

public citizens for children + youth

Testimony Presented to the Philadelphia Board of Education

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I commend the Board and the Superintendent for attending to the urgent nutritional needs of the tens of thousands of low-income children in this crisis. Your rapid response to deploy meals is a testament to the capacity of the leaders of this District and the thousands of District employees who are willing to put the interests of our City's children first.

I am here with a simple request that same diligence and commitment be applied in ways that enable the District to teach our children, now.

As the virus' spread intensifies, the resumption of classes in our school buildings seems very unlikely. We come to terms with this fact and hasten the process of making teacher supported home-based instruction the norm for the balance of the school year.

Parents watched in horror as federal, state and District officials twisted themselves up in illogical arguments that led to instruction to stop cold. Finally, teachers have been given the green light, the engine of the district must turn wholeheartedly toward instruction. Every teacher, classroom aide, special education contractor, high school guidance counselor and contracted infrastructure like Gear Up must be used to educate our children now.

In this emergency, you must take control of the instructional calendar. This emergency must compel you tonight to update the school calendar so that instruction is not suspended through Spring Break. Our students and our parents need you to do what is expected of you. Our students have had a break, two weeks to be precise, it's time to start teaching our students.

That brings us to the technology challenge. Parents understand is more than just hardware. It's ensuring teacher support, materials and wireless access. And parents know it's about making sure that for special education and ELL students, technology and teacher support is deployed that meet their needs.

Here's what we know, 37 other school districts in the five-county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania have already given out laptops or comparable devices to all or most of their students and instruction is commencing.



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We also know that nine days ago, the Miami School District distributed devices to 53,000 students and last week, Boston, New York City and Broward County ensured that students who needed devices received them. Together these districts are kicking off on-line, teacher supported instruction to more than 1.7 million students.

I've attached an excel package with this testimony and links to each district so you can see for yourself that others are already teaching their students.

Parents and students didn't miss the fact that Superintendent [announced](#) that soon technology will be made available to students. But two weeks is too long. The evidence that its possible to deploy technology and support instruction has been presented to you. We are here tonight to ask you to mandate an accelerated timeline so that teachers can teach, and our kids can learn.

Here's what we would like to see:

1. A date certain, and no later than April 6th, when the dissemination of technology will commence so that we can have confidence that the digital divide is quickly being bridged and instruction can proceed.
2. A date certain, and no later than April 6th, for an initial roll of online teacher supported instruction. We understand that such a plan will get better and more detailed over time.
3. A date certain, and no later than April 15th, when teacher supported home-based instruction will commence for special education students and English Language Learners.

