



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

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November 9, 2021

Dear Members and Supporters of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition,

As I write in response to your November 2 correspondence, I feel compelled to first offer this reminder, which can too often be lost in rhetoric and the passion of our own convictions: All of us – the District staff, parent advocates, elected officials – are working toward the same goal. Every one of us wants every District building to be a safe and welcoming environment for our students and staff. Antagonism and accusations do not move us closer together toward that goal.

Our District, quite simply, cannot meet every need that it has with our current funding, yet we work every day toward achieving and sustaining compliance with the federal Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (“AHERA”) and City regulations. The persistent advocacy of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition is essential, and we remain grateful for it. The simple truth is that without additional sustained sources of funding, the District will continue to be unable to achieve everything we need for our children and our schools.

But we can, and indeed are, making improvements each day. And we are committed to working collaboratively with all our stakeholders toward the clear goal of meeting and sustaining compliance, even amid our funding challenges.

What we cannot do, and what thwarts progress, is forcing additional work streams that go far beyond what is prescribed by law and regulation and take us away from what is essential and required. Given our stark budget reality, accommodating selective requests will simply result in a denial to others. This is our reality, and these are the trade-offs that we must live with given our current funding.

We know that as a District we must strive to increase public trust and demonstrate consistent accountability; however, this should be achieved through equitable means and channels that lead us directly toward our shared goal.

As we said in our response to Philadelphia Federation of Teachers President Jerry Jordan on October 20, yet was mischaracterized in your letter by removing the context:

“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.”

Due to decades of underfunding, and despite the recent influx of federal funds, our facilities continue to face supply chain as well as District, City, and contractor labor capacity challenges. We are therefore appropriately focused on the regulatory requirements of the federal AHERA and the City’s Asbestos Control Regulations (“ACR”). Having an undefined, vague or fluctuating standard such as “best practices” creates significant confusion.

We understand why the notion of “best practices” can be appealing. However, adding undefined and potentially conflicting abatement obligations on a severely resource-constrained District will make it harder to manage asbestos and meet the existing regulatory obligations.

The District is working to improve the management of asbestos, abatement, aided by funding from the University of Pennsylvania and additional funding that District and advocates like the Coalition continue to seek. In fact, since summer 2020, we have done asbestos abatement work in 214 school buildings. Fundamental to our approach is a resolve that the District continue to focus on implementation of the requirements in AHERA and the ACR, which will inevitably result in better health and safety outcomes.

We understand the faith you have placed in PFT’s environmental consultant to raise public concerns and awareness. We have been working regularly with Jerry Roseman, who has toured several schools recently, despite your suggestion that we are not consistently permitting access. Mr. Roseman has been and will continue to be allowed to do joint walk-throughs when the District tours a site with contractors and conduct side-by-side testing after remediation of asbestos. However, it is important to note there may be instances when our clear responsibility is to be responsive to urgent issues, not to first coordinate with a third-party schedule.

Mr. Roseman, like other third parties, does not have the authority to explore school buildings without coordination with the District. We are working to develop a clear protocol around the work of third parties, including Mr. Roseman, so we can have clarity among all parties moving forward. The District also shares substantial information with Mr. Roseman via email, including information about scheduling of projects, project design, and sampling results where Mr. Roseman has indicated an interest in a project the District is undertaking.

Your remark about the certifications of OEMS leaders is correct. While the Director of OEMS is a Licensed Asbestos Project Supervisor, OEMS leaders are not listed as certified asbestos investigators; that is not their job. This is precisely why the District employs third-party, independent, certified, and licensed asbestos investigators and management planners to do this work.

We can provide this further update from 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. Our industrial hygienist inspected the conditions on several separate occasions. On October 18, 2021 she went to Room 215 to investigate musty odors. She discovered carpet that was wet and instructed the Building Engineer to dispose of it and he did. Mr. Roseman then viewed Room 215 a few days later and, contrary to District permissions, he removed ceiling tile and purportedly discovered mold. Thereafter, our industrial hygienist performed a comprehensive evaluation of Room 215 when occupants were not in the building. She removed ceiling tiles and discovered minor leaks and mold on fiberglass insulation on the first floor (there was nothing on the second floor). The evaluation was completed on October 29, 2021 and the report is forthcoming. The fiberglass will be cleaned of mold as soon as possible. The fiberglass will be removed/replaced in an upcoming capital project to update the HVAC system.
- **Furness:** The District will be able to address the vast majority of work orders through a paint and plaster project, which was just approved at the October board meeting.
- **U School:** The District has made it clear that the conditions are of concern to us and will be addressed.
- **Baldi:** The District does not believe that there are currently unanswered questions about Baldi.
- **Frankford:** Mold remediation activities began on September 20, 2021, and were completed on October 1, 2021. As a preventive measure for future mold growth, we conducted an environmental survey of all spaces in preparation for adding the appropriate ventilation. An environmental plan has been designed, and a contractor has been selected. The District will take approximately three weeks to complete the environmental project. After the environmental plan is successfully completed, we will move into the second phase which is the installation of ventilation equipment. The District received a proposal that includes replacing the chiller, four uni-vents, control work, two air handling units, related piping, and pipe insulation. All of this combined will address the recurring mold issues for the Instructional Media Center (IMC), music suite, and main office. The District anticipates this work being completed by the end of this calendar year.
- **Masterman:** Mr. Roseman's report on Masterman did not conclude that there was damaged asbestos material observed in the school. The District cannot agree that further evaluation is appropriate when there is no specific identified risk to address. Since the District's response to this report, additional asbestos insulation, in good condition, was removed from room 14 on November 4, 2021, in order to replace a pipe.
- **Heston:** The loose floor tiles in rooms 112 and 114 have been removed and new floor tiles have been installed.

Regarding the Healthy Schools App, we would reiterate that this app is not the District's database for managing reports of facility issues. Reporting through the PFT's preferred platform can create

an additional delay, and sometimes confusion, in the process of addressing the issues reported because the PFT takes time to vet the reports before providing the information to us. If the PFT wants to encourage timely reporting and remediation of such issues, it should recommend members immediately 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 the 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 with a full-time position managing the MOJO system to also monitor the Healthy Schools App, and to confirm the Healthy Schools App reports 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 does so without 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.

I will end where I began: We are all working toward the same goal. We welcome and indeed need your partnership and advocacy moving forward, not demands unrooted in law or regulation that will further exacerbate the financial challenges, resource deficiencies and disparities we are already enduring.

It is my sincere hope that you can remain in fruitful and productive conversation with us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William R. Hite, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

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

WRH/dpw