



The Raja Education Plan

Preparing a Competitive Workforce

Paid for by Friends of Raja

Executive Summary

For Allegheny County to be successful in the 21st century, we must continue to ensure that we are producing a highly qualified workforce. Currently there is a divide between what many of our students are learning in school and what skills are needed in industry. It is leading to a belief among industries that the skilled labor that they need is not here and a belief by young workers that there is no opportunity here. Ensuring that education works in Allegheny County is essential for our continuing prosperity as a region.

The Raja Education Plan will open communications between educators and leaders in the business sector in Allegheny County. It will work to ensure that what is being taught in local college and trade school classrooms are what the industry needs. The Raja Education Plan will also work to ensure that training programs are in place to train the workers needed to fill positions in the Marcellus Shale industry. Finally Raja will work with school districts in Allegheny County to investigate any opportunities for sharing of services in order to save money for county taxpayers.

The Raja Education Plan

For Allegheny County to grow in the coming years, we need a strong and well-educated workforce. While our universities and trade schools produce highly trained graduates, there is sometimes a divide between what the students know and what the industry needs. Local employers have said that they cannot find enough skilled and qualified employees to fill jobs. At the same time students across the county feel that there is no opportunity for them here.¹ Very few connections exist between those in industry to those graduates coming out of our universities, trade schools, and even high schools. These students do not know what types of opportunities are available and are not being trained to be competitive in their fields. As a result we risk losing talent to other competitor regions. Furthermore, there are 43 school districts within Allegheny County that work almost entirely separate of each other driving up the cost of public education within the county. Without addressing these issues, Allegheny County risks losing out on emerging industries as potential businesses move to regions with a more qualified workforce.

Raja's experience in the private sector means that he knows what type of workforce industry in Allegheny County needs to succeed. Raja is not only a graduate of both University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University, he had maintained relationships with all the schools in our region as part of his role in various non-profit organizations. He understands the gaps that exist between the curriculum and industry needs. As county executive, Raja will work to form partnerships between private industry and our educational institutions across the county to ensure that we are producing the most qualified possible graduates. The Raja Education Plan calls for these partnerships to extend across universities, trade schools, CCAC and county middle and high schools. Raja will also work to form partnerships with county school districts in order to find ways to improve efficiency that will save county taxpayer's money while still providing a high quality public education to Allegheny County students.

Raja's Education plan will work to encourage partnerships in education ensuring that local graduates are provided the best possible education by focusing on these areas:

1. Universities, CCAC, and Trade Schools
2. Support High School Students
3. School Districts

1. Universities, CCAC, and Trade Schools

Allegheny County's higher education institutions and trade schools are an important part of the regions long term growth. Our region produces thousands of highly trained graduates every year

¹ "Regional Employers, Educators Bring Career Ideas to the Breakfast Table." *Pittsburgh Regional Compact Quarterly - Summer 2008*. Summer 2008. Web.
<<http://www.pittsburghregionalcompact.org/CompactQuarterly/Summer08.asp>>.

and ensuring that these graduates are trained in the necessary skills that the local economy needs is a top priority for Raja. A study by the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) spotlights the industries that show the greatest potential for growth in the Pittsburgh region in the coming years. The fields identified were healthcare and life sciences, energy, and financial services and insurance.² As county executive, Raja will continue working to connect higher education with potential employers to help promote opportunity in Allegheny County.

