

# public citizens for children + youth

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Statement on Philadelphia Superintendent's Recommended Changes to Schools**

**PHILADELPHIA** (October 15, 2015) – PCCY Executive Director Donna Cooper issued the following statement today regarding recommended changes to schools by Philadelphia Superintendent William Hite.

After years of new models and governance changes, one thing is very clear, both the District and charter-operated schools face performance and resource challenges that require new thinking and creative solutions. We are not convinced that Superintendent Hite's proposed approach to turn school's around is going to result in the desired level of improvement and may cause harm to students attending other schools or the schools slated for closure. Currently, we don't have enough information to judge the actual upfront or recurring financial implications of the package, or whether every impacted child will end up in a school that is better than the one they are attending.

**On Finances:** According to the publicly released information about this District's plan for school improvement, four schools are slated to be run by private operators: three through the Renaissance model and one with Big Picture. The public comments by District officials include estimates as high as \$20 million.

Given the extreme shortage of resources, it is abundantly obvious that the District must release the details about how those funds will be spent. Will those funds flow to all schools affected by this plan or only those being run by private operators? If the funds will go to all the schools, how much is being proposed per seat and by school? We need details.

The District has been inconsistent with respect to the estimated costs of charter expansion regardless of Renaissance or traditional charter option. For instance, since the adoption of the Renaissance model in 2010, some District officials have indicated the cost is \$4,000 per child above the District's per student expenditure while others in the District has said its somewhere between \$1000 and \$1500 more.



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To understand what is proposed and the implications credible cost figures for the Renaissance and in-district turn around seats should be released along with the methodology for calculating those costs.

With this information we can evaluate the degree to which the District is allocating funds for schools operated by a private operators compared to the level of funds available on district efforts to turn around schools. In order to fully determine the wisdom of funding more Renaissance schools, we need additional information.

**On Performance:** In addition to the financial challenges, we have to question the merits of shifting more schools to Renaissance operators. The SRC is poised to not renew one of the current Renaissance charter school operators, and it has already shifted the management of another to a new operator and the fate of a third Renaissance is up in the air all three due to poor performance. We are not patently opposed to the Renaissance model, but to date the results of this model are mixed at best. In fact their mixed results mirror that of the District where some schools work better than others, and some don't work at all. It is noteworthy though that District schools must try to succeed with a much larger share of at-risk students including low income, minority, ELL, child welfare system involved, homeless students or in need of special education services.

The experience with charters and the District run schools clearly demonstrates that achieving the desired results requires more than a management change. For these schools to succeed they must have sufficient funds, well-trained teachers and an effective a long-term, committed principal with the skills to make the schoolwork.

**On Process:** The District must inform parents and seek their input in the proposed Renaissance schools process. Since 2010, the focus of information flow and decision-making has shifted from School Advisory Councils, to all parents. This year the District has appeared to be intentionally vague about the role of parents. First parents are told there will be no parent vote, then they are told a small group of parents selected by the District would have input. The District should commit in writing to a process that defines the role of parents, how parents will vote or have a legitimate role in the decisions, where and when meetings will be held and the purpose of each meeting. The way that the meetings at Cooke and Huey have been handled make it clear that the District must immediately identify someone with appropriate skills to manage this process.

It seems obvious but it must be said that it is in the District's interest to up its game and lead a useful community process that successfully engages parents in their school's future and makes them partners in this process.

We must recognize that resource shortages inevitably make improvement difficult. Without funds, the only way to improve is to rob Peter to pay Paul. We cannot abide by any improvement plan that does injury to some students in order to benefit other students. That's a tough statement, but in order to move forward we must find new resources or new ways to fund improvements that guarantee that no district-run school suffers deeper cuts.

**Editor's Note:** Kate Philips will be serving as interim Communications Director at PCCY while a search to replace Anthony Hopkins is underway. She can be reached via cell 215-850-4647 or email: [katephilips2010@gmail.com](mailto:katephilips2010@gmail.com). ###