



Pittsburgh Public Schools Fulton PreK-5 Special Public Hearing Testimonies
July 29, 2025

#1

Rachel James

Parent



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#2

Shannon Striner

Parent



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#3

Haley Striner

Community Member

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#4

Rebecca Maclean

Parent, Community Member

Fulton's success should be replicated, not closed.

I'm here once again to raise my voice in support of the special community that is Pittsburgh Fulton. In the years that my kids were students there, we celebrated successes, worked through difficulties, and grieved the loss of special community members. We may have grumbled about the size of the gym, or that it would be nice to have a bigger outdoor play space, but those weren't dealbreakers. We recognized that the historic building and the surrounding neighborhood brought value to our school community.

Fulton already embodies the things the district says it wants for all students. It does not make sense to unnecessarily disrupt a learning community that works. As recently as March, Fulton was getting accolades in local media for boosting reading proficiency scores by 20%. Fulton's school population is 73% Black, and it is called an educational success story that continues to trend upward. Why do you want to disrupt Black students' academic success?

I want to thank the Fulton supporters here today, Highland Park Community Council for their letter of support and help in getting the word out, State Senator Lindsey Williams for her advocacy for public schools in our neighborhood and across the state, Mayor Ed Gainey for being a longtime Fulton supporter and advocate, and City Councilpeople Deb Gross and Khari Mosley, whose council districts cover Fulton's catchment area and who recognize the value in communicating effectively to their constituents about issues that impact their lives. Thank you for being good neighbors to Fulton and students in Pittsburgh Public Schools.

PPS' take on community engagement and communication feels very different from theirs. Here's just one example of why so many people think that you have hidden agendas or don't truly have students, families, and community members in mind.

When you want to, you can meet people where they are and effectively communicate. I've received six Talking Points messages and images about Community Kickbacks and Community Conversations this month, rolling out your positive messaging about the Facilities Utilization plan. Pictures and graphics about these events are plastered all over social media, and they're held in the community, at schools and in parks. In contrast, I've received only one message about the school closure hearings, a pdf attachment with no explanation. The hearings, if they're mentioned at all on social media, are listed in tiny font at the bottom of plan update flyers. I left work early to come to Oakland during rush hour and come to you, when you could have easily scheduled hearings in the buildings impacted by this plan. The difference between what you want to do, and what you're legally obligated to do is stark.



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Devon, thank you for always genuinely fighting for all PPS students. To the rest of PPS, I wish I could thank you for being good neighbors. I can't. I think that you think you are. But that's not enough. I want Fulton to stay open. I hope it does. But I also want the Board and the Administration to remember who they work for - the taxpayers of the city, and the children who need stability as part of a positive learning community.

Rebecca Maclean



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#5

Allyson Delnore

Parent



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#6

Michelle Boyle

Community Member



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#7

Lori Cullen

Community Member



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#8

Domenic Filingeri

District Resident, Pediatrician



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#9

Emily Kane

Teacher/Staff, Parent, Organization, Community Member



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#10

Cheyenne Campbell

Community Member, Other Alumni/Sister



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#11

Ian Lane

Parent

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#12

Anne Kasler

Former Parent

Good evening:

My daughter attended Fulton while we lived in Lawrenceville, and we are so grateful she had that opportunity through the magnet program. Pittsburgh Public Schools' motto, "Students first. Always, in all ways," could not be better embodied than at Fulton. The dedication of its teachers and staff is extraordinary—their commitment to nurturing each child's potential reaches far beyond academics and helped lay a foundation in my daughter that will last a lifetime.

She has always loved school and excelled academically, and I believe Fulton played a pivotal role in fostering that success. The way the curriculum was taught not only equipped her with knowledge but also instilled confidence that continues to carry her forward. When we moved to her new district, she qualified for the gifted program—a testament to the strong start she received at Fulton.

Her love for art also blossomed there. Her art teacher recognized her passion early and encouraged her every step of the way. That support still resonates—she continues to create art every single day, in large part because of the encouragement she received at Fulton.

Fulton will always hold a special place in our hearts. Whenever friends or acquaintances ask about schools in Pittsburgh, it is always the first recommendation we give. While I understand that changes are necessary for the district, I urge you to prioritize preserving the strong community and exceptional quality of education that Fulton has built over the years. These are not just features of a school they are the foundation of countless students' success and futures. These strengths cannot easily be replaced within the district.

Thank you so much for your time.

Annie Kasler

Parent of a former Fulton student

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Meredith Knight

Parent



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#14

Marisa F

Parent



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#15

Laura Mullen

Parent



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#16

Valerie Webb-Allman

Parent, Community Member

#17

Kathleen Acklin

Community Member, Other PPS Substitute Teacher

Fulton School: A Community Friend

Good evening. I am Kathleen Acklin. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

A school is more than just a building housing students, teachers, administrators and books. It is a community, a society, a friend. Like all communities, some are stronger, more resilient welcoming and inclusive—and kinder. Fulton is one such community. In addition, Fulton School, unlike other schools in the Pittsburgh Public School District, is the beneficiary of its location in Highland Park, home of the oldest community organization in Pittsburgh, the Highland Park Community Council, a strong supporter of Fulton School and through that school of whole of the Pittsburgh Public School District. The business community in and around Bryant Street also supports Fulton School.

I grew up in Highland Park with fond memories that include Fulton. I attended kindergarten there decades ago and can still recount stories of that time involving the kindness and enthusiasm of its teachers. Although my parents sent me to parochial school for the remainder of my education, my neighborhood friends went to Fulton School and entertained me with stories of their day that included camaraderie and friendships and learning fun.

