

Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Hearing Testimonies
October 26, 2026

#1

Kayla Johnson

Parent

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!
SPEAK UP FOR MILLER!

Our School. Our Children. Our Legacy. Our Future.

Parents, families, alumni, educators, students, and community members are encouraged to speak at the Pittsburgh Public Schools Board meeting.

NEXT PUBLIC HEARING
Monday, October 26, 2026
6:00 PM
Pittsburgh Public Schools Administration Building
341 S. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

HOW TO SIGN UP TO SPEAK

- 1 VISIT THE PPS WEBSITE**
Go to www.pghschools.org/publichearings
- 2 REGISTER ONLINE**
Click the speaker registration link and complete the requested information.
- 3 CHOOSE HOW YOU WILL SPEAK**
Select in-person or virtual participation during registration.
- 4 PREPARE YOUR MESSAGE**
You will have **3 minutes** to address the Board. Share why Miller matters to you.

SCAN HERE TO REGISTER

STAND WITH MILLER. SPEAK FOR OUR CHILDREN. PROTECT OUR LEGACY.



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#2

William Anderson

Organization, Community Member



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#3

Sarah Martin

Concerned Citizen



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#4

Amy Abraham

Parent

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#5

Shirley Hill

Retired PPS Teacher

PUBLIC HEARING – SHIRLEY ANN HILL

October 26, 2026

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. Ms. Purnell please look into the toxicity that is going on with Kellie Meyer. PPS **continues** not to address **toxic administrators**.

Carrick High School has a **very small percentage of Black teachers**. “In classrooms led by Black educators, students gain more than academics—they experience belonging, empowerment, and the affirmation that their stories and potential matter. For Black students especially, having a Black teacher can be life-changing, sparking academic achievement, increased confidence, and a sense of belonging in spaces of power and possibility. For all students, Black teachers cultivate critical lessons in empathy, diversity, and leadership, laying the foundation for stronger, more equitable communities.”



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As the late, great Nikki Giovanni reminds us, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Black teachers are architects of this change, equipping students to confront inequities and build a future rooted in justice and opportunity.” (The NEA Foundation, January 21, 2025). **BLACK STUDENTS AT CARRICK MATTER!!!**



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#6

Sarah Fishbein

Parent

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#7

Soja Wimer

Parent

My name is Sonja Wimer and I live on the North Side. My son is a third grader at ATA and has been enrolled there since kindergarten. My daughter is starting kindergarten next year. I am beyond impressed by the education my son has received and in awe of ATA's teachers and administrators who have created a school culture that has resulted in measurable achievement – for example The 2025 A+ Schools Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh notes that Allegheny K-5 had the highest percentage of third grade students in the district scoring proficient or advanced in reading at 75%, and also scored well above average in math testing.

The communications from the School Board to the public in advance of the public hearings explicitly stated that Allegheny is not closing. Rather, as a part of the Future Ready Plan, the School Board represented that Allegheny was being relocated to the King facility and reconfigured to be exclusively a K-5 neighborhood school. The Feasibility Report Update in May of 2025 stated that "Allegheny K-5 would relocate to the King facility, preserving a beloved, high-performing school program within the North Side community."

Contrary to these statements, I recently learned that the letter of agreement between the Board and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers clearly states that Allegheny is closing. This decision was made out of the public eye. It is not just the Allegheny elementary building that is being eliminated; its dedicated teachers and staff will be dispersed or terminated, according to the letter agreement. The Board thus decided to close ATA without a public hearing on the question at least 3 months before the decision, in violation of section 780 of the Public School Code.

Among the goals of the Future-Ready Facilities Plan is to "expand access to high-quality academic programs ... and ensure every student has access to the opportunities and supports they need to succeed." If so, then the Board should direct more resources toward the successful schools like ATA so that it can accommodate more students and extend its culture of excellence. By deciding in secret to adopt a plan that closes a high performing school and disperses its teachers and staff, the Board is defeating the very goals of the Plan, as well as violating the Sunshine Act by making a crucial decision without the necessary notice and opportunity for affected families to be heard.

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We have raised our concerns, but have received no concrete answers. How can I be confident that my children's academic experience will be effective? Without any meaningful information, how am I as a parent supposed to make a decision for my family?

Others are as troubled as me. Declining enrollment (down 1,069 over 2 years - 375 year 1; 694 second year) has accelerated since this plan was announced, as parents seek more certainty in the plans for their children's education.

