City of Philadelphia

City Council
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Title: Authorizing the Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Education to conduct hearings evaluating needs and identifying priorities for services and supports to strengthen Philadelphia schools.

Sponsors: Councilmember Gym, Councilmember Blackwell, Councilmember Jones, Councilmember Greenlee, Councilmember Parker, Councilmember Henon

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result	Tally
5/6/2019	0	Joint Committees on Children & Youth and Education			
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Authorizing the Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Education to conduct hearings evaluating needs and identifying priorities for services and supports to strengthen Philadelphia schools.

WHEREAS, In 2016, City Council's Committees on Children & Youth and Education held hearings to assess the cumulative impact of reduced state funding on vulnerable student populations as well as on Philadelphia school safety, essential services, and academic outcomes; and

WHEREAS, Since 2016, the school funding crisis has stabilized due to an unprecedented increase in local taxes, which now make up 50 percent of the School District's funding, as well as efforts taken by the City and the School District to mitigate these devastating cuts and to protect Philadelphia's most vulnerable students; and

WHEREAS, After decades of financial instability, the School District of Philadelphia is now in a position to invest. In December 2018, Moody's Investor Services announced that it had upgraded the School District's underlying bond rating by two notches, declaring its outlook as "stable", and applauding improved City finances, new revenues, and strong District management. Superintendent William Hite has remarked that, "Our schools and students can rely on continued investments without the uncertainty of sudden cuts in services"; and

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WHEREAS, The return of Philadelphia schools to local control represents an opportunity to evaluate District strategy for investments in essential services and supports. The last three years has been a period of restoration, as nurses and counselors have been returned to schools, teachers have been given a contract, and school closures have ceased. It is time that such a period of restoration is succeeded by one where priorities for new spending are shaped by our school communities themselves; and

WHEREAS, Despite this stabilization in school funding, our schools are still operating with severe deficiencies and are unable to fully meet the needs of Philadelphia children, and particularly impact populations such as special education students and immigrant students and their families; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania schools have suffered decades of unconstitutional underfunding. While *William Penn et al. v. PA Dept. of Ed. et al*. will be heard in Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court in Summer 2020, litigation has not yet resulted in changes to the current funding levels; and

WHEREAS, The fiscal health of the School District must also be measured by the supports and opportunities provided to its students. Currently, there is one counselor for every 392 students, while the American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 ratio. Many School District buildings are in a state of disrepair, and contain lead and asbestos, while a lack of air conditioning resulted in at least five reduced instructional days this school year. Very few schools have any position dedicated to building bridges with parents and the surrounding community, and far too few have a social worker that can support the trauma-informed social and emotional intervention needs of students and families. Two-thirds of Philadelphia elementary schools lack playgrounds. As of the end of 2018, there were 264 vacancies in facilities-related positions, and there are currently 25 special education teaching vacancies; and

WHEREAS, The voices of students, caregivers, and families must be considered during the School District budget process, and the priorities and needs of these communities must be reflected in the FY20 budget and the District’s long-term agenda; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes the Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Education to conduct hearings evaluating needs and identifying priorities for services and supports to strengthen Philadelphia schools.

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