

*Jerry T. Jordan
President
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers*

*House Democratic Policy Committee
Hearing on Toxic Schools
April 8, 2021*



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FEDERATION of TEACHERS



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House Democratic Policy Hearing: Toxic Schools

Jerry Jordan, President, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

Virtual | Thursday, April 8, 2021 | 3:00PM

Good afternoon. I'm Jerry Jordan, President of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Thank you Representative Fiedler for your remarkable leadership on the toxic schools crisis and your ongoing partnership in our Fund Our Facilities Coalition. Thank you Chairman Bizzarro, Representative Fiedler, and all members of the committee for hosting this important hearing today.

The toxic schools crisis in Philadelphia and across the commonwealth is emblematic of just how profoundly the deep seated, systemically racist underfunding of our schools has impacted our students. Our young people, the majority of whom are Black and brown and experiencing poverty, have had to endure conditions that would never, *ever* be tolerated in wealthier, whiter school districts.

The school facilities crisis is a searing example of this atrocious inequity, and it's exactly why we formed the [Fund Our Facilities Coalition](#) to identify real, workable solutions to the **decades of neglect that have left toxic conditions plaguing our schools.**

- Decades of neglect that led SEIU worker Chris Trakimas to lose his life after a boiler explosion at FS Edmonds.
- Decades of neglect that lead then first grader Dean Pagan to suffer lead poisoning after eating lead paint chips from his desk.
- Decades of neglect that led to a devastating mesothelioma diagnosis for PFT member Lea DiRusso, who spent her career teaching in buildings with known, damaged asbestos.
- Decades of neglect that led Chelsea Mungo, then a fourth grader at Cassidy Elementary, to write to her State Senator and ask why the color of her skin impacted how her school is funded, and shared with him that she feels like she is in prison or a junkyard when she is in what is supposed to be a sacred place of learning.

The Fund Our Facilities Coalition, founded by the PFT and now more than 70 members strong, including many of you, has identified the most critical infrastructure issues that must be addressed. In a moment you will hear from our Environmental Scientist Jerry Roseman, who will outline some of those issues. But let me just say this: for \$200

House Democratic Policy Hearing: Toxic Schools

Jerry Jordan | 4/8/21

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million dollars, we could remediate the most pressing environmental concerns within more than 225 School District of Philadelphia buildings.

That would include, but is not limited to, electrical upgrades, lead and asbestos remediation and stabilization, ventilation upgrades, and COVID related safety protocol. I am including our Fund Our Facilities Coalition two-pager, as well as our [January 2021 press release which outlines what this \\$200M can achieve](#).

The state has a significant obligation here to ensure that our students have access to a thorough and efficient system of public education. And when students are learning in conditions that can quite literally poison them, we are shirking our collective responsibility.

There is always money for what we prioritize. Always.

And let me just close by saying that \$200M is a floor, not a ceiling. And it must come with significant oversight and community involvement. As a society, we have a very important question in front of us, and it's one that really should be easy for everyone to answer: do our students and educators deserve to work and learn in schools that are healthy and safe?

Thank you for this opportunity, and I look forward to continuing to work with each of you.

Attachments

APPENDIX

Jerry T. Jordan
President
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

House Democratic Policy Committee
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April 8, 2021



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FUND OUR FACILITIES

IS A COALITION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS, LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FOCUSED ON ENSURING CRITICAL INVESTMENT IN OUR SCHOOL FACILITIES.

We are advocating for a commonsense agenda based on the following:

- Every child across the Commonwealth has the right to a quality public education in a school that is safe, healthy, and clean.
- For too long, students across the state have suffered from catastrophic disinvestment in their schools, resulting in physical and environmental hazards in their school buildings.
- As leaders in our communities, we have a moral imperative to work in a unified way to ensure that no child is ever again poisoned in their classroom.
- **NEW, January 2021:** As shameful conditions in school facilities have persisted without comprehensive remediation, facilities needs have increased. Additionally, the onset of the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated many of the existing needs within buildings, specifically around air quality and ventilation.

New, January 2021: Our Coalition is calling on an immediate investment of \$200 Million to remediate the most pressing environmental concerns within more than 225 School District of Philadelphia buildings.

- More school cleaning and maintenance staff
- Rodent & pest control; asthma control
- Accelerated & expanded lead paint and asbestos stabilization
- Repair of water leaks
- Electrical & lighting upgrades
- Bathroom upgrades
- Window replacement
- NEW, January 2021: COVID related response and upgrades (including air quality)
- Improved strategic planning, data management, collaboration, and quality control efforts

This \$200 million will help ensure Philadelphia's schools are safe, healthy, and clean. It does not negate the need for the billions of dollars needed for a longer-term facilities investment plan.

