

March 26, 2020 Action Meeting

Written Testimony by Category

Topic: Response to COVID-19 (12 comments)

<u>Name, Affiliation</u>	<u>Testimony</u>
1. Silvia Diaz, Parent	I understand the District has not provided students with distance instruction in part because they believe that federal disability law presents insurmountable barriers to remote education. The Office of Civil Rights, however, has been consistent in taking the position that ensuring compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),† Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act should not prevent any school from offering educational programs through distance instruction. See file:///C:/Users/udiazsi/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/X72STJN6/OCR%20Supple%20Fact%20Sheet%203.21.20%20FINAL.pdf . It does our Philadelphia students a huge disservice to offer less than what is being provided in other nearby wealthy school districts. Our students deserve better.
2. Mindy Barbakoff, Community Member	During this crisis all children need the materials to learn. Support our children.
3. Jaraliz Montes, Parent	I feel that the school district is not doing enough, since I haven't been able to get the learning package from the grab and go meal site. They have been telling me to go online but I am not able to print it out. I feel they need to do more for the students. thanks
4. Cheri Micheau	In the current coronavirus crisis, staff and administration of the SDP have been understandably concerned about equitable access for all students—including those with special needs—to online/virtual instruction. I am sure that the public applauds the SDP's plan, in this rapidly evolving and unpredictable situation, to distribute computers and to work with Comcast to ensure internet connections in every student's home, as well as the lightning turnaround in the production of educational packets and other resources for students in the interim. Everything seems to be in flux, and policies and instructional approaches will continue to evolve to meet the challenge. One possible upside of the current crisis is, however, the opportunity to consider how, and how well, the District has been addressing the learning needs of English Learners (and other learners with special needs), and how it will accommodate these students' instructional requirements through the online medium. The attention now being paid to these students may—it is hoped—pay off in more appropriate instructional approaches and policies in the long term, as well. As an expert in English Learner education, it has been clear to me that the needs of English Learners have been poorly understood and only superficially addressed by the District for decades. Despite criticism and pleas from administrators, teachers, parents and community activists, little attention has been paid to this population in the development of policies toward, for example, assessment, content-area instruction, special EL program design, high school selection, or teacher development, to name

only a few issues. English Learners have suffered through incomprehensible content-area classes; have been assigned homework and home projects that were not adjusted to their linguistic needs; have been placed in newcomer programs that do not ensure college and career readiness; have been assessed and graded without fair consideration of their linguistic levels; and have even been blamed for a school's lack of stellar SPR scores. School administrators and teachers have not been held accountable enough for accommodating these students' academic, linguistic and social needs, or even understanding what those needs are. It does not come as a surprise to most people that ELs, particularly those at beginner and intermediate levels, would not be able to handle the recently distributed educational materials designed for native-speaker students and would most likely not have parents at home who could help them in English Language assignments. I believe efforts have been made to provide some scaffolded materials packets, at least for high school students. But that same level of concern for these students' access to comprehensible instruction has been sadly lacking before this crisis. How many materials and assignments have been sent home with absolutely no consideration of the resources that children would have to complete them successfully? How many classes were delivered with no concern for ELs' lack of listening skills or relevant vocabulary? How many times have newcomers been seated in the back of the room, lost in a fog of confusion or acting out because of frustration? How many parent conferences were missed by ELs' parents because of a school's unwelcoming culture? We can definitely do better, and perhaps through this current challenge, we will learn how to do that. I have several suggestions for the move to create online instructional materials and experiences, suggestions that should also be applied more generally in improving EL education. This is just an initial stab at addressing the challenge. First, it is crucial to involve veteran ESOL educators in collaborating to create or adapt materials (units, activities, projects) for learners at different levels of language proficiency, Grades K-12. Sadly, the majority of 440 staff in the multilingual office—with some notable exceptions— have little expertise or experience in ESOL instruction, as compared to master ESOL teachers across the city. We are wasting a rich resource if we don't involve teachers—and compensate them—in helping to create instructional materials for this new platform. At one time, back in the days when legal pressure was on the District to accommodate ELs, teachers were actively recruited to assist with creating curriculum and selecting materials. I understand that OMCP has already been working on some accommodations to the materials packets, and that should, of course, continue, but with much more active input from teachers. Second, guidelines for content-area teachers working with ELs online should be published by OMCP, based on best practices from QTEL and, once again, drawing on the expertise of veteran teachers of sheltered classes, particularly soliciting ideas from QTEL-trained teachers. These guidelines should also contain a set of reminders about resources (online dictionaries, bilingual resources, etc.) that teachers may share with their EL students. Third, I hope that ESOL class is not disregarded when thinking about online instruction. Because of an ill-considered move to push-in instruction in the last years, students have not been receiving much—or any—targeted language support in many schools. With the online format, it would be possible for students to participate in ESOL classes at their level, in which students would be given the kinds of grammar, vocabulary, and reading support that once was part of a fully developed and research-supported language program. If the SDP develops lessons for each grade, ESOL teachers could provide the kind of adjunct instruction—repeating the main ideas, reinforcing language of the lesson, providing more oral participation opportunities—that is unfortunately not offered anymore in most schools. This face-to-face instruction (albeit by Zoom or other platform) could truly allow students to progress linguistically and find greater academic success. It is an opportunity not afforded many ELs during the “non-virus” school year. Fourth, with computers in the house, parents will now be able to reach out to talk to (and see) BCAs (Bilingual Counseling Assistants) who

