

Pa'Lante!



Pa'lante is a widely recognized cultural call to action; it means to move forward.

Children First's new report, *Pa'lante – It's Time to Move Forward: Improving the Lives of Philadelphia's Hispanic Children*, is the first ever comprehensive look at how Hispanic children and teens in the city

are doing. [The report is available in English and Spanish on our website at childrenfirstpa.org/palante.](https://childrenfirstpa.org/palante)

In some respects, Philadelphia's Hispanic children are doing well, despite structural inequities and hostilities associated with race, culture, or immigration status. Hispanic children have low infant mortality rates, are rarely the perpetrators or victims in gun violence, and are generally not involved in the child welfare system, as compared to other Philadelphia communities. Other good news is that the share of Hispanic children in poverty dropped from 58% in 2015 to 44% today.

However, Hispanic children show signs of struggling:

- Ten percent are uninsured and are three times as likely to be uninsured as Black or white children.

- Only one in five are starting kindergarten with age-appropriate social/emotional skills.
- Seven out of ten are not testing on grade level in math or English.
- Less than 60% graduate high school on time and only a quarter advance to college the following fall.

The institutions charged with meeting Hispanic children's health care, social service, and educational needs clearly need to do more to make it possible for them to graduate high school healthy and equipped for a prosperous, self-sufficient life.

The report findings point to an urgent need to give Hispanic parents culturally responsive information to enable them to access youth-serving systems like health care, education enrichment, and social supports.



New Leadership



After many years as a Children First volunteer and organizer, Javier Suárez is now the President of the Children First Board of Directors.

Noticing a lack of young people engaged in our work, Javier jumped into action to create the Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC) along with fellow Board member Lindsay Albright. Because of his efforts, there is a growing pipeline of child advocacy leaders and a wider base of supporters and advocates. YPAC is quickly becoming a fixture in Philadelphia's political and social nonprofit circles, raising awareness about children and teens, and money for Children First.

Never one to rest on his laurels, Javier was instrumental in the development and release of *Pa'lante – It's Time to Move Forward: Improving the Lives of Philadelphia's Hispanic Children*. Through his decades-long professional experience in the Hispanic community, he realized the lack of information about what Hispanic children and teens in the city need to succeed.

Now he's using his connections to widely distribute *Pa'lante* so leaders, influencers, and lawmakers are informed and moved to action. Javier's latest initiative to improve lives is Live Work Philadelphia, a nonprofit organization working to attract diverse middle-income residents to move to the city and foster ethnic diversity and economic stability, a winning strategy for all children and teens. Thanks to his tireless advocacy, Philadelphia children are moving toward brighter futures and greater opportunities.



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Advocacy in Action

Raising the Alarm on the Need for Mental Health Supports



National suicide rates among kids doubled in 10 years. Half of kids who take their own lives have never had access to any mental health services before making that terminal decision. These two facts alone demonstrate that children are dealing with an unprecedented mental health crisis.

These unprecedented times call for tearing down the obstacles to good and ample mental health care. Better services with ready access to preventative and early mental health services will decrease the share of children who require intensive care to lead a healthy life. We must:

1. End the long waiting lists to see a professional.
2. Address the lack of culturally competent providers.
3. Allow children to get care without delay of a formal diagnosis requirement.

Children First is kicking off the statewide effort to transform the way mental health services are delivered to children and teens.

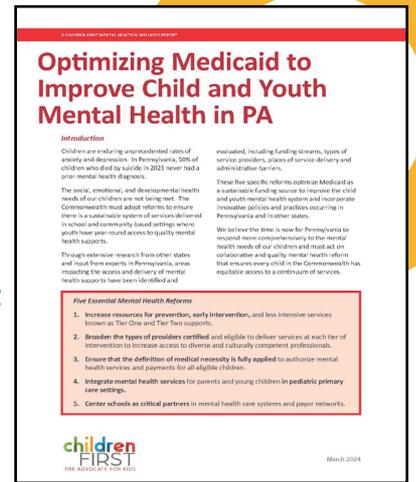
Our new report, *Optimizing Medicaid to Improve Child and Youth Mental Health in PA*, is the first of its kind in Pennsylvania to recommend reforming Medicaid to provide the lifesaving help children need. [Find the report at childrenfirstpa.org/child-health](https://childrenfirstpa.org/child-health).

