



**Fact Finding on Conditions in  
Philadelphia Public Schools  
School Year of 2013-14**

**State Senator  
VINCENT HUGHES**

# Fact Finding on Conditions in Philadelphia Public Schools

## School Year of 2013-14

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Information gathered from news accounts, parents, teachers, administrators and other sources show the plight of our children and the unacceptable environment in which they are being forced to function. The information compiled in the report below should galvanize local, state, and federal authorities to act immediately to protect the interests of Philadelphia's children.

The School District of Philadelphia desperately needs the General Assembly to pass House Bill 1177, which would authorize a Philadelphia-only \$2-pack tax increase on cigarettes. However, it should be noted that the funding would only provide Philadelphia schools with the same level of resources as last year.

The conditions last year in Philadelphia schools were nearly intolerable and prevented thousands of children from receiving the thorough and efficient public education to which they are entitled to under the Pennsylvania Constitution.

Parents, students and teachers are operating under incredibly difficult circumstances resulting from the deep cuts in state funding. It is a credit to all parties that they managed to get through the 2013-14 school year, but the conditions in the schools cannot be tolerated and allowed to continue in the upcoming school year.

**This report should spur the following actions:**

1. The Pennsylvania General Assembly must immediately return to session and act on House Bill 1177 which would generate much-needed revenue for School District of Philadelphia by imposing a \$2-pack tax on cigarettes.
2. The Pennsylvania Department of Education must fully investigate and act on all complaints originating in the School District of Philadelphia based on the inadequate resources and facilities available to students due to funding cuts.
3. Parents, teachers, and students should file complaints with the U.S. Department of Education when warranted.
4. Governor Tom Corbett must meet his responsibility to provide full and adequate funding to public education by providing additional recurring state revenue for the School District of Philadelphia.

## School District of Philadelphia (Part I): Reported Conditions in Academic Year of 2013-14

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### District-wide

- The District has cut over 5,000 positions over the past three years
- More than 30 schools have been closed to save on building costs
- The District has cut administrative costs by over 50 percent, leaving very few staff in the central office
- Average class size was between 30-40 students, with many classes doubling in size
- More than 50 percent of schools lacked a full-time counselor
- One secretary per school, causing front office chaos in schools with thousands of students
- Large schools with between 1,500 and 2,300 students had just one counselor
- School district assigned a group of 16 roving counselors to a total of 115 schools. That's 16 counselors for 48,000 students or a 1 : 3,000 ratio
- Over 100 complaints about working conditions were filed by members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
- A lack of financial systems hindered the ability of staff to order basic supplies, process essential invoices and complete academic service orders for students
- There were no sports or athletics of any kind in winter or spring
- There were no instrumental music classes starting on January 1st, 2014
- School libraries citywide have been closed for lack of staffing.
- There were only 15 remaining librarians in the entire district
- Teachers were spending between \$300-\$400 to replace school supplies that are no longer provided by district
- Students were getting no help in preparation for testing (SAT, PSAT, ACT, etc), college admissions applications and course preparation
- Elimination of non-teaching assistants or supportive services assistants overwhelmed teachers and contributing to an untenable workload
- No assistant principals in schools with under 850 students

### School Site Reports

- A major magnet high school had only 7 physical education teachers for more than 2,000 students, resulting in no 10th grade gym classes
- A high school in West Philadelphia went from four counselors to two, with overall staff reduction from 166 positions to only 97 positions.
- Parents at a neighborhood elementary school reported there were no safe walk volunteers or crossing guards for dangerous intersections. Only one or two crossing guards were available for multiple dangerous intersections
- A 1st year special education teacher at a Promise Academy had no classroom assistants, no one-on-one support, no assistant principal, and no counselor. Principal was overwhelmed trying to handle student behavioral issues
- A principal reported that trash pickup only occurred once per week, resulting in an unsafe and unsanitary conditions
- A principal at an elementary school reported that the lack of counselors, assistant principal, dean and support staff led to major disruptions due to student behavioral issues
- The principal had been required to distribute SEPTA TransPasses, serve as school nurse, act as hallway monitor, take over disciplinary role and monitor lunch room
- There was no dance teacher at a performing arts high school. The class was being "taught" by students and supervised by paraprofessionals

## **Reported Conditions in School District of Philadelphia (Part II):**

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**An assistant principal reported the following conditions at a K-8 school:**

- Lower school had no secretary to answer phones or door
- The two buildings shared one counselor for one day, every seven days
- The two buildings shared one nurse on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The Principal and Assistant Principal dispensed medication to students
- Two noontime aides for 400 students to supervise lunch
- 2nd grade classes and 6th grade classes had 40-42 students
- There were no sports for middle school students
- Only ½ of students in the middle school get music, the other half get art

**A school secretary reported the following conditions related to her position at a high school:**

- Only one secretary for a school with 700+ students
- Must arrive an hour early and stay hours late to answer calls from parents, School District headquarters, faculty and outside callers
- Registers new students because enrollment has increased by 200 students
- Responsible for making student packets, blue cards, roll sheets and emergency contact forms
- There was only one person to deal with parole officers, case managers, therapists and social workers who asked for student records
- Answered calls from parents who were checking on child attendance
- Did early dismissals and facilitates reinstatement from suspension
- Responsible for opening classrooms that are locked if building engineer was occupied
- Performed payroll duties including substitute service
- Handled extensive paperwork for school trips and activities
- Took care of sick students including contacting parents if nurse is not present

**Maintenance and custodial staff reported the following conditions:**

- The HVAC system at a major high school was seriously compromised, with no way of controlling the amount of cold, warm or fresh air that enters the building
- There were only 3 HVAC technicians citywide for more than 200 buildings
- A middle school with paint issues remains unresolved because of budget problems, with teachers and principals painting the school on their own time and dime
- The HVAC system at an elementary school was so compromised that an individual was required to be onsite and monitor the water flow in the building
- A flood due to a malfunctioning HVAC system destroyed several classrooms and thousands of dollars in supplies
- Mold problems have caused an educational center in West Philadelphia to close for an entire year with no plans to fix the problem