

City Council Budget Testimony

May 20, 2020

Dr. William R. Hite, Jr. - Superintendent

School District of Philadelphia

Thank you President Wilkerson. Good Morning Council President and Members of City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you this morning. On May 13, 2020 the unthinkable happened and the School District of Philadelphia was forced to close all schools and educational programs leaving over 200,000 children with no place to go during the day. This was the absolute last decision my team and I wanted to make. Having children out of school weighed heavy on our hearts and minds. We were concerned about their safety, their ability to access ample and healthy food sources, a lack of supervision during the day and, of course, about learning gaps. But the concern for each child's health became paramount and we followed the directive of our Governor and Mayor.

Since school buildings have been closed, we have made sure each child had the opportunity to continue their education by distributing over 2 million age appropriate learning guides and then 84,000 Chromebooks, provided 2.2 million meals, and for the whole family, we created hotlines for mental and behavioral health, FAQ's much needed supports to manage during these uncertain times. We kicked off our Virtual Family Academy and now are providing more than \$350.00 to each family through their EBT card so during the summer, food will be available.

Many of the adjustments we were forced to make in this notable school year have come with a hefty and unexpected price tag. But we knew that our students didn't deserve for COVID 19 to rob them of their education so we did what was needed to keep them on course. Every day we continue to improve on our Continuity of Education plan to provide digital learning opportunities and address the needs of our students. But again, this comes with a significant

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price tag and support from our partners. Thank you Council Members, for always supporting our students and families.

Probably the hardest hit population are our graduating seniors who ended their year abruptly without the opportunity to say goodbye to their classmates and teachers. I'm happy to say we have listened to their voices and acted upon their input to host a Virtual Graduation for all seniors on June 9th. Many of them are continuing their education in a trade school, at the Community College or a four year university. They are truly resilient and remarkable Philadelphia students. Today we have a prime example of that excellence. I'm proud to introduce one of the two student Board Members and a graduating senior from Northeast High School, Doha Ibrahim.