



HOMework

What we seldom consider when seeking solutions for the shortcomings of our Philadelphia education system is the fact that a student's home life plays a critical role in their future success. We cannot simply address school governance, funding curriculum and philosophy and expect that dramatic, sustainable change will occur.

The truth is Philadelphia students come from households and communities facing various challenges – parents who can't read, incarcerated parents, abusive parents, unengaged parents, food deserts, unsafe neighborhoods and any variety of mental health challenges. There is significant research documenting the fact that almost half of school-aged children in the U.S. have suffered a traumatic experience related to family dysfunction or poverty. ([Click here for more information](#)). Given these hurdles, how can we expect that children won't carry the weight of these traumatic experiences from their home lives into the school environment?

Doug Oliver was lucky to have the opportunity to attend the Milton Hershey School – where everyone associated with the school from the janitor, to the teacher, to the coach played a role in Doug's disciplining and character development. This model is one that the City and School District should embrace and is the inspiration for the educational policy addendum called: *Homework*.

Homework seeks to propose a comprehensive solution, through a public/private partnership, to address the issue of education in Philadelphia by engaging City agencies, the City's medical and educational institutions and non-profits to provide our children with a quality education.

City Agencies

There has never been a coordinated approach among City agencies that seeks to leverage budgets and combine efforts to improve educational outcomes for Philadelphia students. There are several City agencies that currently deliver services to Philadelphia families. These agencies have budgets and resources, which can be leveraged to augment School District funds for the benefit of Philadelphia students and their families. Educating Philadelphia students is no longer just a School District issue – it is a citywide issue. The goal of *Homework* is not to place additional strain on other city agencies that are at times underfunded. The goal is to break down the existing “silo” system so agencies can work together to create a true partnership for better outcomes.

Schools in the District should not be without nurses given the resources of the Department of Health. Students should not be without potable water from school drinking fountains given the resources of the Water Department. Schools should not be without after-school programs given the multitude of programs available through Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. *Homework* seeks to engage these agencies that should have a coordinated role in homes and schools and determine how they can administer their respective budgets through the lens of preparing Philadelphia students to receive a good education.

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services has a mission to “provide and promote safety, permanency, and well-being for children and youth at risk of abuse, neglect and delinquency.” The agency provides child protection, foster care/adoption, delinquency, and prevention services to more than 100,000 children and families each year. The 2016 budget for the agency through the City’s General Fund is approximately \$102.7 million.

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health has a mission to “protect and promote the health of all Philadelphians and to provide a safety net for the most vulnerable.” The agency provides support for children and families to include health centers, lead poisoning prevention, chronic disease prevention, and maternal, child and family services. The 2016 budget for the agency through the City’s General Fund is approximately \$116.2 million.

The Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disability Services provides intellectual disability and behavioral health services through four departments: Office of Addiction Services, Office of Mental Health, Community Behavioral Health, and Intellectual disability

Services. The 2016 budget for the agency through the City's General Fund is approximately \$13.9 million. In addition, the agency will receive \$961.5 million from Health Choices Behavioral Health Fund.

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation offers camps, sports and recreation programs, as well as after-school and youth workforce programs. The 2016 budget for the agency through the City's General Fund is approximately \$57.7 million.

The Philadelphia Water Department is responsible for providing safe drinking water to Philadelphia residents. The 2015 budget for the agency is approximately \$354.7 million.

Educational and Medical Institutions

Philadelphia is home for many of the country's top educational and medical institutions. They represent a huge untapped resource for aiding the City in addressing the school crisis. Although financial support is greatly needed, these institutions can also assist by dedicating resources to support the physical and psychological needs of students and families. Some institutions have neighborhood-specific programs and partnerships in place, but a more coordinated – Citywide initiative can be created, ensuring that all children from all neighborhoods can benefit from these partnerships and programs.

Non-Profits

There are countless non-profits in the City that provide much needed services to children and families in Philadelphia. They often operate independently and raise their own funds to advance their missions. The City can benefit from the good work these non-profits are doing in various areas including youth development programs, tutoring programs, after-school programs, urban farms, and healthy lunch programs.

What Will It Take

Coordination is Key

When bringing together the City agencies, educational and medical institutions, and non-profits, it will be essential that a well-defined plan be created. In addition, a robust system needs to be developed in order to facilitate effective communication between schools and agencies regarding the support needed and later provided to students and families.

Focus on Prevention

Instead of reacting to issues that develop, *Homework* can provide a mechanism to meet the needs of students and families on the front end instead of on the back end. When student home environments are improved, students can find success and schools can be more effective.

Modify the Approach

The 'Zero Tolerance' approach to disciplining students is being challenged by schools across the country. Instead of requiring that students ignore their home life issues during the school day, schools can take steps to address student issues before they become larger problems leading to suspension or expulsion. By integrating a trauma response program into schools, including therapists who are closely aligned with teachers, trauma can be addressed and children can be provided with the emotional support services they need.

Start Early

Studies have consistently shown that early childhood programs improve academic outcomes (higher graduation rates, fewer grades repeated, and fewer students in special education programs).

Homework is a big idea that has the potential to solve the School District's funding issue, provide Philadelphia students with the quality education they deserve, and deliver enhanced support to children and families in their homes. By developing a public/private partnership that brings together schools, City agencies, educational and medical institutions, and non-profits, we can reshape the way the Philadelphia education system operates.

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