	<p>might be able to answer questions and address their concerns in parents' native languages. Many of the BCAs are assigned to various schools on different days of the week. I wonder if, during this crisis, it would be possible for the BCAs to be available to parents at all their schools each day during school hours—or even, if BCAs could be listed for parents by language, and could be contacted by any parent in the District from that language background, if help is needed. Contact could also be made by phone, but in this lonely, scary time, seeing a familiar face should be very encouraging. And, conversely, BCAs could be encouraged (required?) to reach out to students from their schools, to check on their wellbeing. Fifth, and finally for today, principals and assistant principals have never been afforded more than just superficial training in addressing the needs of ELs. Not only was SDP training never mandatory, as far as I know (so few principals attended sessions on EL instruction), but also state certification for administrators does not include extensive, necessary coursework on teaching students with special needs such as ELs. During this time when principals will be available online, as well, some Zoom training (mandatory) could be provided by qualified 440 staff. Topics for this training could include, for example: Linguistic and academic accommodations (through QTEL and other techniques); creating a culturally welcoming school (moving beyond the multilingual welcoming sign); how a second language is learned (and the time frame for language acquisition, i.e., students will not be fluent in a month); and linguistic and cultural information on immigrant groups in the city, to name only a few. I am happy to offer my volunteer services in helping accommodate the needs of ELs during this time.</p>
<p>5. Andrea Moselle, Community Member - Our City Our Schools</p>	<p>The rapid shift to a virtual world because of COVID-19 highlights vividly the disparities families & children in Philadelphia and other low income school districts with many children of color face. Already severely underfunded due to a variety of causes including the fact that Pennsylvania doesn't distribute all of its basic education funds through the fair funding formula, perpetuating ongoing and documented racial disparities in funding, we are now watching education grind to a halt for kids in our district when schools closed due to the virus. At the same time, students in nearby suburban districts in our region continue to have access to regular instruction and the stabilizing support of teachers and classmates while Philadelphia students do not. We are particularly concerned with how the board is engaging our students with disabilities, English Language learners, those living in poverty, students of color, students in foster care, and students experiencing homelessness. But this isn't just about the digital divide of laptops and Internet access. At the same time as the kids are adrift without a way to connect to school, many families are also feeling that the District has forgotten them. At a time access to clear and supportive communications on a regular basis AND the opportunity to share their experiences, concerns, and questions as well as their ideas and suggestions for fixing the problems is lacking. Anxiety rises when families are not receiving the regular updates they need from the District and are not being given an opportunity to participate in the Board of Education Action meetings in a virtual but LIVE forum where questions can be asked and answers and ideas can be exchanged. We appreciate some of the responses that the School District and the City have made in recent days such as finding solutions to continuing meal distribution, sending home lesson packets, hotlines in many languages and updating the web site and we are happy to hear that Chrome books are on their way.- but more is needed. We need a commitment to robust, respectful, open and two-way communication between District and Board of Education Leadership and the stakeholders in the district - students, parents, teachers and other staff plays a critical role in bridging some of the disparities we face when catastrophes like COVID-19 threaten to widen them. We're counting on you to invest your considerable ability to be creative and innovative and find a way! Community groups like the ones I am part of are here to support these efforts.</p>