Why focus on Medicaid? Because Medicaid is the insurer for nearly half of Pennsylvania's children and teens and could clear the path for private insurers to follow suit. Pennsylvania can tap Medicaid to:

- Create more prevention, early intervention, and targeted services, especially in schools,
- Build a cadre of diverse and culturally competent certified mental health professionals with a range of experiences and backgrounds, and
- Provide mental health support at pediatrician offices for parents as well as children.

The groundswell of support for these reforms is both inspiring and sobering because it shows how desperate families and children are for the help they need.

[Contact Kate Fox, Behavioral Health Policy Coordinator, at katef@childrenfirstpa.org to get involved in this growing movement.](mailto:katef@childrenfirstpa.org)



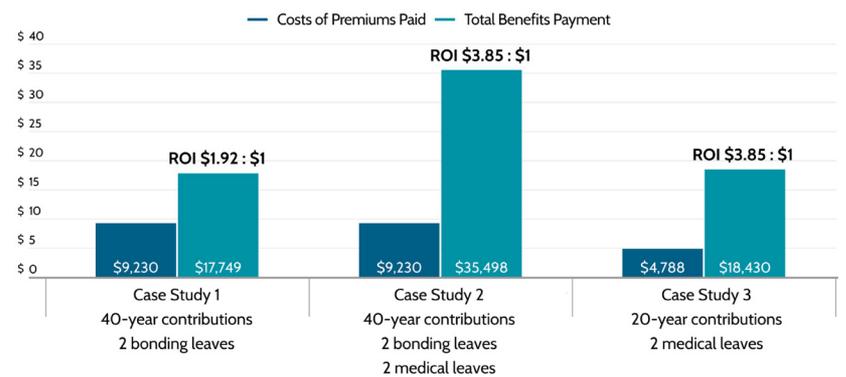
Advocacy in Action

Paid Family Leave: Good For Business, Good for the Economy

Three and a half million Pennsylvania workers risk their financial security when they welcome a new baby, must care for an ailing parent, or experience a medical emergency. Legislation moving in the state capitol – The Family Care Act – would provide a statewide paid family and medical leave program to change that. Children First is working with organizational partners, legislative leaders from both sides of the aisle, and small and big businesses to get it passed.

Children First organized more than 100 business owners – from Cornerstone Barbershop and Learning My Way Montessori to Patagonia and Duolingo – to send letters of support for a statewide paid family leave program to

Return on Investment for Median Workers, Pennsylvania Paid Family Leave



Governor Shapiro and legislative leaders. These business letters were released at a capitol rotunda press conference hosted by Rep. Jim Miller (D-Allegheny) and Sens. Devlin Robinson (R-Allegheny) and Maria Collett (D-Montgomery, in photo left).

Right now, this bipartisan legislation is poised to pass the House of Representatives, and we need your help to push it along. Send a message to your lawmakers on HB 181 and SB 580, urging them to create an affordable paid family and medical leave program that benefits both Pennsylvania workers and businesses.

[To get involved in passing this crucial legislation, email Dan O'Brien, Education & Family Stability Policy Manager at dano@childrenfirstpa.org.](mailto:dano@childrenfirstpa.org)



Advocacy in Action

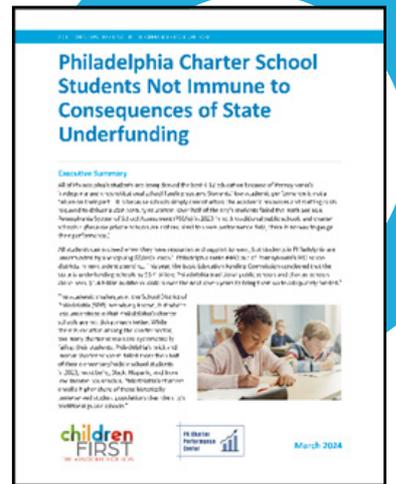
School Funding

Philadelphia's brick and mortar charter schools failed more than half of their elementary/middle school students, most of whom are Black, Hispanic, and from low-income households. Our take is the root cause of the underperformance is that Philadelphia's charter schools are just as underfunded as all of Pennsylvania's schools, thanks to the state's inadequate and unconstitutional school funding system.

