



Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Health and Welfare Fund

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Testimony RE: Philadelphia School Safety & Health Facility Conditions for Philadelphia City Council Hearings

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Thank you for allowing me to provide information today to your committee about Philadelphia public school safety and health. My name is Jerry Roseman. I work as the Director of Environmental Science & Occupational Safety & Health for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Health & Welfare Fund & Union.

I have been inspecting & evaluating Philadelphia schools, & making recommendations to the SDP for fixing them for more than 30 years. During this time I have developed an extensive and direct knowledge of, & a somewhat unique perspective about, school environmental health hazards & the egregiously deficient building conditions faced by many too many Philadelphia school students and staff on a daily basis. every day.

I'm here today to talk about the deplorable physical conditions I regularly see in Philadelphia schools. Conditions that threaten the health, safety & comfort of students & staff while at the same time compromising the promises of high quality academic programming, fiscal & environmental sustainability & socially just, equitable education.

Just since June of 2015 I have participated in evaluating more than 75 separate schools and conducting in excess of 125 on-site inspections to assess environmental and building condition hazards. Seriously inadequate conditions were routinely documented during these inspections and brought to the attention of the District.

My testimony will be framed by the boiler explosion at FS Edmonds that occurred in January of this year resulting in a life-threatening injury to a school district maintenance worker and presenting a potentially catastrophic safety hazard to the entire school population.



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The District has approximately 600 boilers in our schools, equipment that if not **properly and regularly** evaluated, assessed and maintained presents serious, major and acute hazards to occupant safety and health.

Following the explosion at Edmonds the District engaged in an upgraded, systematic and comprehensive evaluation of boiler condition and safety; the results of which have not yet been provided to us.

But it's not just school boilers or District maintenance workers and their union that has long expressed concern about hazardous conditions, highlighting significant deficiencies and clamoring for effective response. The PFT has also been raising the alarm for many years about the dangers to students and staff from asbestos, lead, mold, rodent infestations, lack of fresh, clean air and water, and other indoor environmental dangers which clearly impact not only the health, safety and welfare of occupants but also the ability to deliver and provide high quality educational programming.

Using FS Edmonds as an example, the boiler problem that led to the explosion is only one of many serious documented issues in need of urgent attention at this school. Between the start of the school year and February of 2016, there have been at least 3 separate environmental assessments conducted to evaluate environmental hazards, significant steam leaks and related damage at this school. When I refer to "related" damage I am talking about the documented presence of more than 600 square feet of visible mold growth on walls, ceilings and ventilation ductwork. I am also referring to damage to lead-containing paint and plaster in classrooms as well as the damage and loss of books, floors, doors and other equipment and materials.

During the September inspection we identified major problems with school ventilation and we documented a rodent infestation with a kindergarten classroom being classified as a "potential rodent breeding ground." In January, just a week after the explosion occurred, we identified more than 600 square feet of visible mold growth, significant damage to floors, walls and doors from moisture and dampness, from major steam leaks that had reportedly existed for several years. Then, on February 11, as I arrived to testify in front of the Pennsylvania Democratic Senate Appropriations Committee meeting that was being held at Edmonds, another ongoing, major steam leak was documented in a first floor book closet resulting in thousands of dollars of damage to books and materials.

Unfortunately these conditions are not unique to Edmonds – deficiencies of this scale and scope exist throughout the District. . Just over the past 3-4 years these types of problems have resulted in major impacts and consequences, including but not limited to, large-scale mold growth in educational and mechanical spaces and lack of adequate ventilation in three [3] different schools, serious and dangerous structural damage and impacts on the heating system requiring massive and urgent emergency response in an elementary school, and a school closure and major environmental remediation efforts with hundreds of thousands of dollars of costs for what was been preventable.



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Mold, peeling, chipping lead-based paint and dust, floors, walls & ceilings that are falling apart, with gaping holes and water and steam leaks are conditions that all would agree are unacceptable by any standard or measure.

It is critical that there be major modifications in the manner in which the District conducts inspections, as well as fully sharing information from these evaluations, so they can be easily reviewed and assessed; in order to properly prioritize and effectively respond. These improvements will facilitate the District's ability to perform the necessary repairs and remediation.

We firmly believe that participation by parents, educational and support staff, maintenance, custodial and other school workers, and the organizations that represent them, are necessary to achieve the goal of ensuring safe, healthy, dry, warm and comfortable schools and schools in which academic achievement, fiscally sustainable practice, and equitable education can occur.

On behalf of the PFTH&WF/U we have developed a detailed approach and plan that can work to make our schools safe now & will, we believe, effectively protect our students and staff. We have tried to discuss implementation of this plan with District leadership and to convince them to move forward and to work with us in a collaborative and coordinated manner but with limited success so far. Our approach involves significant changes in the way the District approaches and addresses these problems by recognizing that the dangers posed to occupants is directly related to the interior deficiencies that occur on an every-day basis.

Major elements of our plan include:

- 1) Conducting systematic, comprehensive and joint evaluations and assessments of building conditions, facilities and systems;
- 2) Requiring immediate, comprehensive and significantly increased open data sharing and transparency related to all aspects of building conditions, SDP data and reports, and proposed fixes; this will require the district promptly communicating all findings, status and relevant details about the efforts being taken to fix unsafe conditions to school staff, the organizations that represent them & the school parent community
- 3) Ongoing collaboration with building staff & the organizations that represent them, reviewing and discussing **all** findings and **all** available information in order to develop priorities, schedules & specific resource needs for carrying out the Healthy & Safe Building effort that reflects school-based needs, issues and concerns;
- 4) Involving school staff, & the organizations that represent them, as well as the parent community in the setting of specific priorities, needs and schedules for school fixes; and



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5) Establishing Maintenance Response Teams that will focus on major stabilization actions, at the school level, working in concert with school staff and principals to accomplish work in a verifiable and accountable manner.

In order for this plan to succeed, District leadership from the Superintendent's level must formally support and encourage participation of all its District managers, directors and coordinators. District leadership must understand the importance of immediately stabilizing and repairing interior school building conditions so that every school is at least in a healthy, safe, dry, warm and comfortable condition for all children. The "driving" role of the entire school community in overseeing and facilitating getting needed, scheduled and necessary repair work done in a comprehensive and accountable manner must also be recognized and ensured.