6. Laura Del Castillo, District Staff Member	What is going to be the role of Support Staff (BCA'S, class assistants, climate) if the District decided to implement online learning, during the current crisis?
7. Manqing Lin, Parent	<p>*****Original testimony submitted in Chinese*****</p> <p>I want to talk about special education services. I want to know how the school district can help my child if I can't go back to school in the short term. I did not receive ABA, language, OT and other treatment services while my child was at home, which will cause my child's language communication and social skills to decline, and it will be difficult to follow instructions. The Student's Guide for Special Needs on the school district website is all in English. For me, it was very difficult and overwhelming.</p>
8. Barbara Dowdall, Community Member	<p>I am encouraged, in this time of disturbing crisis, by the combination of Comcast's offer of free internet access (for the moment) and the School District of Philadelphia committed to insuring that every public school child in every household will be provided with their own Chromebook. This is a moment when we will perhaps come to understand and acknowledge the longstanding inequities in education opportunities that have not been addressed by the school district (nor, to be honest, local and state funding sources) – and that robust planning for rectifying these gaps can begin now.</p> <p>I know that every teacher is eager and willing to make use of the opening and expanding communication avenues to interact with their students in meaningful and fruitful ways. The Board of Education, in addition to facilitating access to these avenues, can lay the groundwork for quality instruction when the day comes to resume academics, technical subjects, art, music, and physical education in person.</p> <p>The Board itself is at a critical and thus significant moment in time: having been re-appointed in its entirety, although going forward without two of its original members, Wayne Walker and Dr. Chris McGinley, your work has, as a team, been powerfully affirmed by Mayor Kenney. This is the juncture where you --and the superintendent as well -- can most clearly distinguish yourselves from the School Reform Commission, its policies, practices and shortcomings. Decide now that you are prepared to restore the School District of Philadelphia as a system with uniformity in provision of basics: safe and inviting environments, small class sizes, fully-resourced and professionally-staffed libraries, proper proportions of school nurses and counselors, dependable opportunities for cultural enrichment onsite and off, varied and valuable afterschool programs that meet the needs of working families. As Temple University founder Russell Conwell might have said: "We are wasting a rich resource if we don't involve teachers—and compensate them— in helping to create instructional materials for this new platform..." and for the bountiful and empowering curricula going forward.</p>
9. Beth Beitler, District Staff	<p>Good evening. My name is Beth Beitler and I am submitting my oral speech for the School Board meeting scheduled for March 25, 2020. I have been employed as an Elementary School Counselor for the School District of Philadelphia since 1997. Over the past 23 years I have worked supporting students Kindergarten through 8th grade. In my current school, I service 630 students (K-5).</p> <p>I am here today to address the issue of the Behavioral Health Counselor position that was recently posted on the SDP website. While we can all agree there is a tremendous amount of need to address behavioral health services with our students, we can also agree that more School Counselors need to be hired to meet the</p>

