



**Testimony to the House Appropriations and Education Committees'  
Education Tour 2023**

**October 25, 2023**

Good Morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Grove, Chairman Schweyer, Representative Staats, and all of the members of the Appropriations and Education Committees.

On behalf of the Superintendent, Dr. Tony Watlington, Sr., thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

I am Oz Hill, Chief Operating Officer for the School District of Philadelphia.

Yesterday, you heard from my colleague, Chief Financial Officer Michael Herbstman, regarding the impact of Pennsylvania's inadequate and inequitable school funding.

I want to echo his comments here and share some specific details of the work we are doing to improve our District's school facilities even in the face of such underfunding.

Every day we have to balance insufficient resources, making difficult choices about how we work on our facilities and deliver essential educational services.

We know that when schools are adequately funded, they can attract and retain highly qualified teachers, provide up-to-date resources and materials, and offer a wide range of extracurricular activities. We also know that adequately funded schools have the facilities to support the educational needs of their students. All of these elements are essential to creating a school district where students can thrive academically.

In Philadelphia, we are enormously proud of our students and all our staff, and the resilience they show every day, even amid challenges and resources that don't consistently meet the needs of the 21st century learning environment.

The School District of Philadelphia is composed of more than 300 buildings. And nearly every single one of them contains some asbestos material, in floor tiles, pipe wrap, paint, ceiling tiles, plaster and other materials. That is a hard fact, but one that needs to be considered to understand what we are addressing each day.

Although we have made significant strides in improving our environmental conditions in the past year, as well as other facilities improvements; it is important to recognize the scope of the need.

Some of the District's oldest buildings are 120 years old. More than 200 were built before 1978, when asbestos was commonly used –. That was before the potential health effects were widely recognized in the 1970s.

Last year, the District brought in an outside consultant to manage our asbestos inspections, which has been integral to our improvements. We have completed detailed inspections of every school, and - in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania grant funding - we are identifying and addressing areas of concern.

Yet as we work every day to improve conditions, we see greater need for consistent funding and resources.

I am incredibly proud of our students and staff who have shown resilience when we have needed to close schools for repairs. Today, for example, the students and staff at Frankford High School - a beautiful facility originally built in 1910 - are learning out of reconfigured classroom spaces and a modified cafeteria, while we address environmental needs in other areas of their building that are sealed off.

This summer, we installed more than 800 air conditioning units. Yet still, when temperatures reach a certain level, some of our schools transition to a virtual learning model due to inadequate cooling because of the heat.

In 2017, the School District completed a Facility Condition Assessment (FCA), which identified the structural issues in 308 District buildings.

The Parsons Environment & Infrastructure Group findings include:

- Twenty-one (21) facilities should be considered for replacement.
- Eighty-five (85) buildings in the District portfolio should be considered for major renovation.
- The total SDP facilities funding needs identified at that time were approximately \$7.8 billion.

Clearly, the need is vast, as the Commonwealth Court recognized.

As you heard yesterday from my colleague Michael Herbstman, since 2017 the District has invested in its buildings by modernizing classrooms, upgrading technology for students and staff, making much-needed repairs and remediating environmental hazards.

Between 2013 and 2023, the District invested in \$1.72 billion in our facilities. With this funding, the District:

- Built 4 new school facilities: Propel Northeast Academy, Powel-Science Leadership Academy Middle School, Solis Cohen Elementary School, and T.M. Peirce Elementary School which is on track for substantial completion on November 15th, in a few weeks.

Also, we have completed:

- 10 new school additions;
- 46 new classroom modernization projects;

- Lead paint assessments in 194 facilities, and certified 169 lead-safe schools;
- Added more than 1,800 state-of-the-art hydration stations in every school;
- Installed humidity sensors to monitor and proactively prevent mold in 31 targeted schools; and
- Conducted other deferred maintenance, systems upgrades, structural, energy efficiency and site improvement initiatives.

This past May, the Board of Education approved a 6-year Capital Improvement Plan that includes investing almost \$2.5 billion to improve our learning environments, including the construction of five new school buildings (Cassidy Elementary School, AMY @ James Martin Middle School, Holme Elementary School and two new school locations to be identified) and nearly \$350 million in major renovations. Our improvements will include HVAC, exterior renovations, electrical upgrades.

Here is a further breakdown of District's planned facility investments:

- New Construction, \$602 million
- Major Renovations, \$340 million
- HVAC, \$353 million
- Exterior Renovations, \$265 million
- Energy Performance Improvements, \$246 million
- Electrical, \$211 million
- New Additions, \$154 million

- Site Improvements, \$114 million
- Controls, \$68 million
- Minor Renovations, \$41 million

And just last week, we were able to acquire \$343 million in bond funding – in line with our regular borrowing cycle – to support this work.

While these investments certainly will make a difference, they fall short of our need for consistent, equitable funding to provide students and staff with safe, healthy, optimal learning environments.

Our students deserve school facilities where they can reach their full potential and contribute to the prosperity and growth of their community and the Commonwealth.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.