

Testimony before Philadelphia City Council

Committee of the Whole

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Presented by Donna Cooper

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All budget decisions including how to raise revenues and spend limited city funds are difficult in the best of times; in these worst of times, you are faced with what seems like a no-win set of choices. I wish you Godspeed as you tackle this challenge.

Let me state for the record that the U.S. Senate and the White House have demonstrated shortsighted cockiness that if not curbed are likely to push this nation into the depths of depression that could make the 1930s seem like a cake walk, harming this generation and those that follow it.

I implore you not to let the incompetence in Washington visit more pain on the children of this city. Show them what leadership looks like and choose to put children first as you bring our city's budget into balance.

I ask you to commit to our students that they will not return to schools that are more resource-starved than the schools they walked out of when classes were abruptly ended on March 13<sup>th</sup>.

We've seen this movie before, and it doesn't have a happy ending.

If the revenues proposed by the Mayor are not found for the District, essential student support programs will be slashed. It's simply the worst time, ever, to reduce the modicum of mental health and social supports already in our schools. Fund our schools so that the trauma our children suffered before this pandemic, and through it, is addressed and not ignored. Wounds that are ignored, as you know, only get worse.

And, the District has only this year recovered the arts faculty slashed nearly 20 years ago. When the arts are cut, we lose more in student learning than is gained in reduced expenditures. Core content teachers tell PCCY that when their schools lean into the arts, students are more centered and there is a marked increase in the receptivity to learning.

Fund the schools so our students can learn the skills of creativity and persistence. Those are the skills that make them future ready.

Finally, I ask you to do everything in your power to make sure your budget decisions help our youngest children enter 4<sup>th</sup> grade able to read. There are many reasons our children are so far behind, but the cure is well known, and it begins with high quality pre-k.

The long-serving members of this Council took a very tough vote to enact the tax on sweetened beverages to enable nearly 6000 children to enroll in pre-k every year. While expanding enrollment in September is not a reasonable plan, the budget you enact must provide funds for when this crisis subsides, hopefully this fall, to support a dramatic expansion of pre-k seats this January followed by another large expansion by September.

Thousands of bright young children, eager to start kindergarten ready to learn, are depending on you to choose them. Stand in stark contrast to the callousness in Washington by refusing to reduce access to pre-k in order to balance the City budget. Show the children of this city you believe they are your winning choice.

Thank you.