

School District of Philadelphia Budget Hearing

Children First Testimony

April 21, 2022

Good afternoon. My name is Tomea Sippio-Smith. I am the K-12 Education Policy Director at Children First.

Clearly, this has been a rough two years for our students. They have continued to struggle to adjust to their new normal.

While federal funding last fiscal year allowed the district to add school counselors, 1:1 technology, more special education teachers and therapists, now is not the time to reduce services – not when the district is projecting a more than \$500 million surplus.

We recognize that the district will spend about \$1 billion in charter school payments and that those costs may continue to rise. But let's ensure that the students that *are* enrolled *are* in healthy, safe schools that meet their needs.

Remarkably, we have the funding to address many of them.

Children are having difficulty controlling their behavior and are in dire need of emotional support. Increasing climate staff hours is helpful but having a positive climate and enough school nurses, counselors and psychologists in every building is imperative.

And clearly, our children are still facing academic hurdles.

Our youngest learners need access to high quality learning options from the beginning. Students stand to gain the most academically, if they have access to high-quality kindergartens, elementary, middle and high schools.

Students need teachers *and* class sizes that are small enough so that the teacher can work with students to support their individual needs.

Our students need school-based specialists to support their academic growth in reading and math.

Students continue to need assistant principals to ensure that there are enough adults in the building to support a safe and positive school climate for them.

For decades, we've fought for Philadelphia's public schools to give every child access to the arts because we know that the arts not only foster creativity but support their growth. Consistently, studies show how important activities like music, art, and theatre are to their development. Let's ensure that they don't lose these activities.

Simply put – our students have already lost too much.

We can't afford to strip resources away from children during the toughest years of their lives. We should bolster their support levels while we have the funds to do so.

We have the money. Use the money now to address student needs in every building. If they have what they need, when they need it, they are more likely to remain in the district.