

Testimony  
Presented by Tomea Sippio-Smith  
On Behalf of Public Citizens for Children and Youth  
Budget Hearing in Philadelphia City Council  
Re: School District of Philadelphia

May 15, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the funding and budget for the Philadelphia School District.

Philadelphia City Council has made a concerted effort to meet its obligation to public school students by providing sorely needed funding to Philadelphia's student. City Council has increased the City's contribution to the school district and now as local taxpayers, we are now outpacing the amount of revenue the state is contributing to Philadelphia, one of the school districts in the state that is most underfunded. Philadelphia's local school tax effort, based on the state's calculation, is the 17<sup>th</sup> highest in the state. Obviously, Harrisburg, is not carrying its fair share. It is choosing to support plans for a \$100 million expansion of a program that fails to benefit a majority of the state's students. Philadelphia City Council is to be commended.

Because of sustained investments at the local level, Philadelphia's students continue to make gains.

We support the use of the District's positive fund balance to repair facilities for our students, to make sure that no student enters a classroom with peeling lead paint, damp floors and other environmental hazards. We must also make sure classrooms remain a safe temperature for our students and staff. Students cannot learn while they are in stifling rooms. We encourage the district to work with Council on a plan to outfit every building with efficient air conditioning and ventilation systems for our students and staff.

PCCY also applauds the efforts to rebuild the school district's playgrounds to ensure that they are safe places. These projects are inexpensive, one-time and more should commence with a portion of the projected year-end fund balance. Additionally, with respect to recurring costs, the District's budget proposal includes millions to expand student counseling services and the addition of 50 counselors or student support staff. At the same time the budget includes

millions more to pay for the educational services for children who are living in institutions, \$3 million more than what is being spent this year. While these services are certainly needed, if the school district had ample resources, it could hire additional school psychologists to help so many students who walk through the school's doors suffering from trauma.

Again, while City council and the district are doing more to support Philadelphia's students, the state has not done its fair share. So much more could be done for Philadelphia's students if Harrisburg was on the same page. Classrooms could be treated and repaired, class sizes could be reduced, libraries could be expanded, technology could be more accessible to more students and students who need additional supports and resources, like counselors and mental health services, students would have access to the tools they need to be their best selves.

Students perform better when their school districts are well funded. It is a simple equation really. The city's economic growth will continue to increase as we make funding for high quality education accessible to the city's schools at the local and state levels

City Council and the school district cannot do this alone. Pennsylvania must step up by increasing basic education funding by \$200 million through the state's fair funding formula this year, by \$50 million for special education for students with special needs, and by \$10 million for the career and technical education subsidy to give more students opportunities to prepare for careers. Those sound like big numbers, but it is what is necessary considering the rising costs of educating more than 1.7 million students across the state.

The state has chronically underfunded our schools for too many years and the impacts of this neglect are increasingly clear. If we want our economy to strengthen and grow, the state must do what the city has begun to do and continues to do - commit the resources to make it happen. Thank you, City Council for investing in our students to get them the resources they need. We ask that this budget season you do the same.