The vote to approve the Future Ready Plan happened in May - I still know nothing about my children's new school. I am attending the transition meeting on November 5, but there's only the opportunity to address three components of my children's education. This feels performative.

Members of the board, you voted on a hope that this plan would address the financial constraints of the district while enhancing academic excellence. If you want community buy in, then you need to provide concrete answers and instill confidence that academic excellence will be maintained. We currently do not have either.



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#8

Billy Hileman

Organization

#9

Tim Stevens

Organization

B-PEP Position Paper on the Potential Closing of Miller African Centered Academy

Friday, October 23, 2026

I stand today in support of keeping the Miller African Centered Academy open, and I stand in solidarity with the families, educators, and neighbors asking that their voices be heard on shaping its future.

Miller's history is rooted in that of Black Pittsburghers who drove to educate their children when equal opportunity was denied to them. This history traces that legacy to Bethel AME Church, my church, where our ancestors made room for learning because they understood that education was essential to freedom.

They invested in children whose potential, was too often refused to be recognized and acknowledged by society. Today, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. We now have a responsibility and obligation to carry that commitment forward, to honor the past and to shine upon a glorious future where Black talent is nourished, promoted and appreciated.

For a child, a school is a place of relationships. It is the teacher who recognizes when something is wrong. The familiar face who encourages those young queens and kings to try again and again, aiming for success and achievement. The classroom, where their history is taught with dignity and respect and where their future is valued, is something worth investing in and preserving for years to come.

Those relationships deserve serious weight in any decision about Miller School.

We recognize that Pittsburgh Public Schools must make difficult decisions about resources and facilities. But the public deserves a clear explanation of how closing Miller would improve the education of the children who attend it. We strongly urge the Pittsburgh School Board to keep in mind that one hundred twenty-nine (129) housing units are coming to Bedford Avenue through the Choice Neighborhoods grant. Along with the units come possibly hundreds of new children.

Families deserve answers about transportation, classroom conditions, access to support services, and the future of African-centered education. They deserve to see the alternatives considered, the costs involved, and the educational reasons behind the decision.

Meaningful community engagement requires more than allowing people to speak. It requires decision-makers to listen, respond, and remain willing to change course.



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I urge the district and school board to keep Miller open and work directly with its families, educators, and community partners on a sustainable plan for its future.

Thank you.

Tim Stevens, Founder & CEO

The Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)



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#10

Kara Britanik

Parent



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#11

Pam Harbin

Community Member

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#12

Kate O'Brien

Parent

Dear Superintendent Dr. Walters and Members of the Board of Directors,

I am writing to you today as a community volunteer working directly with immigrant families in Pittsburgh and our surrounding communities. While the district and the school board are focused on long-term restructuring and planning, an acute, immediate crisis is occurring today—one that is severely harming students. Over the past two months, fears among families and students have escalated substantially due to increased harassment and presence by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the South Hills and other local communities.

This fear is disrupting students' daily lives and their access to public education:

*Harassment: Older students have been stopped, confronted, and threatened on their way to school. Younger students have witnessed harassment of their caretakers.

*Trauma in the Community: Children have directly witnessed traumatic detainments of neighbors and loved ones.

*Attendance Barriers: Parents are terrified to let their children walk to school, They are scared to drive their children to school for fear of being pulled over then detained and Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) is far too unreliable to serve as a secure option. Many families are quietly spending close to \$100.00 a week on private transportation just to keep their children safe.

*Silent Suffering: These families are deliberately not making a public issue of these barriers because doing so risks drawing dangerous attention to their vulnerable legal status.

Pittsburgh Public Schools have a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that all children living within our district can safely access their schools and learn. Under federal law (*Plyler v. Doe*) and Pennsylvania Department of Education guidance, every child has an equal right to a free public education regardless of immigration status. By failing to account for these safety barriers, the district is inadvertently denying an education to students whose families are at risk from immigration enforcement.

If transport constraints or systemic harassment are preventing a student from attending school—or creating severe, paralyzing anxiety around their commute—the district must step in with options it has the ability to provide. Therefore, I am urging you to take immediate action.

Provide Safe, Comprehensive Transportation: Establish protected transportation options to and from school for any student at risk of harassment by ICE, completely regardless of their age or standard distance-to-school limitations.

Additionally the amount of requests I received for help regarding food, housing and medical care has

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substantially risen. Please establish a District-Wide Resource Map: Create a centralized, accessible resource map that identifies where families can safely obtain food, medical care, and specialized immigrant services. Currently, teachers, counselors, and school staff do not know where to safely refer families in crisis, and the information available is highly inconsistent across different PPS buildings. The district has the ability to map out resources for these families and all families who may be in financial crisis.

