



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
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William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D.
Superintendent

October 20, 2021

Via E-mail: [REDACTED]

Jerry T. Jordan, President
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
1816 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Dear Mr. Jordan:

I am writing in response to your October 15 communication to address your concerns about the process of addressing environmental issues and to challenge your implication that the School District of Philadelphia is lacking urgency in addressing the most pressing concerns in our buildings.

We expect - and indeed our students, families and staff deserve – that we will be held to account for how to use our extremely limited resources to maintain hundreds of schools and buildings, dozens of which are more than 100 years old. We take reports of potential hazards seriously.

However, raising vague claims, creating duplicative work streams, and demanding the District conform to standards beyond regulatory and contractual specifications is not helpful to achieving safer schools nor to providing an accurate depiction of the effort being made.

Let me be clear: the health and safety of students and staff is unequivocally our top priority.

To address specific areas raised in your communication:

We prioritize responding to reports of alleged conditions that could cause immediate and substantial harm to students and staff. Coordination with a third-party's calendar would cause delay to the District's response to a potential health and safety concern. You seek to hold us accountable for not moving fast enough, yet when we act without deferring to Mr. Roseman's schedule, we are accused of bad faith. We must first act in the best interests of the students and staff, then turn to communicating the details of what we have found and what will be done.

The PFT's environmental consultant, like other third parties, does not have the authority to explore our buildings without coordination with the District. Mr. Roseman did not alert District staff ahead of his arrival at Frankford High School, and he was denied entry by the principal. However, Mr. Roseman has since been allowed into District buildings when he has coordinated the timing with the District. While Mr. Roseman is not a PFT employee, a licensed building inspector or an AHERA Project Designer, he is allowed to do joint walk-throughs when the District tours a site with contractors and conduct side-by-side testing after remediation of asbestos. Mr. Roseman must continue to coordinate in advance with District staff regarding access to District buildings. The District is developing specific protocols to guide this process.

I would also like to address the points you made regarding the Healthy Schools App. The Healthy Schools App is not the District's database for managing reports of facilities issues. Reporting through that platform creates additional delay in the process of addressing the issues reported because we understand that the PFT vets the reports submitted to the App before providing the information to the District. If PFT wants to encourage timely reporting and remediation of such issues, they should recommend their members contact Building Engineers at the schools to address identified issues and to enter work orders in the District's MOJO system, as appropriate. PFT could then use the Healthy Schools App to maintain their own records to track the District's progress.

However, since PFT has been unwilling to do this, and because the District takes reports of potential hazards seriously, the District has agreed to accept reports from the Healthy Schools App. The District has assigned a person in our Facilities department to track these reports, confirm they are being incorporated into the District's MOJO system, and report back on progress.

Although the PFT assigns priorities and timelines for response to issues reported through the App, the PFT has no way of knowing whether those issues are, in fact, the most urgent priorities across all of the District's facilities. That is the determination of the District.

To briefly address the specific schools, you cited:

- Wright: The District has determined what it believes to be the underlying source of the leak and is working to address the issue.
- Furness: The District will be able to address the vast majority of work orders through a paint and plaster project, which is scheduled for board approval this month.
- U School Room 305: The concrete repair has been completed and the roofing repairs above the area will be completed this evening. Plaster paint repair will start tomorrow, October 21. Students do not have access to this space.
- Baldi: The mold, as you know, already has been addressed. Work has begun regarding the insulation and is in progress.
- Franklin Elementary: This is in review; PFT indicated this issue occurred on October 8, 2021, but the District was made aware of this issue on October 15, 2021.

We all are working toward the same goal: achieving and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all students and staff in all of our buildings. We appreciate your partnership to move forward on a constructive basis to help us achieve regulatory standards, not compel us to conform to outside mandates that can exacerbate the disparities or challenges we already experience in our District.

Please feel free to reach out to discuss.

Sincerely,



William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D.

WRH/dpw

c: Alicia Prince, Chief of Staff
Reggie McNeil, Chief Operating Officer