

Philly Healthy Schools Initiative (PHSI)

Philadelphia, PA

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Dear Policymakers and City Officials,

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 and deferred maintenance, has resulted in nearly \$5 billion of needed, repairs, renewal and replacement work.¹ As a result of present conditions, students, teachers and staff have been, and continue to be, 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.

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

- **Improve the Public's Right to Know & Right to Act**—require greater transparency from 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 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 prioritize facility projects and urgently implement fixes in order to remediate these 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 “Facility Master Plan [FMP].** SDP should emulate

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

