

## Legislation Text

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Honoring and recognizing Evette Denise Jones, a caring educator, fierce advocate, and a lifelong community builder, who has tirelessly fought for the children, teachers, and parents of Philadelphia and for schools that meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

WHEREAS, Evette Denise Jones created community wherever she went, forging bonds between educators, students, parents, and neighbors through her fierce love and care for all of those around her, her always-open door, and her tireless fight against injustices across the City; and

WHEREAS, Born and raised in North Philadelphia by a single mother and the second youngest of seven siblings, Jones has dedicated her life to serving and caring for the community she grew up in and for children across the City; and

WHEREAS, Jones was a born educator; she realized that teaching was her calling as a child, after being inspired by her 4th-grade teacher, Ms. Trawick; her mother encouraged her passion, giving her a blackboard, which she used to teach her siblings; and

WHEREAS, Jones went to public schools, graduating from Roxborough High School, where she displayed the talent and work ethic that would serve our city's children so well, starring in the school play, becoming a member of the varsity basketball team and varsity cheerleading squad and graduating 10th in her class; and

WHEREAS, Encouraged by teachers who recognized her potential, and by her mother who always stressed the value of education, Jones applied for college and received several full-ride scholarships; choosing to attend Temple University Ambler Campus; and

WHEREAS, After working her way through Temple, Jones graduated and was finally able to pursue her calling, first as a substitute teacher at Thomas Mifflin Elementary before working at Ivy Leaf for two years until she was hired full-time by the School District of Philadelphia to teach at Edward T. Steel Elementary starting in 1985 and later at Grover Cleveland Elementary; and

WHEREAS, Jones chose to teach in public schools in North Philadelphia to give back and work in her community, and to show her students that someone who was raised in poverty in their neighborhood could succeed; and

WHEREAS, Jones educated her students, but also cared for them; when students would come into class in winter without a jacket or a hat, she would make sure the child received one, even if it came from her own paycheck; always ensuring that her help did not make parents feel shame, often telling them how she received assistance from her community when she was growing up; and

WHEREAS, Jones made her children feel special and loved, particularly around the holidays; when some families in hard times were unable to give presents to their kids, Jones made sure that every student went home with a gift for Christmas and a basket for Easter; and

WHEREAS, Jones made sure her students knew that there was a world outside their neighborhood and that it was as much theirs as anyone else's, taking her students on a trip every month to places like the Franklin Institute, the Philadelphia Art Museum, or to eat in Center City; and

WHEREAS, Jones was a part of her student's lives, walking them home if they were scared, making house visits when issues arose, and attending their birthday parties; and

WHEREAS, Jones changed the lives of the students who sat in her classroom, and many have kept in touch with her over the years; they have become doctors, teachers and public servants, dedicating their lives, like Jones, to their community; and

WHEREAS, Jones never stopped creating community and always made her school into a center of joy and sustenance for the neighborhood, organizing events like a yearly Thanksgiving feast for the school community where all could share in a holiday meal, and leftovers went to the local homeless shelter; and

WHEREAS, Because Jones understood that parents and teachers are partners in educating their children, she kept her door open so that parents knew they were always welcome, and she made it clear that she was both an advocate for their children and for the whole community; and

WHEREAS, After more than a decade as a teacher, Jones started working for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), where she was a powerful voice for teachers and worked to build bridges between educators and parents; and

WHEREAS, Just as she did as a teacher, Jones wanted parents to see her and PFT as partners, as she knew that parents are always the first teachers; Jones often attended Home and School meetings, building solidarity by listening to the concerns that parents had and sharing the problems that teachers faced; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of her deep relationships with parents across the city and her ability to organize and build connections inside and outside school walls, in 2012, Jones became the Community Relations Liaison for PFT; and

WHEREAS, As Community Relations Liaison, Jones went to neighborhoods across the city; her first question was always what could she and PFT do to help their community; and

WHEREAS, When corporate interests and corrupt politicians set their sights on privatizing and dismembering the Philadelphia school system, Jones was there to help lead the fight, fortified by the strong bonds between parents, students and teachers that she had spent her life building; and

WHEREAS, Jones was a founding member of Parents Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS), bringing together parents and teachers from across the city in a battle for the survival of public education, against lawmakers in Harrisburg and the School Reform Commission (SRC), which sought massive school closures; and

WHEREAS, With the future of public education on the line, Jones tirelessly traversed the city with passion and love; a force behind the bullhorn and never at a loss for words about injustice, she spoke at churches, rallies, and marches, and worked arm in arm with Youth United, Parents United, Fight for Philly, The Philadelphia Home and School Council, and any community group or church that would step up for public education; and

WHEREAS, Jones was a powerful advocate in stopping the takeover of Steel Elementary-where she used to teach-helping to mobilize the parents, teachers, and community that she served and knew so well; and

WHEREAS, The people-centered movement that Jones helped build, turned back the tyranny of Harrisburg and the greed of private interests, saving dozens of schools from closure, and eventually ending the School Reform Commission itself, a victory for generations of Philadelphia's children that once seemed impossible; and

WHEREAS, Jones and her fellow PCAP organizers had a vision for Philadelphia schools, born from their deep knowledge and experience in classrooms across the city, one where children were not starved of resources but where schools are embedded in and serve their community, abundantly meeting the needs of the neighborhood, providing food for those who need it, space for cultural learning and exchange, education for parents as well as students, a strong sense community, and a safe, welcoming public space where all can have their needs met; and

WHEREAS, PCAPS's people-centered plan took root, and when Mayor Jim Kenney was elected, their plan started to become a reality, leading to the 20 community schools that exist today and serve thousands of students, parents, and community members alike; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of all that Jones has done for public education in Philadelphia, and the bridges she built between teachers and parents, The Philadelphia Home and School Council awarded Jones with a lifetime achievement award; and

WHEREAS, Jones' grand political victories over corporate interests and the lives she has changed one winter jacket or Thanksgiving meal at a time are powerful examples of what is possible when we open our arms to our community, when we see all children as our children, and when we come together to demand that those in power act for the benefit of those who they serve; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors and recognizes Evette Denise Jones, a caring educator, fierce advocate, and a lifelong community builder, who has tirelessly fought for the children, teachers, and parents of Philadelphia and for schools that meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Evette Denise Jones, as an expression of the admiration and respect of this legislative body.