



PHILADELPHIA

FEDERATION of TEACHERS

Jerry T. Jordan, President

Press Conference on 2022 Full Funding Budget January 31, 2022 | Virtual

Good morning, I'm Jerry Jordan, President of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Thank you to my Senator Vincent Hughes, for his ongoing fortitude and partnership in our ongoing efforts towards equity in public education. One of the most glaring examples of systemic inequity in public education, and I would say in our society at large, is the devastating facilities crisis that for far too long has had horrific consequences for our school communities.

Our schools, which educate primarily Black and brown children, a majority of whom are experiencing poverty, are subject to conditions that in a wealthier, whiter school district would simply never be tolerated.

And here are just some of the faces of this crisis:

- Antione Little, Jr., then 7 years old, who received an electric shock resulting in an open burn from faulty wiring at T M Peirce School.
- Dean Pagan, then a first grader at Comly Elementary, in his desire to keep his desk tidy, ate lead paint chips that were raining down on him in his classroom. His life is forever altered after suffering lead poisoning.
- Chelsea Mungo, then a fourth grader at Cassidy Elementary, who wrote to Senator Vincent Hughes and asked why the color of her skin meant that her school got less funding, and described her school's environment feeling like a 'junkyard.'
- Chris Trakimas, an SEIU worker who died after a boiler explosion at FS Edmonds School in 2016.
- And Lea DiRusso, a veteran District teacher, forced into early retirement after a devastating mesothelioma diagnosis, after spending her entire career teaching in classrooms with known damaged asbestos.

These are real, human beings, who face absolutely gut-wrenching consequences from this facilities crisis.

In the 2019-2020 school year alone, eleven schools were closed due to imminent asbestos hazards.

Imagine, Senator Hughes, going into a school in one of the wealthier school districts in your senate district, and seeing the conditions we saw a couple years ago at Randolph High School? **It was pouring rain that early morning visit—but it was not only pouring outside. It was pouring rain inside the building.** Pouring. Electrical hazards, gaping holes in the walls and ceilings, damage at every turn. But go to a wealthier part of the seventh senatorial district, and you will see weather centers, state-of-the-art athletic facilities—all the resources that *every child* across the Commonwealth so richly deserves.

And yet those billions of dollars sitting in Pennsylvania’s rainy day fund? They’re still there. Even though it’s quite literally raining in our schools.

Further, amidst a global pandemic the likes of which none of us has ever seen, securing even the most fundamental safety provisions for our schools has been yet another painful reminder of just how devastating the infrastructure crisis is in our schools. From fighting for adequate ventilation to ensuring bathrooms are stocked with soap, it’s a sad reality that these ‘must-haves’ are considered ‘nice-to-haves’ by too many people in positions of power.

And yet, the Republican-controlled state legislature has continued to throw up its hands and essentially say to our young people: so what. It stops now. There is a plan to move us forward. There are so many other areas of need that the plan, developed by Senator Hughes and his team, will help address. And the \$1.1 Billion investment to truly address the toxic schools crisis will be an historic component of this urgently needed plan.

This union plans to fight tirelessly to advocate for its passage. Because we know what Senator Hughes and so many others are laying out today will have real, tangible impacts on our young people and school communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and to continue our collective fight for a better tomorrow, a more equitable tomorrow.