



# PHILADELPHIA

## FEDERATION of TEACHERS

**Jerry T. Jordan, President**

**Testimony Submission: Basic Education Funding Commission**

**September 14, 2023**

---

On behalf of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and the more than 13,000 members we represent, I am pleased to be here today to offer insight into the urgency of rectifying the decades-long disinvestment that has left our young people—a majority of whom are Black and Brown and experiencing poverty—shortchanged year after year.

While the focus of my testimony today is not on the ongoing facilities crisis per-se, I would be remiss not to discuss the impacts of last week’s heat wave on the first week of school. As you know, over 1/3 of District schools were dismissed early, which was of course an immediate response to the situation before us: a heat wave. But the dismissals are actually emblematic of a [much larger crisis](#)<sup>1</sup>, and that is the **ongoing refusal by our Commonwealth and quite frankly our country, to provide Black and Brown children the resources they need to thrive**. And that manifests itself in countless ways each day, including learning in buildings so old and with such deferred maintenance that their electrical systems could not even handle air conditioning units even if they were provided. *The buildings in which we expect our students to learn and our educators and staff to work would never be deemed acceptable in a wealthier, whiter school district.*

While the focus of my testimony today is on trauma and stress and its impact in and out of the classroom, the facilities crisis is an *egregious example* of how **our societal failures have perpetuated ongoing stress and trauma**. I have heard countless of our youth speak out about the message that the state of facilities imparts upon them: that no matter how much their teacher cares about them, *learning in a dilapidated school building gives them quite another message.*

And therein lies the crux of the impact of underfunding: students, families, and staff alike can do all the ‘right things’ to help our students grow and thrive. But when that growth is stymied by an ongoing refusal to invest in their futures, our young people suffer profoundly.

---

1

(2023, September 6). *PFT PRESIDENT JERRY JORDAN ON ONGOING HEAT WAVE, URGENT NEED FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS & REMEDIATION*. Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Retrieved September 10, 2023, from <https://pft.org/heatwave>

There are countless studies and reports on what the real life impacts of the ongoing underfunding has on our young people. I am providing a few research reports and recommendations with my testimony, and want to highlight this one quote, which comes from a [summary](#) of an Albert Shanker Institute study<sup>2</sup> titled *Segregation and School Funding: How Housing Discrimination Reproduces Unequal Opportunity*:

*Breaking the cycle of segregation and K–12 funding inequity will require deliberate, large-scale interventions on both the housing and school finance sides of the equation. But the first steps are to acknowledge that racial/ethnic segregation and unequal educational opportunity are inextricably connected and to understand the history of how that came to be.*

That is the solution. Investing in our young people and a deliberate, dedicated commitment to breaking down systems of oppression that have led us to this moment we are in today.

For decades, **our union has been at the forefront of the fight for equity and justice**. And recently, the AFT launched a campaign that identifies and makes key investments in *Real Solutions for Kids and Communities*. You'll see in some of the accompanying [documents](#)<sup>34</sup> that I've shared that resources are key. The AFT lays out a host of recommendations, including the expansion of the **community schools** model. And by resources, that means investing in human capital— it means additional school counselors, nurses, support staff; and it means lowering class size and increasing pay.

*The last several years have been incredibly challenging, and the impact of many of the crises across this nation have been acutely felt by children of color and children experiencing poverty.* And to navigate that trauma and stress, our young people need resources— resources that the government has historically refused to provide.

In an article on [Reimagining School Safety](#), authors Heather M. Reynolds and Ron Avi Astor note,

*The COVID-19 pandemic and recent racial justice movements have made it very apparent that our current approaches to keeping students safe and healthy in schools need major restructuring*

---

<sup>2</sup> Editors. (2022). What We're Reading: The Enduring Impact of Housing Segregation on School Funding. *American Educator*, 46(4), 40. <https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2022-2023/wwr>

<sup>3</sup>

Weingarten, R. (2023). Addressing Loneliness, Learning Loss, and Literacy. *American Educator*, 47(3), 64-70. <https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2023/weingarten>

<sup>4</sup> Weingarten, R. (2023). Where We Stand: Real Solutions for Loneliness, Learning Loss, and Literacy. *American Educator*, 47(3), 1. <https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2023/wws>

*and reform. We lack mental health supports in many schools at a time when students need them most.*

