

Priorities For The Next Mayor

The Kids Campaign

Every Day Safer than the Day Before

We brought together 80+ youth-serving organizations to form **The Kids Campaign**, a nonpartisan voter education effort aimed at making sure the next Philly mayor puts children first. The Kids' Campaign gave

voting parents and young adults the information they needed to determine which candidate they believed will keep kids S.E.C.U.R.E – Safety, Education, Careers, Uplifting families, Recreation, and the Environment.

No one knows better what it's like being a young person in Philadelphia than the kids themselves, so young people have been key partners from the start, headlining press conferences, designing the goals of the campaign, and planning their own debate with the candidates.

The Kids Campaign solicited unambiguous position statements from the candidates – free of rhetoric and packed with details – so parents have unbiased information to cast an informed vote. See the candidate responses online at www.thekidscampaign.org.

This impressively broad coalition delivered eleven policy papers to every candidate on topics ranging from healing systemic rifts that disproportionately harm children of color, to guaranteeing jobs or teens, to solving the climate crisis.

Candidates took notice with several of the most serious contenders using the Kids Campaign materials to define their platforms to make every day safer than the day before. The more than 100 young people involved in the project had a tangible impact on the campaign for Philadelphia's 100th mayor.



Policy Victory

Eradicating Lead Exposure Gets National Exposure



The threat of lead poisoning is so severe in Pennsylvania that even the President of the United States visited to announce new federal intervention with ambitious initiatives to remove lead paint in public housing, child care centers, and schools. Children First was on hand and so was Jenna Curtis (photo left), one of our most stalwart parent leaders contributing to our efforts to end childhood lead poisoning. She had the honor of introducing the President.

Norristown, the City of Chester, and East Lansdowne joined the cadre of localities that have passed lead-safe laws: Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Lancaster City, Columbia Borough, and the Borough of Millvale. In addition, the head of the new Delaware County Health Department embraced the Lead Safe Action Plan we crafted with local leaders to reduce the threat of lead in Delco, one of the most toxic counties for childhood lead poisoning.

Even in Harrisburg, where consensus is hard to find, a Republican-sponsored lead poisoning screening bill passed with bipartisan support last session, and already this year a half-dozen lead poison prevention bills are on the docket to toughen laws on the books. [Go to the Lead-Free Promise Project at www.paleadfree.org](http://www.paleadfree.org) to join the Lead-Free Promise Project, co-founded by Children First and get timely updates on lead poisoning prevention efforts.



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Policy Priorities

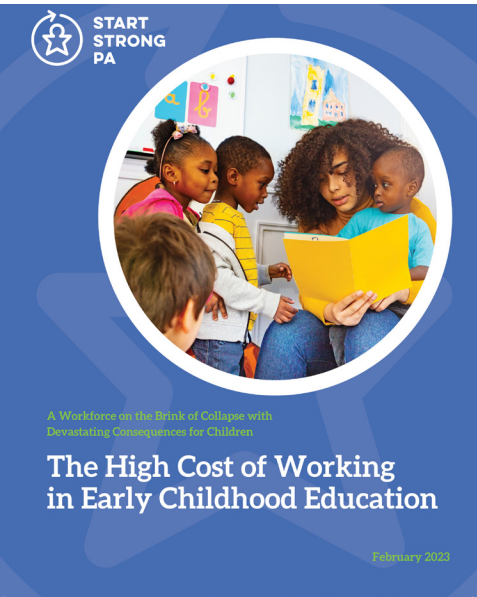
Immediate Action Needed to Avert a Child Care Collapse



Only two out of every 10 child care and pre-k centers are fully staffed, so the parents of 38,300 kids are facing huge challenges to find quality care. Why? Primarily because paying early education teachers in PA just \$12.43/hour means it's hard to find staff. In fact, across the state there's about 4,000 early childhood teacher vacancies.

For those who do stay in the early education field, they don't earn enough to cover basic living costs, even working full time, according to **"The High Cost of Working in Early Childhood Education,"** a new Children First report for the Start Strong Campaign. As a result, 65% of PA early education teachers rely on SNAP, Medicaid, public assistance, or other benefits.

The constant worry about making ends meet takes a huge mental and emotional toll on early education teachers who would much rather be focused on nurturing young minds. "I wake up every day the happiest I can be to see my students, but I debate whether that happiness is worth my financial struggle," Milagros Battiti (pictured above), an early ed teacher, told us at a community forum at the Northeast Family YMCA.



the Northeast Family YMCA.

This financial tight-rope is causing qualified teachers to leave the sector. A solid half of them – many with bachelor's or master's degrees – say they will likely leave their current position within five years.

Governor Shapiro's budget proposal included just \$100

million in child care and pre-k funds, which will only act to keep the sinking sector afloat. Averting collapse of the sector requires five times that.

Go to www.childrenfirstpa.org to tell your lawmakers to solve the child care crisis and to download a copy of the report.

