

School District of Philadelphia Budget Hearing at City Council

Children First Testimony

May 4, 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 Philadelphia's children. Like all of us, they have continued to struggle to adjust to their new normal.

We implore City Council and the School District of Philadelphia to adopt budgets that continues to support our children in two specific areas – with access to technology and ensuring that students continue to receive the tools, services, and resources they need to succeed.

While federal funding last fiscal year allowed the district to add school counselors, 1:1 technology, more special education teachers and therapists, now is the time to ensure that students have what they need, not reduce access – especially when the district is projecting a more than \$500 million surplus next year.

First, we urge the district to continue to fund 1:1 technology and supports for every student. In this new world, consistent access to technology and programming to facilitate learning and narrow achievement gaps is a must. High speed internet is no longer optional, it is a necessity. Students must have access to the technology and supports to ensure that every student and family remain connected.

Second, while the district is critically and chronically underfunded, it has more funding to address more of the issues students are facing than in years past. We implore the school district to use funds on needed supports for students.

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

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, math and science.

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.

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 implore the council to support and the district to allocate the money now to address student needs in every building. If they have what they need, when they need it, our students are more likely to succeed.