

Good afternoon, esteemed City Council members

Thank you, Education Committee Chair Councilperson Quinones-Sanchez for holding this hearing to examine how Philadelphia can most effectively, and more importantly, most equitably use the money from the American Rescue Plan.

My name is Kate Sundeen. I am a teacher at Academy at Palumbo, and a proud member of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

There is no other job I would rather do than teach. I am sure my fellow teachers would join me in saying that the thing that was worst about this year was not being able to be with our students. However, the district and the union made the right call --the safe call-- the call that I firmly believe saved lives-- in choosing virtual education.

However, it didn't have to be this way.

None of us could have predicted this pandemic. However, we ABSOLUTELY could have predicted what would happen to education in Philadelphia if a pandemic occurred. Given that our buildings were unsafe BEFORE the start of the pandemic, with issues ranging from structural problems to lead and asbestos, there was no way our buildings could be up to standard to safely have in-person instruction during the pandemic. Palumbo, itself, had to have part of its building shut down after the ceiling on the 5th floor caved in after the district had neglected our roof for years, despite constant requests for repairs.

Many families watched suburban schools and private schools return to in-person and asked why Philadelphia wasn't doing the same. The answer-- Our students are victims of chronic underfunding when it comes to education, chronic mismanagement when it comes to finance priorities, and systemic racism in policy making and legislation.

If you were to ask Philly students why it is that our students go to school in crumbling unsafe buildings, while students just outside of the city have huge, clean, state-of-the-art facilities, do you know what most of them will say? Our students will say that it's b/c they go to city schools, and those other students go to suburban schools, as if that's the way it should be--that that's the way the world is. Our students are so used to the status quo that they think that's just the way it is. But we know better. It doesn't have to be this way.

Council Members-- This is your chance to start down the path of correcting these inequities. Prioritize education funding when you make your choices. Prioritize funding that helps to fix the district's crumbling infrastructure. Prioritize funding that helps address budget shortfalls that lead to staff cuts. Prioritize funding that helps the non-profits in our city that work to give our students educational and extra-curricular opportunities.

Education is a powerful tool for addressing inequities, but only if we provide for equity in education, itself. Please show our students that YOU believe, and that THEY should ALSO believe that they deserve better.

Thank you.