For comparison, the School District of Philadelphia also had disappointing results, but the charter sector's dismal performance is particularly alarming because charters' freedom from over-regulation was supposed to remedy poor student performance. Like every other public school, charters simply cannot afford the academic resources and staffing costs required to deliver a 21st century education.

Pennsylvania's students are waiting for state lawmakers to pass adequate funding as directed by the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania. Until then, all public school students – charter and traditional – will be denied the educational success they deserve.

Read the new Children First report, *Philadelphia Charter School Students Not Immune to Consequences of State Underfunding* at www.childrenfirstpa.org/education. Learn more and find out how charter schools can be the innovative centers for success they were supposed to be. Email Priyanka Reyes-Kaura at priyankark@childrenfirstpa.org.



Advocacy in Action

Parents and Students Leading the Calls for Change

Who knows better what parents and young people need than parents and young people? Having refined their advocacy skills through the Children First Parents Empowered for Change and Justice in Education programs, parents and students across southeastern Pennsylvania are Children First's most powerful partners in our advocacy work.

High school students walked the halls of the state capitol and parents went office to office in Philadelphia City Hall to demand more education funding. Students and parents have also shared their personal challenges and dreams in community forums and press conferences, and called for the policy solutions that could transform their lives. This work is critically important because it reinforces how the personal is political. "I come here and share my stories with legislators because they need to know what it's like for families today," said Ernie Bristow, a grandparent from North Philadelphia who traveled to the state capitol. "At first I was nervous in these meetings, but I know I need to speak out for my kids and my community."

If you or someone you know wants to learn more about becoming a Parent Empowered for Change or a student in Justice in Education, email Steven Fynes at stevenf@childrenfirstpa.org.



Donor Salute

David Laigaie, a Philadelphia attorney specializing in criminal defense, is one of our most ardent supporters. He is the proud father of Grace (24) and Jacob (18) with his late wife Brenda. He and his new bride, CarolAnn, married last year at scenic Joshua Tree National Park.

As chair of the Children First Action Fund Board of Directors since 2020, Dave has been at the helm as the organization has ramped up its voter engagement activities to early success. "The Action Fund is an additional tool in Children First's tool box and provides a great way to engage voters in our important work," he said. For six years prior, he gave his time and talent on the Children First Board of Directors. "Donna and the crew at Children First punch well above their weight," he said. "I was thrilled to be part of the effort." That's high praise coming from someone who volunteered to exonerate a man wrongly imprisoned for 21 years.

Dave gives that same level of unrelenting commitment to justice to Pennsylvania's children and teens. Be like Dave and support our work. Contact Caroline King at carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org or 215-680-0077.

In Memoriam



Children First lost a dear colleague and longtime employee, Judy Adamson. As our Chief Financial Officer for nearly a decade, Judy deftly managed our financial assets and funder obligations with a true commitment to our mission. She also reminded us time and again to find things in life that bring us joy.

Before co-founding Research for Action and working with them for 20 years, Judy ran a political resistance press shop in the 1970s that grew into a printing company catering to social justice organizations and candidates. Her contributions to making the world a kinder place are her enduring legacy.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Judy was a remarkable individual with a passion for fiber arts, gardening, and travel. She was a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother, and passionate supporter of Community Education Center and Philadelphia Young Playwrights.

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Join YPAC



The Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC) is a growing network of diverse young leaders and child advocates who want to connect with each other and Children First projects that are improving children's lives. Members of YPAC recently paid a visit to Philadelphia City Council to advocate for more funding for pre-k and education funding and, in June, they will be advocating for our youngest learners in the halls of the State Capitol in Harrisburg.

Count yourself among the young "movers and shakers" for children by joining YPAC. Members benefit from the comradery and professional networking while launching meaningful projects to improve the lives of kids and teens.

Contact Steven Fynes at stevenf@childrenfirstpa.org to learn more.