

**Testimony to City Council**  
**Joyce Wilkerson, President of the Board of Education**  
**School District of Philadelphia**  
**May 20, 2020**

Good morning, Council President and members of City Council. Thank you for having us here today.

My name is Joyce Wilkerson and I am the President of the Board of Education. I would like to begin this morning by acknowledging my fellow board members: Ameen Akbar, Julia Danzy, Leticia Egea-Hinton, Mallory Fix Lopez, Lee Huang, Dr. Maria McColgan, and Dr. Angela McIver. Due to our remote platform, they are not with us here on camera this morning, but I know that they are watching and sharing their support.

On behalf of all Board Members, I would like to start by expressing our gratitude for our reappointment by the Mayor and confirmation by City Council earlier this month. It is an honor to serve alongside these individuals as part of a body dedicated to ensuring that all K-12 students in Philadelphia's public schools receive the quality education they need to help them realize their full potential in life.

Board members have been hard at work enacting policy and budget decisions for the School District of Philadelphia that put student learning first. In these unprecedented times, it is urgent to remain focused on academic achievement for our students, ensuring that they receive a quality K-12 education that prepares them not only for higher education and fulfilling careers but also breaks the cycle of poverty for individuals and families -- a goal City Council has led our City on.

At this time, we have been focused first on supporting the District through the unprecedented crisis that COVID-19 has presented. We are proud of the work our school communities and District leadership have done to respond to the crisis. This is work that Dr. Hite will share more about this morning.

We are also deeply grateful for the volunteers who have rallied to support the school community by contributing their time to distribute meals, learning packets and Chromebooks and by donating funds to purchase the Chromebooks.

While the challenges COVID-19 presents are great, we are resolved that we cannot let this crisis stop the progress schools across Philadelphia have been making.

With your support and investments, we've made tangible changes for our students and our schools by adding over 2,500 teaching and staff positions, adding academic programs, strengthening behavioral supports for our most at-risk students and reestablishing extracurricular activities. We've invested in our buildings by modernizing classrooms, upgrading technology for students and staff, making much-needed repairs and remediating environmental hazards.

Our investments are paying off, as public schools across Philadelphia have been moving forward. But I know that no one here who has walked inside a school building or read the news about environmental hazards in school buildings would say that we have done enough; and it is absolutely critical that we do not slide backward.

At this time, we need your support more than ever because we are deeply concerned that the covid crisis will lead to a financial future marked by structural deficits that are devastating to public education. The District has moved from a place of financial stability to a looming financial crisis that could be more severe than even what we lived through 7 years ago when the District experienced a \$300 million funding cut, which led to drastic layoffs, reduced supports for schools and significant decreases in school building maintenance and more.

This year's 2020 graduating seniors began school on the heels of the 2008 recession and have experienced the negative consequences of the financial crisis during their entire educational careers. We cannot repeat this scenario for the students coming behind them.

The Board is deeply committed to keeping Philadelphia public schools whole by advocating for state and federal funding, and we need the city's help too. Mayor Kenney has put forward a budget proposal that would protect our students and schools by calling for a nominal tax increase that would provide predictable funding for our schools. Our children deserve nothing less.

Board members will continue to advocate for maintaining state funding at 2019-2020 budget levels and allowing districts to use their federal funding allocations to help alleviate the additional costs we are incurring to respond to COVID-19. But we can't do this without your help and support.

We have been asking everyone in the education community, including parents, teachers, students and community members, to stand together to protect public education in Philadelphia by keeping it whole even at this devastating time.

We will continue to advocate for state and federal funds by reaching out to Gov. Wolf and state legislators and asking them to support public education in the commonwealth and in the City of Philadelphia. We also support the Governor's plan to correct inequities in Charter school funding, and the Board is lobbying with Districts across the nation to secure additional federal resources.

Finally, Board members deeply appreciate the support of City Council Members and their critical investment in the education of Philadelphia's children. We know this is an incredibly difficult time, and we appreciate your work championing the education of our children.

Thank you.