



# PHILADELPHIA *FEDERATION of TEACHERS*

**Philadelphia Board of Education  
February 26, 2026  
Testimony of Arthur G. Steinberg, President  
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers**

Good evening to members of the Board of Education; Superintendent Dr. Tony Watlington, Sr.; and to all who are here today because they believe every child in Philadelphia deserves access to education and opportunity.

My name is Arthur G. Steinberg, President of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, or PFT Local 3. The PFT represents more than 14,000 educators who work in the School District of Philadelphia. We are proud to be the foremost advocates for children’s education, health, and wellness in the City of Philadelphia

Educators and school building staff know the conditions of our aging facilities inside and out. We at the PFT were first to sound the alarm about hazardous conditions inside our neglected and starved buildings, because our members and students were first to get sick from toxic mold, lead-poisoned water, deadly asbestos, and extreme temperatures that created unacceptable working conditions and learning conditions.

No one who works for the School District knows the urgency of modernizing aging pipes, sewage infrastructure, shoddy insulation, and heating and cooling systems more acutely than PFT members. We have begged government officials at all levels to address decades of unequal access to education resources in low-wealth and Black and brown communities in Pennsylvania.

We are proud to partner with anyone who is willing to fight for what students need and what educators and school staff deserve. Just last summer, Dr. Watlington, Board President Streater, and I teamed up at the state capitol to fight for – and win – a strong education funding package that included millions of dollars more in “adequacy gap” funding for Philadelphia public schools.

We know from the last time the District closed schools in the name of cost savings that the “savings” were not meaningful. The negative impacts far outweighed the benefits. The lack of care shown to communities while imposing those mass closures drove students and educators out of the District.

The only plan for facilities that our members, students, and communities have ever wanted is a plan to fix, modernize, and remediate our buildings. This new Facilities Master Plan, or what we’re calling FMP 1.0, is not that. The District has not provided the data or plan details to convince anyone that FMP 1.0 will leave students, staff, and communities better off. We are instead experiencing déjà vu, because the last round of mass closures did lasting harm to students, communities, and the public’s trust in the District.

Why won't the District explain, for example, how the 216 students enrolled in the closing Robert Morris School would be divided between the two proposed receiving schools, Kelley and Bache-Martin? How are we to know whether the receiving schools have adequate capacity, or what renovations are required at each site, or how the transition would be sequenced? Families cannot make informed decisions without this information.

Where are the detailed plans and timelines for the schools receiving students from other buildings but have conditions rated worse than their current buildings? What's been shared on the FMP website doesn't count.

The District must explain how students and staff will be protected during what could be years of overlapping renovation work across multiple buildings, what air monitoring and clearance testing protocols will be followed, and how the sequencing of moves will account for the time required to complete environmental remediation before younger children – including kindergarteners – occupy these facilities.

The one thing we do know is that the educator staffing shortage here and in school systems across the country is a crisis. Addressing the staffing crisis must be a shared priority. These proposals make that mandate more difficult.

Our schools need fixing and funding - NOT closure. If the District has the ability to raise \$1.8 billion from state and private sources for this plan, then it has the ability to fix our facilities.

What if the promised \$1.8 billion doesn't materialize? Who decides which upgrades and repairs get cancelled, and what would be the criteria?

FMP 1.0 is far too vague and contradictory. Just read the room right now. You're asking educators in buildings slated for closure for blind loyalty – to trust that they will be able to do the jobs they love in as-good or better working conditions.

But loyalty and trust must be earned. Especially given what we now know about how the last mass closure of schools in Philadelphia affected our most vulnerable communities.

The District must do better, show their work, and provide all data used to make determinations about targeted schools. Our union has a saying that resonates especially in long under-resourced communities, "Nothing about us, without us."

No consultant or central administrator knows the needs and wants of our students and buildings better than our members. PFT Director of Environmental Science Jerry Roseman is also here to provide analysis that must be considered in revising this set of proposals for the fates of our schools, students, and communities.

## **Draft Testimony of Jerry Roseman, Environmental Science Director, PFT H&WF & U**

**Purpose of this submission:** To provide the Board with a more detailed technical and implementation-focused critique of the current Facility Master Plan (FMP), to identify the principal gaps that prevent independent verification and public confidence, and to recommend a practical path forward: pause irreversible actions, improve transparency, and complete a collaborative, fundable, no-harm planning process.

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to testify to the Board today about the District's proposed Facility Master Plan (FMP).

