

**PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM GROUP
RELEASES RESULTS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA
SCHOOL FINANCE ISSUES SURVEY**

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(Harrisburg) -- The results of the Pennsylvania School Finance Issues Survey for the 2002 Primary Election and a new web site for voter information were announced today at a news conference in the Capitol Rotunda in Harrisburg.

"How state policymakers will fund schools in Pennsylvania is becoming a defining issue of the 2002 Campaign," said Ron Cowell, president of The Education Policy and Leadership Center, a Survey sponsor.

The Survey was sponsored by the Pennsylvania School Finance Reform Group, a coalition of sixteen regional and statewide non-partisan organizations that are promoting school finance reforms in Pennsylvania. The coalition will not make endorsements, but wants to increase public awareness and campaign discussion concerning major school finance issues.

The ten-question Survey was submitted to all 2002 Primary Republican and Democrat candidates for Governor, Lt. Governor, State Senator and State Representative. Responses were received from 2 candidates for Governor, 9 candidates for Lt. Governor, 19 candidates for State Senator, and 136 candidates for State Representative. Overall, 165 candidates responded, a 37% response rate from the 447 Republican and Democrat candidates on the May 21 Primary ballot.

"The candidates who responded to the Survey expressed almost unanimous recognition that the current system of funding schools in Pennsylvania is broken, unfair to students and taxpayers alike," said Cowell.

In other key results from the Survey, candidates expressed:

- Unanimous acknowledgement that "state policymakers have an obligation to support a high quality K-12 education program...as a fundamental right of every student in Pennsylvania's public school system."
- Broad willingness to commit themselves to vote

only for state budgets that would increase the state share of school expenses and close the gap of resources available between the state's poorest and wealthiest districts.

- Near unanimous commitment to support a comprehensive overhaul of the state's school finance system during the 2003-2004 legislative session.

The Survey sponsors announced a new web site that enables Pennsylvania voters to read the responses submitted to the Survey by all candidates. Voters can view the complete responses from candidates by looking on the Internet at

<http://www.eplc.org/candidates/primarysurvey2002.html>

The Pennsylvania School Finance Issues Survey is sponsored by the following sixteen regional and statewide non-partisan organizations:

- Center for Greater Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania
- Council for Public Education
- Good Schools Pennsylvania
- Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA
- PA Association of Rural and Small Schools
- PA Association of School Administrators
- PA Council of Churches
- Pennsylvania PTA
- PA School Boards Association
- PA School Reform Network
- Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth
- The Education Policy and Leadership Center
- PA Public Education Partnership (includes Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Mon Valley Education Consortium, Philadelphia Education Fund, and Pittsburgh Council on Public Education)

The sponsors of the Survey want state policymakers to accept responsibility and to act to fix a currently ineffective and unfair school funding system.

- Pennsylvania, like most states, has adopted in law academic standards that reflect what students are expected to learn. Pennsylvania also has implemented a system of assessments and other accountability measures that have significant consequences for students and others. But Pennsylvania has done little to ensure that

adequate educational resources, supported by an effective school finance system, are available to support high quality educational opportunities for every student in every school.

- On average, states provide about 54% of the cost of K-12 public education. In Pennsylvania, the state share is much less than 40% and gets smaller almost every year.
- A major purpose of a state's school finance system is to create greater equity of financial resources among the varied school districts in the state. In Pennsylvania, the poorest school districts spend about \$5,000 per student and the wealthiest districts spend about \$15,000 per student. The annual national report card published by Education Week in January 2002 graded Pennsylvania a D- on equity, ranking the state 47th in the country. State funding policies in Pennsylvania sometimes worsen rather than reduce the gap between the poorest and richest districts.