Career and Technical Education Builds 21st Century Skills

Giving students the best chance for a lifelong career and happiness means getting more than – and more out of – their high school education. But "more" doesn't always mean getting a degree from a four-year university.

A new report by Children First and Keystone Research, **"Meeting the**

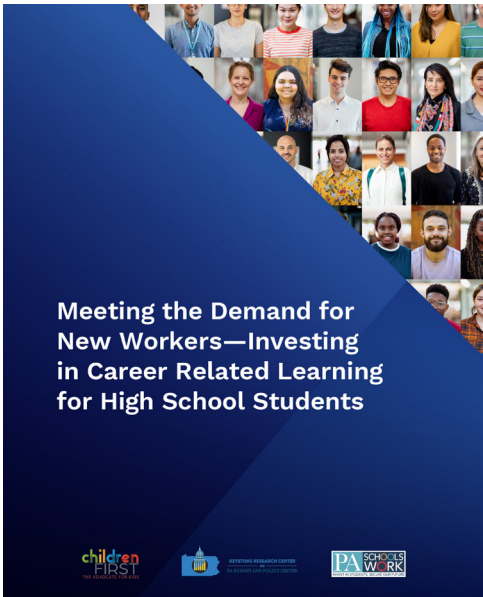
Demand for New Workers – Investing in Career Related Learning for High School Students," shows that

career-related learning in high school jumpstarts many students' careers right out of high school.

Although students with greater exposure to CTE are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in a two-year college, be employed, and earn higher wages, fewer than 7% of PA high school students have access to CTE programs, far less than neighboring West Virginia where a third of high school students get training. Because school districts have to foot the bill for supplies and equipment, low-wealth districts that educate the largest number of Black and Hispanic students can't afford CTE programs, so the youth who may need it the most have it the least.

Governor Shapiro's budget proposal includes a \$24 million increase for CTE, an impressive improvement but not near the \$230 million needed to seriously invest in building proven pathways to career success for students.

Go to www.childrenfirstpa.org/investinginCRL to view or download a copy of this report.



Take Action



Join us in making sure lawmakers make the lives of children better by improving early childhood education, public schools and children's health care

Youth, parents, teachers, early childhood and health care professionals are needed to make sure lawmakers know our children need them to do so much more for kids

June 5th - Paid Family Leave

June 6th- ECE & K-12 Harrisburg

June 20th - ECE & K-12 Harrisburg

June 22nd - ECE & K-12 Harrisburg

Register for any of these events at www.childrenfirstpa.org/2023advocacydays

Questions:
ECE: carolined@childrenfirstpa.org
K12: shirleeh@childrenfirstpa.org
Paid Leave: dano@childrenfirstpa.org



Join a Children First Advocacy Day at the state capital where you will meet with your legislators, participate in a press conference, or watch the House and Senate in action.

Go to www.childrenfirstpa.org/2023advocacydays and register for our Advocacy Days in June, just as the state budget is in final negotiations.

Winning Strategy

History in the Making: State Education Funding System is Ruled Unconstitutional

In a huge victory for every student in the state, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court unequivocally determined that the state's current school funding system is unconstitutional in its historic February 7th ruling. After nearly a decade of legal wrangling, students in rural and urban districts finally have the law declared on their side. In recognizing that education is a fundamental right for all children guaranteed by the state Constitution, the court recognized that students in low-wealth districts are currently denied that right because their districts cannot raise sufficient local resources.



"[The state's] Education Clause was clearly, palpably, and plainly violated because of a failure to provide all students with access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education that will give them a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically," wrote Commonwealth Court Judge Renee Jubilerer. Though the court did not name a specific dollar amount required to provide a constitutional public education in every community, the decision is clear that low-wealth districts are shortchanged by insufficient state funding.

Now it's Harrisburg's job to fill the \$4.6 billion shortfall in public education. Children First and our Pennsylvania Schools Works partners asked Governor Shapiro to invest at least \$1 billion in recurring funds for schools, but his budget proposal fell far short. Join us in telling the Governor that students are depending on him to do much more to align the state budget with its constitutional mandate to fund the schools! [Go to **www.childrenfirstpa.org/keepup** to send your letter today.](http://www.childrenfirstpa.org/keepup)

Advocacy In Action



Children First formed Parents Empowered for Change (PEC) to build a powerful cadre of advocates among parents wanting to champion causes close to their hearts and communities. Maritza Guridy, a mother of six and a foster mom, (pictured with her daughter, Mecca) is driven to reform the foster care system after caring for children traumatized by the system.

"My husband and I have seen what happens when children are denied the support they need. We're tired of seeing the system not respecting the needs of the children," she said. Maritza enrolled in the Immersive Empowerment

Fellowship because of the extensive program support and connections Children First offers. "I want to know what works, what 'sticks.' Lots of people have tried different ways to improve foster care and I want to learn from their successes and avoid their mistakes."

