



# PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION of TEACHERS

*Jerry T. Jordan, President*  
*[www.pft.org](http://www.pft.org)*

## A 2+ YEAR LOOK BACK AT OUR FACILITIES FIGHT\*

\*for a more historic look back, [check out this document](#).

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First, an update on our [Healthy Schools Tracker App](#):

Our App has been one of the most effective tools possible in reporting and remediating concerns. As of January 1, 2020, we were approaching 1,700 reports from over 160 schools. And we have seen an increase in remediations when using the app. But we are not yet where we need to be, and we are doubling down on our efforts to hold the district accountable for the issues reported.

*Not only will we continue our diligent monitoring of reports, but we will also be providing additional more in-depth reports to elected officials.* While we are in frequent communication with our elected officials about issues as they arise, we want to increase the pressure on the District to respond to reports quickly, and we believe that these reports will help facilitate that process.

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While we are fighting for structural change, we are also working diligently to address issues that arise:

September 2017 brought the [challenge of mold at Munoz-Marin](#). September 2018 brought [terrible flooding at Palumbo](#). Through these challenges and so many more, we have remained steadfast in our insistence on proper remediation efforts and results. Unfortunately, the District for too long left our collective calls unheeded. That's why we have maintained our work not only in a process-based way but also to spur political action.

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In the last two years alone, here's *just some* of what we have been up to, in partnership with you:

**January 2018:** The PFT Health & Welfare Fund joined other partners from the Healthy Schools Initiative to testify before City Council on efforts to reduce lead levels in Philly schools.

*During his testimony, our environmental scientist Jerry Roseman announced the following:*

*The District's OEMS [Office of Environmental Programs and Services] has agreed to work together, in a collaborative and coordinated fashion, to redesign the project and to implement the necessary program elements including:*

*1) Conducting comprehensive and systematic environmental inspections in all 29 schools*

- 2) Dramatically improving communication and coordination with school principals and educational and support staff moving forward
- 3) Ensuring open information and data sharing and review of Lead Stabilization work as it proceeds;
- 4) Closely monitoring and overseeing the lead stabilization work as it is performed, using independent environmental technicians employed by the District to verify and confirm all work has been conducted as per work scopes.
- 5) Providing comprehensive reporting and ongoing collaborative review of all project elements. [Read the full testimony here.](#)

**December 2018:** We continued to pursue lead regulations with city council and in fact provided technical assistance in creating some of the most stringent lead laws in the nation.

*For years, the PFT has provided technical expertise and invested its own money to develop common sense cost-effective solutions to improve Philly's aging school buildings. With the passage of the lead paint remediation bill introduced by Councilman Mark Squilla, we've taken another small but significant step toward making Philly's schools healthier and safer for every child. [Read more here.](#)*

**June 2018:** Governor Wolf announced nearly \$16M in lead, asbestos, and mold remediation efforts for Philadelphia schools.

*Governor Tom Wolf was joined by Mayor Jim Kenney, members of Philadelphia's legislative delegation and Philadelphia School District leaders to announce \$15.6 million in joint funding for lead, mold and asbestos removal at 57 school buildings. [Read more here.](#)*

**January 2019:** PFT President Jerry Jordan penned an Inquirer op-ed laying bare why we're fighting so hard for equity.

*Make no mistake: More investment in school facilities is not something that would be "nice to have." It is a human rights issue. As the chair of the American Federation of Teachers' Human Rights Committee, I can't help but think about how much our society still neglects the basic human rights of the most vulnerable among us. From flaking lead paint, asbestos exposure, persistent rodent issues, the presence of mold, and even the lack of heat on bitterly cold days, educators and children in Philadelphia are learning and working in environmentally toxic facilities every day.*

*This is also an equity issue. It's no coincidence that these conditions largely impact children living in communities particularly affected by poverty, and it's an issue that largely affects children of color. If we truly want our children to know that their lives matter and have value, our investment in their basic human rights must be unequivocal. [Read his full op-ed here.](#)*

**January 2019:** We took a huge step forward in innovative, on-the-ground real-time reporting with the launch of our Healthy Schools Tracker App.

