



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Hearing Testimonies
August 24, 2026

#1

Madeline McGrady

Community Member

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#2

Shirley Hill

Retired PPS Teacher

I have followed the public hearings regarding the unfair treatment of former Montessori teacher Ms. Stephanie Lapine by principal Kellie Meyer. Throughout my 41-year career with PPS, I too was subjected to toxic principals like her. In December 2023, Ms. Stephanie Lapine was removed from her classroom by Kellie Meyer. She was cleared in February 2024 but was “conveniently transferred” to another school that does not have a Montessori program. Why is Kellie Meyer not being held accountable for her unfair treatment of Ms. Stephanie Lapine (the only lead black teacher)? Per Kellie Meyer, Ms. Stephanie Lapine was not permitted to clear out her belongings. Various teachers dismantled her room. This resonates with me. When Angel Washington “conveniently transferred” me to UPrep, I was not permitted to completely clear out my room. In fact, someone from CTE boxed up all my belongings and shipped them to UPrep. She was never held accountable and the union was useless. How is it that an administrator can bar an employee from clearing out their room? Some Montessori teachers have filed grievances and still nothing has been done. Toxic principals like Kellie Meyer put fear in teachers who speak up by sabotaging their teacher evaluations which in turn can affect their salary. Pretending there are no problems at Montessori creates an unsettling work environment. Teachers should not have to adapt to this leadership style to keep their jobs. Today starts a new school year and Ms. Lapine is still assigned to a school that does not have a Montessori program. I question how students are first when toxic principals are not held accountable.

Ms. Purnell please look into the toxicity that is going on with Kellie Meyer.

Carrick High School has a very small percentage of Black teachers. “Having Black teachers and other educators of color improves students’ classroom experiences, research shows. They often serve as role models, set high academic expectations and teach material that connects to students’ lives outside of schools.” (The Conversation, June 1, 2026) BLACK STUDENTS AT CARRICK MATTER!!



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#3

Vanessa Dagavarian

Parent



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#4

Marcia Bandes

Organization, Community Member



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#5

Randall Taylor

Community Member



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#6

Kara Britanik

Parent



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#7

Emily Sawyer

Parent, Substitute Teacher



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#8

Lily Allman

Student



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#9

Valerie Webb-Allman

Parent, Community Member

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Ghadah Makoshi

Parent, Organization

8.24.26

PPS Policies and Procedures

Good evening Superintendent Walters and School Board members,

I'm here today to talk about several concerns I have with policies and procedures in the district. I'll begin with the new school handbooks. While I appreciate the effort and time taken to create the template for these documents, there was a lack of accountability and follow through. All the templates began with the same superintendent message, it then allowed each principal to add their own messages which resulted in a wide variety of information. One school, for example, included multiple pages including information about back to school night, and first day of school times and entrances, while other principals had much shorter messages that ranged from very inclusive and welcoming to ones that were almost lecturing families about what was expected of them. And some schools had no handbook.

In these handbooks, there should be cohesion around the vision and mission of PPS, while still allowing for some modifications by each school. After all, why have the school board vote on policies only to have every single principal at every single school create their own, sometimes in direct violation of district policies or state laws, especially around truancy? There should have been more pre-written language in these templates around district policies to ensure it's accurate, while still allowing principals to add in specifics for their schools. And it should always be checked by the Comms department to ensure the same font is used and they are all accessible per ADA guidelines.

My second concern is PBIS. This stands for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. There has not been enough training for principals or teachers on what PBIS is and the way it should be implemented, as I have received numerous complaints, mainly in my role as the Local Task Force on the Right to Education Co-chair about punitive implementations of this model. Kids are punished as a class when one child exhibits behavior that is a manifestation of their disability. Elementary students not being allowed on field trips due to absences even though these children are too young to be held liable for absences according to state law on truancy. Understanding and implementing PBIS with fidelity and equity is paramount to its success. Without that, schools do vastly more harm than not having that program in place in the first place.

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Lastly, but most importantly, I am incredibly saddened and disappointed that the district would deny some students the opportunity to begin school on the first day of school with their peers, but instead tell families to keep those children home because a 1:1 PCA or nurse could not be found for them. That is a failure of the district to have to make even one call telling a child to stay home, because they are not important enough to have the supports they need in place for the first day of school.

I'm asking the board to direct Comms and legal counsel to review all school-level handbook content before next year's publication, to require PBIS fidelity training for all staff this year, and to report back on how many students missed their first day due to staffing shortages, and what's being done to prevent it from happening again. I look forward to your reply. Thank you.

