

Good morning, members of the City Council's Law and Government Committee. My name is Sylvia Simms and I am the founder of Educational Opportunities for Families, and a former member of the School Reform Commission (SRC).

I wanted to take this opportunity to come before you, as you discuss an amendment to the City's Charter to allow for the selection and confirmation of a new 9-member school board, to impress upon you the gravity of the task before you and the Mayor.

As a lifelong resident of North Philly, I have seen the effects that low-performing schools can have on a community. I have experienced the feeling of helplessness that a parent or family member feels sending their student to a school which they know is failing to provide a quality education. And I have also felt the anger of a parent who trusted a school system and its leaders when it asked us to "be patient" and "give the District time to make reforms from within." Well I can tell you, parents in this City are done waiting.

We spend close to \$3 billion every year to educate the students in this City and yet we have 29 schools that only received a single-digit score on the District's most recent School Progress Report. These single-digit schools are home to over 17,000 students who are being failed by this City.

But there is hope for our children, and it comes when families are empowered with access to high-quality school choice options. In the City of Philadelphia, the charter schools are outperforming the District.

Let me make one thing very clear, the new school board has a responsibility to ensure that every public school student has access to a high-quality education. This means, not only must these individuals work to improve the District-run schools but they must also respect and preserve a family's right to choose the best school for their children.

As Mayor Kenney said, "I am responsible to every one of those children, no matter the type of school they attend and I will be judged by the voters on the number of high-performing schools in every neighborhood, not whether those schools are district or public charters."

Council members, there are nearly 65,000 Philadelphia children attending a charter school in this City, that is 40 percent of the total student population.

I ask that you ensure the selection and confirmation process for the new school board is unbiased, and that the board members you confirm are there to represent the needs of every Philadelphia student and not there to push their own political agenda.

On behalf of the 8,000 plus families that I am privileged to call my allies in the fight for better Philadelphia schools, I ask that you take the responsibility of confirming the Mayor's appointed school board very seriously because we will be watching and holding you and the Mayor accountable for the outcomes.