	<p>academic, social and emotional needs of our students. What is confusing is how this position was specifically named. In doing so, the newly created position has taken all of the current responsibilities that Elementary and Secondary School Counselors are currently performing and renaming it strictly to Behavioral Health. For the last 16 years, while the SDP was under state controlled rule, the PFT was not able to negotiate for anything other than salary and benefits for its members. School Counselors roles have shifted dramatically due to the higher needs of being “trauma sensitive”. Most of our students have experienced some form of trauma. We have a tremendous opportunity to meet the needs of the students from an academic, social-emotional and a college/vocational role. In the past, the old term “Guidance Counselor” simply helped students match up with career based vocations. Currently, School Counselors, such as myself, are performing and identified as educational leaders in the building. I personally sit on my school’s leadership team and I feel that my professional recommendations are respected and heard. School Counselors not only meet with students and parents, but analyze school data, develop interventions to help students meet their MTSS goals. School Counselors directly affect their school achieving its school wide anchor goals set by the district and state. If schools want to achieve their school wide progress, we must have a trauma-sensitive lens in order to help their students cope and get connected to services they desperately need. Ultimately, there is no difference between the existing</p> <p>Elementary/Secondary School Counselor position and the new position of Behavior Health Counselor. It is a duplicate position with a different name; hence creating confusion with students and parents and could create adversity among district staff. It would be impossible to function proficiently as a School Counselor without addressing behavioral health issues and crisis; as well as the Behavioral Health Counselor to address issues without it relating to academics, truancy, etc.</p> <p>As I stated earlier, we can all agree that the students, in Philadelphia schools deserve and need more School Counselors to help them succeed as well as help schools achieve their school-wide goals. Research shows that School Counselors have a direct correlation statistically in reference to student achievement and school-wide achievement. I respectfully urge the School Board to adjust the position title of Behavioral Health Counselor back to Elementary or Secondary School Counselor. We already have enough confusion in the world currently; we don’t need any more in our schools. Thank you.</p>
10. Shakeda Gaines	<p>Good Afternoon All,</p> <p>My name is Shakeda Gaines. I am the Philadelphia Home and School Council President. I wanted to speak on the topic of Communication to the Public particularly QUESTIONS IN RESPONSE TO HITE’s LIVESTREAM:</p> <p>We appreciate your commitment to engage with school families weekly on facebook livestream. Seeing young people, parents, families, school staff, and community members share their concerns and questions publicly and without backlash is what we've been fighting for.</p> <p>In this time of community; seeing our love for each other, the power to strengthen the meek, voice concerns, and create change is wonderful to see.</p> <p>HOWEVER! We ask that if Dr. Hite is going live we demand that a portion of that Live broadcast be dedicated to</p>

	<p>reading and answering questions.</p> <p>We understand that some questions are redundant, require planning, and/or require lawyers input. Those questions are up in the air, but for those stakeholders who want to know about job safety, qualifications for supportive services such as Chromebooks, where they can find support for ELL, ELA, IEP's, 504s... Please Respond.</p> <p>Also, If the board doesn't have an answer yet, that is information that school families and stakeholders deserve to know as well.</p> <p>In addition to your commitment to communicating with the public, please make available links to this weekly livestream on the SDP site banner and all livestreams thereafter.</p> <p>We also understand that in these times of uncertainty the unexpected is to be expected but we expect our Leaders to open, honest, and engaging. Thank you for trying, now go up 4 notches 😊</p>
<p>11. Cecelia Thompson, Community Member</p>	<p>Good Evening School Board President Wilkerson, School Board Members, Superintendent Dr. Hite, School District Staff, Students, Families, and Community. My name is Cecelia Thompson and my topic this evening are the Lack of Educational Learning Materials, Supports, and Services for Special Education Students.</p> <p>First, let me start by saying these are trying and difficult times during this pandemic. This is our version of the Bubonic plague. The sacrifices being made by all, including students and their families, and, the staff and their families with the District are much appreciated. However, both versions of the Learning Packets do not address the needs of students receiving special education services. The answers given for families are “pick the appropriate grade and packet for your special needs child”. These Learning Packets are for teachers to develop lesson plans for students. Maybe in September 2019, with the proper instruction to prepare lessons for a special needs child, these would be appropriate. But, during these challenging and uncertain times for families, including those who are deemed necessary and risking infection from being in the public, reading and coming up with lessons for any child is difficult. Devising lessons for children receiving special education academics, supports, and services, is almost impossible. Some challenges include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disruption in routines for children living with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism. 2. Extreme behaviors due to the disruption. 3. The tension and stress in households as financial resources are being depleted due to cut in hours or total loss of employment. 4. Children not understanding why they are not in school with their friends and not having the language to express such, causing challenging behaviors. <p>Furthermore, the resources, for examples, for students living with autism are about scheduling and the Coronavirus and not instruction. And, the Occupational Therapy materials suggest families become School Based Occupational Therapists to complete these tasks. This is simply unacceptable to put on families who are having the aforementioned challenges and more being at home with their special needs children. By now, the District has received guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education which received guidance from the Office of Special Education Programs stating local education agencies, for FAPE, provide learning,</p>

