



## **Children First's Statement Ride Share/School Closures**

Presented to Philadelphia City Council, May 2026  
Inella Ray, Director of Parent Advocacy & Engagement  
Children First

**The District and School Board need to rebuild trust in the process so that City Council can play the role it always has in supporting our schools.**

For 46 years, Children First has been a passionate advocate of delivering more for our kids. We've worked with parents, teachers, principals, businesses, and community members to push the city, the state, and the School District to step up for Philadelphia's children. Time and time again, we've seen our local elected officials - including the Mayor and City Council - join us as leaders in the fight for our kids.

When the closure of 20 schools was first announced, we knew the school facilities plan would destabilize the education of students, making the continuity of teaching and learning and access to school more complicated for many families. Cognizant of the disparate impact of school closures on Black and Hispanic students, **we called on school officials and elected officials to spell out a guarantee that every student would be better off than they are now when the plan is implemented. Further, we called for the District to increase the depth of details of the plan associated with pre-k, CTE, and modernizations so students, children, faculty, and all concerned Philadelphians can determine if the vision and goals of this plan align with the estimated costs and implementation.**

We also urged the School Board to add a new principle to the plan's framing and essential goals that this plan would ***Do No Harm***. This includes outline supports a student transition process that at a minimum includes the following:

1. Robust communication with and support of impacted families.
2. For students being relocated to receive priority access to unfilled seats in other schools, including special admission schools, and priority offers in the school selection process.
3. Individualized transition plans for students with IEPs or IFSPs
4. A full suite of mental health services for students in schools that are closed

At the same time, we also understood the need for a facilities plan that focuses resources wisely and provides a pathway forward for our crumbling infrastructure. The School District of Philadelphia is currently underfunded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by nearly \$1 billion, a stark reminder of the decades of disinvestment in Pennsylvania's largest school district. This chronic underfunding has put the District and the City in a position in which it has to close schools in order to bring modern facilities to every neighborhood.

This process was never going to be easy - but in order for it to work, the School District and the School Board needed to build trust with the communities, parents, teachers, principals, and most importantly the students who will be impacted. We participated on the Facilities Task Force in good faith. But since the list of closures was announced, and then adjusted, it appeared that decisions were not being made in a transparent manner, with a clear rationale and based on facts and input from impacted families.

We urge the School Board to move forward *in consort with its largest local funder, the City of Philadelphia*. The Board must recognize that the District's capital budget is a plan that can and should be adjusted. To be sure there are insufficient resources to accomplish most of what is envisioned in the capital budget as it stands. Thus, it's not set in stone, and it can and should be adjusted based on current and urgent realities.

We stand with Council noting that they have a legitimate role in this process. We urge Council to enter into a productive dialogue with the Board so that an agreement can be reached that includes an increase in local funding to avoid any school-based personnel cuts so that parents and children are confident that both the quality of education and the condition of schools that remain open will improve.

Thank you for your time.