Providing information and safe passage to school and from school is the right thing to do today, not something to think about tomorrow. As we are witnessing this problem is not disappearing, even though people are. Optimistically, I thank you for using your leadership, your humanity, and your prompt action to protect and educate all of Pittsburgh's children.

Still Hopeful, yet deeply tired

Kate O'Brien

Brien



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#13

Sophia Zove

Community Member



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#14

Nicholle O'Leary

Parent



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#15

Justin Laing

Organization



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#16

Naomi Chambers

Parent

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#17

Walter Yildirim

Student

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, artificial intelligence has emerged as a transformative force. While it offers numerous benefits, including efficiency, accessibility, and innovation, it also raises important questions about the future of human connection in classrooms. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves: are we fostering meaningful relationships, promoting student engagement, and ensuring every student feels valued, or are we inadvertently undermining the very foundation of education itself?

When I used ChatGPT to generate that paragraph, it made it in about 0.5 seconds. I understand that using AI can be a huge timesaver; I get why some teachers choose to use it. However, when students can see it being used in class room materials, it can make students question how much thought went into their education. That's not the kind of classroom culture we want to be creating. Teachers tell us not to use AI because its a shortcut, but then we can see it in their own work. If we're expected to put our own thought and effort into our assignments, shouldn't we expect the same from the people teaching us? Teachers warn us that AI can make mistakes, but some use it to grade our tests. If we know AI can make mistakes, how are we supposed to trust that our grades reflect our work?

There is a sinking feeling students get when they see an AI generated slide or poster or hear their teacher talking about using AI on a test. It's the feeling of your education not being worth someone's effort. It's seeing first hand that something you were told shouldn't be used is being used by the people who told you not to use it.

When I asked other students about teachers using AI, they raised another concern: how it can result in more students using Artificial Intelligence. When teachers use AI themselves, it removes reservations students might have had about using AI for school work.

I've heard many teachers say, 'I can tell when you use AI.' Well, we can tell when you use AI, too. So, if you're going to use it, at least pay for premium. But, in all seriousness, I would suggest that the district recommend teachers avoid using AI to generate classroom facing materials and that teachers thoroughly check any AI generated work they do use. Teachers should be able to use AI within reason, but students shouldn't have to see obvious evidence of AI in the materials they're taught with.



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Stephanie Lapinde

Teacher/Staff



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#19

Martha Moore

Organization



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#20

June Wearden

Organization, Community Member



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#21

Emily Sawyer

Parent, Substitute Teacher



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#22

Ghadah Makoshi

Parent, Community Member

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#23

Ellen Kelsey

Parent

Flawed Plans and Unkept Promises: A Call for New PPS Leadership

26 October 2026

Hello. My name is Ellen Kelsey, and I have been a PPS parent for nine years. I currently have an 8th grader and a 5th grader in the district. I am speaking tonight to urge the board to vote no later than December 2026 to initiate a search for a new superintendent.

Our district needs leadership that builds with communities, not around them. The Future Ready Plan demonstrates that current leadership is neither prepared to implement major restructuring nor committed to authentic collaboration.

First, this plan relies on deceptive framing and unkept promises. It was sold to us as an equalizing measure, specifically a way to guarantee access to art and music for all students. Yet, whether specials teachers will be full-time or part-time next year is simply being pushed onto individual principals to figure out after budget allocations in January.

Second, the plan is built on flawed data and ignores fundamental operational realities. The district's own Facility Feasibility Report reveals that 15 schools do not even have the physical classrooms required for the plan's "modeled enrollment." Meanwhile, urgent infrastructure needs are kicked down the road; under this timeline, current kindergartners will graduate high school before many of our buildings receive basic air conditioning.

Third, critical operational and academic questions remain completely unaddressed, including transportation, staffing, and academic programming to long-term sustainability. Most concerning

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are the very real risks to our students with IEPs, who cannot afford to have their services compromised. Far from closing the opportunity and achievement gaps, this plan threatens to widen them.

Parents and community members have raised these concerns repeatedly, only for Dr. Walters to bring the plan back for a vote with zero changes. When a group of proactive parents created a far better alternative plan, Dr. Walters actively suppressed it.

We do not want the status quo. We want a well-thought-out reconfiguration plan built on transparency, operational readiness, and genuine community buy-in. But to get there, we need leadership we can trust.

