

## **Better schools are good business. Investing in public education will build a stronger workforce.**

Daniel K. Fitzpatrick is the local president of Citizens Bank  
Posted on Wed, Jun. 4, 2008

When discussing Philadelphia's future, the focus must be on public education and workforce development. Improving our public schools means turning out graduates who can compete for good jobs in today's economy.

Through a confluence of people and events, we have a window of opportunity that, if seized, will allow us to make tremendous strides to improve our schools and train a first-class workforce.

This work is vital. Fifty percent of our students never complete high school, and 60 percent of our graduates are functionally illiterate.

The hard truth is that we've been failing our children by not providing them with an education that will prepare them to work and to live productive lives. We must do more. At long last, that is starting to happen.

Consider:

Mayor Nutter has placed public education and workforce development at the top of his agenda. He has challenged the business community to hire 2,000 summer interns, a doubling of last year's commitment. Many in business have answered his call.

The mayor is building a coalition of legislators from across Pennsylvania, on both sides of the aisle, to promote more school funding. Last month, I traveled with the mayor to Harrisburg in support of Gov. Rendell's education proposal, which calls for a new formula to address the chronic underfunding of many Pennsylvania school districts. The plan means \$85 million more for Philadelphia in the first year alone. Dozens of school districts statewide also would benefit from this plan.

Business leaders have stepped forward to endorse evidence-based models, such as career-academy internships that support the development of 21st century skills. CEO Ambassadors for 21st Century Skills, which I chair, believes that investing in education is good business.

Arlene Ackerman, the new school district chief, has assembled a panel of 24 local and national experts to evaluate the district's performance on issues ranging from academics to safety - a great start.

This summer, businesses throughout the city will host WorkReady summer internships for Philadelphia high school students. These internships, offered through and paid for by the business community, give students a taste of the working world and an understanding of how school is connected to success.

These initiatives are generating support for investing in our schools and our young people. But we need your help, too.

Call or write your state legislators and City Council members and urge them to support education reform. If you can, be a volunteer, and share the precious gift of your time.

I promise it will be time well spent. You'll help build a brighter future for us all.

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Fitzpatrick is Citizens Bank president and chief executive officer for Eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. E-mail him at [Daniel.K.Fitzpatrick@CitizensBank.com](mailto:Daniel.K.Fitzpatrick@CitizensBank.com).