While this figure is specific to Philadelphia's needs, our Coalition is founded on the principles of equitable access across the state and nation. We are part of a broader nationwide "Fund Our Future" investment agenda for public schools, and we hope that our collective efforts can serve as a model for other cities and states looking for sensible ways to ensure the safety and health of our children.

See Reverse for Coalition Partners | Updated January 2021 | **pft.org/FOF**



AFT Pennsylvania
A Union of Professionals



City Council
PHILADELPHIA

POWER

CONGRESSMAN

Councilmember (At-Large)
HELEN GYM

City Councilman Darrell Clarke
Darrell L. Clarke, President



Cherelle PARKER
COUNCILWOMAN
9TH DISTRICT

BRENDAN BOYLE

THE PUBLIC INTEREST
LAW CENTER



REP. DONNA BULLOCK

195th Legislative District
Philadelphia County

MALCOLM KENYATTA

PA STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Senator SHARIF STREET

Representing the 3rd Senatorial District



public citizens for children + youth

Katherine Gilmore Richardson
COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE

Christine M. TARTAGLIONE
STATE SENATOR
2nd DISTRICT



KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE

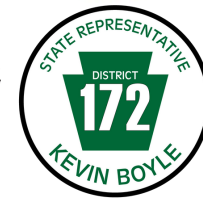
LEANNE KRUEGER
STATE ★ REPRESENTATIVE

COUNCIL MEMBER
ISAIAH THOMAS

KENYATTA JOHNSON
2ND DISTRICT COUNCILMEMBER

WORKING AMERICA
AFL-CIO

ART HAYWOOD
PARTICIPATION IS POWER
Serving the 4th Senatorial District



MARK SQUILLA
CITY COUNCILMAN
— DISTRICT 1 —

STATE REP 175th
MARY ISAACSON
A STRONG PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATIC WOMAN.

THE PITTSBURGH FEDERATION OF TEACHERS



REP. KINSEY
201ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



JAMIE GAUTHIER
3RD DISTRICT COUNCILMEMBER

For Our Future PA
Action Fund

Cindy Bass
8th District Councilwoman
City of Philadelphia

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JOE HOHENSTEIN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MIKE ZABEL
163RD LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

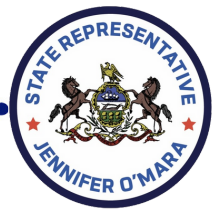


Rep. Regina Young
Rep. Darisha K. Parker
Rep. Danilo Burgos
Rep. Ben Sanchez
Rep. Ed Neilson
Rep. Liz Hanbidge
Rep. Amen Brown
Rep. Carol Hill-Evans
Rep. Dave Delloso
Rep. Tina Davis
Rep. Joe Webster



SENATOR
TIM KEARNEY
26

TIM BRIGGS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
PA 149th



LiUNA!
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District Council 88
AFSCME
We Make Pennsylvania Happen

PHILLY HEALTHY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

Allegheny Labor Federation
Councilmember Curtis Jones



Fund Our Facilities Coalition Announces \$200M Demand, Coalition Expansion

January 14, 2021



NEWS RELEASE

Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
Jerry T. Jordan, President



PHILADELPHIA— The [Fund Our Facilities Coalition \(FOF\)](#), established in early 2019 in response to the ongoing facilities crisis in Philadelphia’s public schools, continues to grow and further our demands for safe and healthy schools.

Today, the Coalition released an [updated demand](#) and [member list](#). Newly elected officials outlined their commitment to the Coalition and their decision to immediately join as partners:

Representative Rick Krajewski (HD-188) noted, “I am well aware that I am who I am today because of my education. I am here because I had a safe school to go to and I had teachers who believed in me and invested in my growth. The children in West and Southwest Philadelphia deserve high quality education in safe healthy schools and teachers and staff deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. That is why I support Fund Our Facilities and will fight alongside teachers and students for the right to high quality public education.”

Senator John Kane (SD-9) said, “We can’t have equity without equitable public education. Right now, we have school buildings that are falling apart, that aren’t safe to be in, and we’re expecting students to learn in those conditions. That is unacceptable. I’m proud to stand with my fellow legislators and our partners in calling for additional funding and resources for our schools and our students.”

Senator Nikil Saval (SD-9) said, “A society is only as good as how it cares for its most vulnerable, and I’m proud to be joining this list of elected officials and community organizations coming together to fight on behalf of Philadelphia children. As a parent, I’m committed to ensuring all our children have the quality education they deserve, in spaces that are safe and nurturing for students and teachers alike.”

