

Legislation Text

File #: 190481, **Version:** 0

Honoring the 25th Anniversary of the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* for its commitment to using local, independent, ambitious journalism as a tool to bring access to information to Philadelphia's public school community, and to provide resources to those working for quality and equity in Philadelphia's public schools.

WHEREAS, The *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* is an independent, nonprofit news service that provides news and commentary on the City of Philadelphia's public school system and community; and

WHEREAS, In 1994, a group of concerned and engaged parents, teachers, and community members formed the *Notebook* as a quarterly newspaper dedicated to providing insight on the state of Philadelphia schools; and

WHEREAS, The history of the *Notebook's* founding largely speaks to the turbulence of the Philadelphia School System in the 1990s and the need for in-depth news and information about the Philadelphia schools for parents and caregivers, educators, and other community members. After the departure of Superintendent Constance Clayton and a Commonwealth Court ruling ordering that educational inequities due to racial and economic segregation of Philadelphia schools be rectified, community members organized around the "need for an independent progressive voice to help make sense of issues and promote and organize for a radical new agenda in the Philadelphia schools;" and

WHEREAS, Thanks to a grant from the Bread and Roses Community Fund, the *Notebook* published its first issue in May 1994, with over 10,000 copies of the 12-page newspaper distributed with a banner headline reading, "Unfair State Funding for Schools Challenged;" and

WHEREAS, Over the course of its 25-year history, the *Notebook* became an indispensable tool for holding public officials accountable and ensuring they were doing right by public schools. In fact, *Notebook* reporting often led to groundbreaking policy change and made national headlines. The *Notebook's* coverage of the 2001 state takeover and the machinations of the for-profit Edison Schools, Inc. cemented the tiny paper's reputation as essential reading. A 2002 *Notebook* article on an uptick in kindergarten suspensions after the rise of zero-tolerance discipline policies was featured in national news, leading to significant policy change. The Paper's 2005 reporting on school dropouts, which highlighted the voices of students who expressed feeling invisible after they dropped out of school, helped to create the School District's Dropout Prevention Initiative, "Project U-Turn," and to improve the District's overall graduation rate. In 2011, a *Notebook* investigation revealed rampant cheating on Pennsylvania state standardized testing, leading to arrests and the implementation of new security protocols. These serve as just a few examples of how *Notebook* reporting has made national headlines while bringing justice to Philadelphia school students; and

WHEREAS, Most recently, the *Notebook* has consistently covered crucial issues including trauma and its effects on student learning, unsafe school building conditions, funding equity, and increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers of color. In December 2016, it thoroughly covered the question of returning local control to Philadelphia schools, further fueling conversations around school governance and the power of education organizing in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The *Notebook*'s dedication to improving conditions for public schools and to building strong learning communities is powered by four core values: a focus on community; an emphasis on social justice, equity, and public accountability; a commitment to journalistic excellence; and a belief that schools must be democratic; and

WHEREAS, Today, the *Notebook* has a circulation of 55,000 copies, largely distributed free of charge, with some articles translated into Spanish, throughout Philadelphia public and charter schools, branches of the Free Library, and over 300 community-based organizations. Even more, tens of thousands visit the *Notebook* website each month to access its meticulously researched news and analysis; and

WHEREAS, Over its history, the *Notebook* has won numerous prizes for its cutting-edge, community-oriented approach to journalism, including several first place awards from the Education Writers Association; and

WHEREAS, The *Notebook*'s success over the past 25 years speaks to the vibrancy of Philadelphia's public school advocacy community. The paper has consistently balanced its role as a bank of essential information for Philadelphia families and a spark for those organizing for education justice in the City of Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors the 25th Anniversary of the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* for its commitment to using local, independent, ambitious journalism as a tool to bring access to information to Philadelphia's public school community and to provide resources to those working for quality and equity in Philadelphia's public schools.