

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the joint City Council Committees on Education and Children & Youth to hold hearings exploring the creation of a School District of Philadelphia Chief of Joy.

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia has specifically identified joy as one of its six Core Values, touting: “Joy inspires active engagement and belonging.” Furthermore, *Accelerate Philly*, the School District’s 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, specifically identifies “prioritizing the social-emotional well-being, mental health, and intellectual and physical safety of all students and staff” as a critical component of the School District of Philadelphia’s current Theory of Action; and

WHEREAS, In Philadelphia and around the country, mental health issues have become increasingly prevalent among young people. The City of Philadelphia’s gun violence crisis, has meant that there is a pressing need for safe havens and sites of socioemotional and trauma-informed supports in neighborhoods across our City, especially for young people who live and attend school in neighborhoods with the highest rates of gun violence; and

WHEREAS, Despite the potential for Philadelphia schools to provide such socioemotional supports to young people, their families, and the broader community, Philadelphia schools have historically failed to offer sufficient mental health and trauma supports, and mental health and trauma have historically not been top investment priorities in setting the School District’s budget; and

WHEREAS, Leading researchers and thinkers on education have identified joy as one essential pillar of creating socioemotionally safe and supportive schools, as well as a driver of student achievement. Classroom practices that promote joy, such as use of toys to model real world student experiences, are found to enhance student excellence, collectivism, expression, and engagement; and

WHEREAS, Ensuring that our schools are equipped with essential avenues for joy-recess, rest, arts, music, and other enriching experiences-may also improve students’ attendance, as well as their mental and physical health; and

WHEREAS, In light of the School District’s emphasis on joy as a Core Value, and the centrality of joy in the School District of Philadelphia’s current strategic plan, there is a clear need for a designated position within the School District of Philadelphia Administration that concentrates on how joy is created and sustained within Philadelphia schools, and how School District of Philadelphia policies and programs are infused with joy; and

WHEREAS, A School District of Philadelphia Chief of Joy would institutionalize the School District’s commitment to joy as a Core Value. This position would focus on dismantling dehumanizing practices, such as restrictions on water or bathroom breaks and collective punishment, that have become all too common in Philadelphia schools, as well as designing and implementing policies and programs that uphold the humanity and dignity of students and staff alike; and

WHEREAS, A Chief of Joy may also work to establish new standards and guarantees to ensure that schools are

infused with opportunities for joy and enriching student experiences, both in and beyond the classroom. The position would also be tasked with evaluating and addressing resource gaps and barriers to children's well-being, and aligning School District departments and programs to systematically achieve concrete outcomes; and

WHEREAS, A School District of Philadelphia Chief of Joy would also conduct a joy audit, which would enable School District of Philadelphia leadership to identify how School District policies, programs, and practices may dehumanize, rather than uplift, students and their families, and to find innovative ways to ensure that these policies, programs and practices reinforce joy, which may further enhance student achievement and outcomes; and

WHEREAS, In order for our schools to be places of learning and growth, they must be places of joy; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes the joint City Council Committees on Education and Children & Youth hold hearings exploring the creation of a School District of Philadelphia Chief of Joy, a senior-level administrator who would, amongst other responsibilities, conduct a joy audit, dismantle dehumanizing School District practices, and design and implement policies and programs that uphold the humanity and dignity of School District students, teachers, and staff.