

## Making Child Care a Priority



Imagine if 10,000 Pennsylvania voters, from all party affiliations and walks of life, came together and told candidates for governor and the legislature to fund child care. Those candidates would listen, and child care would top every candidate's priority list.

Candidates who win the General Election in November would know that thousands of constituents are watching them and holding them to their child care campaign promises. It's not a dream...it's a burgeoning movement that can succeed with your participation.

**Child Care Voters** is a brand-new effort to galvanize child care supporters around the 2022 elections. The nonpartisan project will engage voters who care about access to high-quality pre-k, want to invest and expand access to infant and toddler care, and believe that when we support working families and invest in quality child care, all of Pennsylvania benefits.

*It's time Pennsylvania makes child care a priority.*

Pennsylvania's lawmakers are sitting on billions in tax revenue surplus and unspent federal COVID relief dollars. Yet thousands of Pennsylvania parents are struggling to make ends meet on meager salaries, and are unable to

pay for child care program tuitions that cost as much as a college education.

Help us reach our 10,000-person goal by joining the Child Care Voter Facebook page and getting on the email list. With just a couple of clicks, you'll help make child care a top tier issue in the 2022 elections.

### Racial Equity Guides Children First Early Childhood Provider Council

How can it be that the majority of all child care providers in Philadelphia are Black, Hispanic, and Asian women, but these leaders of color are not a part of the policy conversation that directly impacts their industry and the city's children?

**Children First's Early Childhood Provider Council** was launched to bring to light the issues that affect diverse child care providers and the children they serve. The Council will be advancing policy proposals to increase the availability of inclusive, culturally competent programs so children of color have nurturing places to learn and play.

"Even though we know how much value child care brings to the community and the economy, there's no acknowledgment of how race and ethnicity factor into the equation," said our Early Childhood Racial Equity Coordinator Stephanie Blake. "No one is asking, so we're doing the telling."

## Children First's Celebration of the Champions for Children

Honoring Dalila Wilson-Scott & NBC Universal  
and our 2022 Advocates of The Year

Tuesday, May 10th at 6:00 pm at The Fairmount Water Works

Tickets & Sponsorships: [www.childrenfirstpa.org/2022celebration](http://www.childrenfirstpa.org/2022celebration)



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# Policy Victory



Protecting PA Kids by Ending Lead Paint Poisoning

It's not rocket science: get lead paint hazards out of homes, and kids will stop being poisoned. Children First has been a leader in this work for decades, and the fight continues.

To say that we are making progress is an understatement. Just weeks ago, in response to our tireless advocacy, the Pennsylvania House Democratic Caucus announced \$10 million in new state funds to get the lead out of the homes of children. This is a huge investment in keeping children safe and healthy.

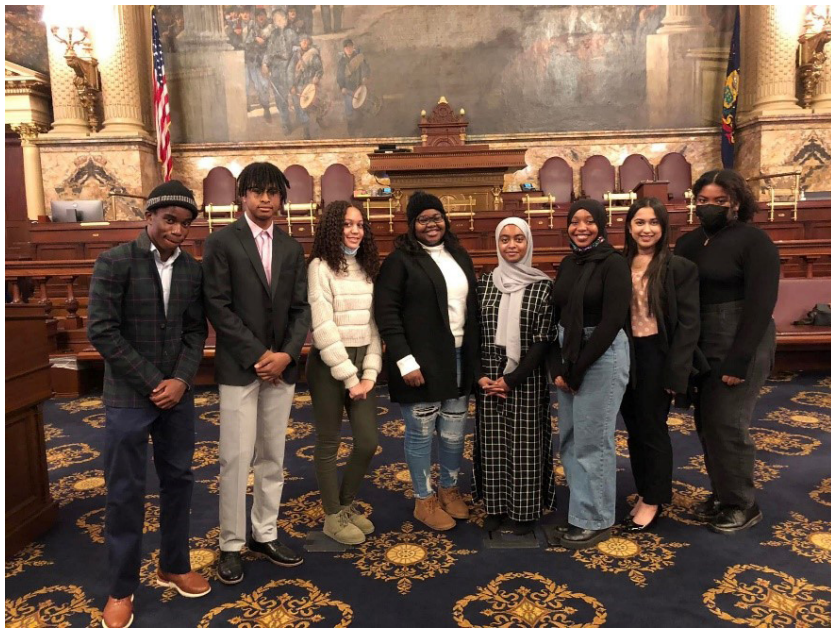
Adding to the progress in Philadelphia spurred on by Children First, two communities recognized the gravity of the situation and passed hard-hitting legislation that significantly reduces the risk of lead poisoning. With an assist from Children First, Norristown passed an ordinance that requires rental properties, child care facilities, condemned properties, and properties for sale be certified lead-free. Pittsburgh also passed a law requiring both testing of residential buildings and child-occupied facilities, and using lead-safe practices during demolitions and renovations.

