



## **An Agenda for Excellence: A Great K-12 Education for Every Pennsylvania Child**

Revitalizing Pennsylvania's economy and creating an environment in which good, family-sustaining jobs can grow is one of Tom Corbett's top priorities. Job creation, stimulating economic growth and expanding our economy are all built upon a solid educational foundation – one that prepares students to compete in the global economy. Tom Corbett believes that all Pennsylvania children – regardless of zip code, race, economic or educational status – deserve a first class education to help them achieve their full potential.

We have arrived at a new era in education. The mandate on our schools in today's global economy imposes a new requirement of universal educational quality. The rules in this new era dictate that it is not enough to educate some of our children, but that to succeed and win we must educate all children at a high level.

No school system in America has achieved the goal of educating all students to high standards. In fact, no state in the nation has ever come close. Tom Corbett believes that Pennsylvania must be the first, and he is determined to help make it a reality. Why? Where the U.S. once stood unrivaled in the world, we now lag behind other industrialized nations. On measures of educational attainment among 30 developed countries, the U.S. places 25<sup>th</sup> in math, 16<sup>th</sup> in reading and 12<sup>th</sup> in science. We rank 10<sup>th</sup> in the number of young people obtaining post-secondary degrees.

Closer to home, the level of Pennsylvania's challenge grows clearer. Fully one-third of all students perform below standard in reading and math. A recent study found that 45 percent of high school graduates received a diploma without meeting standards, while a second study reports that 30,000 students in Pennsylvania drop out each year, never earning a high school diploma at all.

While Pennsylvania has made some gains, it has failed to sustain growth in student achievement. As compared to the results of our own state assessments, national tests show significantly weaker student accomplishment in Pennsylvania. The challenge is clear. Pennsylvania must deliver on the promise of a great school for every child. Tom Corbett

believes that we need a system that is continuously improving and focused on delivering excellence to each and every student in Pennsylvania. That's why Tom Corbett has developed his *Agenda for Excellence*.

An *Agenda for Excellence* can only start in one place, with our children. It provides for every Pennsylvania child to have the choice of a great school, led by highly effective teachers and leaders that will enable students to achieve their full potential. Tom Corbett wants to put students and their achievement at the center of our education system, right where they belong. Every child can learn, but we must empower them with the tools they need to achieve.

To accomplish the *Agenda for Excellence*, Tom Corbett's vision for K-12 education in Pennsylvania encompasses several components:

- Funding schools and students
- Enhancing educational opportunities
- Ensuring effective teachers and leaders
- Embracing accountability for results
- Creating safe learning environments

## **FUNDING SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS**

Tom Corbett believes in Pennsylvania's education system and will make funding our schools a top priority. Putting students first means ensuring the resources intended to support their education make it to the schools and classrooms they attend. Pennsylvania must strive to strengthen its ability to demonstrate to Pennsylvania taxpayers that every education dollar is being used effectively to prepare our children for the future.

Harrisburg needs to change its traditional mindset of compliance and enforcement. Instead the focus must be on setting goals, while providing the support and flexibility to school districts and schools to achieve them. As Governor, Tom Corbett will begin to cut the strings from Harrisburg, giving greater flexibility to districts and schools to direct resources to best achieve student learning goals. Enabling schools to focus on results and eliminating the barriers that get in the way of achieving them is critical to reforming our education system and making it student-centric. From getting more funding directly in to the classroom to providing flexibility of education dollars, Tom Corbett believes it is time for meaningful improvements to our education funding.

- ✓ Align basic education funding to support students and learning. Tom Corbett believes that education funding should be aligned more directly to support students and learning – linking funding directly to students and the schools they attend. The unwritten rule in education has been that children with the greatest educational challenges far too often receive the fewest resources. Pennsylvania's current funding formula took a step

toward rectifying this injustice by basing funding on individual student needs, but it left unchanged practices that work to favor schools with the fewest educational challenges at the expense of those with the most.

