

Testimony on PACE Amendment  
Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund  
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Thank you for inviting me to testify. I am Mary Filardo, Executive Director of the [21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund](#).

*The 21CSF started in 1994 in Washington, D.C. to public the public will and capacity to modernize schools in the District of Columbia. We lead the research and advocacy first long-range facility master plan in 1994. 21CSF provided leadership for the Oyster public-private partnership, and the formulation of the modernization of the Tier 0 elementary school modernizations in starting in the FY2001 capital budget. In 2003 21CSF was awarded a grant from the Ford Foundation to create a learning community of urban education equity advocates working to improve urban public school facilities in New York, Chicago, New Jersey, Ohio, and California. In 2013, 21CSF helped establish the [National Council of School Facilities](#)—an association for state facility agencies focused on state policy and practice. 21CSF is a founder and board member of the [Build America’s School Infrastructure Coalition--BASIC](#), which advocates for an appropriate federal role in the delivery of modern school facilities. 21CSF is also one of the consortium partners establishing the [National Center on School Infrastructure](#). A U.S. Department of Education technical assistance center on public school facilities.*

The 21CSF works to advance effective policy and practice for healthy, safe, educationally appropriate public school facilities that are community accessible, environmentally sustainable, and affordable. We do this through research, advocacy, and technical assistance at local, state, and federal levels.

From our work over the decades, I want to make some observations about the District of Columbia’s public education infrastructure and capital program.

- 1) The District of Columbia has one of the most ambitious public school facility modernization programs in the U.S. There is no other city of comparable size that has accomplished what DCPS has for its public school buildings and grounds.

School Districts FY23	FY 2023			Capital Expenditures FY2014-FY2023 (2024\$)		
	Enrollment	GSF	GSF per Stu	per Student	per GSF	TOTAL
DCPS	49,687	14,742,400	297	\$97,034	\$327	\$4,821,346,670
DC Charter LEAs	41,225	6,937,600	168	\$37,930	\$225	\$1,563,665,288
Baltimore City PS	75,995	15,502,732	204	\$30,765	\$151	\$2,338,004,350
Boston PS	46,367	11,000,000	237	\$18,306	\$77	\$848,805,060
Seattle PS	51,238	9,156,114	179	\$44,055	\$247	\$2,257,304,880
SF Unified SD	48,785	10,000,000	205	\$38,053	\$186	\$1,856,418,410

- 2) DCPS is ranked as one of the fastest improving urban school districts per the NAEP scores, recent research on the impact of facility conditions on student achievement, teacher retention, and health metrics tied to academics strongly suggest that the modernized DCPS facilities may be one of the leading contributors to improved student performance.
- 3) The first master plan to modernize all of DCPS school facilities was made in 1994. The 30 year dedication to the modernization of our public school buildings and grounds was the result of the convergence of civic, business, and political interests which has been sustained through Council policies on planning, budgeting, standards, and oversight.

The challenge of defending the common good, over privilege and bias falls on the Council. The PACE Act was important, as it acknowledged this challenge, and provided an approach to try to make the capital budget allocations more fair. I would like to support the testimony of Will Perkins, in the specific recommendations for the PACE Act.

But I would also like to step back and identify what I think are some of the most pressing public policy issues related to master planning, capital planning and budget that I think DC Council needs to address and which may require a PACE 2.0. These are:

- 1) **The organization of public school sectors in D.C.—How many school districts should DC have?**
  - a. Nationally, states are looking at district consolidations as a way to address costs, inefficiencies, and education quality.
  - b. D.C. has over 60 separate school districts, how many LEAs make sense? And what is the optimal allocation of schools by sector?
  - c. At 14 million GSF of space in DCPS, DCPS has capacity for at least 70,000 students. If DCPS enrolled 20,000 students from the charter sector, this would save the City \$77 million a year in just facility allowance, and would support other efficiencies.
  - d. What is the wholesale plan of D.C. ...not the retail plan...student by student of the Council to better utilize its capital investments? How can D.C. consolidate LEAs into DCPS? What policy needs to be in place to consolidate charter schools into the DCPS system?
- 2) **The ongoing capital maintenance of our \$10 billion 25 year investment in DCPS modern infrastructure.**
  - a. Will it rebuild in-house technical capacity to operate and maintain the modern schools, or will it continue with the more ad hoc repair and maintenance contracts?

- b. What is D.C. doing to ensure that the assets in place will be maintained in good repair and do not depreciate too quickly due to inadequate preventive and routine maintenance?
- c. Where are the maintenance plans for the schools?

**3) The need to share use of DCPS buildings and grounds, to not lose neighborhood schools.**

- a. D.C. will face downward enrollment pressures in both sectors due to dropping births, and depressed in-migration of families due to national immigration policy.
- b. At the same time, there is a growing vulnerable population of adults over 65? What is D.C. doing to ensure it fully utilizes its capital investments for the maximum benefit to its residents?

These are not easy issues to address, but a focus on the common good, will help soften the pressures of privilege and bias. I look forward to D.C. setting a path forward on these challenges.