The Coalition, now more than 70-members strong, began with an immediate ask of \$170M. However, due to years of inaction as well as the onset of the devastating COVID-19 crisis, FOF has developed a \$200 Million demand based on current projections of need.

House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton (HD191) stated, “Now is the time to fund our facilities in Philadelphia to ensure that when students

finally return to the classroom, the buildings where they are taught are clean, safe, and usable. If we do this, we can increase the chances that our students will have a positive learning experience.”

On the Coalition’s growing footprint and our reassertion of our demands, **PFT President Jerry T. Jordan** said, “Following a year unlike any we’ve ever seen, and on the heels of four years of national devastation, our Coalition’s commitment to advancing an equity agenda is more critical than ever. Our students, educators, and communities deserve nothing less. We are not asking for \$200 Million. We are demanding it. Budgets are always reflections of values and priorities. The question in front of us as a society is do we value the children we serve in the School District of Philadelphia, a majority of whom are students of color and who are experiencing poverty?”

AFT President Randi Weingarten noted, “Our children must feel safe and welcome in their schools and their communities, and our educators have a right to be safe too. That’s why it’s imperative for our local, state and federal officials to do their part to address safety issues like asbestos, broken heat and air conditioning systems, undrinkable water and crumbling infrastructure. The Fund Our Facilities coalition formed to identify real solutions to the enormous facilities issues in our schools, and one thing is clear: we need massive federal investment. The outgoing Trump administration and Republican Senate leadership fell far short when it came to providing real infrastructure investment for our country’s public schools, even as COVID-19 made the needs far worse. As we welcome the Biden-Harris administration, we look forward to working together to prioritize the needs of our nation’s public school buildings.”

Philadelphia is poised to receive hundreds of millions in COVID relief funding, and both city and state budget season will be well underway shortly. It is imperative for our leaders at the District, City, State, and Federal levels to recognize and resolve this critical need.

Our Coalition is calling on an immediate investment of \$200 Million to remediate the most pressing environmental concerns within more than 225 School District of Philadelphia buildings:

- More school cleaning and maintenance staff
- Rodent & pest control; asthma control
- Accelerated & expanded lead paint and asbestos stabilization
- Repair of water leaks
- Electrical & lighting upgrades
- Bathroom upgrades
- Window replacement
- NEW, January 2021: COVID related response and upgrades (including air quality)
- Improved strategic planning, data management, collaboration, and quality control efforts

Founding Coalition Partner **Representative Elizabeth Fiedler (HD184)** outlined the need for \$200M: “From our district in South Philadelphia across the city and state, our educators and children often face the consequences of elected officials’ unwillingness to prioritize their health and safety. This deeply troubling reality continues to unfold in schools across Philadelphia where toxins and dangerous conditions persist. I am proud to be part of the call from within our communities, to fully and fairly fund our schools — and at the top of that list must be fulfilling the Fund Our Facilities’ call for an immediate investment of \$200 million to remediate the most urgent environmental hazards.”

This \$200 million will help ensure Philadelphia’s schools are safe, healthy, and clean. It does not negate the need for the billions of dollars needed for a longer-term facilities investment plan.

Councilmember Helen Gym (At Large) highlighted the need for federal and state investment and said, “An airborne virus that has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans underscores the importance of investing in a meaningful plan to modernize our schools immediately. We need President Joe Biden to fulfill his promise to fund school infrastructure investments. Our state must fund PlanCon which is a statewide school infrastructure program. And our school district must expand its maintenance staff. We must make the physical environment of our schools a top priority at the local, state and federal level.”

Senator Vincent Hughes (SD7) noted the ongoing goals of our Coalition, and stated, “Our children deserve to go to clean, safe 21st century schools and I will continue to fight until we can say that is the case for every schoolchild in the city of Philadelphia. I stand with the Fund Our Facilities Coalition to help make that goal a reality. We must continue to persevere in the efforts to raise awareness for this cause so that we can continue to make positive strides in securing the necessary resources for our schools. The School District has an opportunity right now to perform critical infrastructure work in its facilities – and we need to ensure they have the resources to do that.”

Coalition partners pointed to our moral obligation and doubled down on their commitment to this urgent cause:

Philadelphia Delegation Chair Representative Jason Dawkins (HD179) noted, “Fighting for fair and equitable funding for our school buildings is one of the most important things any of us can do. The children of Philadelphia, and the amazing teachers that educate them, have been forced for too long to learn and work in school in buildings that are toxic and unsafe. I’m proud to stand beside Coalition partners and fight for the funding needed to give our children the education they deserve, one that takes place in a safe and modern learning environment.”