- Get funding into the classroom. Making sure that education funding makes it into the classroom is critical to promoting student achievement. As Governor, Tom Corbett will direct the Department of Education (PDE) to work with school districts to devise a reporting system that better tracks the spending of educational dollars and puts an emphasis on direct funding to the classroom. He will work to ensure that schools and students with the greatest educational challenges receive the funding support they deserve.
- Maximize funding flexibility for school districts. Tom Corbett believes that education in Pennsylvania is driven at the local level – where students live and learn. State government should be a partner in ensuring a quality education. As Governor, Tom Corbett will work to bring flexibility to funding for school districts. He believes in greater control of resources at the school level, lessening state mandates to schools that are striving for achievement and directing resources to best achieve student learning goals. In addition, Tom Corbett will direct PDE to encourage multi-district collaborations in purchasing, service delivery and instructional programming, but will oppose any efforts to mandate consolidation.
- Promote portability of funding. Every student has different education needs, and many Pennsylvania families are making choices to find the school that is the right one for their children. Tom Corbett believes that funding should be made portable within Pennsylvania’s education system, so that when a student pursues different learning opportunities, the funding moves along with them. Funding dollars should be unbundled so that educational decisions can be put in the hands of students and their families. This is especially critical for students in failing schools. Students have a right to attend a good school and not be forced to attend a failing one by virtue of their zip code.

### **ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

All students deserve access to a great school and educational opportunities that work for them and their learning needs. Pennsylvania is home to many great schools, but not all schools meet the needs of students and many of our communities are home to schools that do not work at all. To enhance access to great schools and give families choices in their children’s education, Tom Corbett will work to strengthen support for charter schools – new kinds of public schools that for over a decade have provided choices, innovation and opportunities for tens of thousands of students across Pennsylvania. In addition, he will work to improve greater dual enrollment opportunities for high school students pursuing post-secondary degrees, expand

career and technical schools, provide opportunity grants, support the Education Improvement Tax Credit and pilot Innovation Schools.

- ✓ Enhance charter school quality and accountability. Charter schools provide important education options for students and families. As Governor, Tom Corbett will work to enhance the performance of charter schools and provide more students with the ability to pursue learning opportunities that are right for them.
  - Strengthen ethical and performance standards. Tom Corbett believes that a quality education is the best foundation we can provide to Pennsylvania children. As Governor, he will work with the General Assembly to raise performance and ethical standards for charter schools. He will pursue initiatives such as holding board members and administrators to the Pennsylvania Ethics Act; requiring charters to contain measurable academic, financial and operational standards to judge a school's performance; require performance contracts for educational service providers and disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest; provide more equitable funding of charter school students; allow school districts and IUs to hold charters; and allow charters to use school district facilities that are not being used and right of first refusal in disposal of district buildings.
  - Establish independent charter school board. Modeled after charter school authorizers in other states and standards to ensure quality, accountability and transparency, the statewide charter school board would establish a uniform application, review and decision-making process for charter schools. The goal – to approve and grow great schools, put low performing schools out of business and repeat the process. It would approve new charter and cyber charter schools, renewals of existing schools, appeals for local district and university authorizer decisions and assume oversight of existing cyber charters from PDE. It also would be responsible for enacting reforms and for providing monitoring, oversight and intervention authority. Tom Corbett believes that an independent board would provide greater transparency and accountability for the charter schools in Pennsylvania and could encourage the replication of “Schools of Excellence” – high-performing charter schools. The board would be supported by dedicated funding from authorized charter schools.
- ✓ Improve dual enrollment opportunities. Access to post secondary education is an important part of the education continuum for students as they pursue their future and career goals. Student choices should not be limited to selecting a school that best meets their educational needs – students need to have choices in courses, too. By unbundling education funding, high school students would have the ability to earn post secondary credit through dual enrollment. Dual enrollment provides our students with forward thinking educational opportunities, earning credit and providing savings for Pennsylvania families. As Governor, Tom Corbett will infuse the funding for dual

enrollment into the basic education funding formula to ensure expanded dual enrollment opportunities for a broader number of students.