*The [PFT Healthy Schools Tracker Mobile App](#) allows users to identify specific problems with building conditions in schools, including the location, type and magnitude of problem, including the ability to submit photos. The purpose is to report, track, monitor, and yield real results. [Read more about the app here.](#)*

**January/February 2019:** PFT released our **Legislative Platform**.

After an [in-depth survey of PFT members](#), we used member responses to develop a thorough legislative platform that would serve as the basis for advocacy in the upcoming legislative sessions at local, state, and federal levels.

**A key component of our legislative platform is the funding of school facilities**, and we offer legislative solutions at all levels of government. Solutions range from modification of the 10-year tax abatement at the local level to the passage of school infrastructure legislation at the state and national levels. Read the [legislative platform in its entirety here](#).

We followed up our platform release with individual letters to the entire state legislature asking for their sign-on, and urged members to reach out to their elected officials asking for their support. The document, driven by member engagement, has shaped much of our political work, particularly around facilities. Read more about the [platform here](#).

**March 2019:** The PFT launched the **Fund Our Facilities Coalition** in order to elevate the need for funding for school infrastructure investment.

“Fund our Facilities” is a coalition of elected leaders, labor organizations, and community groups focused on securing funding for improvements to school buildings. [Learn about our coalition and our growing list of partners here](#).

As part of our [Coalition launch](#), PFT President Jerry Jordan and Senator Vincent Hughes outlined the moral imperative behind our fight:

*When we invest in our school facilities, we invest in our schoolchildren. When children walk into a school each morning and are met not only by their teacher’s smiling face, but also by a healthy, clean, and safe environment in which to learn, we do more than simply tell them they matter. We show them that, as a society, we mean it. [Read their full Inquirer op-ed here](#).*

**For \$170 million, environmental hazards across the School District of Philadelphia’s more than 200 buildings** can be remediated to the point that every school will be safe, healthy, and clean. This dollar figure addresses the following needs:

- More school cleaning and maintenance staff
- Rodent & pest control
- Asthma control
- Accelerated and expanded lead paint stabilization
- Repair of water leaks
- Electrical & lighting upgrades
- Bathroom upgrades
- Window replacement

**April 2019:** PFT President Jerry Jordan delivered testimony on school building conditions at an infrastructure hearing convened by U.S. Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon.

It is not an exaggeration to say that school building conditions in Philadelphia constitute a health, safety, and moral crisis. [Read Jerry’s full testimony here](#).

**May 2019:** Senator Hughes introduced that would meet half of our coalition ask for immediate funding, and Representative Fiedler introduced companion legislation in the State House.

*The union leaders and legislators who comprise the [Fund Our Facilities Coalition](#) today met at Richard Wright Elementary School to announce legislation sponsored by State Senator Vincent Hughes that would invest \$85 million to make critical repairs to Philadelphia's school buildings.*

*The dollar amount in Hughes' companion bills represent exactly half of the \$170 million the coalition has said is needed to address immediate health and safety concerns, and to ensure every Philly school building is safe, clean and healthy. [Read more here.](#)*

**June 2019:** In a letter to the Governor, Mayor Jim Kenney expressed his support for the Coalition's mission and called for passage of PA Senator Vincent Hughes' proposal to establish the School Emergency Repair program and PA Senator Browne's PLANCON legislation.

*"I urge the swift passage of legislation to meet the \$170 million Coalition ask," Kenney wrote, "At the state level, I support Senator Hughes' proposal to establish the School Emergency Repair Program, as well as the funding mechanisms the Senator has identified to provide \$85 million to Philadelphia's schools. Let me be clear: this legislation is urgent, and it does not supplant longer-term investment strategies, such as that being put forth in Senator Browne's PLANCON legislation. It does, however, work to alleviate some of the hazardous conditions threatening the well-being of our children and educators every day." [Read his full letter here.](#)*

**May 2019:** PFT Staff Rep Hillary Linardopoulos testified at City Council and continued to sound the alarm about the state of schools:

