

Nutter joins rally calling for more school funding

By Dan Hardy

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Mayor-elect Michael Nutter joined students, community activists and education advocates at a rally today to call for the Philadelphia School District to get \$1 billion more in funding, as recommended by a recently released state report on the cost of an adequate public school education in Pennsylvania.

The rally of about 100 people, most of them students, took place at Benjamin Franklin High School, just before a meeting at the school held by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education to explain the report's results.

The study, released Nov. 14 and commissioned by the legislature, calculated that it would cost more than \$1 billion in additional funding - about \$5,000 per pupil - in the 170,000-student Philadelphia district to provide an adequate education for every child. The report put the additional cost statewide at \$4.8 billion and found that overall, the poorest districts in Pennsylvania were also the most underfunded ones.

Nutter told the demonstrators that the report proved "what most of the rest of us have known for a long time: We've been underfunding public education in Philadelphia almost forever. So now its a documented fact."

He called on Philadelphia residents to join in a campaign to secure adequate funding. "We are going to organize ourselves in a way that people have never seen before," he said. "If you really care about the future of this city, if you are serious about reducing crime in Philadelphia, if you're serious about lowering the high school dropout rate, if you're serious about increasing the college attendance rate, if you're serious about lowering the poverty rate, if you're serious about people getting jobs in Philadelphia, we must properly fund education."

Student speakers talked about the effects of underfunding.

Marcella Gibbs, a senior at the Kensington International School of Business, Finance and Entrepreneurship, said she and her fellow students have to put up with "overcrowded classrooms, nasty bathrooms, crowded lunchrooms, antiquated equipment and out-of-date textbooks. In affluent communities, they have resources that we don't have."

Breonia Robinson, a freshman at West Philadelphia High School, talked about "the lack of books, teacher quality and supplies," adding that "we want the state legislature to make education its first priority."

Education reformers at the rally and throughout the state see the study as a vehicle for pushing the state government to pay for a greater share of public school education and to even out funding inequities between less wealthy and more prosperous districts.

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