- ✓ Expand career and technical centers. About one-quarter of today's careers require four years or more of college, while approximately one-quarter of today's job opportunities are available to "unskilled" labor with no more than a high school diploma. Career and technical schools (CTC's) at the high school level offer skill training that provides important job training opportunities for students seeking to enter the workforce. These opportunities often can offer specialization in a field that can lead to a good, family-sustaining job, such as STEM career, and engage potential high school dropouts. As Governor, Tom Corbett will work with PDE and school districts to maximize and highlight utilization of CTC's and ensure continued funding for these programs.
- ✓ Provide Opportunity Grants for students attending failing public schools. Parents should have the right to choose the public school their child attends. They also should be able to make a choice outside the public system when their child's public school is a failing one. As part of his School Grading System, Tom Corbett will work with the General Assembly and educational leaders to ensure that students who are trapped in failing schools may switch to achieving schools and that funding will be available for those students (See *Develop School Grading System* for additional information.)
- ✓ Grow the Education Improvement Tax Credit. Tom Corbett believes that we need to improve educational opportunities and choices for students. The Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program benefits children – Pre-K through 12th grade – in public and private schools. To date, the EITC provides 44,000 scholarships annually and hundreds of programs for public school students to pursue educational goals and advanced learning opportunities. The EITC provides an important piece of workforce development, and Tom Corbett will work with the General Assembly to restore the cuts made to the EITC and explore raising the total credits available in future years.
- ✓ Support pilot of Innovation Schools & workforce development. Innovation schools promote new approaches to schools, learning, and research and development opportunities for public education. As Governor, Tom Corbett will work with PDE and the new independent charter school board to authorize 25 Innovation Schools statewide. These non-traditional public schools would specialize in new approaches to high school linking post-secondary education and the workforce through project-based learning. They would allow for different definitions of achievement beyond traditional measures of reading and math proficiency on the PSSAs, but would require students' record of accomplishment to be demonstrated and documented. Upon yearly evaluation, any successful models would move to full charter status.

## **ENSURING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND LEADERS**

Great school choices are only made possible if schools are staffed by effective teachers and leaders. Research confirms that if the goal is better schools and higher student achievement, improving teacher effectiveness is the most powerful way to do it. Teacher effectiveness has been found to be the single most important school factor influencing student achievement. As critical as teachers are in the student achievement equation, current systems fall short in ensuring that every student has a highly effective teacher and that every teacher has the tools and support he or she needs to be highly effective. Low-performing schools and low student achievement are not necessarily caused by under-performing teachers. Where low achievement exists, it is often a byproduct of a system that treats teachers as “widgets,” denying them their professionalism and making teaching less attractive.

Tom Corbett believes that we can do better and must support teachers as they strive to give our children the best education possible. Pennsylvania needs new evaluation systems that as fairly, credibly and accurately as possible, gauge teacher effectiveness in promoting student achievement. We need systems to help us increase the number of highly effective teachers in our schools and integrate them with the most critical human capital decisions in public education – teacher induction, assignment, professional development, retention, dismissal and compensation.

- ✓ Maximize teacher and leader growth and effectiveness. As Governor, Tom Corbett will direct PDE to retool the state’s evaluation systems to better gauge teacher and leader effectiveness and link to student learning growth. He believes that a percentage of evaluations should be based on student achievement data and results should be tied to induction, certification and tenure. Tom Corbett also believes that evaluations should be utilized to improve the effectiveness of all teachers by customizing professional development to individual teacher needs. He will partner with school districts to build local capacity to support teacher effectiveness and professional development opportunities and to address teachers found to be ineffective. In addition, he will encourage school districts to consider local initiatives to link student achievement to compensation for buildings and districts. Retooled evaluations also would be broadened to link student learning growth to district leaders – superintendents, principals and other administrative staff.

As part of his commitment to maximizing teacher effectiveness, Tom Corbett also believes that teachers should be compensated for their excellence in the classroom, most importantly improving student achievement. Merit pay programs, which operate in addition to base pay, not only incentivize teaching excellence for current teachers, but they also work to help recruit and retain the nation’s brightest minds by attracting new teachers and non-traditional educators into the classroom. Any system would need to be directed at the local level with some oversight from PDE.

- ✓ Expand alternative pathways to teaching and leadership. Most teachers and education leaders have entered the education field through traditional training at colleges and universities specializing in education degrees. While these career tracks are vital to the success of Pennsylvania’s education system, professionals from other fields are seeking to enter the education community through alternative pathways. Programs like *Teach for America* offer people from different careers and backgrounds an opportunity to receive the training they need to teach with a commitment to help students in our most urban and rural schools. As Governor, Tom Corbett will work to support the expansion of pathways to teaching and leadership.

