

MOVE *SCHOOLS* FORWARD

Philadelphia families want schools to prioritize
curriculum and instruction, student safety, and teacher quality.
Can our next Mayor deliver for their children?



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Introduction

As the city examines how best to support Philadelphia education coming out of the pandemic, it is important to acknowledge the new education reality: For schools to achieve positive student outcomes, they need to think differently about classroom instruction and change how they support students. With this in mind, we at Elevate 215 gathered information about what the education landscape looked like coming out of the pandemic and what needs to happen going forward. We also commissioned Embold Research, a leading nonpartisan research organization, to conduct a citywide survey of Philadelphia families.

What we heard was surprising. Across different school types (district, charter, and private), grade levels and virtually all demographic groups, there is general consensus about what the city needs to prioritize to prepare our children to thrive in life. These common messages were most evident in the major themes that came out of the parent survey (described in more detail in this report):

- **When asked about the most important things about schools, parents consistently identify three themes across question types: 1. Curriculum and instructional practices; 2. Student safety; and 3. Teacher quality.**
- **95% of Philadelphia families want schools that create modern learning experiences that prepare students for the real world, but a majority (51%) of Philadelphia parents currently do not feel their children are being prepared to “thrive in life.”**
- **91% of parents agree that “In the upcoming mayoral election, a candidate’s plan for improving the education system in the city is key to earning my support.”**
- **A majority of parents feel that Philadelphia schools are on the wrong track (64%).**

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In this report, we provide facts about Philadelphia schools and highlight the main takeaways from the family survey. We then identify six priority areas based on feedback that Philadelphia's next Mayor can take action on to move schools forward. These actions include:

- 1 Set a Citywide Vision for Schools**
- 2 Increase the Number of High Quality Schools**
- 3 Develop a Plan to Provide Safe and Modern School Facilities**
- 4 Improve Student Safety and Wellbeing**
- 5 Focus on Citywide Teacher Recruitment and Retention**
- 6 Advocate for Equitable Funding for Philadelphia Schools**

We believe these priorities can serve as the foundation for our new Mayor's education plan for the City, and foster collaboration across all communities as we work together to make real progress for Philadelphia children.