Fighting to change policy is urgent, as is the need to help children already poisoned by lead. That's why Children First published **A Resource Guide: Care Management of a Child with Elevated Blood Lead Levels for Health Care Professionals and the Parent Resource Toolkit**. The Resource Guide enables them to advocate for the needs of children already exposed to lead and get them the services and care they need.

We have taken the cause statewide by forming the Lead-Free Promise Project, with more than 50 partners, parents, local health officials, and others telling lawmakers about the lead poisoning hazards in their communities, and pushing the State to adopt proven remedies. The rapidly organized lead poisoning prevention meetings held in eight rural and small cities across the state sent lawmakers a strong message that they must act.

Learn more about the Lead-Free Promise Project at [www.paleadfree.org](http://www.paleadfree.org).

## Advocacy in Action



"Our text books are older than the students using them." This reference to the antiquated textbooks used in Pennsylvania public schools was the opening talking point made by Upper Darby high school student Tanveer Kaur in a meeting with House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton during a Justice in Education visit to the State Capitol. Fellow student Zibo Semone-Bridgers pitched healthier meal options for students. "I think that more appetizing and appealing food will give students the fuel they need to succeed in school."

Through **Children First's Justice in Education** initiative, high school students from southeastern PA are introduced to the political realities of the lawmaking process, meet with local and state elected leaders, and sharpen their advocacy skills. Writing a "pitch" is an essential lesson that teaches students how to get their voice heard.

Children First formed **Justice in Education** in response to the powerful youth engagement in the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd. Students realized that their protests were just one tool to push political change; taking their case to the halls of power was the next step. In addition to the visit to the State Capitol, students have spoken with school board members and have led education funding rallies at their schools.

Tomea Sippio-Smith, our K-12 Education Policy Director, remarked that reports of the fair funding trial seeped into the **Justice in Education** sessions. "Education funding is an incredibly personal issue for the students. In real time, they listened to the witness testimony and the insidious statements by the legislative defendants, and it hammered home why their advocacy is valuable."

Cut through the noise and hear directly from the students who are living through unfair funding. Students from the William Penn School District, the lead plaintiff in the fair funding trial, took to the airwaves to share what their education experience is like.



Three students at Penn Wood High School host short and insightful podcast episodes and share their experiences in – and hopes for – their chronically underfunded district. Subscribe to PENNding Funds on iTunes or Spotify.



# Winning Strategy



In November, Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Court began hearing evidence of what we've known all along: Pennsylvania's public schools are desperately underfunded, and our students are suffering because of it.

Lawyers for underfunded school districts and parents of the students they serve made a compelling case to prove the state's failure to provide the "thorough and efficient" education guaranteed by the Pennsylvania Constitution. Only 14% of public school students attend schools that receive adequate state education funding, leaving nearly nine out of ten students at the mercy of local taxes and/or denied adequate and necessary resources.

The trial exposed the disdain that some lawmakers have for public education. Lawyers for the Republican defense asked why all students need to have a top-notch education. "What use would a carpenter have for biology? What use would someone on the McDonald's career track have for algebra?" Defense attorneys berated principals and school superintendents, some of whom became emotional while sharing

their despair caused by insufficient funding. This line of questioning was a low point in Pennsylvania's history that we won't soon forget.

The stellar legal team argued for funding in the courtroom while Children First mobilized students, parents, educators, and supporters to make our case in the court of public opinion.

We held rallies at the Capitol, online watch parties of the trial, solemn public vigils, church hall meetings, and community conversations, ensuring that Pennsylvanians knew what's at stake in the trial: our children's education and their future.

