

ALL CHILDREN MATTER: LET'S PUT THEM FIRST
Mayor Aidsand Wright-Riggins

The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, ***“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”*** Currently, more than half a million children attend public schools in southeastern Pennsylvania, and I am personally rooting for each one of them. As a parent and grandfather of three children who have attended schools in this region for the last 30 years, I desire that all our children are able to come to school prepared to learn and attend publicly funded institutions that have the ways and means needed to provide a high-quality education for them. As I see it, every child matters! And if each child truly matters to us, this can only be achieved through adequate and equitable funding and equal opportunity for all our children.

I am grateful to reside in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a state that affirms a constitutional obligation to provide every child a ***“thorough and efficient”*** education. I am proud that Pennsylvania sets a standard of measurement that truly quantifies our society’s soul condition. That said, sadly, for decades, Pennsylvania has been neglecting our constitutional obligation to provide every child a “thorough and efficient” education.

Are you aware that Pennsylvania ranks 45th in the nation in state share for education, putting the heavy tax burden on local districts to fill the \$4.6 billion void, leaving poorer districts insufficiently funded? Are you aware that Black, Hispanic, and low-income students suffer disproportionately from this underfunding?

I am sure that some of our residents are saying about now, what does this have to do with me and us? Collegeville and the Perkiomen Valley School District are doing just fine! For instance, according to the Niche.com which ranks nearly 100,000 schools and districts based on statistics and millions of opinions from students and parents.

- Perkiomen Valley School District ranks # 32 of 495 Best School Districts in Pennsylvania.
- Perkiomen Valley School District ranks # 39 of 496 Best Teachers in Pennsylvania.
- Perkiomen Valley School District ranks # 53 of 496 Best Places to Teach in Pennsylvania.

Yes, the fact is, Perkiomen Valley School District is a top-rated, public-school district that according to state test scores, 65% of students are at least proficient in math and 82% in reading. Our district shines! But our district could be doing better if funded fairly. And, perhaps more importantly, lower wealth area school districts could be doing far better than they are if Pennsylvania fairly funded all schools.

Pennsylvania contributes just 38% of the costs of K-12 education. Only five states cover a smaller share. The national average is 47%. Since the state share of funding is so low, local wealth shapes everything kids need in school to reach their full potential. Perkiomen Valley School District falls \$ 5,381,992 short of the PA benchmark for basic adequacy. That means that the average student in our district is shortchanged \$ 99.00 annually.

Poor school districts can spend \$4,800.00 less per student than wealthy districts. In Pennsylvania, the students who need the most, get the least because of where they live. For instance, in the Pottstown School District, in 2021, there were no Elementary School Counselors. There were no Middle School foreign language courses. There were no athletic or non-athletic intramural after school activities. Nurses and librarians had to be shared among schools.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, ***“In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...This is the inter-related structure of reality.”***

As a parent, resident, and public official, I am urging our community to join the fight for fair funding of **ALL** our schools. Communities across Pennsylvania deserve an equitable funding model to be totally implemented to level the playing field for our children. Our court needs to declare that the current funding system doesn't comply with the Commonwealth's Constitution. The state needs to stop funding schools through the current Hold Harmless system. Our state needs to create and maintain equitable school funding.

If you'd like to help join me in this fight, here are some resources you might want to check out:

Children First: www.childrenfirstpa.org

POWER: www.powerinterfaith.org

Fund Our Schools PA: www.fundourschoolspa.org