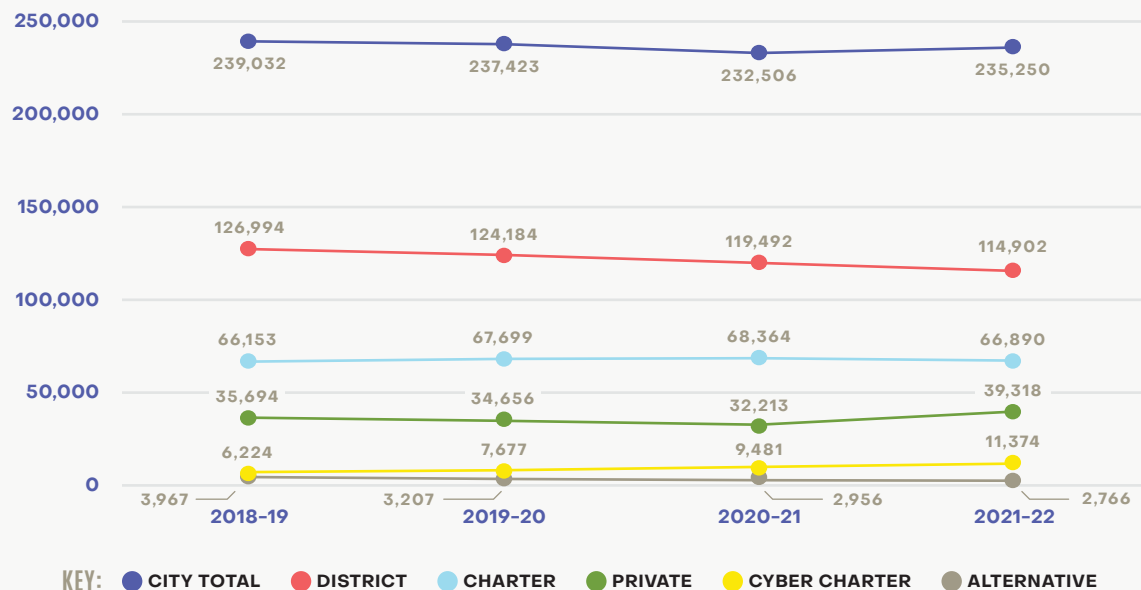
Background Information

Since the COVID pandemic began in 2020, it has been difficult to find publicly available information about the state of schools. Before examining the parent survey results, we think it is important to review some basic information about school academic performance, enrollment data and funding. These contextual facts are intentionally not expansive, but simply provide high-level information in a few main areas.

Student Enrollment and Demographic Data

- ▶ Student enrollment is down across public school sectors in Philadelphia in recent years.
- ▶ While this follows a pre-existing decline in public district school enrollment, it reverses a previous growth trend in brick and mortar public charter schools.
- ▶ Enrollment losses are not equally distributed across demographic groups in public district schools.
- ▶ Unlike public schools, private schools and cyber charter schools saw increases in enrollment during and since the pandemic.

Number of students enrolled in Philadelphia schools by sector 2018–19 through 2021–22



Source: Qlik Enrollment App and PDE Non-Public Private Enrollment Report

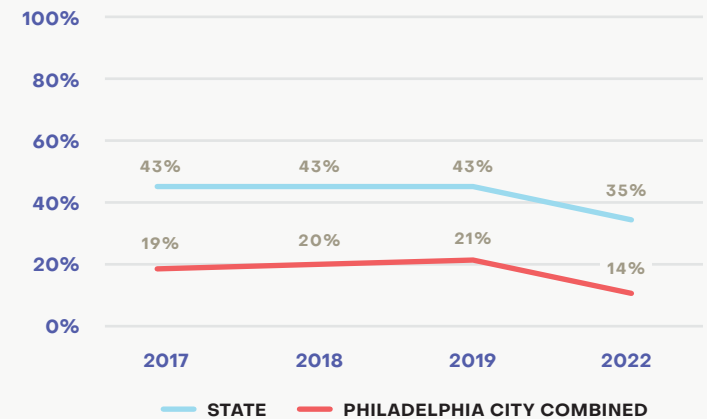
Aggregate Student Learning Outcomes and Graduations Rates

- ▶ Largely consistent with National and State trends, student learning outcomes in reading and Math decreased during the pandemic.
- ▶ When breaking out achievement data by race, all four subgroups saw declines in 2022 in Math and English Language Arts scores.
- ▶ Graduation rates stayed consistent through the pandemic, but the new statewide graduation requirements for 2023 may impact future rates.
- ▶ Note: The Philadelphia City combined number includes all public district and charter school students who took the test.

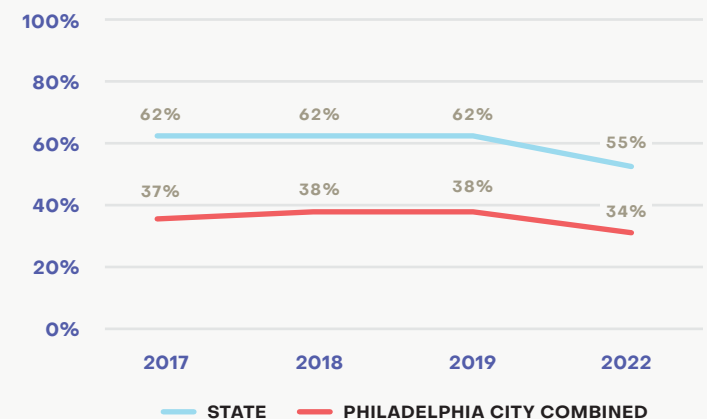
Federal, State and District Funding Situation

