

Pittsburgh Public Schools Fulton PreK-5 Special Public Hearing Testimonies Submitted Not Read
July 29, 2025

Ellen Maginnis

My name is Ellen Maginnis, and along with my husband and three kids, have been residents of Highland Park for the past 6 years. We love living in Highland Park and while my kids don't go to Fulton, the school is an anchor to the neighborhood.

I cannot comment on the quality of education but know that the school is a valuable resource to the families that go there. I understand the complexities of the decisions the School Board has to make. I am requesting that PPS be more transparent about the goals and outcomes of their Facilities Utilization plan and that if PPS has to move out of the building, I strongly support keeping the building as a public resource in the neighborhood and NOT selling to a condo developer.

I am unable to make it to the meeting tonight but will continue to follow the decisions made by the Board and keep the Board accountable to serving the community's needs.

Best,

Ellen Maginnis

Renee Prymus

Dear PPS Board:

I am writing as a Dilworth parent of rising 4th and 6th graders.

First, I theoretically support restructuring the district. Trying to navigate the change from elementary school to middle school for my oldest child was difficult. There were no clear options, and now my child's friends will be scattered around greater Pittsburgh area. I am excited that future families will have a more clear path through the district—and eventually their buildings will have AC too.

In the meantime, though, there are students who will be caught at critical years in this transition. Some of the students and schools will be minorly affected, and the education of some will be majorly disrupted. In the materials about this transition, the language is that magnet school students “will return to feeder schools.” The “return” here implies that these students are returning to something familiar. Most of them are not.

At Dilworth this next year, my fourth grader will experience a new principal. According to the plan, for fifth grade she will move to Sunnyside, and then on to yet another new year for middle school. Change after change--after 5 years at one school, she will not experience her capstone year at Dilworth with the classmates and teachers she has grown to love and trust.

Fulton will be completely closed: many of their students will transition to Dilworth; others to Sunnyside. Dilworth itself will be completely broken up. This isn't a matter of schools closing or programs ending: these are complete, functioning communities that will be fractured.

My question is this: what will be done to care for these students and staff during the transition? There has been ZERO talk about supporting students and staff through these changes.

During my first year of teaching in 2003, I worked at a small, rural boarding school. The school closed after my first year, and the students went in three different directions. I moved with a third of the students to a new city, teaching in their new school for a year to help them transition, providing stability. Can we create stability for these students? Can students near the end of their time at a school stay at the school? Can some of the teachers move with large numbers of students?

I don't know if some kind of stability can be woven into this process—but we do need to care for the students and staff who are disproportionately affected by these upcoming changes.

Thank you for your leadership.



Pittsburgh Public Schools Fulton PreK-5 Special Public Hearing Testimonies Submitted Not Read
July 29, 2025

Sincerely,

Renee Prymus
Director, First-Year Engineering Composition Program
Teaching Associate Professor, English Department

Fonda Kelly

To the PPS Board:

Although we planned our testimony for the evening of the Fulton closure hearing in our neighborhood, it is a response to the district's broader zoning changes and closures.

We are City residents (15206) and parents of a preschool-age child. One of us grew up here and the other moved here 13 years ago. Even after almost all our friends moved to the suburbs because of schooling, we thought we wanted to stay in the city and send our child to PPS. We have the privilege of being able to support many of our child's needs at home if not met at school. We also have a history of and continued interest in being active members of any community we're a part of.

However, we have been tracking and tracing PPS's zone changes and closures over the last decade and a half - and these most recent changes have convinced us that we, too, will likely need to leave the city. We don't feel comfortable with the uncertainty and instability our family would have knowing that their school might change unexpectedly. We also have heard and read about other involved parents not feeling heard by PPS leadership. This discourages us from wanting to try to be a part of PPS. We feel our own efforts in advocating for our child and their classmates would be done in vain.

We both have significant work experience with public services and we understand that running an urban public school district is complex. Keeping that in mind, we ask that you reduce complexity by not opening, closing, and shuffling schools so frequently. We ask that you support stability in our communities by supporting long-term development of a consistent set of schools. We ask that you have transparency about when and where AC and HVAC renovations will happen.

