

Broad Coalition of Education Groups Demand School Funding Efforts Linked with Property Tax Reform

Poll shows overwhelming majority support their call

NEWS RELEASE - Monday, October 28, 2002

(Harrisburg) -- Eighty-four percent of respondents to a recent statewide poll indicate that they would vote for a candidate for Governor who is committed to provide the services necessary for every child to pass state tests. Similarly, 83% state they will vote for the gubernatorial candidate that is committed to increasing funding for poor school districts. Terry Madonna, pollster for Good Schools Pennsylvania responded, "This poll shows that this election is a referendum on public education. Voters want elected leaders who have the courage to take this issue head-on."

Thirteen groups representing interests as diverse as school boards and the teacher unions were unified in their demand that the candidates and the legislature address school reform in tandem with changes in the property tax system. Specifically they seek:

1. Decreasing reliance on property taxes for school funding to such a degree that the average state share is restored to an average of at least 50% across the state.
2. Increasing state commitment to quality services that will boost student achievement. These services could potentially include pre-K, full-day kindergarten, smaller classes in lower grades, and extra help for students falling behind, increased parental involvement and improved teacher training.
3. Developing a comprehensive structure for an accountability system.

The Madonna Young Opinion Research Poll conducted for Good Schools Pennsylvania found that the views espoused by the gubernatorial candidates on education will be a chief determinant of the votes cast by respondents to a statewide poll. Respondents to the poll included 48% Republicans and 40% Democrats with the greatest plurality from the Central region of the state.

According to the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, Joe Bard, "The current focus of the legislature demonstrates a greater commitment to grandstanding and party bashing than to the hard work of building consensus on the components of school reform. Their efforts to address property tax reduction in isolation from school funding reform are terribly out of step with the electorate."

Stinson Stroup of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators pointed out that, "For almost three decades, school officials have faced a declining state commitment to public education. In fairness to students and taxpayers this trend must be reversed. This poll confirms that an overwhelming number of Pennsylvanians share this view and that the state must pick up a greater share of school costs."

Tim Allwein of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association went on to say, "Some will suggest that school spending is rising too rapidly. In fact, school spending grew at a slower rate of 42% since 1989 than the overall rate of growth of the state budget which grew by 63% in that period. Pennsylvanians are learning these facts and getting clearer and clearer about the need for the state to step up to the plate as an equal partner."

These thirteen groups called on their constituencies and all those who support public education to vote in unprecedented numbers. "Our leadership is a group of individuals who are regular voters. But in this election we are working hard to make sure all of our

members, their families and supporters also go to the polls and cast their votes for house, senate and the Gubernatorial candidate that they believe will put the interests of public education first," said Tomi Waters Boylstein, President of the Pennsylvania PTA.

"This poll confirms that the legislature is ignoring the views of Pennsylvanians," said Donna Cooper, Campaign Director for Good Schools Pennsylvania. "According to the poll results, 78% of voters plan to pay attention to the special session. And, 81% of survey respondents indicated that such a session must address the critical school funding issues as well as property tax reduction. In fact, those who at first indicated that property tax reform was their top priority for the session switched their position when asked: Would you still prefer to see reduced property taxes if you knew it would leave the amount of money going to schools unchanged or even reduced? With this information, 27% of respondents no longer identified property tax as their priority."

According to Ron Cowell, President of The Education Policy and Leadership Center, "This election will determine whether Pennsylvania has any real intention to fix the state's very ineffective education funding system that is a primary cause of high property taxes and one of America's most unequal and, for tens of thousands of students, most inadequately funded school programs. If this funding system is to work better for taxpayers and students alike," Cowell said, "voters need to support candidates who clearly share this purpose and who will be held accountable for action rather than talk during 2003."

For more information, contact Sheila Ballen at (215) 275-7329.

Pennsylvania School Finance Reform Group

Good Schools Pennsylvania

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA

Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PAARS)

Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials

Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY)

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Pennsylvania PTA

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Pennsylvania School Boards Association

Pennsylvania School Reform Network (PSRN)

Pennsylvania State Education Agency

The Education Policy and Leadership Center

(EPLC)