They go on to note that “[r]ecent data show that 14 million students in the United States attend schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.” And they conclude that “[a] large body of research has demonstrated the positive impact of whole-school and whole-child prevention approaches that focus on developing and maintaining a welcoming and supportive climate and minimizing the removal of students from school.”<sup>5</sup>

This is what the AFT is talking about when they outline [What Kids Need](#).<sup>67</sup>

And finally, but most certainly not least, I want to address the **crisis of gun violence** and the devastating impact it has had on our young people. Last [school year alone](#), thirty three of Philadelphia’s public school students were killed and 199 were shot.<sup>8</sup> School communities endured shootings on or near school campuses, and communities across the city endured the ongoing and profound havoc this crisis wreaks. Many students come into school having endured the loss of a loved one.

And once again, the thrust of this crisis is **systems of disinvestment and oppression**. In a 2022 article for Center for American Progress, Marissa Edmund [clearly illustrates](#) what this means:

*Notably, gun violence has a disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities and is highly concentrated in a relatively small number of neighborhoods that have historically been underresourced and racially segregated. This is due to a combination of weak gun laws; systemic racial inequities, including unequal access to safe housing and adequate educational and*

---

5

Reynolds, H. M., & Astor, R. A. (2023). Reimagining School Safety. *American Educator*, 47(1), 22-25. [https://www.aft.org/ae/spring2023/reynolds\\_astor](https://www.aft.org/ae/spring2023/reynolds_astor)

<sup>6</sup>(2022, July 14). *FACT SHEET: ‘What Kids and Communities Need’ Campaign*. American Federation of Teachers. Retrieved September 10, 2023, from [www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/wkn\\_fact\\_sheet\\_2022\\_final.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/wkn_fact_sheet_2022_final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> (n.d.). *‘What Kids and Communities Need’*. American Federation of Teachers. Retrieved September 10, 2023, from <https://www.aft.org/whatkidsneed>

<sup>8</sup>(2023, August 31). *PFT PRESIDENT JERRY JORDAN JOINS CEASEFIREPA, CONGRESSWOMAN MARY GAY SCANLON, AND ADVOCACY PARTNERS TO CALL FOR ACTION ON GUN LEGISLATION*. Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Retrieved September 10, 2023, from <https://pft.org/ceasefirepa>

*employment opportunities; and a history of disinvestment in public infrastructure and services in the communities of color most affected by gun violence.*<sup>9</sup>

And here's what we know: **there are solutions, and the solutions are resource dependent.** Who can argue that the crisis so devastatingly outlined by Edmund above, and so viscerally felt each day across our city, does not need to be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic way?

Everytown USA, a national gun safety advocacy organization, has [outlined](#), in the literature I have shared with you, both school and non-school based solutions, ranging from gun safety laws to school investments.<sup>10</sup>

There are no quick and easy 'fixes' for a system that has been perpetuated by decades of disinvestment. But here's what we know right now: the court has ruled with finality that **the system by which we fund public education in our Commonwealth is inequitable**, it is unconstitutional, and it must be fixed; and it **must be fixed by the legislative and executive branches.**

Every lawmaker in our Commonwealth owes it to our young people to once and for all address the disinvestment that caused then fourth grader **Chelsea Mungo** to write to **Senator Hughes** and tell him that her school felt like a 'junkyard.'<sup>11</sup> Shame on anyone who sees Chelsea's pleas and those of students before and after her and refuses to act with the urgency this crisis demands.

I thank everyone here for their attention to this crucial issue, and I **urge you to act swiftly.** There are a number of resources and studies that I have included with my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

---

<sup>9</sup> Edmund, M. (2022). Gun Violence Disproportionately and Overwhelmingly Hurts Communities of Color. *Center for American Progress*.  
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/gun-violence-disproportionately-and-overwhelmingly-hurts-communities-of-color/>

<sup>10</sup> Editors. (2022). Keeping Students Safe from Gun Violence. *American Educator*, 46(4), 11-13.  
<https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2022-2023/everytown>

<sup>11</sup>(n.d.). *The Children of Philadelphia Have Been Attending Toxic Schools for Years. This Is a National Crisis.* Senator Hughes. Retrieved September 10, 2023, from  
<https://www.senatorhughes.com/the-children-of-philadelphia-have-been-attending-toxic-schools-for-years-this-is-a-national-crisis/>