## **EMBRACING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS**

Tom Corbett believes that we must set high expectations for students in order to achieve meaningful success and education reform. We need to refocus the education system that has been organized around adult interests as much as it was around the students that it serves. Whether they are post secondary or technical training bound, going directly into the workplace or achieving milestones as a special needs student, every student not only needs to be embraced, but also must serve as the focal point of Pennsylvania’s education system. To achieve these goals, Tom Corbett believes that we need to embrace accountability in our education system to ensure the best quality education for our students. This drive for excellence includes meeting performance-based accountability and empowering parents with information and choices.

- ✓ Embrace performance-based accountability. To ensure that we help every Pennsylvania child succeed, Tom Corbett believes we must focus on student performance and learning growth as a core part of our education system. As Governor, he will direct PDE to partner with local school districts to provide greater flexibility to achieve performance goals and promote waivers of state laws and regulations – except for health and safety – if a waiver increases student achievement gains. He is committed to reducing barriers to improvement and innovation and believes school districts should not be penalized for reducing costs and increasing productivity. Tom Corbett also believes that we can no longer fund failure and must work to intervene in failing districts and close failing schools.
- ✓ Develop school grading system. Utilizing national models, Tom Corbett will work with the General Assembly to develop a school grading system to better explain educational success and identify those schools that are in need of the most assistance. A grading system is recognizable and allows families to become more involved in the education of their children through a system that readily explains the quality of education and educational opportunities their children are receiving. Parents often can “trigger” a turnaround in low-performing schools and can continue to push high-achieving schools to do better. To calculate grades – A, B, C, D, and F – the school grading system would be based on student performance on state assessments and other objective measures

of student achievement, including proficiency rates, learning gains, closing achievement gaps, graduation rates, accelerated coursework and college and workforce readiness.

Tom Corbett understands children's futures cannot be put on hold while time is taken to develop a good school grading system. That is why he believes it is vital to extend an immediate helping hand to students currently attending schools already identified as failing under the current accountability system. Tom Corbett's plan will automatically trigger opportunity grants for students in schools in Corrective Action II for their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

Once a school grading system is established, Tom Corbett will focus on the bottom five to 10 percent of public schools that have historically failed. Low performing schools will be required to adopt a state-approved turnaround model, modeled after the national turnaround models with a shorter timeframe. If the turnaround of the chronically failing school is not successful after a certain period of time, students must be offered the choice of a quality public school or provided an opportunity grant to go to another school.

### **CREATING SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

Schools should be safe havens for teaching and learning, and parents, students and teachers have a right to expect that their schools are safe learning environments. As Pennsylvania's top law enforcement officer, Tom Corbett has spent much of his career protecting Pennsylvanians – especially those most vulnerable in our society – our children. As Governor, Tom Corbett will continue to push for safe schools and direct PDE to strengthen and implement initiatives to ensure that our children not only are getting a quality education, but also learning in a safe environment.

- ✓ Strengthen cooperation between schools and law enforcement. Tom Corbett will encourage local school districts to work with law enforcement through memorandums of understanding and mandatory reporting of crimes to ensure that our schools are safe.
- ✓ Require schools to establish clear codes of conduct & emergency plans. Most schools have in place codes of conduct by which they govern the student body and ensure orderly conduct of students. Many of these codes of conduct are out-of-date and do not reflect current technology, cyber use and updated emergency response plans. As Governor, Tom Corbett will direct PDE to work with local school districts to update codes of conduct and emergency preparedness plans to ensure the safety of students, teachers and school staff.
- ✓ Ensure accurate data collection and reporting of school violence to PDE. Tom Corbett will direct PDE to work with local school districts and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to ensure that there is accurate data collection and reporting of

school violence.

- ✓ Broaden list of offenses that bar employment in schools. Pennsylvania currently has a mechanism in place to review and bar potential school employees based on prior criminal offenses. Where appropriate and necessary, Tom Corbett will work with local school districts to broaden that list of offenses.
- ✓ Encourage use of school safety programs. Tom Corbett will work to encourage local school districts to utilize programs that are successful at reducing disciplinary action and promoting safe learning environments. He will direct PDE to establish an online clearinghouse of programs and resources to assist schools.