



**Testimony to the Senate Democratic Policy Hearing
Staffing Shortages in Education
February 1, 2022**

Good Morning, Chair Muth, Senator Williams, and distinguished members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee. I am Larisa Shambaugh, Chief Talent Officer for the School District of Philadelphia. I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with information on staffing shortages in education.

About the District

First, I would like to provide you with information on the District. We are the eighth largest school district in the nation as a community of over 19,000 caring employees working together with parents, families, volunteers and community members to support the limitless potential of almost 125,000 students in the District and over 200,000 students both in Districts and charters.

We are proud of the progress we have made. In just the last four years, more than half of our schools have improved on one or more metrics in the District's School Progress Report. We have doubled the number of high performing schools and cut in half the number of low performing schools. Our four year graduation rate is increasing and we have more students earning industry credentials and enrolling in Advance Placement and dual enrollment classes.

We have also stabilized our finances and made targeted investments. Since 2017, we have regained local control of the District and our bond rating has been upgraded to investment grade for the first time since 1977. With new funding from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia, we invested in our students and schools by refilling over 2,500 teaching and support staff positions, adding academic programs, strengthening behavioral supports for our most at-risk students and reestablishing extracurricular activities. We also invested in our buildings by modernizing classrooms, upgrading technology for students and staff, making much-needed repairs and remediating environmental hazards.

Staffing Overview

We know that the progress seen in recent years has not been possible without the tremendous contributions of great teachers, transformational leaders, and essential support staff. I am humbled to work alongside so many tremendous individuals and so grateful to know Philadelphia's young people are being supported and cared for by individuals so dedicated to our young people.

In general, we have seen tremendous progress in our ability to staff the District. In recent years, we have successfully had approximately 99% of our leader and teacher roles filled by the time school begins so that all of our classrooms and schools are set up for success from day one. This year, despite the challenges of the pandemic, we began the school year with 99% of school leader roles filled and 98% of teacher roles filled. We have also maintained a commitment to teacher diversity, where we see about 31% of our teachers who identify as teachers of color.

However, staffing challenges that have always been present have been exacerbated by the pandemic:

- As teachers have left our District, we have not been able to fill these positions throughout the year at the rate we were previously able to meet. Our support positions continue to be areas of concern and focus for my staffing team.
- In a year where we have seen a sharp increase in teacher absences for a variety of legitimate reasons, the shortage of substitute teachers who are interested in picking up coverage in schools has resulted in many teachers not having a substitute when they are not able to come into the building. Our colleagues are making this work, by sacrificing their prep periods and lunch periods; by teaching rather than coaching, administering, and more; and by consistently making the choice that they are committed to ensuring SDP students can keep going to school in person whenever it is possible.
- Other critical areas have arisen including the nationwide shortage of nurses that has made it difficult to fill our needs for school nurses.
- Other operational and support roles have also impacted day to day operations, including the need in our District as well as across the state for bus drivers. We also see an ongoing need in our instructional support positions, such as paraprofessionals, as well as operational support roles in maintenance and food service.

Statewide Issue, Statewide Solutions

What we are experiencing is not limited to Philadelphia. We can all point to examples of staffing shortages in rural, suburban, and urban school districts across the Commonwealth. And, while the pandemic has accelerated and amplified school staffing shortages, the long-term needs have been on our radar and need long-term solutions.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), between 2013 and 2019, the number of people seeking teaching certification in Pennsylvania shrunk by more than 65 percent. During a similar time period the number of emergency permits issued by the Department more than doubled.

While this is a statewide problem, the effects can be felt acutely in underfunded districts that serve primarily students of color – districts like Philadelphia. According to Pennsylvania's State

Plan for Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators for All Students, during the 2016-2017 school year, the eight districts with the greatest number of unfilled vacancies were all Title I districts. And in six of those eight districts, Philadelphia being one, the majority of students served were students of color.

