**Philadelphia Healthy Schools Initiative**

**c/o Penn Environment**

Dear Laurel,

On behalf of the Philly Healthy Schools Initiative (PHSI), we’d like to ask you to consider becoming a signatory partner of our growing coalition.

Formed in May 2017, Philly Healthy Schools Initiative brings together parents, teachers, and principals, students, community members, and public health experts from Philadelphia and around the country to develop a plan to address the environmental health threats found in our school buildings. Many facilities require urgent repair, in addition to long-term modernization in order to be safe, healthy, educationally inspiring, and environmentally sustainable institutions. Our schools are critical parts of the social fabric for our communities and neighborhoods; places where our children go to learn, achieve, build lifelong friendships and grow up to be productive citizens in society.

In October 2017, on the heels of the JB Kelly Elementary School mold outbreak that forced the school to shut down for a week, PHSI held a press conference at City Hall along with Councilman Derek Green and Councilwomen Helen Gym to announce the filing of a formal Right To Know request with the School District to get more information about environmental health risks at JB Kelly and other city schools.

Sadly, the situation at Kelly is hardly a fluke. The average age of our public school facilities is more than 66 years, and decades of under-investment has resulted in nearly $5 billion of deferred maintenance, repairs, and replacement needs.[[1]](#footnote-1) As a result, students, teachers and staff have been exposed to lead in paint and drinking water, asbestos, mold, rodent and pest infestations, and lack of proper climate control.

Classrooms and school buildings that pose these health hazards for our children also make it harder to deliver the quality education that they need and deserve. Sadly, many toxic materials and deficient conditions are too commonplace in our schools and, in particular, the most extreme risks and worst conditions are present in our poorest and most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Not only do the conditions found in our schools compromise student and staff health, safety and well-being, but they also undercut educational achievement, fiscal and environmental sustainability, and educational justice and equity.

**We Can & We Must Do Better**

This situation necessitates immediate action and a real and sustainable community and civic partnership with the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). For these reasons, we ask you to work with us to move swiftly to:

* **Improve the Public’s Right to Know & Right to Act** — by immediately requiring greater information and data transparency from the SDP. As parents and residents, we are all invested in improving our education and our schools, but this can only be achieved when the public is well informed. Our coalition intends to work with the District to establish priorities, plans, approaches and budgets for major school improvements;
* **Establish the “ABCs” of school health**—an “Adequate Building Conditions” standard and a set of “Best Practices” should quickly be developed establishing minimally acceptable standards a school building must meet to maintain a healthy learning environment and protect students and staff;
* **Identify and address the most critical health and safety priorities.** SDP should better prioritize facility projects and implement critical Facility, Maintenance & Operation Department [FM&O] fixes in order to quickly remediate the most urgent environmental health threats in our schools and put every school on the path to meeting the Adequate Building Conditions “ABCs” standard;
* **Develop a comprehensive district-wide “Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan” [CEFMP].** SDP should emulate school districts across the country that developed Facilities Master Plans. These plans prioritize the planning and development of equitable capital and maintenance needs and budgeting to ensure that our schools that are healthy, safe, educationally inspiring and environmentally sustainable;
* **Create an Educational Facilities - Environmental Health Stakeholder Advisory Committee -** increase and formalize engagement of parents, teachers, public and private advocates, to include input from all relevant stakeholders, and to work with City Council, the MOE and the SDP, to provide input and recommendations to the SDP and to develop the CEFMP;
* **Support increased funding at all levels, and from all sources, to help finance these crucial initiatives to ensure our school buildings are environmentally safe.**

We know that working together, we can make sure that all of Philadelphia’s schools are healthy and safe places for our children, teachers, school workers and community members. We look forward to working with you to make this vision a reality.

**Current Partners:**

32BJ SEIU Local 1201

American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees [AFSCME] DC 33

American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees [AFSCME] DC 47

American Postal Workers Union [APWU]

East Passyunk Crossing Civic

Education Law Center

Friends of Hackett

Friends of Jackson

Friends of Neighborhood Education [FONE]

Friends of Stephen Girard Elementary

Friends of Southwark Association

Media Mobilizing Project

Moms Clean Air Force PA

National Nurse-Led Care Consortium

Parents United for Public Education

Passyunk Square Civic Association

PennEnvironment

Philadelphia AFL-CIO

PhilaPOSH

Philly Schools Uniting Neighborhoods [PhillySun]

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia

SEIU Healthcare PA

Teamster Local 502, CASA (Philadelphia School Administrators)

The Food Trust

The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

United Home Care Workers of PA Youth United for Change (YUC)

Central Roxborough Civics Assoc. Healthy Schools Network [Claire Barnett]

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***Technical Advisory Committee Members to the PHSI-Coalition***

*1) 21st Century School Fund, Wash., DC*

*2) Center for Cities + Schools, University of California, Berkeley*

*3) Center for Environmental Excellence in Toxicology [CEET] Perelman Medical School University of Pennsylvania*

*4) Fred Farlino, SDP’s Executive Director for School Support Services, General Manager for Facilities, Maintenance & School Operations [FM&O], & Chief Operating Officer* ***[retired]***

*5) Darryl Alexander, Formerly Director of Health, Safety & Well-Being for the American Federation of Teachers [AFT]; currently “Consultant to the AFT’s Office of the Secretary-Treasurer”*

1. http://www.philly.com/philly/education/Phila-school-buildings-need-almost-5b-in-repairs.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)