

Estelle B. Richman, Chair of School Reform Commission

Testimony to City Council

School District of Philadelphia

May 9 , 2018

Good morning, Council President Clarke and members of City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony to you. My name is Estelle Richman and I am the current Chair of the School Reform Commission (“SRC”) of the School District of Philadelphia (the “District”). Before I begin I would like to acknowledge and thank my fellow commissioners Fran Burns, Bill Green, and Marjorie Neff for their service to Philadelphia’s students.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge each of the nine newly appointed members of the Board of Education. Each of them brings a unique and critical perspective to this work. I am confident that their diverse backgrounds and experiences will be their greatest strength in providing collective support for all of the Philadelphia’s students and stakeholders.

Likewise, I would like to thank the Mayor for his commitment to local control and for appointing a diverse collective of individuals to govern the School District.

In my time on the SRC, I have learned much about the details and complexities of public education. Through our weekly school visits, I have had the opportunity to meet our relentless school leaders, hard-working teachers, and bright students.

Each and every day, I have been inspired and energized by the unwavering commitment made by each of these individuals to improving outcomes for our young people.

This past November, the SRC took the deliberate vote to dissolve and allow for a clear path to local governance. We took this vote with complete confidence in Dr. Hite's management of the District and the stability we have seen under this leadership. We have worked hard over the past few years to make new investments and reinvestments in schools that are focused on the development and learning of our students. In that time, the District has also had four years of balanced budgets, improved its credit rating, and settled contracts with each of its union.

Through years of difficult decision-making and hardship, the District is now in its strongest financial standing. With four years of balanced budgets, the District has been able to make targeted investments that actualize the Anchor Goals outlined in its Action Plan.

One key example of such an investment is the District's focus on Early Literacy to ensure that all eight year-olds are reading on or above grade-level. Targeted investments towards this goal have resulted in more than 900 students reading at the highest level and fewer than 1,500 students reading at the lowest level. Specifically, every grade level from 3rd to 7th grade made gains in PSSA reading exams, with 3rd graders making the largest gains. These outcomes are the result of significant investments made by the District. These investments include new K-8 math and reading books for every K-3 classroom, one early literacy coach in each

elementary school to support K-3 teachers, capital investments to modernize K-2 classrooms that support the early literacy work, and additional investments to support our traditionally lowest performing schools.

The District has also worked in partnership with various City agencies on key projects such as the re-opening of Vaux HS and a joint career fair with the Philadelphia Housing Authority. We have partnered with members of City Council, the City's Water Department, and Parks and Recreation to advance the greening and beautification of school yards across Philadelphia. We have worked in collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Education to support the expansion of Pre-K seats and establish the Community Schools Initiative in twelve District schools. As well as partnering with more than 2,000 individual providers to establish key afterschool and out of school time programs in schools. These examples of strong partnerships have resulted in aligned efforts between organizations to support communities and their schools.

I am proud to share that through such investments and partnerships the District has seen its graduation rate climb to an all time high (67%), it has increased the percent of K-2 students reading on or above grade level, improved school climates, and stabilized its budget. This work could not have been possible without the support of City Council and the Mayor.

As a city, we have worked hard to stabilize the District. The leadership of Council President and fellow City Council members in committing resources to the District

has positioned us to stabilize our finances and share today's positive message highlighting the hard-work and achievements of our students and staff.

It is because of the District's financial and organizational stability that I took the vote to dissolve the SRC back in November. In our final months before the Board of Education assumes governance, my fellow Commissioners and I are working hard to ensure a smooth transition.

Today, I ask that each of you renew your commitment by supporting the District in expanding investments, that allow us to 1) reduce class size 2) strengthen our investment in early literacy by expanding resources to 4th and 5th grades 3) accelerate capital investments to modernize classrooms 4) invest in additional teachers that specialize in supporting English learners and students with emotional support needs 5) invest in additional arts and music programs 6) increase financial support for our lowest performing schools, and 7) increase opportunities for credit recovery and grade enhancement for high school students.

Thank you to Council President and to all Council members for the opportunity to submit written testimony and your continued partnership in support of our schools.