June 3, 2014

Mayor Michael Nutter

Hon. Darrell L. Clarke, City Council President

Hon. Jannie Blackwell, City Council Member, District 3

City Hall

Philadelphia, PA 19107

Senator Vince Hughes Senator Anthony Williams

4950 Parkside Avenue, Suite 300 2901 Island Avenue, Suite 100

Philadelphia, PA 19131 Philadelphia, PA 19153

Rep. James R. Roebuck, Jr. Governor Tom Corbett

4712 Baltimore Ave. Southeast Office

Philadelphia, PA 19143 200 S. Broad Street, 11th Floor

 Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: Philadelphia School District Budget Crisis

Dear Governor Corbett, Mayor Nutter, Hon. Blackwell, Hon. Clarke, Senator Hughes, Senator Williams, and Representative Roebuck:

We write on behalf of the Spruce Hill Community Association (SHCA), an active and diverse volunteer organization of residents, students, business owners, and institutions committed to serving the interests of the Spruce Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia. Our Board and our officers are elected annually by our members, which include hundreds of neighborhood families.

As a community, **we call on the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide additional funding to the Philadelphia public schools**. We believe that the anticipated budget shortfall, which is expected to dramatically increase the teacher-to-student ratio in the schools, will inevitably result in unsustainable conditions. Recent, well-publicized events have demonstrated that Philadelphia schools are already dangerously understaffed in critical areas. To further dilute the amount of support available to our schools and our children will inevitably result in severe, unintended consequences that are currently unimaginable. Our elected leaders must step up to find the funds necessary to avoid such an unprecedented calamity.

Moreover, there is an obvious upside to increased funding. A sincere investment in our schools would benefit the entire city, as good schools are among the chief engines that build strong communities. To use our neighborhood as an example, prior to the opening of the Penn Alexander School (PAS) in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania, Spruce Hill was overwhelmingly a renters’ neighborhood – a place where students and university employees lived for a few years before moving away, often resulting in the type of blight and dangers that accompany absentee landlord communities. However, the opening of PAS has dramatically changed that. Now instead of being an area from which people quickly move away once they have children, Spruce Hill has instead become a neighborhood where families move to buy homes and raise their children. Investment in the neighborhood has followed, and landlord neglect is gradually being replaced by homeowners’ pride, which in turn has resulted in greater access to retail, green spaces and other improved amenities and living conditions. In addition, the spirit of community has spread beyond our immediate neighborhood, and many residents of Spruce Hill have become involved with the surrounding communities, including extensive volunteer efforts by Spruce Hill residents on behalf of the nearby Henry C. Lea and (now closed) Alexander Wilson schools.

Our experience demonstrates that by investing in schools, other neighborhoods can experience a similar transformation, and more families will stay and invest, and take pride, in their neighborhood. However, unfortunately, the reverse must also be true -- neglecting the schools is tantamount to neglecting the entire city. Underfunding the city’s schools is a clear invitation to families to move out and invest elsewhere. It is not a sustainable long term plan for stability or growth, and will ultimately detrimentally impact the entire city, the School District, and everyone who lives here.

We appreciate that this is an election year and that the fate of the Philadelphia School District is a “hot button issue” that could impact many races at both the commonwealth and the city level. We are asking you, however, to put politics aside and focus on the children of Philadelphia. We urge you to all work together and collaboratively find a way to properly fund the city schools in 2014 and thereafter. It is undeniably the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

Eric Santoro

SHCA Director and Education Chair, on behalf of the SHCA Board of Directors

cc (via email):

Dr. William Hite, Superintendent, SDP

Karyn Lynch, Chief of Student Services, SDP

Sheila Sydnor, Principal, PAS