

TESTIMONY before the Philadelphia City Council

Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21st Century School Fund

Chairperson, [re]Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition

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Good morning, I am Mary Filardo, Executive Director of the 21st Century School Fund, a non-profit organization that is dedicated to securing local, state, and federal policy and practice that enables all children and communities to have modern public school facilities. Modern means they are healthy, safe, educationally excellent buildings and grounds that anchor their neighborhoods and communities; and are also energy efficient, environmentally sustainable, and resilient in the face of human and climate threats.

The work associated with transforming the buildings and grounds in the Philly Public Schools in so many neighborhoods is tremendous, but it is worth it.

As I was preparing my remarks for today, I came across testimony to the City Council from December 2021. I am going to read the main points of this again, with a few added comments and then am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Philadelphia City Council
Funding the Modernization of our Schools**

December 15, 2021

Testimony of Mary Filardo, Executive Director of the 21st Century School Fund

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Mary Filardo, founder and executive director of the 21st Century School Fund, a small non-profit that started in 1994 to build the public will and the government capacity to modernize the public schools in the District of Columbia. We do research and advocacy on issues of PK-12 public education infrastructure to so ALL children, no matter the wealth of their neighborhood or district can attend modern public school facilities.

I am here today to encourage this City Council, Philadelphia Board of Education, and the School District of Philadelphia Administration to be brave on behalf of the children and neighborhoods of this great city— and to share with you some of what this means.

- 1) **Bravery means: Bringing a bold vision** for public school buildings and grounds—one that entitles all children and neighborhoods to modern public schools that are educationally inspiring, serve as centers of their communities, and use the latest technologies for sustainability and resilience.
- 2) **Bravery means: Exposing building problems**— Building problems need to be in the light of day to be addressed and to find their rightful priority in the long list of work orders and capital needs.
- 3) **Bravery means: Developing an educational facilities master plan with your stakeholders**—not just your consultants.
- 4) **Bravery means: Sharing and fixing facilities management challenges**--managing a portfolio of over 200 mostly antiquated schools with over 115,000 children in millions of square feet of space on 100s of acres of land in the municipal public school system needs special attention and reforms. Philadelphia is a city full of experienced and talented building professionals—working in universities, for major commercial landlords, and hospitals. Get their input on what the management team needs to manage current day to day conditions and transform school facilities into 21st century schools.

- 5) **Bravery means: Trusting civic stakeholders to fairly wrestle with funding, management, and building deficiencies** so the City has their support for paying for the capital plan that sets priorities for the generational work of the master plan.
- 6) **Bravery means: Dedicating revenue toward a stable capital program for public school facilities**—making schools a priority means finding the revenue to ensure the city can make progress on the plan.

In DC the initiative to modernize all of DC public schools started in 2000. As of 2021 all of the buildings have been upgraded and nearly 70% of all square footage has been fully modernized. The program has not been without problems, but it has sustained through major changes in governance, administration, and many election cycles. **The modernization program has sustained because there is statutory language that keeps the vision for modern public school infrastructure alive.**

There is not a fast fix for the accumulated deficiencies in your public school buildings, so this Philadelphia Council and this Mayor need to be brave now, and put into law the requirements for the modernization of the Philadelphia public schools.

If the City Council is “brave” what do you do?

The code requirements for a bold vision, transparency, community planning, facilities management reforms, and finding a stable and adequate revenue source to pay for current deficiencies and the modernization of buildings and grounds will take leadership, collaboration, and a sense of urgency. The task force or committee that puts together the policies to underpin the modernization of public schools needs to earn public trust. It should be led by representatives of the residents of the City, not by employees or consultants. There is much work that has been done and is being done by stakeholders and the District that can inform this work. The Council can provide this leadership.

Policy alone is not enough, just as even funding alone is not enough. But these are necessary, but not sufficient elements of delivering modern schools in Philly. The management is a challenge. This is true, not just in Philly, but across the nation. But again, solving the management and labor issues associated with operating, maintaining, repairing, and modernizing public school buildings needs work. It is ALL work. This work needs to be planned, project managed, and funded. I encourage the City Council to make the modernization of all of the District’s public schools a priority.

Essentials for Modern PK-12 Public Infrastructure Stewardship

Governance and decision making

- Well-developed codes, policies, and regulations that articulate and designate the local, state, and federal roles and responsibilities for PK-12 facilities
- Defined and transparent systems for public reviews and approvals
- Compensatory systems for allocating facilities funding to low-wealth and disenfranchised communities

Facilities funding

- Dedicated, stable, and adequate revenues for capital funding
- Dedicated, stable, and adequate operating funding for facilities operations, maintenance and repairs
- The capacity and authority to leverage public assets and private equity to generate new capital for local district facilities
- Low cost credit and reasonable fees for local district borrowing
- State and federal capital funds to supplement local effort and need

Facilities management

- Adequate funding with clear priorities
- Local school district and state government mission statements and strategic plans that include school facilities
- Well trained and experienced facility managers and labor personnel, with adequate compensation
- Technology tools that support facilities management and maintenance functions
- Systems and protocols for open communication between the many stakeholders associated with and affected by school facilities

Facilities planning

- Robust public engagement
- Mandates, standards, guidance, and funding for regular operations, maintenance, capital, and educational facilities master planning
- Training and support of district staff for effectively engaging a broad set of local stakeholders
- School district authority, requirements, and resources for planning across other affected public agencies, regions, and sectors

Data and information

- Standardized and relevant facilities data collection at federal, state, and local levels
- Public access to facilities data and information
- Timely analysis of facilities data and information to inform decisions
- Integration of facilities data and information with other school, community, and fiscal data and information

Facilities accountability

- Standards for facility planning, management, and equity
- Standards for design, condition, utilization, and location of public school facilities
- Meaningful metrics that can be used for comparisons across schools, districts, and states
- Consequences for school districts whose facilities management practices result in unhealthy and/or unsafe conditions for occupants
- Consequences for school districts and contractors whose practices contribute to waste, fraud, or abuse of public funds



Adequate & Equitable U.S. PK-12 Infrastructure

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

*A report from the Planning for PK-12
School Infrastructure National Initiative*