- Extend University of Pittsburgh Industry Board Concept: Raja was the founding Chair of the University of Pittsburgh's Computer Science Industry Board. The Industry Board is a collaboration of the University of Pittsburgh Department of Computer Science and leaders in local industry. The objective of the board is to ensure that the university keeps in touch with local industry and ensures that the courses that are being offered align with the latest industry needs. Local industry also benefited by being provided easy access to young and well educated students who have already been trained in the needs of the business. As county executive, Raja will work with all Allegheny County universities to encourage the creation of similar industry boards that span disciplines to help provide local graduates with the training needed to find employment after graduation.
- Train Workers for Marcellus Shale Jobs: It is important to the region's economy that the skilled labor needed for Marcellus Shale exploration can be found locally. That is why as county executive, Raja will work to ensure that Allegheny County trade schools and CCAC continue to produce highly educated graduates that are prepared for high demand jobs related to the Marcellus Shale industry. Raja will work with CCAC to improve and expand its Energy Training Program. The program offers credit degree and certificate programs for in demand jobs in the industry.³ These institutions are perfectly suited to help train workers in the fields currently in demand by the industry. These skills range from engineering and drafting to staking, scoping, cementing, completing and fracturing.⁴ Raja will grow this program and work to expand the concept to other trade schools located within the county to help reach as many possible employees as possible.
 - Raja will work to create a specialized program within the Marcellus Shale training program that specifically targets the unemployed and underemployed. CCAC's Career Transition Center for Dislocated Workers serves as a good template of the type of training program that can assist Allegheny County's unemployed workers in attaining the proper training to gain employment in the Marcellus Shale

² *Emerging Industry Workforce Strategy*. Rep. Community College of Allegheny County, 22 Jan. 2010. Web. <http://www.ccac.edu/files/PDF_Document/ebf926af63d94058975556b7302999bf.pdf>.

³ "Marcellus Shale - Energy Training." *Community College of Allegheny County*. Web. <<http://www.ccac.edu/default.aspx?id=152187>>.

⁴ *Marcellus Shale Workforce Needs Assessment*. Rep. Marcellus Shale Education & Training Center, June 2009. Web. <<http://www.northerntier.org/upload/Needs%20Assessment%20with%20cover%20revised.pdf>>.

industry. A study completed by Public-Private Ventures looked at the impact of sector-focused training programs for low-income workers. The study found that those participants who sector-focused programs earned significantly more, about \$4,500 more over the 24 month study period. Additionally this study indicated that workers that participated in such training programs had increased job retention, greater hours worked, and increased access to healthcare.⁵ Raja believes that training programs in Allegheny County that target low income workers will help many individuals reduce their reliance on social services and increase their self-reliance.

2. Support High School Students

As county executive, Raja will work to improve the future careers of local middle and high school students. Raja will accomplish this by supporting programs that connect students to future careers, offering relevant career training as well as connecting employers to potential future employees. Additionally, Raja will work to find innovative ways to provide education assistance for young graduates so that they can continue their education right here in Allegheny County. By investing in our youngest generations and exposing them to the opportunities that exist here in the region, we can build a stronger economy.

- Support Organizations like the Pittsburgh Regional Compact: Engaging college students with potential employers is a great way to help provide opportunity to local graduates but Raja believes that we should start sooner. Raja will continue to support organizations like the Pittsburgh Regional Compact. The Pittsburgh Regional Compact is an organization that connects employers to middle and high school students in Allegheny, much like the Industry Board at the University of Pittsburgh. This partnership provides relevant career education for students and allows them to gain valuable career awareness and preparation as they prepare to further their education after high school.⁶
- Work to Keep Young Minds Here: Raja will work with across sectors to investigate ways to provide affordable education for Allegheny County residents. Possible areas of study would be the possibility of expanding a scholarship program similar to the Pittsburgh Promise to all county residents by working with the public, private and nonprofit sector across Allegheny County. Raja will also work to promote public school reform locally so that our schools can become more competitive and provide local graduates with the best possible education.

⁵ Maguire, Shelia, Joshua Freely, Carol Clymer, and Maureen Conway. *Job Training That Works: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. Rep. Public-Private Centures, May 2009. Web. <http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/294_publication.pdf>.

⁶ *Pittsburgh Regional Compact*. Web. <<http://www.pittsburghregionalcompact.org/>>.

3. School Districts

Allegheny County has 43 school districts within its borders. These school districts are unique and worth saving, but with so many districts there is inherently unnecessary duplication of services. As county executive, Raja will work with all of those 43 school districts to investigate ways that services can be shared. Possible areas that can be investigated are purchasing and maintenance. Where school districts are failing financially or academically Raja will work to see where improvements can be made.