

**Testimony of Dr. William R. Hite, Jr., Superintendent,
School District of Philadelphia
May 26, 2015**

Good morning, Council President Clarke and members of City Council. I am Dr. William R. Hite, Superintendent and CEO of The School District of Philadelphia.

I want to thank City Council not only for the opportunity to provide testimony today, but also for your continued willingness to champion Philadelphia students and schools. Over the past five years, City Council has supported more than \$300 million in additional revenue to Philadelphia public schools. That strong show of support from Council has enabled us to stabilize the school system and begin to rebuild. Thanks to Council's efforts, we were able to open schools on time this year and, for the first time in the past three years, avoid significant further cuts to programs and services.

While we still must do more to achieve our overarching goal – to ensure that all children have great public schools close to where they live – we have seen encouraging signs of progress.

Our schools are safer, with reduced suspensions, zero schools on the state's "Persistently Dangerous" list, and expanded positive climate initiatives. Student attendance is up. A citywide effort is helping young students learn to read. We opened three new, neighborhood-based, innovative high schools this year and expect increased enrollment at several high-performing schools next year. We launched an online school application process, resulting in more students and families actively participating in the school selection process. We aligned our curriculum to the rigorous Pennsylvania Core Standards with more supports for better instruction. We revamped our teacher and principal hiring strategies to better compete for the most talented staff. We are using staffing approaches that allow us to best match educator talents with student and school needs. More schools have engaged parents, School Advisory Councils, and "Friends of" groups. Our comprehensive School Progress Report – featured in your budget books – now includes not only all District-run schools, but also 75 percent of eligible charter schools, helping us to better celebrate, learn from, and support our wide range of schools.

There is momentum in our public schools. However, it will take a collective effort to build a system of great schools across Philadelphia. Currently, academic performance is far too low. Outcomes are not close to equitable. And most schools – particularly those in our neighborhoods most challenged by poverty – lack anywhere near adequate staffing and resources.

Our first year required stabilizing a precarious system. Our second year focused on setting ambitious student learning goals and aligning resources accordingly. Our third year and beyond seeks to ensure that every child benefits equally from those

resources. We have a new statement of goals and values, Action Plan 3.0, that details our approach. Our requested investments from the state (\$159.4 million) and city (\$105.2 million) are essential to this work.

I have spoken to almost all of you individually about this year's approach to planning for the requested investments. Rather than dictate to schools how these resources should be used, we asked school leaders and their teams to tell us how they could best use the resources to meet student needs. The school-by-school budget book includes information on each school's plans for those resources.

While each plan is unique, common themes include increasing access to Advanced Placement classes and credit recovery opportunities; staffing support so teachers can do small-group and individualized instruction; enhanced school climate programs; counseling and social-emotional support for students; additional resources to serve English-Language Learners and special education students; and technology, books, and supplies to support teaching and learning.

These resources also would enable us make a significant investment in expanded alternative education opportunities – a significant focus area in our Action Plan.

I could go on and on about how these investments will help our students reach their full potential. But rather than hear it from me, I'd like to introduce some terrific students to share in their words why fully funding public education matters. These students won the "Students Speak!" contest.

First, we have Xue Yao "Brian" Zou, a 10th grade student at Central High School, who won the video contest. Second is Sarah Santiago, also a 10th grade student, from Esperanza Academy Charter School.

Afterwards, we would be happy to answer any questions from the Councilmembers.

As always, we appreciate your support of The School District of Philadelphia, our students, staff and their families.