



SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

We're rewriting the book on education



Rewriting the book on public education

Our vision is different

From politicians to pundits, business leaders to philanthropists, there's no lack of individuals and organizations with ideas for reforming public education.

However, very few of these proposals are based on actual classroom experience—the ultimate testing ground for discovering what works and what doesn't.

Our vision is different. “Solutions that Work” is a blueprint for change that is grounded in firsthand knowledge, supported by research, and tested in practice. It contains ideas to create a culture of teaching excellence and includes a special focus on struggling schools.

Creating a culture of teaching excellence: There is a significant body of research that defines the professional supports that help new educators build the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to meet the increasing demands of their professions. Those findings are an essential part of our plan—as are our proposals for reinventing evaluation systems, multiple performance measures, and streamlining dismissal procedures.

A special focus on struggling schools: While the goal of establishing higher professional standards applies to all districts, “Solutions that Work” provides a wealth of concrete and evidence-based strategies that can be put into action where the need is greatest. The Commonwealth must prioritize its resources and human capital in a fiscally responsible manner by focusing on struggling schools; accordingly, many of the reforms we propose are not just educationally, but economically sound as well.

For example, there is solid evidence that the economic and social benefits of investing in high-quality pre-K programs far outweigh the upfront costs. That's why investment in early childhood education is a cornerstone of the PSEA plan.

It has been shown that, when entire communities take responsibility for their schools, students earn higher grades, score higher on standardized tests, stay in school longer, and enroll in more challenging coursework. Accordingly, programs that encourage families and communities to become more actively involved in their public schools are another key element of our plan.

Students learn best and fulfill their highest potential when they are taught in an environment where they are physically, socially, and emotionally safe. With strategic investments by school officials and communities, every child can learn in a safe, clean, and positive environment.

Working together, we can rewrite the book on public education. We can create a new generation of public schools built upon real-world ideas from PSEA and its membership—the real experts in education.





Creating a culture of teaching excellence

Reinvent the teacher and principal evaluation system to support high standards and promote great teaching. Create a more effective process that includes a shared vision of excellence, multiple objective measures of performance, and well-trained evaluators.

Provide high quality mentoring for new teachers and principals. Implement appropriate professional supports that have been shown to significantly reduce educator attrition and have a greater impact on student achievement.

Streamline dismissal procedures for teachers and principals. To ensure ongoing excellence for all students, there must be efficient, fair, and objective procedures in place for removing teachers and principals who fail to meet performance standards. While guaranteeing due process, we must also ensure that the dismissal procedure is completed during a specific, yet reasonable timeframe.

A special focus on struggling schools

Invest in early childhood education. When it comes to supporting high quality pre-K programs, now is not the time to be pennywise and dollar foolish—proven economic and social benefits clearly outweigh upfront costs.

Require site-based decision making for schools where students are struggling to succeed. No one solution will fit the unique needs of each challenged school. However, strong leadership teams implemented at the site and composed of those who best know the students is a concept that will work. Site-based decision making teams will also consider the unique learning needs of English language learners and students with disabilities.

Provide additional learning time for students who are not proficient. Under the right conditions, extended academic learning time has a positive impact on student achievement in schools that serve low-performing students. Regardless of the length of the student day or year, there are many ways to maximize academic learning time. Some examples include before- or after- school opportunities for assistance, flexible scheduling, positive behavior support programs, additional tutoring, and smaller classes to ensure more individualized attention.

Provide all students a full range of opportunities to prepare them for work or post-secondary education. Recognizing that success is not reserved solely for college graduates, PSEA will work with policymakers to ensure that students have valid options in our high schools or career and technical schools that prepare them for their post-graduation choices.

Involve families by establishing district programs that promote and encourage parents, families, and communities to be actively involved and engaged in their public schools.

When teachers, support professionals, and school administrators develop positive, trusting relationships with families and communicate frequently, student achievement increases. Major barriers to these positive interactions include: insufficient knowledge or skills to collaborate effectively, school policies that restrict interaction, and language and cultural differences. These barriers can be overcome through increased awareness, education, and the development of policies that meet the needs of both family members and school personnel.

Provide resources for students and encourage coordination between schools, law enforcement, and social service agencies to ensure that all students can achieve high standards.

By ensuring that key personnel (such as family liaisons and social workers) and key resources (such as online grade books and other tools) are available to all schools, we can help all students achieve high standards. Just as important, by encouraging ongoing and frequent discussions between schools, law enforcement, and support agencies, we can address the unique needs of students at risk.

Provide alternative placements for disruptive and potentially violent students to foster their own success and that of their classmates.

Positive learning environments are linked to fewer behavioral and emotional problems and better staff retention, which contributes to continuity of strong adult role models. This is especially important in high-risk environments.

Provide students with the training and resources to communicate with adults about bullying, threats, or other abusive behaviors.

Initiate programs to stop these behaviors, such as increasing the number of, and accessibility to, appropriate personnel and require that all school districts have the ability to place disruptive students in high-quality alternative education programs, cyber charter schools, or other schools that can meet the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of these students.

Ensure that school buildings and classrooms meet high standards for cleanliness and safety.

Students need schools that are clean and safe to be able to learn and achieve high standards. Clear standards will ensure that all school districts meet these important goals and that all students have the best possible environments in which to learn.

