



**Testimony to the School Board of Philadelphia
Re: School Facilities Plan**

Feb. 26, 2026

Good evening, board members. My name is Symbol Lai. I'm with Children First.

I'm testifying about the school district's facilities plan. I want to thank the district for working with the Mayor and City Council to develop a plan that rehabilitates schools. Philly schools are some of the oldest in the nation, and it's no small feat to attempt a wholesale renovation. I commend the district for this effort.

In this next phase of planning, I urge the board and district to flesh out more fully how the proposed modernization of 159 buildings will ensure Philly students access to a quality education. This is an education that includes pre-k and career technical education. If the district and board's aim is to expand opportunities, the district must offer concrete details on how new facilities and renovations will make space for pre-k and CTE.

Second, as the board weighs possible closures and co-locations that impact students, I urge board members to toe the line of doing no harm.

Impacted students **MUST** be better off when the plans are implemented and complete. Their new school must improve academic performance, elicit safe climates, and provide ample afterschool enrichment opportunities. The facilities plan cannot force students to uproot themselves only to attend a new school, where their academic experience deteriorates.

For this to happen, I urge the board to guarantee the following

- The district must develop plans for clear, continued communication with impacted families. The district must give clear, timely information about changes and projects as well as support and resources for families to adjust. The district must also provide options that allow parents to choose the school that best fit their child's needs.
- The district must give students who relocate priority access to unfilled seats in other schools, including special admission schools, and priority offers in the school selection process.

- The district must guarantee a seamless transition for impacted students receiving IEPs and IFSPs. These plans should be developed by sending and receiving schools as well as by the Office of Diverse Learners.
- The district must work with the city’s DBHIDS and CBH to increase mental health supports at sending and receiving schools so that students at both schools are supported in the change.

Finally, if this master plan is to ensure that every student has access to high-quality academic and extracurricular activities, Children First urges the district to outline the operational resources needed to make that happen. We know that the current plan was developed to account for chronic underfunding. We want the board sets its sights further on what we need to meet an ideal. Clarify the resources you need to give Philly students the quality they deserve.

Again, any facilities plan that proposes school closures and co-locations must do no harm. That means, it must guarantee protections and increased resources for impacted families. It must spell out how modernizations will account for programs that define a quality education – programs like pre-k and CTE. And, it must speak to the resources needed to enhance education, enrichment, and supports for schools in question. I urge the board to refine the plan before them accordingly.

Thank you.