

An Open Letter to The Honorable Josh Shapiro, Governor of Pennsylvania

January 16, 2024

Dear Governor Shapiro,

We are school board members, parents, educators, and community members from all around Pennsylvania. We are from well-resourced and underfunded school districts; from rural, suburban, and urban ones. We share a common conviction: Every child in Pennsylvania deserves a high-quality education. We are convinced that the ONLY way to provide this is to fully and fairly fund our public schools.

As you know, the Commonwealth Court ruled last February that the Administration and Legislature are failing to provide each student with a high-quality public education, violating the state constitution and undercutting our potential as a Commonwealth. We have watched closely, knowing your ability to listen to the people on the ground and creatively solve problems. We had hoped to see you forge a solution, addressing the court's order to correct the deep disparities in our public education system. Instead, we saw a failure of leadership, from an underwhelming initial budget proposal to your abandonment of key campaign promises to "*fully fund our schools*". Even as the budget process was finally completed at the end of 2023, we couldn't help but notice that there was no funding for Level-Up or any other program that would address our massive, and unconstitutional, educational opportunity gap.

We realize some want to direct education dollars toward programs that propose to "help students escape" from under-resourced schools. Whether we are discussing EITC or vouchers, let's be clear: these programs fail to get the Commonwealth even one penny closer to meeting its constitutional obligation to Pennsylvania students. Privatization methods siphon funding away from public schools and into programs that have shown poor results - they have not meaningfully improved academic achievement or significantly reached underprivileged students. Yet even if these programs worked well, they would *still* fail the vast majority of Pennsylvania students because they do not and can not address the root problem.

The root problem is that Pennsylvania has been underinvesting in public schools for decades, with economically disadvantaged public schools seeing particular divestment. The importance of public schools must be acknowledged and prioritized. Public schools are where all students are guaranteed an education - full stop. It doesn't matter whether students have a disability, what their family background is, what their religion is, or what

mistakes they've made - public schools are morally and constitutionally obligated to provide a "thorough and efficient" education to every Pennsylvania child.

These schools are foundational to our children and our communities. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth's decades of underfunding them has created a \$6 billion gap between what our students need and what they get. This lack of resources is particularly concentrated in schools that educate students from lower-income families and students of color. These disparities hurt students in real time, as larger class sizes, fewer enrichment opportunities, and dangerous school facilities impact students' current academic, physical, and mental well-being. As you said in your brief in support of the plaintiffs in the school funding case, *"The evidence before the Court shows that the resources of Petitioner schools and Philadelphia are inadequate... educational outcomes in those districts are both significantly worse than those in other districts across the Commonwealth and inadequate in their own right."* And these disparities cause lasting harm, translating into lower graduation rates and lower lifetime earnings.

To address this core challenge of insufficient funding from the Commonwealth, we must commit to ensuring our public schools, especially the long-underfunded ones, have the resources they need to provide a quality education for their students.

These students - all of them - need someone to champion them. As Attorney General and as a candidate for Governor, you expressed support for full and fair public school funding. As Governor, those students need you to step up and lead, to address this foundational problem with decisiveness and determination. Our students need historic results, which ensure our public schools are fully equipped to provide every student with a thorough education that ensures they graduate ready for college, career, and civic life.

There is no greater challenge before our Commonwealth right now.

But together, we really can do big things.

Will you lead our Commonwealth in this great and worthy effort - providing every student with access to a high-quality, public education?

With Conviction and Hope,

Laura Johnson, Pottstown School District

Dr. Karen Beck Pooley, Bethlehem Area School District

Jacquelyn Huff, State College Area School District

Monica D'Antonio, Norristown Area School District

Cynthia Wirth, Norristown Area School District

Carol Vorchheimer, Philadelphia School District

Paul Castanzo, Pottstown Senior High
Sara Miller, Pottstown School District
Na'imah Rhodes, Pottstown School District
Christopher Jaramillo, Norristown Area School District
Alina Kitchell, Daniel Boone Area School District
Michael Faccinetto, Bethlehem Area School District
Donna Smith, Bellefonte Area School District
Chris Petro, Pottstown School District
Donna Force, Perkiomen Valley School District
Laura Frymoyer, Boyertown Area School District
Jeff Chebot, Cheltenham School District
Ann Davis, Upper Dublin School District
Robert Lieberman, Cheltenham School District
Len Zangwill, Abington School District
Tod Weinstein, Jenkintown School District
Gillian Szymanski, Upper Dublin School District
Keri Marini, Pottstown School District
Shannon Patrick, Bethlehem Area School District
Jacqualyn James, Stroudsburg Area School District
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Meredith Johnston, Pottstown School District
Paul Friel, Owen J Roberts School District
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Brenda Stover, Hempfield School District
Catherine Fox, Scranton School District
Greg Newswanger, School District of Lancaster
Rev. Dr Marcia B. Bailey, Perkiomen School District
Rev. Sarah Strosahl-Kagi, Pottstown School District
Joshua Kagi, Pottstown School District
Greg Vennemann, Bethlehem Area School District
Rev. Jesse North, Manheim Township School District
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Scott Trefny, Warwick School District
Beth Sviben, Central Dauphin School District
Dr. Meredith Hegg, Upper Darby School District

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Ian Carlis, Southern Lehigh School District
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Melissa Hecht, Upper Dublin School District
Wendy Elliott-Vandivier, Philadelphia School District
John Elliott-Vandivier, Philadelphia School District
Nancy Schek, Cheltenham School District
Sara Kehs, Spring-Ford Area School District
Richard L. Ayers, State College Area School District