

SUBJECT: Basic Education Commission Testimony

Mayor's Testimony (5 minutes)

Welcome to Philadelphia and Thank you for coming. I know many of you from my many, many trips to Harrisburg over the last several years where we often discussed the challenges facing Philadelphia's public schools and the need for a new formula. Then, I asked you for your assistance to help us better fund our schools locally and I thank you your efforts on that front. Yet here we are again. However this time, not for last minute stopgap measures to fill a budget gap, but about the work of this commission.

And I ask you today: What is the goal of this commission? What are we, as a collective, trying to do here? I believe any commission as powerful as this body should be about the business of **creating the best public school system in the world**, period. I understand, on some level, this commission is tasked with figuring out the weights for a formula to disperse the state education budget. And you have heard and will continue to hear from many experts in these technical issues. I will leave that to them. I am here to talk about our role as publicly elected officials in ensuring that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the city in partnership take this opportunity the Commission is providing to push our public education system to new heights.

Like you, I am a publicly elected official who has decided to try and take on the improvement of public education for my constituents. I think that is what this commission is really charged with. We, me locally and you at the state level, have been given a rare opportunity to change the lives of millions of young people. We are here to be the education leaders that the citizens of this Commonwealth have told us loudly and clearly that they need us to be. They have demanded that we find an answer to why their children have no counselors—why their afterschool activities have disappeared—why their Physics classes or AP classes have been cancelled. Why there are no more adults in their hallways to keep them safe from bullying. They know what I hope we all know by now—that educational outcomes are not just simply a nice-to-have but rather are a determinant of a person's future.

Parents know that the system that knew, and sometimes loved as a student themselves, will NOT serve their children well. They understand, on some level, that their children will not be competing for a local job against the child seated beside them but against the child in Boston, Hong Kong, London, Bangkok, and New Delhi.

Not more than one hundred years ago this country had about 8% of its citizens with a high school degree and only 3-4% with a college degree. And that kept our economy strong and growing. Back then, that was all we needed from our public education system. Those days are long gone. Now we need 80 to 90 percent of our citizens to have a high school degree and 40 to 50% to have either a 2 or 4 year college degree. That is a dramatically different needed-outcome from our public

education system and demands a greater level of support from both local and state funders.

So I suggest that we are not here today to simply figure out how to fund the status quo, which is a difficult task itself. You all have a once in a lifetime chance to do something historic. To say in your words and deeds that you want this Commonwealth to fund the **best** public education system. There has been much conversation about “adequacy” around the issue of funding formulas. Some are for it and some against. And I realize it has a very specific usage in this conversation.

But I have to say, I have never wanted a merely “**adequate**” anything for my children. Have you?

I have never wanted a merely “adequate” economy for my city. Or a merely adequate level of public safety. Why should we lose the opportunity that this commission has to make us the best state in the country or the world? That is what this city and state should be working together to accomplish. Simply funding the status quo is standing still when the rest of the world is racing forward.

I know that you - like I did in 2008 - are facing a difficult budget situation. I am in no way minimizing that challenge. But there are some things you can't afford to skimp on, or just barely fund. I know that “adequacy” will not win the global competition our state and city faces and that our current fifth graders will face in 10 or 15 years from now when they are looking to get their first job. That's why education is the number one issue for the state's business leaders. These businesses can't be globally competitive if we are only going to - at best - supply them with only adequately prepared workers.

As a city we have made some substantial gains towards the educational goals I laid out for the city 7 years ago. Even though City Hall did not, and still does not, have direct authority over the public education system we have managed to increase our high school graduation rate by 11 %. Also, over the last five years we have increased our support to our schools by \$357M annually. This represents the greatest increase over the same period in the last thirty years.

We have accomplished those increases by doing some very difficult things that others will outline later this afternoon. We did these things because we believe in our public school system—district and charter-managed schools - and believe that investing in them makes good long-term sense for the entire city and therefore for the state. We know now, in no uncertain terms, that the voters of the state have given us a mandate to fix this education funding crisis. It is not simple, but it is necessary. This city is ready to support the hard work of this commission as it takes on this most-worthy task.

Before I conclude I want to briefly stand in support of three principles that you will hear more about over the next two days.