City Council Majority Leader Cherelle Parker (CD9) said, “When the Coalition started two years ago, we were focused on a crisis that was the byproduct of aging and crumbling infrastructure. Covid-19 has increased our challenges exponentially. We must respond by ensuring that the necessary funding is provided to guarantee that the children in the School District of Philadelphia have all they need to become successful adults as we move through this crisis. The public health and safety of our children must be our number one priority. Put in perspective, this is a small ask.”

Councilmember Derek Green (At Large) noted, “As a public school parent and member of this Coalition, I am proud of the work that we have done to address the conditions of our schools. We have raised the alarm that these buildings are in desperate shape, and though the progress we’ve made to date cannot be understated, there is still much more work to do. We need our state government to provide the fair funding that we need so that we can address this crisis.”

Representative Mary Isaacson (HD175) said, “As a vocal member of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition, I will never stop fighting for healthy and safe classrooms for all of our students. This pandemic cannot make us forget the fact that schools filled with lead, asbestos, and environmental hazards put our kids and teachers at risk every day before COVID19 hit. We have a constitutional and moral obligation to do better by our students and make certain they have safe halls and classrooms to return to.”

Pennsylvania AFL-CIO President Rick Bloomingdale said, “No matter where they’re from, every child in Pennsylvania has the right to a quality education in a safe school. It’s time we fund Pennsylvania’s future by creating jobs and building safe schools.”

POWER Interim Executive Director Bishop Dwayne Royster added, “POWER Interfaith’s alliance with the Fund Our Facilities Coalition has bolstered our work to end racial bias in state education funding. As we strive to support Philadelphia schools in meeting the urgent challenges of COVID, Fund Our Facilities provides an open forum for lawmakers and

community advocates to work together so that the city's kids get their fair share of relief funding.”

Representative Malcolm Kenyatta (HD181) said, “We know that the Commonwealth can do so much more to address the toxic classrooms and crumbling school buildings that are all too common for the children of Philadelphia. That’s why I’ve raised my voice in Harrisburg over the past year – and will continue to this year — about the funding needs so passionately highlighted by this coalition and aimed at protecting the health and lives of people in our schools.”

Representative Morgan Cephas (HD192) stated, “Just because children are learning virtually because of COVID-19 doesn’t stop our fight to secure funds to rid their schools of dangerous toxins like lead, mold and asbestos. The fact that plans are underway to replace Cassidy Elementary in Overbrook, which has been considered the worst building in the district, is evidence of our progress. However, there’s still much to be done to ensure all students have a safe learning environment to return to.”

Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO President Patrick J. Eiding said, “The Philadelphia Labor Council has been a part of the Fund Our Facilities coalition since its inception and we will continue our support until ALL children and teachers have a clean and safe environment to learn and grow.

Senator Christine Tartaglione (SD2) said, “Delivering equitable and safe access to public education has always been a fundamental responsibility for public officials of all levels, and long been a difficult challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic has not changed anything in that regard. The district, city, state, and federal government must come together to provide the resources and initiatives that will protect the health of all students, educators, staff, and visitors.”

Representative Leanne Krueger (HD161) said, “Whether students and educators should be forced to learn and work in schools that are dangerous to their physical health is not a geographic question, it is not a political question, it’s a moral question. Pennsylvania has failed for too

long to invest in school infrastructure. As a former member of the PlanCon Advisory Committee, I saw firsthand facilities across the Commonwealth in dire need of capital investment, and joined the Fund Our Facilities Coalition because we need action now.”

Senator Art Haywood (SD4) shared, “The conditions of many public schools are deplorable. The state has a duty to provide school buildings and facilities that work to promote learning. We are failing that test. The work to fund our schools is essential.”

Representative Kevin Boyle (HD172) pointed to the state’s constitutional obligation and noted, “The right to education in a safe and healthy building is a constitutional right. The reality however for far too long is students, teachers, administrators and other staff have been exposed to toxic and dangerous conditions. I joined this coalition to promote fair funding so we can address these unsafe conditions.”

Representative Jennifer O’Mara (HD164) said, “I joined FOF because I believe that in order to receive an adequate education, every student must feel safe within their classroom. A child’s zip code, race or socioeconomic status should never play a role in their future success, or at this point in time, their health and safety.”

Representative Jared Solomon (HD202) noted, “I consider it my duty to ensure all children have the opportunity to thrive and reach their fullest potential, which is why I am a proud member of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition. We have made a lot of progress, but we have more work to do, to ensure that the immediate health and safety concerns our kids face are addressed. If our kids are going to have a shot at academic success they need school buildings that are clean, safe, and vibrant.”