The legal decision regarding the infringement of the constitutional guarantee is now in the hands of the judge. But state lawmakers don't need to wait for the Court to decide; the General Assembly can pass a state budget this year to remedy the unconstitutional underfunding. The state Legislature's refusal to spend any of the \$10 billion in the State's surplus is ample evidence that we need to keep the pressure on until lawmakers bring justice to education.



## Donor Salute

They say if you want to get something done, ask someone who's busy. Joy Soto, a donor and member of the **Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC)**, is just that kind of person. She brings her A-game to every Children First project, and is always eager to do and learn more.

"I was drawn to the advocacy and collaborative nature of the work done by Children First and feel that I'm learning from the best in the region when it comes to fighting for kids and youth!"

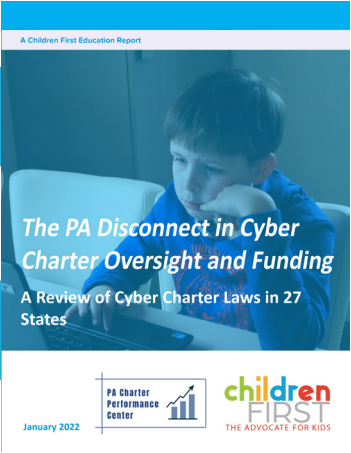
Born and raised in Philadelphia and a proud product of public schools, Joy has a deep commitment to children in the city. Her full time job as the Education and Community Engagement Manager at The Philly POPS keeps her busy, but she still finds time to volunteer with a variety of youth empowerment programs, helping teens and young adults reach their full potential. Her willingness to serve is inspiring – she's even the co-chair of our Events Committee that is planning the major Children First celebration next month!



### More About Young Professionals Advisory Council

**Children First's Young Professionals Advisory Council** is a diverse group of enlightened and engaged young leaders from across the Philadelphia region who have come together to support our mission and work. The purpose of YPAC is to build the pipeline of leaders, networkers, advocates and donors for Children First well into the next 40 years! To learn more about YPAC and get involved, contact Steven Fynes at [stevenf@childrenfirstpa.org](mailto:stevenf@childrenfirstpa.org).

# The Cyber Disconnect



Pennsylvania has greatest number of cyber charter school students in the country and the highest taxpayer costs – approaching \$1 billion last year. And, among the 27 states that permit cyber charter schools, our Commonwealth has the weakest laws to ensure that students and taxpayers are getting their money's worth.

Children First's PA Charter Performance Center released **The PA Disconnect in Cyber Charter Oversight and Funding** and found Pennsylvania is the cyber charter capital of the nation. "There are persistent performance problems in cyber charter schools so they are letting down students. And, the combination of negligent state oversight and out-of-control costs makes cyber charters a very expensive and bad deal for local taxpayers," according to the Director of the PA Charter Performance Center, ML Wernecke.

Nearly half of Pennsylvania's cyber charters have never been audited and the others only sporadically, leaving the door wide open to fraud. Without oversight, Pennsylvania could join states like California, Ohio, and Indiana that were swindled by cyber charter fraud totalling \$368 million.

Despite the hefty price tag, every one of Pennsylvania's statewide cyber charters is among the state's lowest performing schools. By 2025, school districts will need an additional \$1.7 billion to cover all charter school costs – including cyber charter tuition – inevitably driving up local property taxes. These exorbitant costs could easily be brought under control if Pennsylvania would implement common-sense reforms that are in place in other cyber charter states: a flat cyber rate that reflects the actual costs of virtual instruction, and accountability for persistent poor performance. The proposed changes have been put on the table by Governor Wolf repeatedly, but nothing has moved in the General Assembly. The Pennsylvania Constituion guarantees a thorough K-12 education. Our leaders are obligated to learn from other cyber states and ensure that Pennsylvania is delivering the best education possible.

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# Insuring Children

Overwhelmed school nurses and counselors are clamoring for resources to help kids in their care, and Children First continues to deliver health insurance resources they need.

The latest edition of **A Manual for School Nurses and Counselors** is now available for school nurses and counselors, child care providers, after school programs, and the general public. The manual helps them navigate their way through the system so they can locate the best health care options for kids.

Visit [www.childrenfirstnurses.com](http://www.childrenfirstnurses.com) to browse this valuable tool to get children covered.

