

Student Voices: Philadelphia Mayoral Debate

CASSANDRA AVILA, Student Voices and *the.News* correspondent, Senior at Edison HS:
Local elections, such as those for city council or mayor, can be confusing with many candidates and issues to learn about.

STUDENT:

He wants to put more cops out there and try to help our schools out...

CASSANDRA AVILA:

In Philadelphia, my classmates and I have tackled the challenge by examining the concerns we have in our community and finding out what those candidates say about them.

I think if you're a good leader, you can encourage people and you can make people do what you want them to do and what's right for the city.

Using the Student Voices website, we researched their backgrounds and their campaign platforms to prepare for a citywide mayoral debate in which we would get to ask a question.

JENNIFER ROMAN, Senior, Edison HS:

Well, the city issues that are more important to me in Philadelphia is the violence that is going on in our community.

ERNESTO MEDINA, Senior, Edison HS and INTERVIEWER

Oh, I don't feel safe in school // Why? // Cause kids find many ways to bring weapons into school.

CHRIS JOHNSON, Teacher:

What could the next mayor do?

CASSANDRA AVILA:

We wrote and then talked about the issues that affect us most.

SUHEIDI MIRANDA, Senior, Edison HS:

I live across the street from a park and it's used, not for playing, but for prostitution and garbage disposal.

STUDENT:

...and there's drug addicts out there using heroine, and using needles and they just leave their needles out there. They don't even do anything about it.

ERNESTO MEDINA:

Last summer I volunteered to clean up the parks and I go back a couple days later and it's back to the same thing again... needles on the sidewalks, graffiti all over the basketball courts.

CASSANDRA AVILA:

We as a community need to do something but what are you going to do for me for mayor? How are you going to help our community by making it better?

We sought out the perspective of the local media and chatted online with Wendy Warren, assistant managing editor of the Philadelphia Daily News.

WENDY WARREN, Assistant Managing Editor, Philadelphia Daily News:

It sounds like the students are very focused on safety and very focused on their neighborhoods.

CASSANDRA AVILA:

She helped us frame our myriad concerns into a single pointed question.

WENDY WARREN:

I don't want the candidates to get away with a sound bite so I'm going to try to drill them down to specifics a little bit.

I want to just challenge them to just step back too. Make sure it's an important question. You only get one shot at this and so it needs to be something that is really challenging.

CHRIS JOHNSON:

How can the mayor provide enough leadership to encourage the rest of the citizens to keep recreation centers clean? Very good!

CASSANDRA AVILA:

We decided to challenge the candidates to fix up our city's parks and recreation centers.

DANIEL CARINO:

Most youth will at least have some place to go so they don't have to see the violence.

TEACHER and STUDENT:

Vote for the question // I say go for it.

SUHEIDI MIRANDA, Senior, Edison HS:

It's straightforward. It talks about everything and basically it leads to other things as well.

CASSANDRA AVILA:

He can go into the crime in the city. He can go into youth violence. He can go into the drugs.

JENNIFER ROMAN, Senior, Edison HS:

Hopefully we get the correct answers instead of someone trying to beat around the question.

MICHAEL HAGEN, Institute for Public Affairs, Temple University:

I think it's a great question.

CASSANDRA AVILA:

To help us wade through the candidates' spin we turned to Michael Hagen, Director of the Institute for Public Affairs at Temple University.

MICHAEL HAGEN:

They'll have to be attentive to nuances and attentive to the sort of underlying assumptions.

How knowledgeable are the candidates about the issues that are being raised here, how passionately do the candidates feel about the issues that are being raised here?

CASSANDRA AVILA:

The night of the debate, a few of us were able to sit in the live audience and see the candidates firsthand.

MARTY MOSS-COANE, WHYY Debate Moderator:

Let me read what the question is: Parks and recreation centers are used to keep youth out of trouble, but many are rundown. What are your plans, Michael Nutter, to improve the quality of these centers and parks, to make them both fun and safe to be in. Please be specific about your plans and how you would pay for it.

MICHAEL NUTTER, Democratic Candidate for Mayor of Philadelphia:

Fairmount Park System's budget must be increased over time to at least about \$30 million.

CONG. BOB BRADY, Democratic Candidate for Mayor of Philadelphia:

Keep our kids active, keep them off the street. That will help stop the crime that...

TOM KNOX, Democratic Candidate for Mayor of Philadelphia:

We could fund all of this if we got rid of pay-to-play politics in Philadelphia.

REP. DWIGHT EVANS, Democratic Candidate for Mayor of Philadelphia:

We need a dedicated revenue source to the parks.

CONG. CHAKA FATTAH, Democratic Candidate for Mayor of Philadelphia:

I'm for fully funding the parks, but I'm for fully funding our schools too.

CASSANDRA AVILA:

In the town meeting that followed, we talked more about what we want from the city's next mayor. We learned that hearing the candidates in person can help us understand the election and determine which ideas we support.

I think as a student living in Philadelphia, I think it could be scary at times, even walking to school. I mean, we have gang fights all the time. We have just violence.

If recreation centers is the solution, which we think it's one of the solutions, how are they going to help and how are they going to rebuild them?

DANIEL CARINO, Senior, Edison HS:

If you want something done, you can't just start complaining, complaining. You have to get involved.

JENNIFER ROMAN, Senior, Edison HS:

If we don't pick a right candidate, nothing is going to happen in our city

SUHEIDI MIRANDA, Senior, Edison HS:

I never thought it was that important until it actually got us so involved in it. I actually realized that once you do get involved, you actually have a voice

CASSANDRA AVILA:

For more information on getting involved in your local election, visit the Student Voices website. Cassandra Avila for Student Voices and *the.News*.