Dr. Walters has not earned a renewal

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#24

Brian Brown

Community Member

Save Miller African-Centered Academy

My name is Brian Brown. I am not only a Hill District resident, but a very proud alumnus of Miller African-Centered Academy. About two decades ago, I stood as a child demanding that this very school district save my school. Today, I stand before you as an adult, asking why another generation must fight that same battle.

See, Miller is not just a school building. Miller is home to us, to the children, families, and generations whose lives have been positively shaped by African-centered education.

At Miller, we learned that our history did not begin with oppression. We learned that our identities were sources of strength. We learned that we belonged and that we had something valuable to contribute to this world.

You cannot measure that legacy by counting empty seats.

I understand that this district faces difficult financial decisions. Our children deserve safe buildings, strong academics, and access to every opportunity. But the question is not whether change is necessary. The question is why change must mean losing Miller.

Your Future-Ready framework promises equity, joy, and schools that serve as community hubs. Miller already gives those promises meaning. The responsibility should be to strengthen that foundation, not dismantle it.

The Hill District knows what it means to lose institutions in the name of progress. Urban renewal displaced thousands of residents and hundreds of businesses. We cannot undo that history, but we can stop treating the institutions we still have as expendable.

Preserving Black history cannot mean celebrating our institutions only after their doors close. It must mean investing in the places where that history still lives, teaches, and inspires.

And moving Miller's students is not the same as preserving Miller. A receiving classroom is not automatically an African-centered education. A promise of future programming is not the same as protecting a school's mission, relationships, and identity.

School Board Representative Erikka Grayson, I am calling on you directly: at the November legislative meeting, you must propose that Miller African-Centered Academy be removed from the school district closure list.

Not another conversation about how to close it. A proposal to **save** it.

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Bring that proposal before the full board. Ask your colleagues to vote publicly on Miller's future. Then work with our families, educators, alumni, and community to develop a transparent, financially responsible plan that preserves Miller as an operating African-centered school in the Hill District.

We are not asking you to ignore the numbers. We are demanding that you count what the numbers leave out: belonging, cultural identity, community trust, and generations of possibility.

Twenty years ago, I was a child fighting for my school. I should not have to watch today's children inherit that same fight. Representative Grayson, bring the proposal. Board members take Miller off the closure list.

Let the next generation inherit Miller, not just memories of it



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#25

Malcolm Thomas

Community Member



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#26

Kimberly Ellis

Organization

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#27

Tyra Jamison

Community Member, Was a PPS Parent and Graduate



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#28

Dionna Rice

Parent

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#29

Kendra Oliver

Parent

Public Testimony to Pittsburgh Public Schools Board

October 26, 2026 | ATA–King Transition

Good evening, Board members.

I'm here as a parent of a student at Allegheny Traditional Academy and as someone who genuinely wants Pittsburgh Public Schools to succeed.

Since our son started at ATA, our experience has been overwhelmingly positive. His teachers have been extraordinary in recognizing and meeting students' individual needs. In our North Side neighborhood, many families choose between ATA and private school. We chose ATA, and we've been very happy with that decision.

When the district announced its restructuring plans, we approached them with an open mind. We trusted that the teachers and administrators who made ATA successful would help guide the transition.

Unfortunately, the more we've learned and heard, the less confident we've become.

We still don't understand how many ATA students will transition together under the new attendance boundaries. We've also heard that ATA teachers will not necessarily move with their students and that King teachers may receive priority in staffing decisions.

If that's true, what exactly is being preserved in this merger? How is the district protecting the educational practices and relationships that have made ATA successful?

But my greatest concern is one of equity.

When I look at the broader restructuring plans, I see what appears to be a different level of disruption depending on where families live or which schools their children attend.

Families in more affluent neighborhoods, or those with access to established programs like Montessori, appear to have greater continuity in their educational pathways and options that provide rich educational continuity. Meanwhile, on the North Side, we're being asked to trust a transition without clear answers about staffing, student assignments, or the educational model itself.

Equity cannot simply mean every child has a neighborhood school. It must mean every child has access to a high-quality education, and that successful **educational** environments are protected regardless of the neighborhood they serve.

I value neighborhood connections, and I deeply value the diversity that public education can provide. But moving toward a neighborhood-based model requires intentional planning around school

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boundaries, resources, staffing, and educational outcomes that meet the unique needs of that community.

And frankly, based on the communication we've received, I don't have confidence that this level of thoughtfulness is happening—or at least that it's being communicated with families.