	<p>supports, and services to students receiving special education services.</p> <p>So, what can the District do to provide FAPE for their Special Education Students. Below are some suggestions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At minimum, inform all special education teachers they can provide materials to families for their students. Families can have the option to pick up these materials from the school, pick up the materials at a school near them (many special education students are bused to schools outside their neighborhoods), or, email the work to the students. Note: Some special education teachers were doing so, but, were told not to by their principal through communication from the District last week. Because this document has not been made public, I cannot comment on the contents, and therefore do not know if there was a misunderstanding of the communication. 2. Have meetings with families, via Business Skype, Zoom, or phone call, on how to best provide the other services students are receiving, such as speech, OT, ABA, and other supports. <p>If students were using interventions in schools, provide families with the appropriate information to access these programs at home. If they need technology and internet access, this, per articles where Dr. Hite was quoted, be available to these families. 4. The materials for Complex Needs Learners is not what those students were doing in school. For this population, a communication between their teacher and families is paramount. In terms of communication with families, educators are to be mandated to communicate with families at times convenient for the families and not the educators. These are families who are the first responders, hospital workers, those at testing sites, those working at grocery stores, and any other worker deemed necessary to sustain life as per Mayor Kenny's Order, need to have conversations at times other than between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm. Moreover, while not pertaining to the special needs population, the hours for the learning materials of 9:30a-11:30a are not convenient for working families. Please consider 6p-8p for those who desire to speak to a live person. And, those on the phones need to be educators. When I used the hotline, the person admitted not being an educator. Instead, my information was referred to a Special Education Director, which gave me the information on the website. Finally, please consider having Zoom-type communications with families to hear their concerns. While it would not be live-streamed, it can be recorded and listen by the public within 24 hours. Families and the Community do want to help. They need a way to communicate with the Board of Education live, so they feel heard and their comments valued and appreciated. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my comments in writing this evening.</p>
<p>12. Donna Cooper, Executive Director PCCY</p>	<p>I commend the Board and the Superintendent for attending to the urgent nutritional needs of the tens of thousands of low-income children in this crisis. Your rapid response to deploy meals is a testament to the capacity of the leaders of this District and the thousands of District employees who are willing to put the interests of our City's children first.</p> <p>I am here with a simple request that same diligence and commitment be applied in ways that enable the District to teach our children, now.</p> <p>As the virus' spread intensifies, the resumption of classes in our school buildings seems very unlikely. We come to terms with this fact and hasten the process of making teacher supported home-based instruction the</p>

norm for the balance of the school year.

Parents watched in horror as federal, state and District officials twisted themselves up in illogical arguments that led to instruction to stop cold. Finally, teachers have been given the green light, the engine of the district must turn wholeheartedly toward instruction. Every teacher, classroom aide, special education contractor, high school guidance counselor and contracted infrastructure like Gear Up must be used to educate our children now.

In this emergency, you must take control of the instructional calendar. This emergency must compel you tonight to update the school calendar so that instruction is not suspended through Spring Break. Our students and our parents need you to do what is expected of you. Our students have had a break, two weeks to be precise, it's time to start teaching our students.

That brings us to the technology challenge. Parents understand is more than just hardware. Its ensuring teacher support, materials and wireless access. And parents know it's about making sure that for special education and ELL students, technology and teacher support is deployed that meet their needs.

Here's what we know, 37 other school districts in the five-county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania have already given out laptops or comparable devices to all or most of their students and instruction is commencing.

We also know that nine days ago, the Miami School District distributed devices to 53,000 students and last week, Boston, New York City and Broward County ensured that students who needed devices received them. Together these districts are kicking off on-line, teacher supported instruction to more than 1.7 million students.

I've attached an excel package with this testimony and links to each district so you can see for yourself that others are already teaching their students.