At a hearing called by founding [coalition partner Councilmember Helen Gym](#) we testified:

*A budget is a reflection of priorities. As Councilmembers, you are in the midst of setting forth your priorities for the coming year, and in turn developing your road map for moving Philadelphia forward. The facilities crisis, I believe, has an across the board consensus in being a defining component of not only the discussions around the budget, but in terms of shaping an investment agenda. At the PFT, we work every day to demand equity for our public schools. In the poorest big city in the nation, in a school system educating largely students of color facing poverty, how we, as a union and as a city, prioritize this fight defines the work we do. [Read the full testimony here.](#)*

At the Council budget hearings we testified:

*We are calling for \$170 Million from any and all government sources. That means City, State, and Federal.*

*At the City level, we are in support of efforts to modify the 10-year tax abatement as a means of investing in these critical issues. Since Councilmember Goode's proposals several years ago, we've supported this modification and we encourage Council to get coalesce around making this critical investment happen this year.*

*It's true that there is a massive amount of work ahead. But when it comes to improving learning conditions for our children, I think we all agree that no challenge is insurmountable. \$170 million will not bring our schools to equity. But it is a realistic figure that represents a critical step forward for all of us. [Read the full testimony here.](#)*

**May 2019:** Our advocacy yielded a **big win!**

*For years, the PFT has led the charge in organizing and strategizing around publicizing and elevating the issues experienced daily by educators and schoolchildren. It is important to recognize our collective progress.*

*I was pleased to hear the District announce their commitment to providing 500 air conditioning units in 23 schools. Additionally, we have been working to secure the next phase of lead remediation efforts. This week, PFT staff members attended meetings at schools across the city that are scheduled to begin work. [Read more here.](#)*

**August 2019:** The Governor announced an **influx of \$4.3million towards our facilities fight.**

*The Fund Our Facilities Coalition applauds Governor Wolf for committing \$4.3 million to be used for lead stabilization work in Philadelphia's public schools. The negative health and developmental impacts of exposure to lead cannot be understated. Too many of our schoolchildren are being poisoned in their classrooms. These funds are crucial to ensuring that we continue to make progress toward making every Philly school lead-free.*

*Unfortunately, the presence of lead is only one of the challenges facing our school buildings. Our aging infrastructure yields problems, such as mold, outdated HVAC systems, water damage, and pest infestations. That's why our coalition continues to call for an immediate investment of \$170 million for critically-needed repairs and improvements that will make our schools clean, healthy and safe for all of our children.*

*We look forward to continuing our work with the Governor and the General Assembly to make this investment a reality. [Read more here.](#)*

**September 2019:** PFT & Coalition called for an immediate \$100M investment in facilities.

*In response to news that a longtime Philadelphia school teacher has been diagnosed with Mesothelioma, members of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition held a press conference at the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers offices to call for an immediate \$100 million investment to perform lead and damaged asbestos abatement in Philadelphia's public schools. The figure makes up the bulk of the \$170 million the Coalition has been calling for since May. [Read more here.](#)*

*Lea DiRusso's story made national news in November as she was featured on Good Morning America:*

*Cancer should NEVER be a consequence of dedicating your life to educating Philly's children. Lea's story is a stark, devastating example of why the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers established the Fund Our Facilities Coalition. We know what resources are needed, and we know the funding exists to secure the safety of our students and educators. [Read more here.](#)*

**September 2019:** Founding Coalition partner Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler hosted a policy committee hearing on **facilities**, during which the Coalition announced a series of school tours to highlight building conditions. Tours with elected officials have been ongoing.

*Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler led a House Democratic Policy Committee public hearing on school building toxic conditions and emergency funding.*

*The combined building tour and hearing, which was attended by elected officials from across Philadelphia and neighboring counties, marked the launch of a series of similar events hosted by the Fund Our Facilities Coalition. [Read more from the South Philly Review here.](#)*

**September/October 2019:** This year started out with catastrophic conditions at Ben Franklin/SLA.

The PFT participated in countless meetings, walkthroughs, and scientific evaluations to address the serious environmental hazards in the building.

