



Please accept my gratitude for being here with you this morning.

Thank you Representative Harris and Representative Schweyer for meeting with us today. I am the proud Superintendent of the Upper Darby School District. I have been in the business of advocating for Fair Funding of the Schools in the Upper Darby School District and Districts similar to ours for over a decade, and while I am proud to advocate on behalf of the District I serve, I often feel meetings such as these end with the same results year-after-year. The state and federal mandates have increased as have the needs of the students and families we serve, yet the same expectations pushed into our public schools are not met with the same level of support at a state and/or federal level. Typically, when I participate in these types of opportunities, I share that the Upper Darby School District is a community that represents over 90 different languages with a student population of over 12,400 students. We currently operate 13 schools:

- 3 Grades K-5 buildings
- 6 Grades 1-5 buildings
- 1 Kindergarten Center
- 2 Middle Schools
- 1 Comprehensive High School

I talk about the fact that many of our schools were built in the 1950s and several of our schools were built in the 1920s. I spend time highlighting the overcrowding in our District that resulted in modular classrooms and leased former parochial schools, one of which, up until recently, was not even in our District.

I often review a non-exhaustive list of changes that have occurred over the past decade- changes such as:

1. The rating of our schools has changed from Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to the School Performance Profile (SPP) to the Future Ready PA Index. With every new report card or school rating change, there have been increased unfunded mandates. And I believe that very few people are able to articulate the intricate differences between and among the different iterations of each report card. I am left with asking what purpose do these rating systems serve if not to only further highlight how funding directly relates to student achievement.
2. Charter school costs and funding
3. Pa Legacy Standards to PA Core Standards
4. Corrective Action to CSI to A-TSI to TSI
5. Act 82 to Act 13
6. Keystone Exams to Act 158
7. The teacher certification system
8. Threat Assessments
9. Title IX
10. Homelessness
11. Foster Care
12. Exit criteria for EL students
13. Trauma Informed Care
14. Safe to Say Something
15. FID
16. Act 44
17. Act 55
18. Educating students until they are 22. A decision passed after the start of a new school year and the passing of budget (increase over close to \$700,000 close to a 1% tax increase)

19. Potential mandating of full day Kindergarten and perhaps full day programming for 3 and 4 year olds
20. National teacher shortage and increase in emergency certified staff

Let us not forget COVID-19, and the push to provide several different types of instructional models, one to one technology, internet access, the changing of the work environment, and now significant resources to help students and staff with attendance and mental health.

I would argue that we are operating some of the most complex organizations in this country, and we are expected to meet every new regulation and mandate without the proper funding and support. There comes a point in time, and I think we are beyond that point, when you have to decide what you want out of your local public schools. I will not focus all of my comments on the non-exhaustive list of aforementioned very important points. Instead, I would like to ask a few questions.

What would you say to the following facts if this were your community?:

1. EL population growth from 2007-2008 (570 students) to 2023-2024 (2010 students representing 90 different languages). How do you meet the needs of students who qualify as English Learners (ELs) if you do not have the funding to hire additional teachers, and even if you did have the funding, there are not enough teachers certified in this area?
2. What about students in need of autistic support? Our autistic support program is increasing by 15 students a year for a total of 233 students. For every 6-8 new autistic support students, we have to find classroom space and additional teachers, classroom aids, and specialized instructional resources.
3. What would you say to middle school science courses taught by emergency certified teachers who do not have a degree in science let alone a degree in teaching?

4. How would you respond to over \$200 million dollars in facilities needs, and this does not include the need for a new middle school and elementary school?
5. How about having to bus students to over 131 different locations, and because of these demands you are often able to get students who attend your district schools to school on time let alone an hour after the typical start of the school day?
6. How about having to implement Student Attendance Improvement Plans (SAIP) for close to 2200 students who, at this time of the year, have 3 or more absent days without proper attendance documentation? This results in an average of 110 individual parent/student meetings per social worker across the district.
7. How about having to cover classes without substitute teachers when you are averaging 60 absent teachers a day with a substitute teacher fill rate of 40%? This results in increased teacher coverage, teacher burnout, and inconsistent educational opportunities for students.

The message I want to convey today is that we (public education) provide one of the top, if not the top, service to every local community we serve, the Commonwealth, and throughout this country. How is it possible that there is still an argument over funding the very laws and rules that are passed at a state and federal level? The non-exhaustive list of examples that I have provided you here today were not invented by the administration, Board of School Directors, or the local taxpayers in the Upper Darby School District, yet we are left with the daunting task of finding complicated and creative solutions that often leave our community feeling like their children are missing out on opportunities other communities provide. It is a vicious annual cycle that weakens trust and relationships with our staff(s), students, and families.

Why not us?

Why don't the students who attend schools in the Upper Darby School District, William Penn School District, the Chester Upland School District, or Southeast Delco School

District deserve the same educational opportunities as other wealthier surrounding school districts? Public Education is in need of additional funding, and this need did not happen overnight. As I stated when I started my comments here today, I have been advocating for the Fair Funding of Public Schools in the Commonwealth for well over a decade. I participated in just about every type of advocacy initiative that you can think of including participating in Children First's *School Play*. There is a reason teachers and administrators are leaving public education, and that the number of young people interested in pursuing education as a profession continues to rapidly decline. Year after year, public educators have been asked to do more with less yet meet every new challenge. The overall lack of funding has left education facing perhaps its greatest challenge, and it has nothing to do with test scores. If we do not act now and swiftly, we will not be able to staff our classrooms with high quality teachers who inspire our students to reach their fullest potential.

We have a tagline in the Upper Darby School District...*Opportunity, Unity, Excellence*. Our goal in the Upper Darby School District is to provide the *Opportunity* for ALL of our students to be *Unified* in their ability to pursue *Excellence*. Equitable allocation of education funding will assist in removing barriers so our talented and dedicated teachers can support students in reaching this goal. I have witnessed first hand the power of collaboration. My hope is that we can continue to work together to put children and their needs first. Every child deserves an opportunity to reach their personal goals and attempt to make their dreams and aspirations a reality. With the support of government officials and follow-through on promised funding, we can do this and more.

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