Parents and students didn't miss the fact that Superintendent announced that soon technology will be made available to students. But two weeks is too long. The evidence that its possible to deploy technology and support instruction has been presented to you. We are here tonight to ask you to mandate an accelerated timeline so that teachers can teach, and our kids can learn.

Here's what we would like to see:

1. A date certain, and no later than April 6th, when the dissemination of technology will commence so that we can have confidence that the digital divide is quickly being bridged and instruction can proceed.
2. A date certain, and no later than April 6th, for an initial roll of online teacher supported instruction. We

	<p>understand that such a plan will get better and more detailed over time.</p> <p>3. A date certain, and no later than April 15th, when teacher supported home-based instruction will commence for special education students and English Language Learners.</p>
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Topic: Public Comment at Board Meetings (**6 comments**)

<u>Name, Affiliation</u>	<u>Testimony</u>
<p>1. Duong Ly, Community Member Viet Lead</p>	<p>Dear President Wilkerson and Members of the Board of Education,</p> <p>We write to you concerning the protocols for the March 26, 2020 Action Meeting.</p> <p>Holding a meeting that the public cannot attend in person violates the PA Sunshine Act, but of course the Board must heed the health warnings from city and state officials. The alternative is to hold a virtual meeting that the public can both observe and participate in. Current technology allows for both of these.</p> <p>The Board has announced that it will live-stream the meeting at the scheduled time. Members of the public can send in testimony in writing or by phone no later than 24 hours before the meeting. Members of the Board will read summaries of those testimonies.</p> <p>That is not a public meeting. That is a live TV show.</p> <p>We have been told that most Board members will be present via phone. That same technology could be used to have members of the public testify via phone. People could submit their numbers by calling in advance or emailing their phone numbers and topics before the meeting. Staff could call them at the appropriate time—before or after voting—and each person could give their own testimony, in full, in their own words. Everyone watching would be able to hear the testimony. In addition, some of the questions and comments sent via email and twitter could be answered during the meeting.</p> <p>The Chief Financial Officer will be making a presentation on the lump sum budget. Without real-time participation, no one would be able to ask a question about that presentation. Testimony sent in ahead of time could not be amended to include comments or questions about that or any other business taking place during the meeting.</p> <p>We have also asked that all non-essential Items be withdrawn for now, and that each Item Description include a sentence explaining why it is essential and must be voted on this month. Thanks to the Board for already withdrawing Item 31.</p> <p>In this difficult time, it is important that the public be able to participate in the democratic process. The Board</p>

	<p>must make a good faith effort, using the technology available, to include the public in this week's public meeting. We appreciate being part of the conversation. We look forward to your response.</p>
<p>2. Lisa Haver, Community Member</p>	<p>The Board is not holding a public meeting. On the anniversary of its last closed meeting, the Board is televising a closed meeting of the Board. For some reason, the Board has decided not to use available technology for real-time, 2-way communication. Many people at the meeting and watching the meeting have, over the past 2 weeks, attended online meetings through zoom and similar technology. The Board could have had members of the public call in during the meeting in the same way that most of the Board members are calling in. The Board will approve millions in spending at this meeting, as it does in every meeting, for example Items 16 and 17 for ERP, but without public comment in real time. Erik Arneson, head of the PA Office of Open Records, issued a recent statement that exceptions to the Sunshine Act can be made, but meetings must include 2-way communication. https://openrecordspennsylvania.com/2020/03/11/the-sunshine-act-and-covid-19/ During this crisis, it is important that the public be able to both observe and participate in their government. The Board must make a good-faith effort to use all available means to make sure the public is not shut out.</p>
<p>3. Karel Kilimniik, Community Member</p>	<p>Since testimony is being summarized I am focusing on two issues. During this crisis technology is being used universally to facilitate meetings. The Board needs to open their meetings to the public so that those wishing to testify can call in and read their testimony. Having someone summarize is simply not adequate. We are using technology today during this crisis to hold meetings. These meetings include allowing voices to be heard and not simply summarizing their remarks. If I wanted someone to summarize then I would send in a summary of my remarks. Otherwise my voice is being filtered. My second point is that the Board should only consider Items that are essential. APPS has noted repeatedly that the descriptions convey scant information about the Item under consideration. Each Item needs an explanation of why it is being contemplated during this pandemic. We realize that you are working at warp speed and under dire conditions to move forward. As government officials you should lead the way for public participation not simply providing a platform for your voices to be heard and ours summarized.</p>
<p>4. Aiden Castellanos, Community Member</p>	<p>I'm incredibly disappointed that the School Board is not having live public participation in their meetings. There's so many concerns that communities have right now that need to be addressed now. As the school board, you all have a responsibility to the people who depend on schools in having interactive, engaged meetings. I want to uplift the requests that Our City Our Schools have made including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Only essential Items voted on this month. All other Items tabled. -Take questions via email or twitter during the live streamed meeting. If the questions pertains to a specific Item, read the question or comment just prior to the meeting so that Board members can answer before voting. -Have staff members read the testimony of public participants. Testimony sent in to the Board should be considered oral testimony, not written testimony. Testimony of Items should be read before the Board commences voting. -The Board should inform the public of its decisions and actions by posting a banner on the homepage of the District website. <p>Please meet the needs of the people you're supposed to be supporting.</p>