Councilmember Katherine Gilmore Richardson (At Large) said, “As a graduate, former teacher, and now parent in the School District of Philadelphia, it is vitally important that we ensure a safe and healthy environment for our students to learn and grow. We cannot expect our children to excel when we put them in hazardous and poorly maintained environments. This is vitally important as we resume in person learning after COVID-19.”

Representative Joe Hohenstein (HD177) said, “I am a member of the coalition because, simply put, our children are our future. That future should not be constrained by dilapidated, neglected buildings. Rather it should be nurtured and cared for by facilities that challenge and stretch a child’s mind to imagine possibilities.”

Representative Dave Delloso (HD162) said, “Everyone deserves safe, healthy and clean schools to learn and work in. We cannot fail to do our duty to make the needed investments to improve these buildings.

Councilmember Isaiah Thomas (At Large) stated, “As we prepare to return to in-person education, we have to make sure that our students and faculty are returning to a safe learning environment. It’s not enough to keep them safe from COVID-19 – we have to fund our facilities to keep them safe from pests, lead paint, water damages, outdated electrical and the various outdated infrastructures that Philadelphia schools have become too used to. We can’t return to business (and school) as usual – we need to return safer and better!”

Philadelphia Jobs with Justice Executive Director Devan Spear said, “Through our work to hold wealthy institutions in Philadelphia accountable for what they financially owe our public schools via Payments In Lieu Of Taxes, it has become clear that there must be far greater investment from all revenue sources. Other wealthy institutions as well as the state, and federal governments have an obligation to pay their fair share for safe and healthy facilities.”

Councilmember Cindy Bass (CD8) added, “I am a member of the Fund our Facilities Coalition because for generations, our children and those who care and educate them have been in environments that are not just unkempt but actually toxic and dangerous. Funding from the Commonwealth is required immediately to right this decades-long wrong.”

AFSCME District Council 88 Director Tom Tosti said, “No child should have to go to school with the fear and exposure of what Philadelphia kids face every day. The funding that was part of the new relief Bill should be

released so our schools can start cleaning and fixing what has haunted our parents and children for years.”

For Our Future PA Action Fund Executive Director Ashley

McBride noted, “The COVID-19 vaccines offer teachers, staff and families hope that we will soon get back to everyday life — including a return to in-person learning where we know kids learn best. The return to classrooms, however, makes it more important than ever to ensure that our learning facilities are safe for re-entry. In 2021, as we adjust to the new normal, we need to make sure that includes a definitive plan of action from our city, state and federal leaders to address the dangerous state of too many educational facilities across Pennsylvania.”

PA Spotlight Executive Director Eric Rosso added, “Philadelphia teachers face unprecedented challenges including being the target of frequent attacks from bad actors who have exacerbated the financial problems within the School District to pad their bottom lines at the expense of our children. PA Spotlight is proud to join this coalition in fighting for them and lend our efforts to hold those bad actors accountable.”

Representative Joe Ciresi (HD146) said, “Access to a quality public education in a safe and healthy learning environment is the right of every student in the Commonwealth, regardless of ZIP code. Our state needs to make this commitment, which is why I support the Fund Our Facilities Coalition’s push to address these historic inequities and underfunding.”

Senator Sharif Street (SD3) added, “Funding of our educational facilities has never been more critical. The disparities in equitable education funding are well documented. The continued divestment has been critical to the development of hazardous learning environments. Lead and asbestos bring risk of respiratory disease compounded by a pandemic that primarily targets the lungs. The Coalition’s 200 Million demand based on current projections of need is only a first step in ensuring that learning is safe and equitable in our Commonwealth.”

Representative Mike Zabel (HD163) agreed and added, “For the legislature, it is morally imperative that we address the health crisis in Philadelphia’s public schools with all the necessary investments.”

Coalition partner Nicole Fuller, Executive Director of

PhilaPOSH summarized, “We are a member of this diverse coalition because this is the village that advocates, fights, and supports Philadelphia educators and children.”

AFT Pennsylvania President Arthur G. Steinberg concluded, “Education equity is one of the civil rights issues of our time. As a union, we are proud to play a part in the Coalition in achieving parity across districts in facilities funding. We appreciate that labor, community, and even some non-profit organizations have stepped up in response to this crisis, and together are demanding that all levels of government provide additional and sustainable funding for all aspects of public education. Our work on facilities funding will not be done until every student, educator, and school staff member is safe from toxins in school buildings.”

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