My name is Jerry Roseman, and I serve as Director of Environmental Science for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and Health and Welfare Fund. I am here to provide technical input and reaction now that the District has put forward its proposed Facilities Master Plan and is looking for public response and input

The public and key stakeholders have a responsibility to respond with questions, comments and critiques of any plan. We should get to "kick the tires" on it and provide input on whether the details, the assumptions, the ideas and conclusions all make sense. My focus is primarily a technical one so my comments are based on that. Given the short time, these are some of my toplines/highlights with a few brief examples.

I recognize the almost impossible challenges posed by the decades long structural underfunding of our schools – this tragic situation is a failure of public and political will and many levels – Federal, State and City – certainly not that of our district management and leadership -- but what is the responsibility of District managers and leaders, the trusted stewards of our children, is to undertake planning in an honest, open, and transparent manner, and to work with the PFT and other stakeholders to develop a workable plan.

### **Top-Line Conclusions**

**The current FMP should be treated as FMP 1.0 (a draft direction-setting document), not an implementation-ready plan.**

- The District is asking the Board and the public to accept disruptive closures, mergers, moves, co-locations, and repurposing decisions without releasing the school-level data, formulas, weighting, and assumptions needed to verify the recommendations.
- The public-facing scoring system (building condition, program alignment, utilization/capacity, vulnerability) is not auditable as presented because the underlying methods and inputs have not been disclosed in sufficient detail.
- Capacity and utilization appear to be major drivers of recommendations, but in multiple cases the calculations are confusing, opaque, or potentially misleading when applied to co-located buildings and multi-program sites.

- The District has not yet provided school-specific receiving-readiness plans that document conditions, scope, sequence, supports, and no-harm protections before moves occur.
- The headline FMP funding figure does not, by itself, demonstrate that the plan is adequately funded; the Board has not been given a clear budget crosswalk that reconciles FMP funding with existing capital plans and annual M&O spending.
- Maintenance and operations (M&O), custodial services, cleaning, environmental hazard management, and occupied-construction controls are under-specified relative to their importance in real-world implementation and student/staff protection.
- A more credible near-term strategy would combine stronger portfolio-wide M&O stabilization with targeted capital improvements to the most critical systems, while pausing irreversible transitions until the District provides verifiable school-level planning and funding detail.

***My major recommendation: Continue planning, but pause irreversible actions until the District demonstrates a transparent, fundable, and no-harm implementation pathway.***

I support the need for a real, long-term facilities plan for Philadelphia's public schools. I support the need for increased investment, thoughtful sequencing, and hard decisions when those decisions are justified.

This testimony is not an argument against planning or investment. It is an argument for a better planning process: one that is technically verifiable, honestly scoped, and grounded in implementation reality.

The issue before the Board is not simply whether the District has produced a set of recommendations. The issue is whether the District has produced a plan that can be independently understood, tested, and trusted enough to justify disruptive actions affecting students, staff, and school communities.

The District is relying heavily on major decision-making scores for building condition, program alignment, utilization/capacity, and vulnerability — but it has not provided the underlying datasets, scoring formulas, weighting, assumptions, or methodologies needed to evaluate whether those scores are accurate or fairly applied.

The current FMP relies heavily on summary scores and broad categories to support recommendations across a large, aging portfolio. But the underlying 'show your work' layer is not publicly available in a form that allows independent review. Without school-level inputs, documented formulas, weighting assumptions, cut-points, and decision rules, the plan functions more like a directional presentation than an implementation-ready blueprint.

That distinction matters because the District is not only describing priorities; it is asking communities and the Board to accept closures, mergers, co-locations, and repurposing decisions that are highly disruptive and difficult to reverse.

## **The Four Core Gaps: Data, Transparency, Funding, and Collaboration**

### **The Data Gap**

- The District has not released key school/building-level datasets in a way that supports independent verification of scores and recommendations. Missing or unclear data include the inputs used for building condition scoring, capacity/utilization calculations, program alignment scoring, vulnerability scoring, and school-level implementation assumptions.

### **The Transparency and Methodology Gap**

- Even where top-line numbers are published, the methods are not sufficiently documented. A score by itself does not reveal what was measured, when it was measured, how conflicting data was handled, how categories were weighted, or how sensitive the result is to assumptions.

### **The Funding Gap**

- The Board and public have not been provided a clear reconciliation showing how the FMP's headline 10-year funding total relates to the District's existing capital plans, annual facilities M&O spending, and the scale of deferred maintenance and critical system needs. Without this crosswalk, adequacy cannot be evaluated.

