

## Legislation Text

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Calling on the School District of Philadelphia to promptly negotiate a mutually agreeable new contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers that prioritizes the health and safety of school staff and students and acknowledges the contributions of teachers and other staff, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHEREAS, On August 31, 2020, the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) expired with no new agreement in place; and

WHEREAS, The PFT represents over 13,000 individuals working in Philadelphia schools as teachers, counselors, nurses, secretaries, librarians, paraprofessionals, and more. These workers are the lifeblood of our public schools, and their support of young people and families has been an invaluable source of stability during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for teachers and other school employees, including the rapid transition to virtual instruction. PFT members have nevertheless risen to meet these challenges, even though many youth and their families lack reliable access to the internet and have suffered from the health and economic fallout of COVID; and

WHEREAS, The eventual return to in-person instruction will bring additional challenges, including the necessity of safeguarding the health and safety of student, teachers, and staff; and

WHEREAS, The PFT has led the fight for healthy schools, partnering in the founding of the Philadelphia Healthy Schools Initiative, developing a school-based mobile application to report dangerous building conditions, decrying faulty construction, and supporting school communities and parents who have demanded school improvements. In August 2020, the PFT led a coalition of educators, school administrators, support staff, parents, caregivers, community members, and students to demand that the 2020-2021 school year begin virtually, given the grave threat to health and safety that COVID-19 continued to pose; and

WHEREAS, Before COVID-19, the state of Philadelphia's public school buildings threatened the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff. On August 19, 2020, the School District's Office of the Inspector General published a review of the Ben Franklin High School and Science Leadership Academy building merger, finding that a "series of critical missteps across the planning, design, and construction" would have compromised the health and safety of students and staff. This "cautionary tale" emphasizes the need for a contract that includes assurances of a safe reopening of school buildings, including regular, thorough cleaning of school buildings, access to personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies, and an effective process for reporting health and safety violations in school buildings; and

WHEREAS, A fair contract is necessary to ensure that these challenges are addressed along with traditional aspects of labor-management relations, such as compensation and working conditions; and

WHEREAS, A fair contract is necessary to retain teachers in the School District, a lesson the City learned during the near four years that PFT members went without a contract under the state takeover. During that time

period, the District struggled to fill positions, resulting in debilitating vacancies across the system. District employees, families, and children suffered as a result; and

WHEREAS, The School District has improved its fiscal health substantially in recent years, due in large part to significant increases in financial support from Council, but continues to face fiscal limitations. Those limitations are a direct result of the ongoing failure of the Pennsylvania General Assembly to meet its constitutional obligation “for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education.” As such, both the PFT and the City must continue to partner with the School District to advocate for adequate state financial support; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That this Body calls on the School District of Philadelphia to promptly negotiate a mutually agreeable new contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers that prioritizes the health and safety of school staff and students and acknowledges the contributions of teachers and other staff, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.