be on creating school environments – public and charter – that foster positive educational outcomes for all students. Currently, there are too

many public and charter schools where performance is mediocre at best and a disservice is being done to kids. This cannot continue.

In order to provide every child in Philadelphia with a quality education, the City needs to have fully-functioning, high-performing schools in every neighborhood.

Accountability Is Where It Starts

In order to properly educate our children, reforms must be made to establish standards that every Philadelphia school – public and charter – is required to meet. Those managing our schools also have to be held accountable for education outcomes.

I will institute aggressive intervention policies to deal with underperforming Philadelphia public and charter schools. These policies will include putting a performance improvement plan in place for schools that underperform in any single academic year and changing the management of schools that fail to meet standards for two consecutive years. When necessary, new, experienced management and good teachers will be drawn from high-performing schools and placed into failing schools.

Simon Gratz School provides a good example of how this model can work. Mastery Charter school stepped in to take over the management of Simon Gratz after several years of underperformance. Under Mastery Charter's leadership, Simon Gratz is serving children in their catchment area. Simon Gratz is now one of the fastest improving schools in the City.

A New Role For The School Reform Commission

The School Reform Commission (SRC) currently has responsibility for managing the Philadelphia School District. After decades of failing Philadelphia students, it is evident that a shift must be made in the role of the SRC. I believe the Mayor should appoint three SRC board members, while the Governor should appoint the two remaining board members. This enables lines of accountability to be maintained with the City and State and aligns the interests of the Superintendent and the governing authority. Most importantly, I believe that the SRC should function as a regulator rather than as an operator. The SRC's core responsibility should be clear and unequivocal: ensuring that no school in the City of Philadelphia is ineffective and enforcing change when needed.

Currently, groups seeking charters for new schools present their plans to the SRC for approval. These plans - which detail the experience of school management and teachers, describe the curriculum, and provide strategies for engaging parents and meeting academic standards – should also be required from ineffective public schools. They too should demonstrate how they intend to achieve success.

Modifying the SRC's role from operator to regulator of school performance will establish a mechanism for holding Philadelphia's public and charter schools accountable to our children. This model functions successfully in business and

industry where the focus is not on how companies operate, but more how they comply with agreed upon standards.

Closure Of Wrongly-Sized And Poorly-Maintained Schools

Unfortunately, there are too many Philadelphia schools operating below capacity and in facilities with significant, deferred maintenance. An analysis needs to be performed to align the number and size of schools to meet the needs of each community. Schools may need to be shuttered and replaced by new, suitability-sized schools in similar proximity in order to minimize inconvenience for families as much as possible. My promise to Philadelphia families is that we will not stop until there is a fully-functioning, high-performing school in every neighborhood.

Skimming The Cream

Both public and charter schools have been known to pick and choose students and enroll selected students to boost their performance metrics. Students with behavioral issues, learning differences or who come from low-income households, on the other hand, are funneled to underfunded and therefore ineffective public schools.

Philadelphia schools must educate all Philadelphia children, without fear or favor. The fact that Mastery Charter has turned Pickett Middle School into a high performing school without skimming the cream proves that a model which brings students together regardless of their background, behavioral challenges or economic disadvantage can be effective.

Characteristics Of High-Performing Schools

We already know the formula for high performing schools. Top performing schools, regardless of whether they are district schools or charter schools, share a few, common characteristics.

They have:

- Strong principals
- Good teachers
- A well-designed core curriculum, and
- Involved parents.

These characteristics need to be infused into district and charter schools throughout Philadelphia and need to be part of the corrective plan for failing schools.

Teachers As A Critical Key To Success

Teachers cannot be blamed for failing schools; they have historically not had the resources they need to do their jobs. In any system, however, there are weaknesses that have to be managed. Teachers – just like schools - should to be held accountable to standards which are fair and which recognize the reality of classrooms today. When teachers don't provide our children with the education they deserve, the City must have the flexibility to retrain or replace them.

Funding And Spending

Many will ask how do we pay for a quality education. Here is the current reality – The School District spends roughly \$129 million to operate 19 consistently underperforming schools. With approximately 200,000 students in the school district, the average cost to educate a student is \$12,500 per year. Only \$6,000 per year, however, is spent on each student. Where is the delta going? It is being taken from students to manage the City's non-education related financial challenges.

The City is in a difficult position given that the Commonwealth holds the purse strings and that non-Philadelphia Pennsylvanians resent their tax dollars being directed at underperforming Philadelphia schools. Worse yet, they don't believe that any money that might be appropriated would make it to classroom. In this climate, we can't count on funding from the state. Even as we continue to push for a fair funding formula out of Harrisburg, Philadelphia may need to make tough funding decisions to educate our children.

Team Work

In order to support Philadelphia students in a positive and meaningful way, all stakeholders must play a role, agree to common objectives, and work hard to achieve them. Engaged parents – advocates like my mother - must hold the Mayor, the SRC, school management and teachers accountable. Teachers and the teachers' union must commit to working in partnership with the City and State to develop a plan to facilitate student success.

As Mayor, I will work to improve the educational outcomes for all Philadelphia students by developing a plan for accountability and reform, providing for long-term financial sustainability, and securing the support of all stakeholders, all while keeping the needs of students front and center.

In the end, we can and we must do better.

Friends Of Doug Oliver 200 S. Broad St. Suite 400. Philadelphia PA 19102

215.985.4900 | Contact@DougOliver2015.com

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