

'If you're down with education, stand up!'

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Class was in session Saturday as the Philadelphia Department of Human Services held its Back to School Fair at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

More than 1,000 parents and their children filled a large meeting room, where many found seats on the floor. For the adults, it was a day to get information about after-school pro-

grams. Vic Richard, department of recreation commissioner, said there are approximately 130 programs offered. Girl Scouts of Southeastern Pennsylvania and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People were a few of the organizations present. The NAACP's ACT-SO competition is held for high schools in a myriad of areas, including architecture, dance, music and oratory.

"I have brochures on charter schools and community centers. I'm

glad that there are so many supporting groups here that can help us," said Rene Richards, who came with her granddaughter, Tesra Padgett, 9.

Students of all ages, ranging from elementary to high school, enjoyed free giveaways and pep talk turned concert by Grand Hank, who hosts a science education show on the School District of Philadelphia Network.

"If you're down with education, stand up!" he told the crowd.

The fair signified not only a new

school year, but a new beginning for the district. More reforms are underway this school year than ever before, including a new, reinforced dress code. This year will also get the balling rolling on the School Reform Commission's "Declaration of Education," a list of goals to be achieved by 2008.

Paul Vallas, Philadelphia School District CEO, made a brief appearance that morning and had a message for parents: No excuses.

"It takes a school to make a com-

munity," he said. "What I need from you is to make sure all of your children are starting school on time and getting help with their homework."

He also had high expectations for the students, even the young ones.

"School is your first job. You have to get up and get to work on time, and sometimes you have to take your job home with you," Vallas said. "You get paid by getting into a quality college."

Linda Pickett, a member of Quaker City alumnae chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., said the fair was a

good start for the school year. She has brought dozens of grandparents and grandchildren to the fair for the last two years.

"It gets people thinking," she said. "It was good for the masses to hear Paul Valles speak.

James Sharp, chief juvenile probation officer, said it is up to parents, teachers and students to have a successful school year.

"We're going to hold each other accountable for performance," he said.

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