- ▶ In February 2023, the state courts ruled that Pennsylvania schools do not have the resources to adequately educate all students, and the funding gaps across the state render the system unconstitutional.
 - ◆ This long-awaited decision creates an opportunity to make the state's funding system more equitable for all families.
- ▶ Pennsylvania school funding is complicated:
 - ◆ PA ranks 45th in the US in state share of education costs; and
 - ◆ PA ranks 10th in public K-12 spending.
- ▶ As shown, the declining enrollment in Philadelphia public schools could lead to decreased funding under the current statewide formula.
- ▶ If the State calculated formula was fully funded it would bring in an additional \$1 Billion a year to Philadelphia schools.
- ▶ As part of the federal pandemic relief fund package Philadelphia schools received over a \$1 Billion in federal stimulus dollars to be spent between 2022 and 2024.

Math Data



Reading Data



What We Heard From Families

At the beginning of the 2022–23 school year, Elevate 215 commissioned Embold Research—a team of data scientists and communications professionals that are the nonpartisan, non-political unit of the national research firm Change Research—to conduct a scientific survey of Philadelphia families who have children enrolled in public district, public charter, or private schools. We’ve included the core findings and key themes from the parent survey in this report.

Core Findings

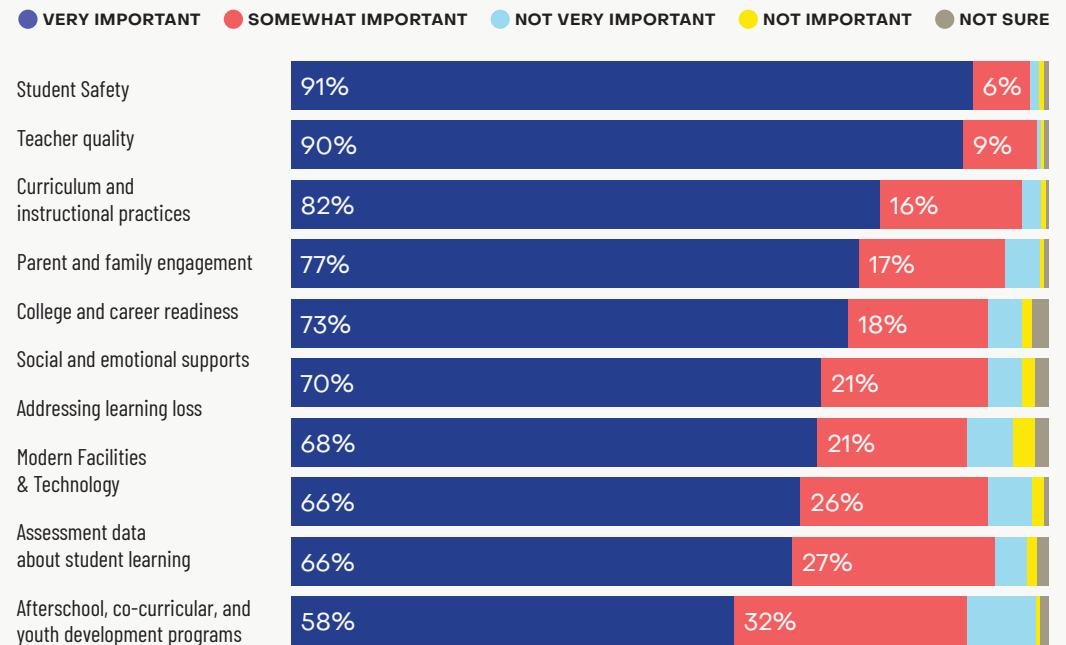
- ▶ When asked about the most important things about schools, parents consistently identify three themes across question types:
 - ◆ Curriculum and instructional practices;
 - ◆ Student safety; and
 - ◆ Teacher quality.
- ▶ 95% of Philadelphia families want schools that create modern learning experiences that prepare students for the real world, but a majority (51%) of Philadelphia parents currently do not feel their children are being prepared to “thrive in life.”
- ▶ 91% of parents agree that “In the upcoming mayoral election, a candidate’s plan for improving the education system in the city is key to earning my support.”
- ▶ A majority of parents feel that Philadelphia schools are on the wrong track (64%).



