Eyes on Education

A Pennsylvania Student Photography Exhibit
“If we take photos, we can make a difference…”
- Odessa (10th Grade), Philadelphia

“Maybe if they see that we care, they’ll care.”
- Nikole (10th Grade), Philadelphia
Background
Starting in January 2007, high school students from across Pennsylvania were given cameras and the opportunity to record what they thought was important for the public to know about their education.

Project Coordinated by:
The Pennsylvania Education Funding Reform Campaign
(Education Law Center & Good Schools PA)
&
Critical Exposure
Here are their stories…

Participating School Districts:
Philadelphia, McKeesport, Sto-Rox,
York City, Uniontown, and Laurel Highlands
STUDENTS AT WORK
Shawn Riley (11th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“Sto-Rox [H.S.] has a poor academic reputation. I see students working everyday. I’m out to prove this [reputation] wrong.”
HISTORY DESTROYED
Hope Phillips (10th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“The students here at Sto-Rox can’t learn with missing pages, and writing throughout the books. I think it would be very helpful to teachers and students to get new textbooks. It’s time for the old textbooks to go.”
OLNEY WEST LIBRARY
Jasmine Garnett (10th Grade)
Olney East H.S., Philadelphia

“There is not one single book on [many] of the shelves here. If there is, let me know! Students are not able to go into the library unless with a class or accompanied by a teacher. A valid note will not permit you into the library.”
SCHOOL FUNDING DIFFERENCES ARE LARGE THROUGHOUT THE STATE

Annual current expenditures per student range from about $7,000 in some Pennsylvania school districts to over $17,000 in the wealthiest districts.

Just a $2,000 difference in per student spending adds up to a gap of $50,000 per classroom of 25 students.
C@T AND MOUSE
Alyssa Savatt (12th Grade)
Sto-Rox School District

“This is a mouse and keyboard from the business classroom. The teacher, Mrs. Marshall, works hard to help students to be proficient with technology, but she has to work with old and outdated equipment.”
FINALLY, NEW EQUIPMENT!
Ruben Correa (12th Grade), Edison H.S. – Motivation Academy, Philadelphia

“These are new computers for my shop class (graphic communication) that were supposed to be there when I was in the 10th grade and got there now that I’m a senior.”
THE WATER ATE MY HOMEWORK
Garrett Shoemaker (10th Grade)
Uniontown Area School District

“These are our gym lockers. A pipe from above leaks and destroys my school work. You never know which locker will be flooded.”

20TH CENTURY LAB? NOT!
Sarah Lough (11th Grade)
Laurel Highlands School District

“This is a picture of a biology lab with old broken equipment. Notice on the upper left hand corner of the closet it says ‘Animal Study Center.’”
CEILING
Carmen Rosa (12th Grade), Edison H.S. – Business Academy, Philadelphia

“This is the ceiling across from my locker. It’s falling apart [and] leaking. This is also a safety issue because that ceiling is falling and leaks which can lead to injuries. The ceiling is like this all over the school.” Nikole Browning describes a similar ceiling at Mansion H.S.: “The mold on the ceilings can make students sick, not to mention it’s very gross looking.”
CLASSROOM
Gary Chau (12th Grade), Masterman H.S., Philadelphia

“A classroom with exposed, noisy pipes overhead.”
The state share of total education spending has fallen too low.

In 1975 the Commonwealth provided 55% of all funding for public education. By 2006 the state share had fallen to 36% – far below the national average of 47%.

Our state now ranks 42nd in the country on this factor. The low state share puts pressure on local districts to fill in the gap. Some can’t.
THE LAW

THE PENNSYLVANIA CONSTITUTION
“The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth.” Constitution of Pennsylvania, Article III, Section 14

PENNSYLVANIA STATE LAW
The “purpose of public education” is to “prepare students for adult life by attending to their intellectual and developmental needs and challenging them to achieve at their highest level possible. . . . [P]ublic education prepares students to become self-directed, life-long learners and responsible, involved citizens.” 22 Pa. Code § 4.11
THE REALITY

“All students don’t get the same quality education. The suburban school students get a way better education than city school students. This is important because if their education is better, their opportunities will be better. It’s like the suburban kids are getting a head start in life.”

- Blair Scott (12th Grade), Mastbaum H.S., Philadelphia
CREATING POSSIBILITIES
Sam Taylor (12th Grade)
Sto-Rox School District

“This is our Superintendent, Ms. Fran Serenka. She is one of the few good things in our school. She wants a better environment and she tries to achieve that for her students.”
“Ms. Driggin [or, as students call her, “Ms. Drigg igg igg igg iggin”] is my biology teacher. She is a driven teacher that is wonderful and kind. People that don’t have her class come to just talk to her because she is very welcoming. But due to the budget cuts, she has been force-transferred and won’t be at Olney [H.S.] next year.”
The percentage of teachers who are not highly qualified (by the state) is 10 times higher in high poverty schools than in low poverty schools – 10% versus 1%.

