

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committees on Education and on Public Health and Human Services to hold joint hearings examining the School District of Philadelphia's preparedness for public health and environmental emergencies, and to develop best practices that can help the District adequately prepare for these emergencies.

WHEREAS, In October of the 2019-2020 academic year, the Benjamin Franklin High School and Science Leadership Academy campus was closed due to high levels of asbestos found in separate areas of the building; and

WHEREAS, The School District's environmental staff and outside firms failed to identify the presence of asbestos inside the Benjamin Franklin High School and Science Leadership Academy campus buildings before beginning construction work in 2018, causing workers to damage the asbestos and spread the carcinogen while students and staff were still in the building; and

WHEREAS, According to an investigation conducted by the School District of Philadelphia's Inspector General, throughout the 2018-2019 academic year, "the Benjamin Franklin High School community endured an intolerable experience" in an "environment inundated with noise, frequently soiled with dust and construction debris, and were asked to teach or learn in that same environment"; and

WHEREAS, Witnesses noted the impossibility of the school staff to keep the building clean; inconsistent efforts to contain high levels of dust and debris escaping from the construction area in an occupied building; constant construction noise that disturbed instruction, testing, and daily interactions, and created insufferable conditions for certain special education students; and staff members and students falling ill, suffering health complications, and being hospitalized; and

WHEREAS, Over time, exposure to asbestos in the air can cause asbestosis, pleural disease, lung cancer, mesothelioma, and other cancers to the larynx, ovary, pharynx, stomach, and colorectum. The asbestos exposure that students and staff have experienced has put their future long term health at risk; and

WHEREAS, It is imperative that City Council, the Philadelphia Board of Education, and District parents, students, and staff have a clear understanding of the District's plan to dismantle the structure and culture that allowed this aforementioned incident to happen, along with constant updates on the progress of this plan; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the Committees on Education and on Public Health and Human Services to hold joint hearings examining the School District of Philadelphia's preparedness for public health and environmental emergencies, and to develop best practices that can help the District adequately prepare for these emergencies.