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Students, Parents and Education Advocates Demand Fix for Philadelphia Schools

Philadelphia, Pa. (November 28, 2007) – A high quality education and well-funded public schools are necessities if Philadelphia’s more than 200,000 students are to achieve state standards and compete in today’s economy. But as the result of inadequate and inequitable funding from the state, the city’s students do not have access to the programs and resources needed to receive that high quality education. Those inadequacies and inequities will no longer be tolerated.

That was the rallying cry of students, parents, and education advocates at Benjamin Franklin High School Wednesday evening. Their plea came during a press conference held in advance of a public briefing by the State Board of Education regarding the results of a year-long effort to “cost-out” Pennsylvania’s public school system.

“The costing-out study says are schools are underfunded, but I already knew that,” said Breonia Robinson, a student at West Philadelphia High School and member of the Philadelphia Student Union. “I go to classes that are too crowded, without enough books for every student, and I’m taught by teachers who aren’t always qualified. It’s a direct result of my school not having enough funding, and I think it’s unfair.”

“We as students believe that we need adequate resources to get the best education possible so we can be prepared to go to college, and this is why we support the costing out study,” added Seada Washington of Youth United for Change.

“Every parent’s dream for their children is to achieve greater successes than we had,” said Delores Shaw, a parent of a Mastbaum High School student and active member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (EPOP). “But the reality is that when we send our children to our neighborhood schools, they may not receive the education they need to go to college or get a quality job and to ensure their future success. We can not sit idly by and tolerate these conditions any longer.”

The public briefing at Benjamin Franklin High School is one of six presentations being conducted by the State Board of Education and Augenblick, Palaich & Associates, the Denver-based consultants who wrote the costing-out study, to discuss local implications of the study’s findings. The report, which was commissioned by the General Assembly

and released on November 14, found that an average of \$12,057 per pupil is needed for Pennsylvania's public schools to educate students to achieve state standards. In Philadelphia, the number was \$14,919 per student, nearly \$5,000 more than current expenditures.

A student photography exhibit, "Critical Exposure: Eyes on Education," co-sponsored by Good Schools Pennsylvania and the Education Law Center, was also featured at the press conference. The photos, taken by students in Youth United for Change, demonstrated the inequities in conditions at several Philadelphia schools.

In the months leading up to the release of the costing-out study, there was movement toward ensuring that the results of the study would be used effectively. Representative John Siptroth (D-189) and Beverly Mackereth (R-196) introduced House Resolution 460 in October, calling for creations of a Joint Legislative Commission on Public School Finance to use the study to craft recommendations for new education funding formulas. Last week, Senator Pat Browne (R-16) introduced a similar proposal, Senate Resolution 210. But, advocates stress that their work is not yet finished.

"We hope our presence here today shows our state and city lawmakers that we are a united front who are serious about education reform," said Helen Gym of Parents United for Public Education, whose organization along with other groups including Good Schools Pennsylvania, Education Law Center, Philadelphia Student Union, Youth United for Change, EPOP, and Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) helped to coordinate the event. "We can't wait any longer – it is time to change the way our state funds public education and we demand action."

"With the costing-out study in hand, we now have the opportunity to get public education right in Pennsylvania," said State Representative Tony Payton, Jr. (D-179), who lent his support at the press conference. "But the question remains – do we have the political will to do what's right, not just for the children of Philadelphia, but for all the children of this Commonwealth? The answer must be 'yes'."

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