

Sharahn Satana, City Council Education Committee Testimony. April 28, 2021.

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you councilmember Quinones-Sanchez for hosting this forum and helping to build a vision for a school recovery plan that we all can support and believe in. My name is Sharahn Santana and I am a teacher at Parkway Northwest High School for Peace and Social Justice, PFT building representative, and a VERY PROUD member of PFT LOCAL 3. I'm here today to share my testimony with the hope that it will help shape and influence your decisions about how schools should spend federal stimulus money provided by the American Rescue Act.

I've had the privilege of working in the Philadelphia School District for the past five years. And I say privilege because I have been blessed to work with some of the most amazing, intelligent, resilient, and deserving young people in the city. But, when I think of my students' education, and then think of the generational poverty many of them have been forced to endure and overcome, as a result of racial and socioeconomic restrictive housing policies that have had an immeasurable negative impact on their education, my heart breaks. More specifically, my heart breaks for the learning gaps, lack of classroom resources, oversized classrooms, teacher shortages, high-stakes testing, and dilapidated buildings that plague our school district. When I think of my students; I think they deserve better .

With the \$1 billion dollars in funding from the American Rescue Act, we have the opportunity to right some of the historical wrongs that have done so much harm to our students and their communities.

My recommendation is that the stimulus should be used for the following:

1. Capital spending to Fund our school building facilities
2. Stop-gap interventions and resources
3. Proactively supporting students Mental health and wellness post pandemic.

First, a mental health and wellness liaison is needed in every school to help students cope with returning to the classroom after more than a year in virtual learning. Providing a liaison will serve as proactive and preventive measure for unforeseen students issues and incidents that can and will arise. Next, Hiring temporary additional school based staff to act as teaching assistants and climate support will allow teachers to work with students in small groups and more effectively use formative data to drive instruction. We must also support after school programming and tutoring facilitated by highly qualified teachers.

BUT WE CANNOT use this money to hire new staff, purchase new resources and implement new programs, if the very foundation that houses the staff, resources, and programs is old and falling apart.

During my time as a teacher and Building Representative in three different schools within the school district, and as School Advisory Council chairperson for Franklin Learning Center, I have experienced and worked through unimaginable building conditions which no student should be subjected to learn and thrive in:

Asbestos,

Entire floors being inaccessible due to health and safety violations,

No air conditioning,

No heat,

Strange pungent gas emissions without a known cause or credible explanation,

No hot water,

Broken toilets,

Mold,

Leaking ceilings,

Rodent infestations,

Decaying hallways and stairwells, and

Insufficient ventilation - which the pandemic has exacerbated in the most undeniable way.

Yet, when I drive through the city, I can't help but notice all of the new developments popping up everywhere, including in the underprivileged communities where the schools are crumbling!

I am so tired of my students harmfully associating capital and quality as exclusively white privileges. Good Jobs First's report shows that in 2019 Philadelphia's schools lost more than \$112 Million dollars in tax revenue thanks to the infamous 10-year tax abatement and other corporate tax credits. What are we teaching our black and brown students by leaving this problem unresolved??? bThey are smart. They see the haves, and far too often, themselves as the have-nots.

This money must be spent in a way that attempts to undo some of these unjust generational wrongs. A minimum investment of at least \$200 Million dollars is needed to remediate the most pressing environmental concerns within more than 225 buildings. We must spend this money in

a way that will have an enduring impact on my students today, and the future generations of students tomorrow.

It is truly ironic that the most exhausted word in public education is the one thing our school district doesn't appear to prioritize: EQUITY. All stakeholders are crying out for it.

I'll leave you with this - The U.S. Census Bureau recently confirmed that Pennsylvania grew more slowly than it did the prior decade, and this lagging growth could mean Pennsylvania will see a reduced share of federal money. So, how we spend this money now is more important than ever.

Please. I implore you. Use this money to provide stop gap interventions and resources, account for our students mental well being, and most urgently, FINALLY fund our school building facilities NOW!

Thank you all for your time and this platform to share our thoughts on shaping the future of education in Philadelphia.