Maritza is using the Empowerment Fellowship to dive deep into the chronic problems within the foster care system, collecting data and categorizing resources, to develop a comprehensive advocacy plan. She's also learning how to leverage and expand her networks, and values having a consistent network within the Fellowship to get ideas and feedback. "The Fellowship is helping me fully understand the foster care challenges and develop my vision and plan. I couldn't do this on my own." [Go to **www.childrenfirstpa.org/pec** for more information about Parents Empowered for Change.](http://www.childrenfirstpa.org/pec)



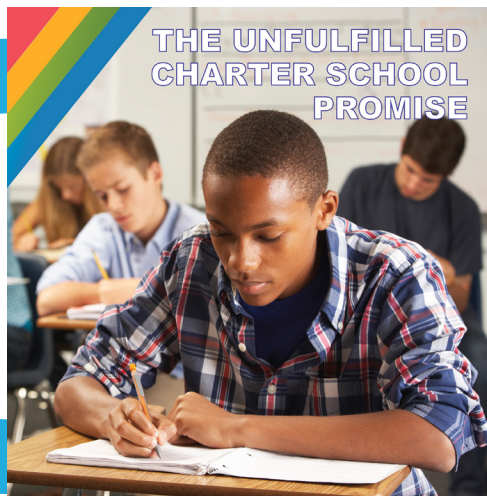
Donor Salute

Diego Matamoros, a private equity and M&A attorney with FisherBroyles in Philadelphia, joined the Children First Board last year. A father of three young children attending public schools, Diego is enthusiastic about Children First's regional work for children.

Before law school, his career as an opera singer took him around the world, performing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and the Turin Royal Opera in Italy. In September, Diego will perform for the first time in 10 years at an event to support Children First. "I'm thrilled to be able to organize an evening of beautiful music and raise funds to support our incredible work."

Diego is also a monthly donor, appreciating the ease of making his contribution a part of his family's regular budget. "It makes it so much easier to have an amount locked in – the same as our other fixed expenses – so we don't have to scramble at the end of the year," he said. "It allows Children First to plan on a steady stream of income as well." [To support our work and learn more about this amazing concert, contact Caroline King at **carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org** or **215-680-0077**.](mailto:carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org)

Keep Your Promises



A Children First PA Charter Performance Center
Report on Charter Schools in Pennsylvania
March 2023



Charter schools bill themselves as being innovative learning centers, free of restrictive red tape that stunts creative instruction. But despite being in business for a quarter century in Pennsylvania, the promise of charter schools remains unfulfilled, according to **“What do PA Charter Schools have in Common with School Districts?”** a new report by the **PA Charter Performance Center**.

Instead of improving over time, charter schools student performance overall has been consistently low since 2015. Of the approximately 34,000 Black, Hispanic, and low-income charter school enrollment, more 22,000 failed their 2019 English PSSA and 29,000 failed the math. That’s a fail rate of 50% in English and 75% in math.

While charter school test scores aren’t going up, charter school costs are. School districts spent more than \$1.6 billion to send students to charter schools and another \$1 billion for cyber charter schools in the 2021 school year. Payments to charter schools are projected to soar by another \$1.7 billion by 2023, making them the fastest-growing cost in the state’s education system and still the educational needs of children of color and those who are low-income are not being met.

It turns out that charter schools face the same inadequate state funding that hurt district-run schools. If the district-run school is underfunded, charter schools in the district will also be underfunded – it’s how the funding system “works.” Black, Hispanic, and low-income families living in those struggling district-run schools often turn to charter schools as a saving grace, but the report shows that students are not finding an academic refuge in the charters. **To learn more about the PA Charter Performance Center, visit www.childrenfirstpa.org**

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Changes to CHIP

Starting April 17, 2023, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) will be deciding who qualifies for CHIP. This will include both new applications and renewals.

This means that the current 130,000 CHIP families and all new enrollees will need to go through DHS instead of their CHIP health insurance plan to determine eligibility.

Questions about DHS’ new process for applying and renewing CHIP coverage can be addressed by calling the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930 or 1-215-560-7226 in Philadelphia.

Our Helpline is also available to help at 215-563-5848 x171.

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What will change for CHIP families?

- CHIP applications and renewals will be processed by caseworkers in local DHS County Assistance Offices.
- Information about who qualifies for CHIP will come from DHS. This will include notices, requests for proof of income and/or citizenship, and renewal packets.
- Information on how to appeal a decision about who qualifies for CHIP will come from DHS.
- The Unique Family Identifier (UFI) number that is used to identify a household by the CHIP health insurance companies will be changed to a record number by DHS.
- DHS made improvements for completing online applications and renewals through the COMPASS website at dhs.pa.gov/COMPASS and the COMPASS PA mobile app.

❗ **WONT CHANGE:** a child's current CHIP health insurance plan

❗ **WONT CHANGE:** a child's CHIP health insurance benefits or services

CHIP families should expect to receive a welcome letter from DHS with their new record number and other details surrounding this new process in early April.

Questions?

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CHIP families should still contact their CHIP health insurance plan with questions about health insurance benefits, providers, and premiums.

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