

# Philly Healthy Schools Initiative

**Contact:** David Masur – Executive Director PennEnvironment [[david@pennenvironment.org](mailto:david@pennenvironment.org)]

On behalf of the organizations below, we call on you to take immediate, ongoing, and much needed action to address the threat of dangerous conditions in Philadelphia’s public school buildings and grounds. These 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.

The average age of our public school facilities is > 66 years and decades of under-investment has resulted in nearly \$5 billion of deferred maintenance, repairs, and replacement needs.<sup>1</sup> 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 & 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;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.philly.com/philly/education/Phila-school-buildings-need-almost-5b-in-repairs.html>

- **Develop a comprehensive district-wide “Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan” [CEFMP]:** SDP should emulate school districts across the country that have 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.

32BJ SEIU Local 1201  
 AFSCME DC 33  
 AFSCME DC 47  
 American Postal Workers Union [APWU]  
 Bella Vista Neighbors Association  
 Cedar Park Neighbors  
 Central Roxborough Civic Association  
 Cobbs Creek Neighbors Association  
 Cook Wissahickon Home & School Association  
 Crosstown Coalition  
 Defend Our Future  
 Dickinson Square West Civic Association  
 East Kensington Neighbors Association  
 East Passyunk Crossing Civic  
 East Point Breeze Neighbors  
 Education Law Center  
 Fox Chase Elementary Home and School  
 Friends of Bache Martin  
 Friends of Hackett  
 Friends of Jackson  
 Friends of Nebinger  
 Friends of Neighborhood Education [FONE]  
 Friends of Penn Treaty School  
 Friends of Southwark Association  
 Friends of Stephen Girard Elementary  
 Friends of Vare-Washington  
 Hawthorne Empowerment Coalition  
 Healthy Schools Network

Jackson Home and School Association  
 Lower Moyamensing Civic Association  
 Manayunk Neighborhood Council  
 Mantua Civic Association  
 McCall School Advisory Council  
 Media Mobilizing Project  
 Meredith School Advisory Council  
 Moms Clean Air Force PA  
 National Nurse-Led Care Consortium  
 National Youth Foundation  
 Packer Park Civic Association  
 Parents United for Public Education  
 Passyunk Square Civic Association  
 Penn Alexander Home and School Association  
 PennEnvironment  
 Philadelphia AFL-CIO  
 PhilaPOSH  
 Philly Schools Uniting Neighborhoods  
 [PhillySun]  
 Physicians for Social Responsibility  
 Powelton Village Civic Association  
 Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia  
 Queen Village Neighbors Association  
 SEIU Healthcare PA  
 Teamsters Local 502, CASA (Philadelphia  
 School Administrators)  
 The Black Church Center for Justice and  
 Equality

The Food Trust  
The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers [PFT]  
United Home Care Workers of PA

Veterans Stadium Neighbors Civic Association  
Washington Square West Civic Association  
Youth United for Change [YUC]

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

- 1) 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, Washington, 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]***