The District is working on a variety of initiatives and projects to address our staffing shortages directly. However, as some solutions are shared across local, state, and private system, I would like to close with three key areas that could help us address staffing challenges both here in Philadelphia and across the Commonwealth:

1. **Adequate and Equitable Funding:** Due to chronic underfunding at the state level, the School District of Philadelphia is at a competitive staffing disadvantage. Our financial position forces us to make decisions based on the revenue available. As a result, staff at the School District, on average, make less than their peers working in better-funded suburban districts. Additionally, our staff are more likely to work in old school buildings where limited revenue has forced the District to defer maintenance projects in favor of adding critical staff and investing in classrooms.

Despite our funding challenges, the School District has worked hard to address these issues. Last fall, the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers agreed to a new contract that includes a nine percent raise over the life of the contract. Additionally, the School District will spend more than \$2 billion, a combination of local borrowing and federal stimulus funding, over the next five years to improve the conditions of our school buildings. But without adequate and equitable funding, districts like Philadelphia will continue to face challenges. As a result, adequate and equitable state funding must be the foundation from which additional staffing strategies are built upon – this has to be the starting place.

2. **Strengthen the Teacher Pipeline:** As noted above, Pennsylvania has seen a significant decline in the percentage of individuals seeking teacher certifications. At the district level, we have put in place several programs already to address this issue. For example, for the past four years we have implemented a teacher residency program with local university partners and have increased the total number of participants each year. Additionally, we are currently working with our local teachers union to develop a pathway for our own paraprofessionals to obtain degrees and become certified teachers (more information on that will be shared by the District in February). Lastly, we have relied on the emergency certification procedures laid out by the state to expand our pipeline of educators that are coming in from non-traditional pathways. We are grateful for the support for flexibility during the pandemic from the state that have allowed them to continue teaching with emergency certification.

In recent years, we have been able to supplement our efforts by participating in two state level initiatives – – *Aspiring to Educate* and *Innovative Teacher and Principal Residency Grants*. Both programs were designed to increase not only the pipeline of individuals seeking educator certifications but also the number of educators of color. We appreciate the commitment to funding innovative programs designed to address pipeline issues. We are hopeful that these types of state-level programs can be scaled and funded annually. Currently, within the General Assembly, there are a number of bills that would help us get to this point.

A great example of a long-term sustainable program that we would like to see in Pennsylvania is Senator Hughes’ Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Diversity legislation (Senate Bill 99). In addition to strengthening dual enrollment and dual credit programs as well as PDE’s role in coordinating teacher recruitment, retention, and diversity, this legislation would establish educational programs of study at our Career and Technical Education Programs. Building education occupation programs into our secondary schools will provide another pathway for individuals, including individuals of color, into professional educator careers.

An important complement to Senate Bill 99 would be scholarship, loan forgiveness, and “grow our own” programs. Representative Young’s Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (House Bill 2247) would enable the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency to forgive up to \$40,000 in student loans for any teacher who remains employed at a school within the commonwealth for at least four years. Representative Schlossberg’s Grow Our Own legislation (House Bill 2206) would allow districts with the greatest staffing needs – those like Philadelphia – to partner with an institution of higher education to establish local pathway programs for high school students and paraprofessionals.

3. **Expand the Pool:** Strengthening our teacher pipeline is a long term strategy – but it will take time to see the results relative to school staffing numbers. As a result, we need programs and policies that will provide more immediate relief and still support our long-term goals focused on teacher quality. Unpacking the barriers to teaching in Pennsylvania must be central to that conversation.

One tool that the General Assembly is already considering is an educator reciprocity program. Currently, Pennsylvania does not have a teacher certification reciprocity program. As a result, teachers certified in other states, including in our neighboring states of Delaware and New Jersey, are often required to take additional course work or assessments to obtain Pennsylvania certification.

In October, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 224, which would provide out-of-state educators comparable in-state instructional certifications. The city of Philadelphia's workforce draws from surrounding states. Enabling the School District to also draw from a multistate workforce allows us to maintain high quality teachers while expanding the limited pool that is not big enough.

We know there is not one magical solution to solve our staffing challenges. It will take multiple strategies that require long-term support to turn around the current trends. The School District stands ready to be a partner in developing and implementing statewide solutions. Thank you again for your time and the opportunity to testify before you today. On behalf of the School District of Philadelphia, I am pleased to provide you with any additional information you need and answer any questions you might have.