

Education

Joe Hohenstein is a product of Philadelphia public schools. He believes that school reform starts with a solid, quality public system supplemented by other educational models. If elected he will seek to provide the right school for each child in his district. Between former Republican Governor Tom Corbett's move to drastically slash funding for public schools across the state, and budget impasses over the last several years, Harrisburg put a stranglehold on millions of dollars which should flow to school districts like Philadelphia. Pennsylvania's education system is in serious trouble and that vision of the right school for each child is unattainable.

Governor Wolf's election and his bold plans for Pennsylvania's education system were a beacon of hope, but progress has been stymied by state Republican legislators' efforts to block the budget. Joe offers voters a chance to make this election a referendum on the politics-as-usual games that are being played by state legislators in Harrisburg. In line with Joe's broader desire to bring responsibility and accountability back to Harrisburg, he believes legislators shouldn't play petty politics when it comes to the education of Pennsylvania's youth. Joe's campaign focuses on specific reforms that he will work toward once elected.

The core of Joe's education platform centers around:

- Fair funding of public schools, regardless of the socioeconomic status of those living in a given school district
- Greater accountability for charter schools and reforms to charter lottery systems
- A new model to replace the Philadelphia School Reform Commission

Fair funding

Pennsylvania's school funding system is inherently broken. It has been called "the nation's most inequitable" due to the fact that the school districts with the highest poverty rates receive one-third fewer state and local tax dollars per pupil than the wealthiest districts. This imbalance violates fundamental fairness.

Joe would work to implement a funding formula similar to the one put forth by the Basic Education Funding Commission and ensure that all students in Pennsylvania have equal access to the resources they need to learn. Further, Joe supports a community school model that would provide families of all socioeconomic statuses with the resources to help their children thrive. The model is similar to the one Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney proposed during his 2015 mayoral campaign—establishing school-based hubs of parental support, health care services, childcare and after-school services. Joe supports creating funding avenues for districts where this model would be effective, especially Philadelphia in which his legislative district lies. A central element of any new funding system will have to include separation of funding streams for public school districts and charter schools receiving public funds.

Improved charter accountability and lottery system reforms

While there are many well-run and effective charter schools across Pennsylvania, there have been numerous instances of mismanaged funds, fiscal irresponsibility and outright corruption. Joe believes charter schools should be held to the same standards to which any entity receiving money in the public trust would be held accountable. Joe would have supported the Democratic amendments which were shot down by the Republican-led Legislature last year that would have made charter schools more locally controlled, better for kids and more responsible to taxpayers.

Joe also would work to reform the lottery systems under which many charter schools operate. Lottery systems are often a form of segregation, and the admission process for charter schools needs to offer a level playing field for all students. Joe believes that we should be able to find the right school for every child and that parents should not have to feel lucky they won a lottery.

Establishing the Right Governance Model after the SRC

The School District of Philadelphia needs more local control. The School Reform Commission finally recognized that fact when it decided to dissolve. The blank slate provided by that dissolution presents a unique opportunity to establish a working school board and governance structure. All governmental entities must be held accountable in ways they currently are not. The current interim Board with all nine members being appointed by a single commission controlled solely by the mayor of Philadelphia cannot become the final structure.

Joe supports a different model for Philadelphia School District governance, similar to one put forth by the Education Voters PA. The model would include both appointed and elected members, creating a nine-member board. The governor, members of the Philadelphia General Assembly delegation, the mayor and City Council would all have the ability to appoint a member, giving each of these entities skin in the game. The people of Philadelphia would have the ability to elect the remaining members through a vote. By giving voters the ability to choose members, as well as vote them out, the board will inevitably be held to a higher level of accountability and responsibility than it is now. Giving elected officials such as the Mayor and Governor the ability to directly appoint members would also give these stakeholders a direct line into the operations of the District.

The defining issue for the School District of Philadelphia has been the inability to consistently secure the financial resources to provide a quality education for its students. This model keeps the state involved but also would increase accountability for those on the board. It is a model that provides the best opportunity for transparent and accountable governance for Philadelphia's troubled district. It is a model that provides Philadelphia with the best opportunity to fulfill the vision of each child having an opportunity to attend the right school for them.