

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

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August 15, 2014

Open Letter from Superintendent William R. Hite:

Today, just three weeks from school opening, we once again find ourselves having to make unbelievably tough choices. As we announced more than a month ago, we have an \$81 million shortfall in our current year budget, which must be closed through additional revenues or cost reductions.

For the sake of minimizing disruptions for families and for the sake of educating children, we have made the decision to make a series of additional, difficult – and, hopefully, temporary – cuts in order to open schools on time.

In reaching this decision, we focused primarily on the hardship that not opening schools on time would create for students and families – most importantly, the loss of classroom time for students. As a school district, our priority is maximizing the opportunity for student learning. To delay school opening – during which time we would be required to continue paying employees, make our charter school payments, and meet other contract costs, all while students are not being educated – punishes students for adult failures.

We also took into account the fact that delaying school opening until we have more certainty about additional revenues potentially could further exacerbate our deficit if, for example, additional students exited to charter schools.

Finally, we considered the public assurances we have received from the Governor and the House Majority Leader that they will do everything they can to ensure that the cigarette tax authorizing legislation is passed when the General Assembly returns next month. We appreciate the ongoing support and leadership of the Philadelphia delegation, the Mayor and City Council in this effort.

Weighing all of these factors, we determined that opening on time with these further cuts was the least harmful decision for students and families. Accordingly, we are implementing the following service reductions:

- High school students who live within two (2) miles of school will not receive transportation support (an increase from 1.5 miles). As a result, approximately 7,500 students at District, charter, and non-public schools will no longer receive transportation support.
- Approximately 300 students will be impacted by reduced services in the multiple pathways to graduation programs, which will result in fewer higher-quality options for students.
- Elimination of preparation and professional development before school opening for teachers at some of our most challenged schools, the Promise Academies.

- Schools will be cleaned less frequently and have access to fewer cleaning supplies; repairs at schools will be delayed.
- The District will leave school police officer vacancies unfilled, reducing the overall number of officers available to support school climate and safety.
- Additional departmental staffing reductions will result in reduced direct support for schools and families. Details regarding these reductions will be announced as we work through a process with our staff.

We are also assuming – and these are high-risk assumptions – that we will be able to negotiate lower pricing with key vendors, realize significant revenues from additional building sales, and keep our charter school payments manageable through state payments solely for authorized enrollment levels.

As we cut so deeply into our core functions, we again implore our funders and several labor unions to help prevent further harm to our schools and our students' educational experience.

We implore our state legislators to quickly enact the Philadelphia-only cigarette tax, which is expected to generate approximately \$49 million this year if implemented by October 1<sup>st</sup>. Each month of delay in authorizing this tax results in the loss of millions of dollars of revenue.

We implore the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) to make concessions in line with those already made by principals, blue-collar workers and non-represented staff. We are not seeking across-the-board wage reductions from the PFT, but rather benefits changes that would enable us to restore essential services to schools.

If the state and the PFT do not find a way to close what remains of the \$81 million gap after the cuts announced today, we will be forced in mid-October to cut into school budgets, which can only mean increased class sizes and an increase in combined or "split" classes.

To be clear, filling our \$81 million gap will only allow the District to return the inadequate and insufficient resources schools had last year. To make transformative investments in our schools, we need both new recurring revenues, including a fair funding formula at the state level and responsible cost restructuring, and overdue reforms to our employee benefits structure.

Adults have the power to make right the wrong being done to our students and schools. Providing all children with a rich, high-quality education is not only a basic right, but a moral obligation. I am hopeful that all Philadelphians will join with the District in pursuing what is best for students.

Sincerely,



William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D