Key Themes:

- ▶ When asked “how important each of the following are for you when considering the school your child(ren) attends” parents listed student safety, teacher quality, and curriculum as top priorities in school selection.
 - ◆ Most parents report that student safety (91%), teacher quality (90%), and curriculum and instructional practices (82%) are very important when considering which school(s) their child(ren) attends.
- ▶ In the survey, parents were presented with a series of statements about schools. Two responses stood out in relation to the upcoming Mayor’s election:
 - ◆ “We need investments in and support for schools to create modern learning experiences that prepare students for the real world.” In total, 95% of parents agreed (70% strongly agree / 25% somewhat agree) with that statement.
 - ◆ “In the upcoming mayoral election, a candidate’s plan for improving the education system in the city is key to earning my support.” In total, 91% of parents agreed (59% strongly agree / 32% somewhat agree) with this statement.

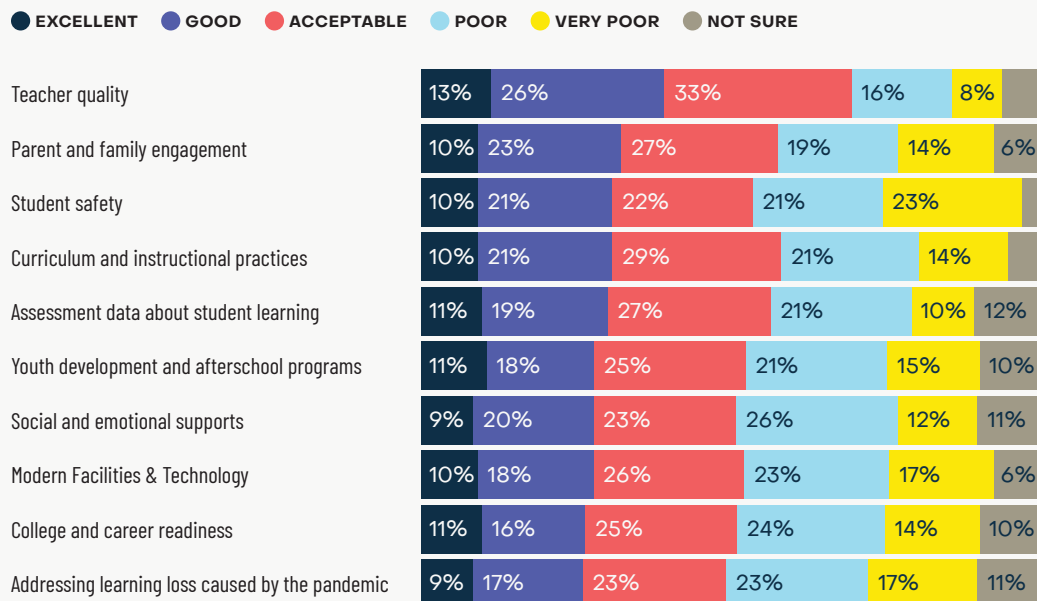
How important are each of the following priorities to you when considering the school(s) your child(ren) attends?



- ▶ When asked to rate Philadelphia schools on key attributes, teacher quality is viewed as the most positive attribute; 39% of parents rated teacher quality as “excellent” (13%) or “good” (26%). One third of parents feel that teacher quality in Philadelphia schools is “acceptable,” and 24% think it is “poor” or “very poor.”

- ◆ Other strengths are parent and family engagement (33% excellent/good) and curriculum and instructional practices (31% excellent/good).
- ◆ Parents believe Philadelphia schools’ greatest weakness is student safety (44% poor/very poor). This is followed by modern facilities and technology, and addressing learning loss caused by the pandemic, where 40% of parents say Philadelphia schools rate as “poor” or “very poor.”

How would you rate Philadelphia schools on each of the following attributes?