Upon the PFTH&W discovery of damaged asbestos materials, we urged closure and issued this [statement](#). Subsequent issues resulted in additional monitoring and recommendations:

*[October 4, 2019:](#) The students and school staff at Ben Franklin/SLA have had their school year unacceptably disrupted by ongoing construction issues and dangerously high levels of asbestos in the boiler room and the SLA Commons. But until these areas are properly cleaned and tested by the District and the PFT, it is imperative that students and school staff NOT be allowed to enter the building.*

*[October 8, 2019:](#) So much of the righteous anger and frustration on display at this morning's town hall could have been avoided if the District had worked more closely with the PFT on potential solutions. It is also not unreasonable to expect the District to have had an emergency relocation plan in place prior to this school year; or, at the very least, to have engaged in proactive communications with school communities the moment they realized construction wouldn't be nearly finished by September 1.*

*I sincerely hope these town halls serve as a wake-up call for the District. We work for the parents and schoolchildren of Philadelphia—it is wrong to obfuscate or hide information from them.*

**September/October 2019:** PFT identified damaged asbestos at TM Peirce Elementary School, and we advocated for the immediate closure of the gym.

Only when our concerns were [reported in the press](#) did the district respond.

*During the tour, [Jerry] Roseman, PFT president Jerry Jordan, and [Senator Sharif] Street said they also saw flaking lead paint and unsealed lead abatement work areas just "[feet from where children were learning](#)," Jordan later wrote.*

We have monitored and insisted upon a number of solutions at Peirce, finally resulting in their relocation while work is completed.

PFT attended every community and staff meeting and was instrumental in moving forward with an acceptable plan. The insight of our environmental scientist and our organizing work led to significant gains and the ultimate relocation of the school until such time as the current building is suitable for occupancy.

**October 2019:** PFT Released Asbestos Action Plan.

*PFT's Healthy Schools Action Plan lays out a series of "action items" for five key areas:*

1. *Assessment and Evaluation;*
2. *High-risk location identification;*
3. *Urgent short-term response;*
4. *Operations and maintenance; and*
5. *Long-term abatement [\[Read the full plan here.\]](#)*

**October 2019:** Fund Our Facilities Coalition sent a letter to Governor Tom Wolf urging his administration to find a way to immediately send \$100 million for asbestos and lead abatement in Philly's schools.

*"In light of the horrific Mesothelioma diagnosis of a long-time Philadelphia teacher, we once again made our urgent plea. We believe that \$100 million of our \$170 million ask must be invested immediately to address dangerous asbestos and lead in each school."*

*The letter—which includes photos highlighting dangerous school building conditions—is signed by 32 of the legislators, labor leaders and community groups that make up the Coalition. [Read the letter here.](#)*

**November 2019:** Now This news video site with millions of subscribers and followers across the nation produced a powerful video on the toxic conditions in Philly's public schools.

*The video garnered more than 400,000 views. [Watch the video here.](#)*

**November 2019:** The District released a new environmental plan, addressing many of the issues we have raised.

*The District's 'Environmental Improvement Plan' is an overdue but welcome step toward establishing consistent oversight and management of the infrastructure issues prevalent in our city's schools. The plan includes many components that the PFT, through our Health and Welfare Fund, has been pushing the District for years to implement. We're happy to see so much of our work reflected in this plan. [Read more here.](#)*

**November 2019:** The emergency closure of Pratt Head Start Center, where the PFT discovered 70 instances of damaged asbestos in the boiler room alone, and issues permeated the building.

*These are issues that the District must systemically address in a comprehensive manner. It is unacceptable that the discovery at Pratt was only made when it was being looked at as an alternative location after damaged asbestos was found at TM Peirce. Further, it was only the thorough evaluation done by our environmental scientist that led to the discovery of damaged asbestos at Pratt. [Read more here.](#)*

**November 2019:** PFT joined Senator Hughes for a Call to Action.

*Following the event, we urged members and allies to [call elected officials here.](#)*

*Read more about Senator Hughes' event [here.](#)*



Senator Hughes has a [powerful website dedicated to the issue of Toxic Schools](#). Check out some [“Why We Fight” videos here](#).