### **The Meaningful Collaboration Gap**

- Many stakeholders—including members of advisory committees and the Project Planning Team—requested granular data and methods throughout the process. Too often, that information was not shared in a way that allowed meaningful technical review before recommendations were advanced.

If a plan promises to modernize and maintain a large number of buildings over a short period of time, while also managing major transitions and closures, but is not transparently funded or operationally sequenced, the likely result is not just implementation difficulty. It is a public trust problem.

Communities may be asked to absorb immediate disruption based on promises that cannot be delivered at the scale, pace, or quality represented. In a system where trust is already fragile, that can do lasting damage to future planning efforts and to confidence in institutional stewardship.

For that reason, the Board should require the District to align the plan with what can actually be funded and implemented, rather than allowing a high-ambition narrative to substitute for a verifiable implementation strategy.

### **School-Level Examples That Illustrate the Problem**

## Motivation HS/Bartram

- The Motivation case illustrates how scoring and capacity methodology can materially affect the public narrative. The District's utilization framing treated the Turner Building as if Motivation's student count could be evaluated against a whole-building capacity denominator, despite the building being a co-located site with multiple programs.
- When all occupants and realistic planning assumptions are considered, the 'severely underutilized' narrative is shown to be misleading and problematic with respect to District conclusions and recommendations. The case also raises concern that the receiving-site readiness story is underdeveloped relative to the disruption being proposed.
- The District's own condition indicators and publicly reported school performance/attendance context – both of which document a move from “better to worse” (Motivation to Bartram) also complicate the rationale for moving Motivation into Bartram without a much more detailed no-harm and educational continuity plan.

## Harding MS

- The Harding proposal is a high-complexity transition involving school phase-out, growth of receiving schools, and K-8 expansions. Summary data indicates major condition and adequacy concerns at the site, including poor/unsatisfactory top-line condition indicators, high estimated repair costs, and a large number of inadequate systems. Very little to any explanation is provided about what will actually be done, how or when; even the “newly” launched details on the District’s FPP site is woefully inadequate in describing what they are planning to do.
- At the same time, capacity and utilization figures are being used as drivers in a context where the Board has not been shown detailed room inventory methods, receiving-school readiness analyses, or fully documented transition sequencing tied to conditions and scope.
- This is precisely the kind of recommendation that should not advance without school-level implementation detail, hazard controls, and documented readiness plans for all affected receiving schools.

## Morris ES & Other Directly Impacted Programs

- **Overall building scores – even if fair or good -- can hide critical system failures.**

A single School Building Score (SBS) can make a building appear “fair” or even “acceptable” overall while one or more critical systems (HVAC/ventilation, roofing, plumbing, electrical, windows/doors) are still in poor or unsatisfactory condition. For planning and student safety purposes, a school with a failing HVAC system or recurring roof leaks may function much more like a “high-need” building than its overall score

suggests which can under-or even overstate repair needs and readiness for incoming students

**Scoring appears to rely on mixed or unclear data dates (“as-of” problem).**

The District has not clearly documented which condition inputs were used for each school, when they were collected, and whether more recent repairs, failures, or deterioration were incorporated. If the scoring combines older FCA/FCI data, newer walkthroughs, and partial updates without publishing the dates and rules used, the final building score may not reflect the school’s current real-world condition and can therefore be misleading when used to justify disruptive transitions.

**- The scoring method is not transparent enough to verify what is driving the result.**

SDP has not published the underlying building-condition scoring rubric (inputs, weights, cut-points, and transformations), so stakeholders cannot determine whether the score is being driven mainly by backlog cost, recent inspections, life-safety issues, environmental concerns, or other factors. This makes it difficult to assess whether similar schools are being scored consistently, and whether the resulting recommendations are technically justified; the result is a score the public is asked to trust, but can not independently evaluate.

Top-line building condition labels can obscure failures in the systems that most directly affect health, safety, and learning: HVAC/ventilation, roofing/envelope, windows and doors, electrical, plumbing, and thermal controls.

A school may be labeled 'Fair' or even 'Good' and still experience serious day-to-day failures that disrupt instruction and create environmental health concerns. This is why system-level condition and scope must be part of receiving-site readiness and transition planning.

The FMP materials also do not adequately disclose how environmental hazards and occupied-construction risks are being integrated into sequencing. For major work in older buildings, the Board and public should be shown hazard controls, dust and exposure management, air monitoring/clearance protocols, and occupancy protections.

