

Legislation Text

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Honoring the award-winning *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* for its enduring legacy and commitment to education justice, to independent journalism, and to centering and uplifting citizen voices through more than a quarter century of public school advocacy, upon its transition to new management under Chalkbeat.

WHEREAS, The *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* was founded in 1994 by a group of engaged parents, teachers, and community members seeking an “independent, progressive voice” to “promote and organize for a radical new agenda” amid the turbulence of the Philadelphia school system in the 1990s. Its founders included Paul Socolar, Helen Gym, Deborah Wei, Len Rieser, Eric Joselyn, Rochelle Nichols Solomon, Cindy Farlino, Mary Yee, Colleen Davis, Patricia Lowe, Kathy Fleming, Wilfredo Rojas, and the late Myrtle Naylor, Shafik Abu-Tahir, and Chip Smith, among many other deeply dedicated supporters and leaders; and

WHEREAS, The *Notebook's* vision was guided 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, The *Notebook's* opening editorial laid out its vision: “We believe that [the] citizens of Philadelphia wield substantial power if and when they come together in an organized way to change our schools. This newspaper is written by and for the parents, communities, staff, and students that are involved in our school system. These grassroots experts are the people who must unify around a shared vision for better schools.” It stated unequivocally that “We bring a point of view to debates about the schools; we believe that public education must have at its heart the idea of equality”; and

WHEREAS, Over the next quarter century, the *Notebook* lived up to its vision of racial equity and citizen activism through award-winning investigative journalism that often led to groundbreaking policy changes as well as national headlines. The paper consistently concentrated resources on covering structural racism that denied educational opportunities to Black and Brown communities. The *Notebook's* coverage of the 2001 state takeover of the Philadelphia public schools and the political machinations of the for-profit Edison Schools cemented the upstart paper's reputation as essential reading; and

WHEREAS, Outstanding stories of change over the years included the *Notebook's* report on rampant kindergarten suspensions, which led to the end of the practice; an investigation on high school dropouts, which contributed to the creation of “Project U-Turn,” the School District's dropout prevention initiative; and its award-winning investigation into rampant cheating on Pennsylvania state standardized testing, which led to arrests, new security protocols, and re-examination of the role of standardized testing. The *Notebook* often wrote about underreported issues including trauma and its effects on student learning, school segregation, unsafe school building conditions, and the District's declining numbers of teachers of color. In 2016, the *Notebook* thoroughly covered the issue of returning the District to local control, kickstarting the conversation around school governance, which would eventually lead to the end of the state takeover in 2018. These serve as just a few examples of how the *Notebook* became indispensable reading while bringing justice to Philadelphia school students and families; and

WHEREAS, The *Notebook* strove to do more than just report and publish, but remained committed to outreach and engagement throughout its history - connecting with communities of color and including grassroots voices, ensuring its print edition reached often-marginalized neighborhoods, publishing in Spanish, highlighting issues facing students with disabilities, and hosting public events such as its annual celebration that drew mayors, members of Congress, and civic leaders; and

WHEREAS, The *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* began as an independent, mission oriented, nonprofit investigatory news service - unusual for its time - and has played an influential role at the vanguard of Philadelphia's new media environment. Its commitment to ending injustices has broadened more traditional media outlets in their understanding of accountability journalism that is values-based and calls for deep community engagement; and

WHEREAS, In the words of founder and long-time editor Paul Socolar: "While we cannot claim to have brought quality and equity to all the students of Philadelphia . . .we've created a vehicle for communities to have a voice - a community-based, watchdog publication that school officials answer to. Most fundamentally, the Notebook has kept education issues front and center, helping Philadelphians of all stripes understand that there is no issue more vital to the city's future"; and

WHEREAS, Under new management, the *Notebook* will continue its mission as a community-based watchdog, now under the Chalkbeat name. We trust that Chalkbeat will take every measure to preserve the *Notebook* archives and build upon the *Notebook's* legacy, in particular its commitment to outstanding journalism and its belief that in order for change to happen, grassroots activism by parents, educators, students, and the public must thrive. Parents are more than just school consumers, and teachers are more than heads of classrooms - they are active agents of change within a system that benefits from their engagement and advocacy; and

WHEREAS, A civil democracy requires an informed public. The *Notebook* not only informed, but opened channels for public input into decision making processes that changed the trajectory of the School District of Philadelphia. For Philadelphians who value quality and equity in public education, this will forever be their newspaper. May it live on through the movements it empowered, the journalists it nurtured, and the stories it told; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors the award-winning *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* for its enduring legacy and commitment to education justice, to independent journalism, and to centering and uplifting citizen voices through more than a quarter century of public school advocacy, upon its transition to new management under Chalkbeat.