**December 2019:** PFT participated in a national public education forum, where we once again brought our facilities fight to the national spotlight.

We were selected to ask a question of a presidential candidate, and asked Senator Amy Klobuchar about her plan for school infrastructure. Watch [highlights here](#).

Read more about Sen. Klobuchar’s response and the forum in the [Washington Post](#):

*Sen. Amy Klobuchar (Minn.), answering a question from a Philadelphia teacher who recounted the story of a child encountering lead in his school and being poisoned, said she would make schools a priority in her trillion-dollar infrastructure plan.*

*“We have not been investing in these schools,” Klobuchar said. “That’s why when I put out this infrastructure program, a trillion dollars, I put schools up front.”*

**December 2019:** PFT outlined where we’ve been and where we’re going in our fight for healthy schools in a Medium post.

*The hazardous, toxic conditions in which Philadelphia’s children learn and their educators work are nothing short of a crisis. Our members, students, parents, and community partners have worked tirelessly to draw attention to the enormous human and civil rights issue unfolding in our city every day, while simultaneously making ends meet in school buildings that are quite literally poisoning them. [Time](#) and [again](#), we have worked to collectively [outline](#) what is [at stake](#) and to expose the very real [hazards](#) that our school communities are experiencing every single day.*

*Our Union, one of two teachers’ unions in the nation to employ an environmental scientist, has been on the cutting edge of innovative tech solutions to crowd source reports from within our school buildings to ensure that no issue is swept under the rug. Our [Healthy Schools Tracker app](#), the first in the nation, has allowed our members and the general public to report in real time the hazards they observe in their buildings. Read the [full post outlining our fight here](#).*

**December 2019:** Fund Our Facilities once again took our fight to Harrisburg.

*The PFT and the Fund Our Facilities Coalition joined our partners at the State Capitol to call for immediate investment in our school facilities. The rally was organized by founding coalition partner State Representative Elizabeth Fiedler (HD184). [Watch highlights here](#).*

**December 2019:** A big win! Philadelphia City Council passed modifications to the 10-year tax abatement.

*City Council made their last session of 2019 memorable and impactful with their passage of reforms to Philadelphia’s 10-year tax abatement for developers.*

*The modification of the 10-year tax abatement was part of our legislative platform: Wealthy developers should not be able to continue to profit without paying their fair share. Good Jobs First estimates that Philadelphia schools lose \$61M annually in abatement revenue. Read [more here](#). Read our statement on its passage [here](#).*



**December 2019:** Another three school closures in the span of a week.

[Read about the district's closure of FLC:](#)

*The School District of Philadelphia made the correct decision in closing FLC due to the discovery of an imminent asbestos hazard in the heating shafts. I recently toured the school to see firsthand the environmental concerns reported by our members. Following my visit, I spoke with Dr. Hite to urge immediate action.*

*The situation at FLC is emblematic of the emergency conditions in far too many of our school buildings. Today's discovery reflects both the progress we have made and the deeply flawed system in which we are operating. For the first time in recent memory, the District quickly reported to us the discovery of an immediate environmental hazard and committed to collaborate with us on a plan for swift remediation. However, it is problematic that our recommendation to conduct this assessment was made months ago, and only just took place.*

[Read about our call for the District to close Carnell:](#)

*For the second time this week, the School District discovered imminent asbestos toxins endangering the health and safety of schoolchildren and educators. The PFT was alerted this morning by the District's environmental team of the discovery of asbestos hazards at Laura Carnell Elementary School, and PFT Health & Welfare Fund's environmental scientist Jerry Roseman reported to the site to conduct a walkthrough and initial assessment. Not only was Jerry Roseman able to verify the imminent hazards identified by the district, he identified at least one additional severe hazard and potentially many more.*

The elected officials representing Carnell issued a [joint statement in partnership with the PFT:](#)