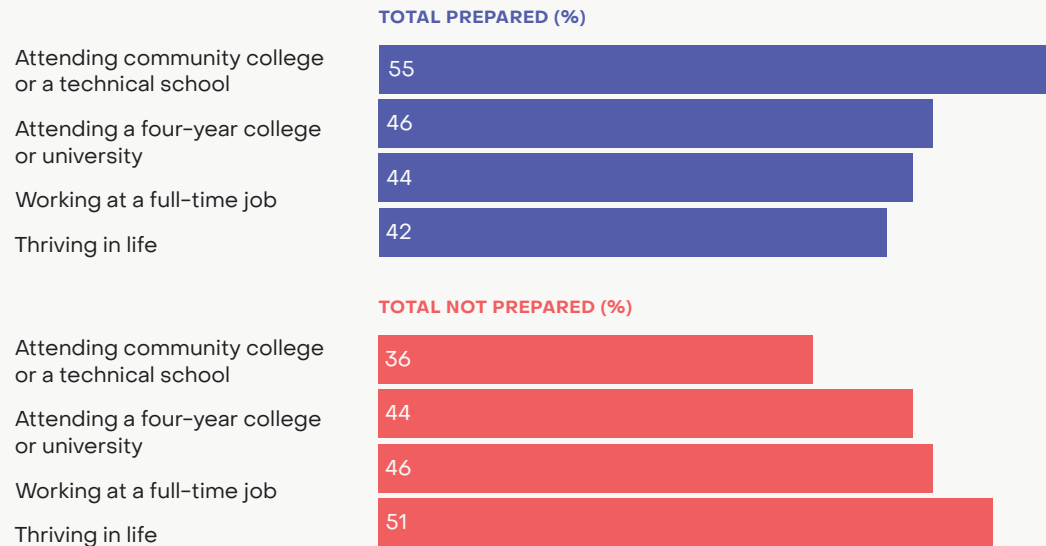
Parents rate **teacher quality** as Philadelphia schools’ most positive attribute, and view **student safety** most negatively.

- ▶ Parents have mixed views of how prepared Philadelphia high school graduates are for life beyond high school.
 - ◆ They are most likely to believe that high school graduates are prepared for attending community college or a technical school (55% prepared), and least likely to believe they are prepared for “thriving in life” (51% not prepared).
 - ◆ Parent opinions are split on how prepared graduates are for attending a four-year college or university and working a full-time job.

51%

of parents say Philadelphia high school graduates are **not prepared to thrive** in life.

How prepared do you think Philadelphia high school graduates are for each of the following?



Action Steps to Move Schools Forward

Based on feedback, we believe these action steps can serve as the foundation for our new Mayor's education plan for the City, and foster collaboration across all communities as we work together to make real progress for Philadelphia children:

- 1 Set a Citywide Vision for Schools**
- 2 Increase the Number of High Quality Schools**
- 3 Develop a Plan to Provide Safe and Modern School Facilities**
- 4 Improve Student Safety and Wellbeing**
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This section further outlines specific actions the next mayor can take in these six areas of focus.



1. Set a Citywide Vision for Schools

- ◆ Align education, civic, business, labor, philanthropy, and community leaders around this vision and galvanize resources from each sector to support it.
- ◆ Appoint and actively manage a school board directly accountable for implementing the vision.
- ◆ Appoint a cabinet-level chief education officer with authority to manage the school board and leverage city resources and influence to support the educational vision.

Based on Feedback: 91% of parents surveyed agree that “In the upcoming mayoral election, a candidate’s plan for improving the education system in the city is key to earning my support.” This is the first competitive mayoral primary election since state control of schools ended in 2018. The mayor now has the responsibility to appoint and manage the Philadelphia school board. Our first recommendation is that a mayor must embrace this responsibility as central to the job — to set a vision, appoint board members aligned with that vision, and be held accountable for student outcomes.

