



Testimony on Budget of the School District of Philadelphia before City Council
Alfredo Praticò, Masterman High School class of 2019 on behalf of the City-Wide Student Government.

I come to you today as a student in the School District of Philadelphia and as a representative of its City-Wide Student Government. I am a strong advocate of public education and a believer in the new age of public education in Philadelphia.

What could be more essential to a bright future than a promise to provide a strong education to its youth—the next generation of leaders.

Now is finally the time when we can come together and take care of our own. It is time and it is necessary. Education is an investment that safeguards against poverty, strife and prejudice because a great education teaches you not what to think but *how* to think. Our education needs to provide us with critical thinking tools that not only allow us to hope for the cure for cancer, *or* solutions to the opioid crisis, *or* peace, *or* the eradication of hunger, but tools which allow us to know that these things *are* possible and that *we* can create them.

I vividly remember the 2011 budget cuts that slashed teaching staff and crushed the extra money that provided for essentials such as books and basic supplies needed to run day to day school operations. Even though no one bluntly said “your futures don’t matter” or “we don’t care what happens to you” the message was clear. There was no money to hire staff and to fund programs led by people students trusted and looked up to for comfort and knowledge, // for strength and resilience when situations at home got tough.



At my school, though we had little money, we were fortunate enough to have a unified community who brought in boxes of pencils and rolls of toilet paper to make up some of the losses. We were some of the more fortunate ones. At the end of the day, every child who had no support suffered the greatest loss. I would estimate that the majority of students fell into the latter category.

Those schools are in neighborhoods with severe economic challenges, located in every councilmanic district. Schools in areas where parents were not involved, organized, or with financial means to cover the gaps. Parents who were trying desperately to make ends meet at home and could not stretch their paycheck any further.

//In the end, our education was taken hostage and so were our futures.

We must consider what it is like **now** and what the real chances are for a child to succeed if they do not have a structure and support system to protect and guide them. How difficult are the odds of success if there is no clear path. Public education is supposed to be the safety net for all, not for the few.

As I have become more active in my community I have had the possibility to see the needs of students beyond my own personal experience, and as I see these needs and realize how dire they are I realize that the responsibility falls on every shoulder to fund and uphold a building block of democratic society — education.

We need to look at the bigger picture and provide funds and programs that provide for all 135,000 plus students in the district, beginning in pre-kindergarten and continuing all the way



through 12th grade. We can no longer support only in word this most basic need. We must make an education which provides valuable *opportunities* for all // a reality for all.

As a student I stand before you on behalf of my peers and ask that this City Council considers specific funding for programs and initiatives that address biases of all types. If we will ever be a society freed from the chains of discrimination we need to address these issues head-on, in schools first. As a society, we must understand that respect and acceptance of our fellow human beings are as intrinsic to peace and democracy as proficiency in math and English. Let our district set the bar and take a stand.

If we make public education our priority today we will reap the benefits tomorrow. Education will give my generation and future generations the tools to realize equality for all, live better lives, be more productive citizens, and have futures that are not linked to hereditary poverty and violence. The cycle must be broken and education *is* the answer.

The new School Board *and* City Council *and* the Mayor *and* every citizen now has the power to right a wrong. What we believe will be reflected in our actions. // What will be tomorrow is carved by what we do today. // How we provide for the education of our children today truly measures our social responsibility to our city and our country and our own moral choice to pay forward good fortune. Yes, there is a price to a good education but the price of doing nothing is far higher.