<p>5. Deborah Grill, Community Member</p>	<p>The advent of the coronavirus has thrown our nation in a state of crisis that is the new normal. Routine business has been thrown out the window as we are directed to practice social distancing and remain quarantined in our homes. I know that the Board, Dr. Hlte and District staff have been working diligently to meet the needs of Philadelphia students, parents and teachers in this crisis, and I thank you all for that.</p> <p>While the Board will live-stream and televise this month's Action meeting, there is no avenue for real time comments and questions from the public. Submitting written testimony which will be summarized and read aloud by staff is not a substitute for open public interaction.</p> <p>I hope that in future meetings the Board will find a way to follow the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records advisory on making public meetings interactive:</p> <p>“The Sunshine Act is clear that public meetings should be held at public buildings with open public participation whenever possible. If an official emergency declaration prevents that from happening, a meeting via teleconference, webinar, or other electronic method that allows for two-way communication is permissible in most circumstances. (Some agencies may be governed by laws which add requirements beyond those included in the Sunshine Act.)”</p> <p>https://openrecordspennsylvania.com/2020/03/11/the-sunshine-act-and-covid-19/</p> <p>I am sure that the District’s technology is capable of providing such an electronic method. Parents, teachers and students need the direct means of communicating with the Board that these meetings would allow, especially in this time of crisis.</p>
<p>6. Ilene Poses, Community Member</p>	<p>****Sing to the tune of "Follow the Drinking Gourd" Choose a good singer! ****</p> <p>Chorus Follow the Sunshine Act Follow the Sunshine Act For the public is awaiting to participate in meetings So follow the Sunshine Act</p> <p>Verse CoVid 19 makes assembling hard Peo-ple still want to heard Sum-mar-izing's not the same as testifying Please follow the Sunshine Act.</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>Verse</p>

	<p>Technology - affords us Zoom Helps people express their views. Transparency build trust that's a fact So Follow the Sunshine Act.</p>
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Topic: Action Items (2 comments)