Thank you for your consideration,
The Kelly family

Lena Makaroun

As a physician and community member in Highland Park, living just three blocks from Fulton Elementary, I am writing to implore the city to find productive, alternative solutions to closing our neighborhood school. My testimony takes a public health perspective on this issue. Fulton is a high performing school that is a success story of how serving kids from disadvantaged backgrounds helps us all thrive. Families that can walk their children to school and trust that their kids are being cared for, supported and taught in a good environment, particularly kids who may have special needs, experience less stress, can achieve better employment outcomes for themselves and contribute to the well-being of their families and society. This school makes a tangible difference in our community and provides an intimate school where kids can get the attention they need so that they can prosper in their future endeavors. Research has shown that early childhood education has long-lasting impacts on future achievement and health. I recognize the financial challenges faced by the city, but implore council members to engage stakeholders in the community to come up with alternative strategies besides school closures. Investing in the education of Pittsburgh's children will have long lasting economic and social benefits for our city.

Jason Griess

Dear PPS Board Members and Superintendent Walters,

Highland Park Community Council (HPCC) is the city's oldest continuously operating community organization. As such, the HPCC Board submits this letter on behalf of its members to stand in opposition to Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS) plans to close Pittsburgh Fulton as part of its 'Future-Ready Facilities Plan.'

We have several concerns with this process:

- Closing a historically high-performing school, serving a predominantly minority and low-income population, acts in direct opposition to the goals the district says it wants to achieve.
- Once closed and sold, a public school in a safe, walkable neighborhood with good transit access will be impossible to replace.
- The district's community engagement process has been lacking from the beginning, and the scheduling of the state-mandated public hearings over the summer continues to increase distrust with community members

The Highland Park Community Council and Highland Park residents continue to advocate for keeping Fulton open. Highland Park becomes a less desirable place to live for families without a school in the heart of the neighborhood.

Plus, the specter of an empty school anywhere and especially a block away from the main business district has potential negative implications. Other empty school buildings in the city quickly fall into disrepair, where they become unsightly and attract vandalism. Former school buildings have the potential to be turned into apartments or community centers – projects that could bring value to the neighborhood but are in no way guaranteed to happen and that typically take many years to develop, during which time the building could decay and drag down the neighborhood.

Fulton's location in the middle of the Highland Park neighborhood is important for both the PPS community and the broader neighborhood. It sits in a safe, calm residential neighborhood with ample, convenient public transit access. While we recognize that the district must address concerns about its budget, overall student performance, and equity, it is not clear that the proposed Facilities Utilization plan will accomplish any of these goals.

We strongly ask to reconsider Fulton's closure, and will continue advocating for it to remain a community asset.

Sincerely,

Jason Griess

Board President, Highland Park Community Council

Sarah Ramsey

My testimony is twofold. The first part is specific to Fulton and second, related to overall changes to the feeder and magnet patterns. I have two children who have attended or currently attend Fulton. My first child just graduated from Fulton and started there as a kindergartener. My second child will be entering 3rd grade at Fulton this coming year. Both have THRIVED there. The teachers have been amazing, the community amazing and the staff amazing. We also live a short walk from the school and have enjoyed being a part of the Fulton community these last six years. I realize the building is on the older side and could benefit from more state-of-the-art updates, but it's never been a "concern" for me. What I am concerned about is what will happen to the community and school building if Fulton does close. Having a thriving school replaced by an empty building will only hurt the neighborhood and community. I'm also concerned about how my child will be transitioned to another school. The original plan to move these Fulton students to Dillworth and stop the magnet program at that building is a big cause of concern. It's already very full and I don't see any way for a whole school of students to transition there abruptly. What will happen to all the parents that are part of the magnet program at Dillworth when suddenly they are forced to find a new school?

In addition, I have concerns with school choice for middle and high school students in general after changes are made. For example, my oldest son will be attending a charter school for Middle School next year because he is still on the waitlist at Scitech even though he has a gifted science and math IEP, highest PSSA math scores, and great attendance and grades. We were told all those things would be weighted to help his chances to get into Scitech, but it didn't seem to matter. Our feeder is Westinghouse, currently, which isn't even an option based on some of the things I listed above. If there aren't higher education options beyond just neighborhood schools, I don't know what choice we and other families will have going forward. I want to support PPS, but when there aren't good choices or ways to access quality schools, we're left with no other option. We will figure it out, but not all families have that luxury.

Thank you,
Sarah Ramsey (mom of Fulton students Liam and Eli Drenning)