Average annual teacher salaries range from under $35,000 in some districts to over $81,000 in the wealthiest districts. The average length of teaching experience ranges from 10 years to 22 years.
OVERCROWDED GYM CLASS
Dorales Burns (11th Grade), Edison H.S., Philadelphia
LAZY HEAT
Shawn Riley (11th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“It is so hot in our classrooms. Some people just fall asleep. We have no air conditioning. Sometimes it is so hot that people do not come to school.”
NO HEAT
Anthony Mancini (10th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“This photograph shows a heating vent covered in plastic, held on with duct tape. This shows how our school’s heating system is lacking heat. I find it more difficult to concentrate when freezing in class. The cold makes me want to curl up and go to sleep.”
DILAPIDATION
Darvin Martin (12th Grade), McKeesport Area School District

“This is a busted chair in the auditorium.”
“DANCE CLASS,” YEAH!
William Elkins-Crosby (12th Grade), Kensington H.S. – Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), Philadelphia

“This is where our fancy footwork is supposed to be happening, but yeah, we also have our assemblies in here, too. I don’t think it’s fair for them. If there’s an assembly going on, they lose a lesson for the day.”
A BIG HOLE
Allison Funwela (11th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“The photo taken through the hole in the screen looking onto the football field was to express the sadness of what looking out a window in Sto-Rox is like. Not only is the field in bad condition but the screen itself is torn. Seeing things like that puts a damper on the motivation to learn or even care about the school.”
THE VIEW OUT OF A FILthy CLASSROOM
Gary Chau (12th Grade), Masterman H.S., Philadelphia
STATEWIDE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS ARE LARGE

- 68% of students pass state assessments, but only 50% of students in poverty do.

- 88% of students graduate, but only 76% of black students and 70% of Latino students graduate.

- 699 schools are not making “adequate yearly progress” (23% of all schools).

- 186 of these schools have been failing for at least 4 consecutive years.
OPTIONS IN SCHOOL
Keyshawn Joyner (9th Grade), William Penn H.S., York

“This helps some students to find positive things to do instead of just going out and getting into trouble. This board is located in the library. Once a month the student council posts activity updates about the different things that are going on.”
THE MEMORIAL
Carmen Rosa (12th Grade), Edison H.S. - Business Academy, Philadelphia

“I think the most important thing in our school is the memorial for all the Edison students who died in the Vietnam War. Edison has the most students who died in the war of any high school in the country, which is why we want college recruiters in our school. We don’t want to kick military recruiters out but we do want as many college recruiters as there are military.”
“OUT OF ORDER”
Ken Dorsey (11th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“I took this photo to depict the state of despair that parts of our school are in. I hope that when other view “Out of Order”, it makes them think about how we feel when surrounded by visuals like the broken urinal. Although we are used to visuals such as this in our school, they affect our thoughts daily. We, the students of Sto-Rox High School, feel as though we do not deserve better. Therefore, we are less inclined to strive for better.”
DIRTY BATHROOMS
Ruben Correa (12th Grade), Edison H.S. – Motivation Academy, Philadelphia

“These pictures show the boys’ bathroom in the school. It’s always dirty, we never have hand soap or toilet paper, the hand dryer doesn’t work, there are missing doors on the stalls, the toilets are always clogged, and there’s graffiti all over the place.”
UNDER-FUNDING AFFECTS DROPOUT RATES

The 20 most under-funded school districts in Pennsylvania (as measured by the 2007 Costing-out Study) have 17% of the state’s students but 35% of the dropouts.

The dropout rate in each of these 20 school districts is two or three times higher than the rate in neighboring school districts.
VACANCY
Andrew Fleming (11th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“Increasing rates of relocation have become an apparent trend within the McKees Rocks area. Those who are able, both mentally and financially, to detach themselves have done so posthaste as the cesspool of criminal activity and drug trafficking continues to spill onto more streets.”
ABANDONED
Keyshawn Joyner (9th Grade), William Penn H.S., York

“This house has been on Princess Street for I don’t know how many years. No one has done anything about it. This could be a place where someone could live, but instead it’s just sitting there. It could fall down and hurt somebody. I wish it were knocked down and built back up.”
Property Tax Squeeze

Shrinking state funding forces school districts to raise local taxes to make up the difference. As a result, over 44% of total education funding comes from property taxes, compared to the national average of 29%. This 15% gap adds up to more than $3 billion of local property taxes in Pennsylvania.

Many of the poorest communities in PA are taxing themselves at the highest property tax rate, but still not raising enough money to provide a high-quality public education. Thus further contributes to community decline.
REMAINS IN THE TRAIN YARD
Anastasia Toth (12th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“This picture shows the train yard under the McKees Rocks Bridge. There have been several fires in the train yard because of the abundance of abandoned buildings.”
NO NEED
Sam Taylor (12th Grade), Sto-Rox School District

“This photograph is just one of the many bars in McKees Rocks. I feel that there is no need for as many bars as we have. The bars just contribute to the poor reputation of McKees Rocks.”
Pennsylvania’s economy is relatively weak compared to neighboring states and national averages.

Annual economic growth in PA is 4.97% compared to the national average of 6.27%, 6.3% in New York, and 6.4% in Delaware.
THE FUTURE IS MINE
Darvin Martin (12th Grade), McKeesport Area School District