<p>1. Diane Payne, Community Member</p>	<p>Relates to Action Items: 16, 17, 24, and 32</p> <p>Times of crisis calls for our government officials and citizens alike to work in ways we never imagined. I do applaud all the work and worry that the SDP & BOE are engaged in at this moment. That being said, crises can not become a reason to ignore laws and transparency nor a reason to silence or mute the public's voice.</p> <p>As this crisis stretches into future months, the Board must rise to the available technological choices which can actively engage the public. It is already happening across a variety of sectors. For the April Action Meeting, this Board should have a viable plan for real time public engagement as the Sunshine Act requires.</p> <p>In times of crisis, only essential business should be handled as all officials and citizens grapple with what the needs may be for the future. It was heartening to see Action Item 31 eventually withdrawn. However, I have questions about four other Action Items.</p> <p>Action Items 16 and 17 are for multi-million dollar increases to the ERP process. The details listed in the Action Items refer vaguely to "a change in the implementation timeline" with no details justifying this timeline change. Although it would be easy to justify due to the crisis, this Item was on the list before the crisis. The public deserves to fully understand the WHY and the HOW of a \$59,000,000 expenditure.</p> <p>Action Item 24 is for a change order to the Ben Franklin/SLA project. This is another example of no information about why this \$1,798,148 change order is needed. The public deserves to understand.</p> <p>Action Item 32 is for \$638,565 to the AARP literacy volunteer program. This is an example of closely examining all Action Items for a litmus test of "essential". We are all very much aware that we cannot quite imagine what "returning to normal" is going to look like. Every expenditure on the Action Item List should contain a sentence - throughout this crisis - that identifies what is *essential* about the item.</p> <p>Transparency, public engagement, and trust in the District are ongoing places of conflict. This crisis actually offers an opportunity for the Board to look for ways to mend these conflicts. Do not let this opportunity be lost.</p>
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<p>2. Lynda Rubin, Community Member</p>	<p>Related to contract action items, e.g. #32</p> <p>I'm submitting this testimony in the expectation that since no set-up has been made to allow for individuals to call in and read our own testimony, that my, and all other testimonies will be read in full and not summarized. "Summarized": means the reader has the ability to pick and choose which parts of the testimony will be read and whether to include all of the actual wording or not. Any of these, including the intonation of the reader could impact the meaning of testimony, even unintentionally. I realize that circumstances dictate changes are necessary. I urge the Board to learn from appropriate staff what technical options are available, or could be made available, to assist that meetings be as close to actually attended meetings as possible. The lack of an audience in the room, regardless of size, will affect the discussion by the Board; that's just human nature. I also ask that the Board increase its explanations of the details of items being voted on, especially where contracts are involved. Of course, contracts have to be prepared and agreed to in advance in order to allow for both the District and the company to put them into effect. But not all contracts are essential at this time, even for planning purposes. I also don't understand why the terms of contracts signed by a public entity like the School District shouldn't be made public. Descriptions are never quite as revelatory as the actual wording. I've heard testimony questioning the reason for any number of change orders and amendments to existing contracts. These changes should be explained. I believe that when this Board first took over, you published contracts. We who attend meetings and who testify raise issues that are of concern not only to us individually, but to District staff, parents and students. Some issues bring out more people. And sometimes, the Board or Dr. Hite actually learns about something going on (or not going on) in the field and has expressed appreciation for learning about the issue, and has then followed up. I appreciate the District's efforts to try to make the web-site more accessible. However, even I, with some knowledge of District operations, have had extreme difficulty finding things. I can only imagine how frustrating it must be for parents and community members without such knowledge. One of my favorite lines from the film, "Philadelphia" is when Denzel Washington asks, "Explain it to me like I'm a 6 year old." That statement is deep. Running a large school district is daunting indeed. The more everyone shares how directives, plans and oversight are playing out in actual schools throughout the city - the better, more equitable and responsive our educational system will be. Thank you.</p>
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The Board received the same email from the following individuals: Madeline Shikomba, Carolyn Lazard, Aiden Castellanos, Kristen Goessling, John Colgan-Davis, Tammy Murphy, Kaitlin McCann, Alex Avelin, Alan Anthony, Aj Aaron, Yahya Alazrak, Malika Bender, Bryce Bayer, and Nova McGiffert.

The email reads:

"Hello,

The COVID-19 pandemic is drastically shifting our lives, and this is not business as usual. It is more critical than ever that the board listen to and focus on the immediate needs, concerns, and proposed solutions of school families during this

time. Please implement the suggestions below in order to ensure that the [Thursday](#) meeting is accessible to our school communities:

Only essential Items voted on this month. All other Items tabled.

Take questions via email or twitter during the live streamed meeting. If the questions pertains to a specific Item, read the question or comment just prior to the meeting so that Board members can answer before voting.

Have staff members read the testimony of public participants. Testimony sent in to the Board should be considered oral testimony, not written testimony. Testimony of Items should be read before the Board commences voting.

The Board should inform the public of its decisions and actions by posting a banner on the homepage of the District website."