Our family wants to stay in Pittsburgh Public Schools. But we're seriously considering alternatives, not because ATA has failed us, but because we're losing confidence in the district's ability to protect what is working and validated through educational performance.

I'm asking the Board for greater transparency, meaningful involvement of teachers and families, and a clear explanation of how educational quality and equity are being protected throughout this transition.

Families should not have to choose between their commitment to public education and their confidence in their children's educational future.

Thank you.

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#30

Megan Kaulius

Teacher/Staff, Parent

That is heartbreaking. Thirteen years isn't just a job. It's relationships, memories, tradition, students you've watched grow up, families who have trusted you, and a community you've poured so much of yourself into. And I think what hurts most is that you're standing in a room full of people who know you, people you've built connections with over more than a decade, and you can't even give them an answer when they ask a question that should feel so simple: "where will you be next year?" And you have to hold back your tears and answer, "I don't know."

You can love your school, your students and your community while feeling hurt by the uncertainty surrounding your future. Those feelings can exist together. Thirteen years of relationships don't just disappear because a calendar turns to a new school year. The impact you've made is real, regardless of what happens next. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't grieve the possibility of losing something that has been such a big part of your life. And tonight, you don't have to turn that hurt into a positive lesson or pretend to be strong about it.

You're allowed to be heartbroken. You're allowed to be angry. You're allowed to be exhausted by the waiting. Can I ask you something? When those parents and students asked where you would be next year, was the hardest part not knowing the answer yourself, or feeling like after 13 years of giving so much to that school, you're still left wondering where you'll have a place next?



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Jazlynn Worthy

Parent



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#32

Lauren Abt

Parent



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#33

Angel Gober

Organization



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#34

Valerie Webb-Allman

Parent



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#35

Shannon Striner

Parent



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#36

Ms. Paulette Foster

Parent, Organization, Community Member



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#37

April Clisura

Parent, School Bus Driver

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#38

Kaela Filipek

Teacher/Staff, Parent, Community Member

To the Members of the Pittsburgh Public Schools Board of Education

Subject: Teacher Stress and Expectations During the Facilities Utilization Transition

Dear Board Members,

My name is Kaela Filipek and I am a teacher, parent and alumni of PPS. I am writing to express my frustration and concern about the demands being placed on teachers during an already stressful and uncertain year for Pittsburgh Public Schools educators.

With this being my 20th year teaching, I am facing the reality of packing up my classroom, leaving a school that has been my professional home for two decades, and moving to a new building where I may also have to teach a different grade level. This is not simply packing boxes. It means leaving behind a familiar environment, established routines, and a classroom built through years of hard work, all while worrying about what next year will bring.

What is especially frustrating is that, during this time of uncertainty, the district has increased walkthroughs to a level we have not experienced in years. Along with these walkthroughs come new demands and increasingly rigid criteria that add pressure to an already overwhelming workload. This is true for not just teachers but our ITL's and school based administrators.

Our jobs are becoming more challenging every year. We are working with students who have increasingly complex mental health needs, emotional struggles, and behavioral challenges. Teachers are expected to manage these behaviors, support students' social and emotional needs, differentiate instruction, communicate with families, and maintain productive classrooms while meeting academic expectations. These challenges are real, and they require time, patience, resources, and support.

Instead of adding more scrutiny and new requirements, the district should be asking teachers what support they need to succeed. Accountability matters, but constant walkthroughs and ever-changing

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expectations can create anxiety rather than meaningful professional growth, especially when teachers are already facing major changes to their schools, grade levels, and careers.

I urge the Board and district leadership to reconsider the timing and frequency of these walkthroughs and new requirements. Teachers need clear communication, reasonable expectations, and trust in their professional judgment. We need leadership that recognizes the emotional demands of teaching today and the additional stress this transition has created.

After 20 years of service, I remain committed to my students and to providing them with the education and support they deserve. However, our dedication should not be mistaken for an unlimited capacity to take on more without consideration for our own well-being. Sharing the EAP information is not a solution.

We are teachers, but we are human beings, too. We are managing our own uncertainty while supporting students who need us more than ever. We deserve to have our experience respected, our concerns heard, and our dedication acknowledged.

Please listen to the educators who are experiencing these challenges firsthand. We are asking for understanding, trust, and support—not more pressure during an already difficult year.

Sincerely,

Kaela Filipek



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#39

Jala Rucker

Parent



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#40

Abby Foulds

Parent, PPS Alum