I am also very concerned about what is missing: too little detail on maintenance and operations, cleaning, transition sequencing, environmental hazards, and the costs and controls needed during major modernization work while buildings remain occupied.

For students and educators, maintenance and operations, and cleaning is not an abstract budget line. It is the everyday reality of heating and cooling, leaks, bathrooms, pests, cleaning, ventilation maintenance, and work-order response.

An FMP without a robust, clearly costed M&O strategy is not a complete facilities plan. It is a capital project list. In a large aging portfolio with deferred maintenance and planned transitions, weak M&O capacity will undermine capital investments and destabilize receiving schools.

If the District's available capital funds are insufficient to achieve all promised modernization outcomes in the current timeframe, the Board should require a more practical strategy that combines stronger M&O stabilization with targeted capital improvements focused on the highest-risk systems and schools.

The District's headline 10-year FMP funding amount cannot be evaluated on its own. The Board must be shown what is included and excluded in that number, what overlaps with the existing capital program, what relies on new funding not yet secured, and how annual M&O budgets factor into implementation.

The \$2.8 billion 10-year plan, as proposed, is not a “once in a lifetime opportunity” as has been claimed by SDP and Board leaders – it is a \$280 million per year capital improvement plan in a district that is already spending about that same amount every year for infrastructure modernization, and it isn't close to enough.

***Our district requires about \$600 million to \$700 million per year for capital improvement and another \$600 million to \$700 million per year, in addition, for M&O, to take care of existing problems and to maintain our schools in a safe, dry and warm condition.***

A transparent budget crosswalk should link dollars to specific buildings, systems, and annual condition outcomes. Without that, the Board is being asked to evaluate promises rather than a fundable implementation model.

This is especially important because the District is representing major portfolio-wide outcomes—including moving poor/unsatisfactory buildings to better condition categories—while while proposing disruptive transitions that depend on timely readiness and construction sequencing.

My requests and recommendations at this point are is simple; if funding and implementation capacity are constrained, the District should pivot from overbroad promises to a more credible phased strategy:

- Portfolio-wide M&O stabilization: strengthen custodial and trades staffing, preventive and predictive maintenance, work-order triage, ventilation upkeep, and leak/moisture response across all schools.
- Targeted capital work: prioritize critical system failures (HVAC, roof/envelope, electrical, plumbing, life safety, hazard remediation) in the highest-need schools and in any receiving schools.
- No-harm transitions only: do not move students/staff unless the receiving site demonstrates documented readiness and equal-or-better conditions, supports, and environmental protections.

### **Some Board Action Requests**

Based on my analysis for PFT and my experience evaluating school facility and environmental conditions in Philadelphia, I recommend the Board adopt the following next steps before advancing irreversible FMP actions:

- Treat the current FMP as FMP 1.0 and pause irreversible actions (closures, mergers, co-locations, repurposing decisions) pending additional school-level documentation and public review.
- Require full data and methodology transparency for all major FPP scores: building condition, program alignment, utilization/capacity, and vulnerability (datasets, formulas, weighting, thresholds, and decision rules) – we can share our multiple data requests and asks for this information.
- Require school-by-school implementation and no-harm readiness plans for all directly impacted and receiving schools, including system scope, schedule, sequencing, hazard controls, room/capacity assumptions, and student support continuity.
- Require a public budget crosswalk and annual funding model showing FMP inclusions/exclusions, overlap with existing capital plans, annual M&O spending assumptions, secured vs requested funds, and building/system outcomes by year.
- Require a robust M&O and custodial improvement plan as a core FMP component, including staffing levels, vacancy reduction targets, preventive maintenance metrics, work-order response benchmarks, and cleaning/service standards.
- Establish a formal stakeholder technical review process to examine data, methods, and implementation plans before recommendations are finalized, with documented responses to stakeholder concerns and evidence requests.
- Require documented evaluation of lower-disruption 'improve and keep' alternatives for schools proposed for closure or relocation, including cost, implementation feasibility, and educational/environmental impact comparisons.

I am not asking the District to stop planning. I am asking the Board to require a real plan: one that is transparent, technically verifiable, fundable, and safe enough to deserve public trust. Philadelphia's students and educators have lived too long with deferred maintenance, underinvestment, and decisions made without sufficient accountability. We should not repeat that pattern under the banner of modernization.

We need a plan that shows its work, matches the money, protects people during implementation, and improves conditions now while building toward longer-term modernization. That is the standard I respectfully ask this Board to require.

Thank you.