*"Based on the information I have received, I urge the District to immediately work with the PFT on a suitable relocation plan until such time as we can be assured that our students and staff will be safe in their building," stated **Councilwoman Cherelle Parker (9th District)**. "The health and safety of our students and staff is of the utmost importance, and I stand ready to assist the District and PFT in any way possible. The toxic conditions in many of our school buildings is a public health crisis on par with both the gun violence and opioid epidemics and, as a member of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition, I strongly believe it should be treated as such."*

***Representative Jared Solomon (HD202)** said, "In order to ensure the safety of our students and staff, the District must immediately remediate the imminent asbestos hazards at Carnell Elementary. With evaluations ongoing this evening, we do not yet have evidence of whether the building is safe to open tomorrow. I am prepared to offer any assistance needed to facilitate the process of securing the safety of Carnell students and staff. I commend the PFT for their dogged pursuit of safe and healthy schools, and it's why I am a partner in the Fund Our Facilities Coalition. The time to fund our facilities is now. Our children and educators cannot wait a moment longer."*

***Congressman Brendan Boyle (CD2)** also urged immediate action and said, "We cannot accept this as the norm. The Philadelphia School District has already had to close four school buildings in this year alone. Our schools should foster an environment that stimulates intellectual curiosity, but instead, our students and teachers are surrounded by health hazards. I will continue to stand with the Fund*

*Our Facilities Coalition, as the need for immediate investment in our school facilities is beyond clear. We do not have time for excuses. If we want our children to grow, they need a safe place to do so.”*

**Related to these closures, additional elected allies have issued important calls to action:**

Coalition partner **Senator Hughes** wrote to the Governor issuing an immediate request for funding:

*Following the fifth and sixth closures of Philadelphia schools as a result of health hazards, State Senator Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia/Montgomery) called on Gov. Tom Wolf to direct state funding to address the issue of chronic underfunding of public school infrastructure in his home city of Philadelphia and across Pennsylvania.*

*After calling and speaking with Gov. Wolf about the issue, Sen. Hughes sent an open letter to the governor Friday afternoon. The conversation and letter came in the wake of closures at McClure Elementary and Carnell Elementary on Dec. 19, when exposed asbestos was discovered throughout the building. Ben Franklin High, Science Leadership Academy, T.M. Peirce Elementary and Franklin Learning Center had previously been shut down because of similar environmental concerns. The closures have displaced 3,600 in Philadelphia schools in the 2019-20 academic year. [Read his letter here.](#)*

Coalition partner **Senator Larry Farnese** issued a call for his colleagues to join him on school tours.

*In the coming months, I am happy to arrange tours of school facilities in my district so you can see these hazardous conditions for yourself. I am convinced that the experience will propel a bipartisan effort to ensure that every child in Pennsylvania, whether you represent them or not, deserves to attend school free of health and safety risks. [Read his letter here.](#)*

Coalition partner **Senator Tina Tartaglione** issued this statement regarding the December school closures.

*As a member of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition and through the diligent advocacy of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, I have become keenly aware of the pervasiveness of hazardous materials in public schools throughout the city and I remain committed to identifying resources that will enable the School District to eliminate the threats and protect the health of the people who occupy these aging facilities every day. [Read the full statement here.](#)*

**January 2020:** The PFT is following up with ongoing issues at FLC, McClure, Carnell, and a number of additional schools. We will continue to be in close contact with the staffs of affected schools as well as with the District regarding all locations and our recommendations and demands. There are a number of outstanding issues in multiple locations that we are demanding be addressed.

**While we have been working with our elected allies, we have been working diligently to ensure that we are present at every meeting and walkthrough, as well as responding to members' concerns. We have also been working closely with parents to build engagement and collaboration to these critical issues. Our approach to the facilities crisis is a holistic one, and we are always working to expand our impact.**

**Only with your continued partnership, use of the app, and advocacy, will we be able to achieve our immediate goal of \$170M for facilities and our longer-term goals of an equitable school system. Our fight goes on.**