

Speech Presented at PASW Press Conference in
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Tomea Sippio-Smith, K-12 Policy Director
Children First

Good morning. My name is Tomea Sippio-Smith. I am the K-12 Education Policy Director at Children First, formerly known as Public Citizens for Children and Youth or PCCY. Children First is a advocacy organization that works to improve the lives of our region's children by developing initiatives and advocating for public education, quality healthcare, child care, and juvenile justice. I'm honored to stand in the presence of these committed and dedicated education advocates.

We are all here today to reaffirm our position that PA Schools Work when we adequate and equitably fund education for all of Pennsylvania's students.

Earlier this year, we thanked the PA legislature for increasing state education funding to help students regain their education footing, enter school buildings and continue learning.

However, those investments can't and don't offset generations of continual deprivation and underinvestment in our schools. If it didn't appall you the first time you heard it, taken together the statistics around where Pennsylvania's education system currently stands, should.

This year - Pennsylvania ranks 45th in the nation in state share of funding for K-12 education. And if 45 sounds familiar to you it should, because year after year, the state has ranked in the 40's - near the bottom because of its inadequate and inequitable school funding system. This system fails far too many students, shifts the burden to local taxpayers and weakens Pennsylvania's future by leaving students in many districts without adequate buildings, text books, technology or access to the tools and resources necessary to prepare them for college, trade schools or their careers.

But, this wasn't always the case. Pennsylvania used to provide a greater share of state funding to its students. And that the shift to invest a smaller share was a choice. A choice that has left 277 school districts – more than half of all districts in the state – in a situation where they need at least \$2,000 more per student to

adequately support their students' learning needs so they can graduate ready to compete in today's economy. Moreover, it has left students of color and students that are impoverished to be repeatedly subjected to inequities because they are most likely to attend schools that have been chronically underfunded.

And we all know that our state's constitution requires the General Assembly to do better than this. The PA legislature is obligated to provide every public school student with a thorough and efficient education. But that a system that leaves some students without computers, guidance counselors, librarians, special education services or AP classes is not thorough, and a system where only three-quarters of students in low wealth districts graduate on time is not efficient. And a state that requires students to progress, graduate and acquire college and career skills should be held accountable for failing to provide the resources that will allow them to achieve the very goals we have set for them – leaving communities across the state struggling and lacking the adequate workforce employers state that they need.

And finally, we've stated something that's even more appalling. The difference between the funding that students need and what we provide them with. \$4.6 billion. Pennsylvania's adequacy gap is at least \$4.6 billion. Yet, we are in a position to change it, not tomorrow, not five years in the future, not because the court has to direct the legislature to, but today - because we have more than \$7 billion dollars available that Harrisburg is choosing not to use to adequately and equitably fund our schools.

Pennsylvania's 45th ranking is an abomination. PA Schools will work better for Pennsylvania when Pennsylvania works better for our children. We call on the General Assembly to adequately and equitably fund our schools.

This concludes our press conference.

With that, we are happy to answer any questions the press may have.