Ghadah Makoshi
Advocacy and Policy Strategist
ACLU of Pennsylvania



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#11

Sarah Zangle

Parent



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#12

Laura Chu-Wiens

Parent, Organization

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#13

Jackie Smith

Organization, Community Member

RE: Downtown Development TRID

My name is Jackie Smith, and I live in the Park Place neighborhood and work as an educator. I serve on the board of the Human Rights City Alliance

I'm here to urge you to vote no on the downtown TRID initiative.

This proposal is asking you to gamble with taxpayer money, and to commit current and future taxpayers to paying for projects that may or may not pay off, either in financial terms or in terms of benefits for residents in all of our neighborhoods.

There is a long track record of tax-increment financing, which is a tool designed to be **deliberately complex** so the public cannot readily weigh the costs and benefits. Research has shown **questionable benefits** from these schemes. But the evidence is clear that tax increment financing like the TRID proposal **reduces government revenues and rarely generates the job growth** proponents claim.

We are being told that there's an urgent need to redevelop downtown, and that this needs to take precedence over addressing other long-standing and truly urgent needs like affordable housing and investments in our young people. The public deserves to hear a strong case for **why the downtown must be prioritized over investments in other parts of the city**. We also need evidence to show that investing in repurposing downtown buildings for housing will actually produce what's promised. We cannot afford to wait for downtown growth to trickle down to the rest of us—if indeed this bet pays off.

We're also being told that the **only way to finance what the city needs is through this kind of speculative investment**. The TRID is nothing more than a gamble, and both current and future generations of taxpayers are being asked to bear the risks that this bet will pay off. But we know from the evidence that success is far from guaranteed, and in the end it is taxpayers who will bear the burden of long-term debt servicing. Why should we commit future generations to take on this 40-year financial burden? Why aren't we considering other possible tools the city can use to generate revenue, such as fairer tax policies?

Finally, how can we be certain that the promised benefits of this proposal in terms of equity and sustainability will be realized? There needs to be far **more transparency** in how funds will be allocated. Placing this decision making authority in the hands of an unelected body is unlikely to help our city confront the very real challenges of racial disparity, growing inequality, and worsening impacts of climate change.

The Human Rights City Alliance is part of a global movement whose motto is "human rights don't trickle down, they rise up." People know that trickle down economics doesn't work, and even leading economists are admitting this. We're asking the School Board members to **vote no on the downtown TRID** and demand **more creative and forward-thinking solutions to the challenges our communities and our young people are facing**.



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Shannon Striner

Parent

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#15

Annette Hall

Parent

Mercades

Good evening PPS board- First thank you for the back to school event!

- Happy back to school day! Well at least that's what it's supposed to be today- But for many of us - we are going in to this school year with mixed emotions of happiness, sadness and fear for our kids futures

Some may say Abby and Maddie are some of the lucky students who get to Graduate from their current schools- Abby at Schiller and Maddie at Woodbine.

But Really are they?
No of this plan is lucky for any of these kids

Both my daughters have IEPs and both have "0" transition plans at this time - And teachers have so little information they can't even begin to help make a plan.

Maddie was hoping to follow in her Sisters foot steps and go to Schiller for 6th to 8th Grades.

- Now that Schiller will no longer be a magnet school that will not be a option.

- She will now be put in her neighborhood school that is well below herd immunity levels

- Dropped from the STEAM programming that she has loved and kept her interested in school

- And pulled from her Classmates and friends of the last 6 years -

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Now many of you may say Why mention
herd immunity in the schools? and may also
think it is selfish of me to think of that
as a factor-

- When you have a kid who has health issues like
Maddie it is extremely important to have
a school that has herd immunity - as well as teachers
and staff that are able to know your child and
signs of health issues.

- Maddie would have had this at Schiller ~~with~~ with a
easy/ and less stressful transition - as those
teacher got to know her through her Sister!

But now ---- We go through this school year
with the fear of the unknown for her next year!

- What will the Class Sizes be? Will it be safe for
her? Will the teachers understand her needs.
Will they even have the time to get to know her like
her current teachers due to larger class sizes?
- When your child has spent multiple days in the
hospital these are things that weigh heavy on
your mind-
- When there are no communicated plans for transitions
you fear the worst-
- PPS Board I urge you to use your time wisely
and communicate openly with the community
as these changes take place and get to work on
transition plans for these students with disabilities
and medical issues -

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