



GOALS & GUARDRAILS

City Council Hearing

May 11, 2021

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Board of Education Testimony

Good morning. Thank you to the Mayor and all members of City Council for the chance to be with you here today and for your partnership in service to the students of Philadelphia. Today, as we all prepare for the District's budget hearing, we would like to provide you with an update on Goals & Guardrails, the Board's 5-year plan that we adopted in December, 2020, and began implementing in January 2021, and how this plan is shaping our approach to this year's budget and the work of the District.

I would like to begin by briefly sharing the Board's vision for Goals & Guardrails and some background on their development. In December 2020, the Board of Education adopted its five-year strategic plan called Goals & Guardrails. As the governing body of the School District of Philadelphia, the Board of Education's role is to set a vision for public education in Philadelphia and then to hold the School District accountable for realizing it. As a Board, we have spent our first two years visiting schools and meeting with community members to learn about how best to carry out this critical work.

Our vision for public education is simple. We believe in a school system that provides every student with the tools and experiences they need to reach their fullest potential. In order to achieve this vision, we set clear student learning goals for the District and guardrails that provide the conditions needed to make student learning a priority. We are implementing this plan because it is time to move from a mindset of system survival to a world where every school is providing every child with the tools they need to reach their potential. To accomplish this, we must be focused on student achievement.



To summarize the Goals & Guardrails plan: we have five academic goals and four guardrails. Our first two academic goals are focused on reading and ensuring that our 3rd through 8th grade students have the reading skills they will need to succeed in their education and future lives. Our third academic goal is focused on Math, a fundamental skill that is too often overlooked. We want to make sure that our 3rd through 8th grade students also have the mathematical foundation that they are going to need to succeed. Finally, our fourth and fifth goals look at skills necessary for our students to graduate with the academic and/or career and technical skills needed for employment and a fulfilling life beyond graduation.

Just as importantly, our plan also includes four guardrails which we believe are the conditions necessary to help our students learn and achieve.

- **Guardrail 1 is:** Every school will be a safe, welcoming and healthy place where our students, staff and community want to be and learn each day. This means that our schools will be: 1) environmentally safe and clean; and 2) spaces with inclusive climates that provide students with access to robust social, emotional, and mental health supports.
- **Guardrail 2 is:** Every student will have a well-rounded education with co-curricular opportunities, including arts and athletics, integrated into the school experience.
- **Guardrail 3 is:** Every parent and guardian will be welcomed and encouraged to be partners in their child's school community.
- **Guardrail 4 is:** Our students' potential will not be limited by practices that perpetuate systemic racism and hinder student achievement.

Each month the Board spends 60-90 minutes of its Board meeting time monitoring progress toward achieving these Goals & Guardrails. So far, we have monitored progress on Goals 1, 2, 3 and 4. This month, we will monitor our first Guardrail which will be Guardrail 4, looking directly at eliminating practices that perpetuate systemic racism and hinder student achievement.



Since we began monitoring Goals & Guardrails in January, there are some clear takeaways that have begun emerging as we monitor how our students are doing. These trends allow us to identify our students' needs and invest in targeted strategies and resources that will support their individual needs in order for them to reach their fullest potential. So far, some of our clear takeaways are:

- Our Special Education students and English learner students are generally farthest from the targets set for our academic Goals, followed by Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students.
- Schools that are not on track to meeting our goals, serve more Special Education students and English language learners than our other schools.
 - Additionally, off track schools serve more students that require the most intensive interventions and services.
- Attendance matters: Our schools that are on track for our academic goals have attendance rates that are substantially stronger than other schools.
- Finally, staff retention also matters: Off track schools are more likely to have higher turnover of school leaders and teachers.
 - Regarding principal retention rates: 45% of off track schools have a school leader who has been there for less than 3 years compared with 18% in on track schools.
 - Data for teacher retention rates show: a 76.5% retention rate in off track, and 88% retention rate in near track, and a 91% teacher retention rate in schools that are on track for meeting our goals.

These takeaways matter greatly to us when we look at the District's proposed budget, and they are the guiding issues that we will be focusing on as we move toward adopting the budget later this month. We are excited by the budget that the District has put forward because we believe that it is structured to address the areas of concern that our Goals & Guardrails clearly highlight.

Some of the things that we see in the proposed budget and that we hope you will be encouraged by include:



- Differentiated strategies that provide more support to the schools that need more support. For instance, the District’s proposal provides all schools with an additional position, but it will provide 2 discretionary positions for schools that are not on track to meeting our Goals & Guardrails.
 - Strategies for providing more support for our students receiving special education services. These include more special education teachers across the District with an additional 50 psychologists, 10 occupational therapists, and 20 speech therapists. Additionally, the district is identifying investments for a system-wide redesign and a more proactive approach to serving all students with Special Educational needs.
 - Supports that make our schools more safe, healthy, and welcoming by specifically providing programming for schools in communities most impacted by gun violence.
 - And, finally, we are thrilled that the District will be formalizing the equity work that it has been engaged in this year by creating the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- These are just some of the investments that you will hear about today that we believe indicate an approach that will move the needle for our students.

Overall, this approach to looking at our schools allows us to specifically target our resources to the schools and students who most need the support. As we move forward, you can expect to see from us investments that are similarly targeted and specific to student needs. We know from this work that not all of our schools need the same thing, and we want a budget that directs dollars to where they are most needed. This means that some students will require more support and resources than others; and we need to be prepared to meet those needs. For the Board, this means we must set clear expectations for student success, monitor progress towards those expectations, and adopt a budget and policies that provide support based on the needs of our students.

Before we end, we’d also like to take a moment to address concerns that we have heard from our African American founded and led charter school community and that have also been raised by several members of City Council regarding our practices as a charter school authorizer. As I hope that you can see from our presentation this morning, we as a Board have high expectations



for all schools. We believe that it is our role to hold all schools accountable for fulfilling their purpose of meeting the needs of our students. We intend to do this for both District and charter operated public schools.

The office operates on the principle that charter schools have been granted a high level of autonomy in exchange for a high level of accountability for providing Philadelphia students with the education that they require in order to thrive and succeed. To this end, our Charter Schools Office uses a framework for measuring the organizational, financial, and academic performance of our charter schools and produces public annual reports indicating whether schools are fulfilling their public mandate. These annual reports serve as a guide for our charter schools so that they can see whether they are on track for a renewal every 5 years when their charters expire.

We encourage everyone to look at our Charter Schools Office's website where all of these reports are posted publicly. Many of our charter schools, which serve approximately one third of the public school students in Philadelphia, are doing phenomenal work; but for schools that are not serving students well, it is our responsibility to hold them accountable.

While we believe that we do this in a fair and equitable manner, concerns have been raised that our practices have discriminated against African American founded and led charter schools. We take all allegations of discrimination seriously and are working now to provide these schools with an independent entity who can investigate these allegations. We intend to look at these concerns openly, and we will address any areas where we are falling short.

Finally, no matter how strong our practices are now, we are also always focused on continual growth. We look forward to continuing to align the work of our charter authorizing with our Goals & Guardrails. This will include a review of our past work to inform our future path and the establishment of a two year working group with the charter sector to support this alignment. We intend to do this work with our charter community and you will be hearing more about this in the near future.



Now, I would like to thank you all for listening to the Board's updates on our critical Goals & Guardrails work. We are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.