2. Increase the Number of High Quality Schools

- ◆ Align schools, and their curriculum and instruction, with the modern learning experiences families say they want.
- ◆ Expand, replicate, and create more high quality, innovative, and high-demand school models that prove they can prepare students for college and successful careers.
- ◆ Empower families by providing more and better information about school options and enrollment.

Based on Feedback: 95% of parents surveyed and school leaders alike want more high quality, modern learning experiences available to students and a vast majority of parents rank “delivering high quality curriculum and instruction” as their top priority for schools. This means not only realigning schools, programs and curriculum with the learning experiences that better prepare students for the future, but replicating and expanding schools and programs that have demonstrated they work.



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3. Develop a Plan to Provide Safe and Modern School Facilities

- ◆ Create and implement a master facilities plan to align the District facilities including new construction, renovations, and consolidation or adaptive reuse where needed.
- ◆ Secure expertise and capacity from public-private partnerships with real estate, finance, business, and city leaders to partner with the school district on facilities management and master plan implementation.
- ◆ Create transparent ways for school communities to engage in facilities planning.

Based on Feedback: Facilities is an area identified by parents as the second poorest attribute of Philadelphia schools, following student safety. Combined with recent school closures related to asbestos, and years of reporting on the decaying and toxic nature of the aging school facilities, it is clearly a major issue that the next mayor must address with great urgency.

4. Improve Student Safety and Wellbeing

- ◆ Ensure students are safe inside schools and in the surrounding communities as they go to and from school and attend school-related activities.
- ◆ Increase support for basic student physical and mental health needs.

Based on Feedback: No matter where you look or who you talk to in Philadelphia, safety comes up and stands out as an issue where progress must be made for our children and communities to thrive. Our survey and engagement is no different. A top priority for the next Mayor has to be to increase collaboration across sectors to create safe schools and learning environments for children that prioritize their overall wellbeing.



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5. Focus on Citywide Teacher Recruitment and Retention

- ◆ Partner with the state and citywide education leaders K-16 to create more pipelines to careers in education.
- ◆ Work with District and school leaders to build sustainable systems to recruit, retain, and support high quality and diverse teachers, and to make Philadelphia a destination for great educators.

Based on Feedback: Philadelphia families value their teachers, but our city, state, and country are facing a serious educator shortage. To overcome this challenge, and emerge with a higher quality and more diverse educator workforce, our region must prioritize and collaborate across agencies to build a sustainable talent pipeline citywide.

6. Advocate for Equitable Funding for Philadelphia Schools

- ◆ Use one-time federal dollars to make important, catalyzing investments for students now.
- ◆ Actively advocate for the State to provide fair funding for all Philadelphia public District and charter schools based on the recent court decision.

Based on Feedback: Fair funding for Philadelphia students has rightfully been one of the biggest stories of the past decade in education. With the recent State Supreme Court ruling in the lawsuit challenging Pennsylvania public school funding, a new governor and legislature, and evolving enrollment and funding needs in schools, there is newfound momentum to provide more equitable funding for schools. The next mayor of Philadelphia should work with local and state leaders to advocate for an equitably funded formula that will fairly support Philadelphia schools.

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Conclusion and Next Steps

While the last several years have been challenging, we hope this report emphasizes the opportunity we have to make an impact on how students in Philadelphia are educated for many years to come.

The challenges of the last few years have created an urgency for elevating what is working and focusing on what connects us and not what divides us. With a new governor, superintendent and a crowded field of mayoral candidates in Philadelphia vying for the Democratic nomination in May, we can chart a new course for our students if we choose it.

Elevate 215 is committed to amplifying the voices of Philadelphia families, students, educators and community members about their education priorities, examining local proof points and research, and working with civic and school leaders to lift up practices and programs that work for students.

We invite you to join us in our mission to make sure that every child in Philadelphia has access to a great school.

Please visit elevate215.org to learn about ways to get involved in creating a brighter future for Philadelphia schools.

For more information about the Embold Research survey of Philadelphia families visit Elevate 215's Move Schools Forward Report page at elevate215.org/news/move-schools-forward-report.

