

Good Evening. My name is Kristin Luebbert—community member, taxpayer, teacher, and member of the Caucus of Working Educators, the social justice caucus of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

When speaking of spending that values cheap and easy over long-term value, my grandmother (probably your grandmothers, too) had a saying: Penny wise and pound foolish. Many items in this budget—especially the outsourcing of valuable staff—are the very epitome of penny wise and pound foolish.

The potential outsourcing of our certified school nurses to agencies that employ lesser-qualified people is most certainly an example of this flawed and short-sighted policy. Agencies exist to make a profit—they will come in to our schools for one reason only: to make money off of our students. If a student has a problem that is not billable or has the “wrong” insurance, these agencies will flatly refuse to serve them. This is already happening in our schools that have outsourced mental health services for students. At my school we have an outside agency that provides mental health services to some students. The VERY FIRST thing this agency (and, indeed any agency) does when a student in distress is recommended to them is to vet the family’s insurance coverage. I cannot count the number of times I have received a call in my classroom regarding a student I referred for services only to be told: “Sorry, the family does not have the correct insurance, we cannot admit them to our program.” The needs of the students, the families, and the school community are simply not addressed by agencies if they cannot bill for the service. This is the nature of the beast—agencies exist to make money!

So many of the things our certified school nurses do all the time are simply NOT “cost-effective” in the world of billing codes and medical insurance. When those children show up at the nurse’s office instead of being asked: “What’s wrong, sweetheart, what happened?” will they be asked, “What is the name and number of your family’s insurance policy?”

What will happen to the kindergartner who gets so excited or nervous that he wets his pants and needs to go to the nurse for some comfort, a change of clothes, and a phone call to mom? There’s no billing code for that.

What will happen to the seventh grade girl who did not realize she would get her period that day and needs some comfort and a sanitary pad? There’s no billing code for that.

Who will I—as a teacher—consult when I need help figuring out why an 8th grader is unusually sleepy throughout most of the school day? Who will be that trusted school nurse who can call the family to delicately investigate the myriad of reasons--from depression, to homelessness, allergies, to drug use that could cause this? There’s no billing code for that.

I could go on, but again I say to you that agencies will not equitably serve all our students—and I thought that was our mission. Please do not be penny wise and pound foolish and please restore our real certified school nurses to our schools.