As a result of my youthful experiences at and with Fulton School, its students and staff, when I returned to Pittsburgh after serving in government, I immediately signed on to be a PPS substitute teacher. My favorite school as a substitute is far and away Fulton School. I have substituted at Montessori, Sunnyside, Liberty, Obama, Woolslair, Arsenal, CAPA and Dilworth. Although these schools are fine, there is nothing to compare with the overwhelming sense of purpose coupled with warmth, love and kindness from the students and staff I experience at Fulton. I feel part of a community there from the moment I check in at the office. My whole day goes better even after I leave school and fondly recall the experiences of the day.

I truly believe that If Fulton School is closed, the Pittsburgh Public School District will be diminished by far more than just the loss of a building. Pittsburgh Public Schools will lose a huge piece of its heart.

Please find a way to keep the vibrant learning community that is Fulton School open not only for the students of today but for posterity. By closing Fulton School, I fear that the Pittsburgh Public School District will lose not only this outstanding, transformative school, but the support of the Highland Park



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community it serves.

Thank you.

Kathleen Acklin



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James Rooney

Community Member

I am writing to strongly urge you to keep Fulton PreK-5 open. Fulton is much more than just a neighborhood school—it is a vital asset to our community. As Pittsburgh’s French Magnet school, Fulton provides a unique and rigorous academic program that fosters not only language proficiency but also broad cultural awareness, preparing students for success in a globalized world.

Fulton’s role extends beyond its magnet status. The school brings together a brilliantly diverse student body and nurtures an environment where every child can thrive. Fulton’s record of academic growth demonstrates that its students are succeeding: recent analyses highlighted a significant increase in core academic areas, with a particular focus on effective questioning skills contributing to student achievement.

In addition, Fulton acts as a true community hub. Students benefit from strong partnerships with organizations such as Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium, and East End Cooperative Ministries. These relationships provide experiences and support that go far beyond the basics, from after-school programs to opportunities for college and career exploration. Fulton’s programs encourage family engagement and provide family support services, exemplifying the best of community-centered education.

It is also crucial to note concerns regarding the data used to rank and evaluate schools. Reports and community members have indicated that the consultant’s data was riddled with errors and inaccuracies, casting doubt on any conclusions drawn from it. Any decisions based on such flawed information should be halted or, at minimum, thoroughly re-evaluated with transparency and accuracy as guiding principles.

Our city cannot afford to lose a school that delivers academic excellence, diversity, and a robust community connection. Please reconsider any plans for closure and invest in this exceptional institution instead.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely, James Rooney

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#19

Margaret Overbagh-Feld

Parent

My name is Margaret Overbagh-Feld, and I am a proud Fulton parent. I am also an educator with over twenty years of experience in New York City and Pittsburgh Public Schools—teaching, coaching, and working on school improvement in literacy and for students learning English as a new language. I’ve worked with many schools in many contexts and know firsthand the challenges public education faces today.

I agree with the district that our current system reinforces deep inequities, particularly around magnet schools and the gifted center. As a family, we chose to send our children to Fulton, our neighborhood school, because we believe in living our values of equity, inclusion, and the power of public education—and that meant not participating in systems that continue to fuel inequity. Since starting at Fulton in fall 2021, our kids have thrived in a supportive, inclusive community with dedicated teachers, meaningful traditions, and extraordinary growth in learning.

But Fulton’s building hasn’t seen significant capital investment since 1929, but on the District’s own records. Now, the district’s answer to nearly a century of neglect is simply to close it. While I don’t dispute the need for change, I see no evidence that this plan will deliver greater equity, inclusion, or sustained investment in the schools that remain open. Where are the details—on demographics of reassigned schools, costs for renovations, and a plan to ensure resources are distributed equitably rather than continuing to flow to wealthier, whiter neighborhoods? As they say, in education, green follows white.

Where is the blueprint for how merged school communities will be built—with shared voices from staff, students, and families shaping everything from uniform policies to cherished traditions? Because what’s being proposed isn’t just closing a building—it’s dismantling a thriving school community.

As a parent, that breaks my heart. As an educator, it makes me furious. No schools—including Fulton—should be slated for closure until the district can prove that these changes, made in the name of equity, will truly create it.



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Jason Stringer

Parent

#21

Sean Mahan

Parent, Community Member

Let's Preserve PPS's Success Stories as We Build Its Future

Sean Mahan

My family moved to Pittsburgh in 2017—we wanted to live in a city, and specifically a city where our kids could get a great *public* education. From what we could learn in central PA, Pittsburgh Public Schools wasn't a perfect system, but it had plenty of good schools. The magnet system allowed us to move here without the pressure of choosing the "right" neighborhood, and with the reassurance that there was a way to move a kid to another school, whether to pursue a specific opportunity or to get out of a situation that wasn't a good fit.

We sent our eldest child to Dilworth in part because our neighbor's kids had gone there—and they were possibly the nicest teenagers we'd ever met! My son had the same principal as they did, many of the same teachers, and our family benefited from and contributed to the same strong parent community our neighbors had described. Stepping into that kind of a community is a tremendous privilege, because of all of the little things already in place: relationships, organizations, practices, and culture—none of which are easy to build from scratch. My son graduated from Dilworth in 2024 having had a wonderful experience there, thanks to a fantastic faculty and staff, and thanks to a parent community that was both caring and effective.

But my daughter, a rising second grader, will not have that same experience. Next year, instead of having a homeroom teacher who held her as an infant during Dilworth's famous morning meetings, she will move to a new school, to be taught by a newly shuffled collection of teachers. My spouse and I will be part of a group of parents all staring at a pile of puzzle pieces that have just been dumped out. Whoever takes my daughter's spot at Dilworth will likewise find a school effectively starting from scratch.

There is an undercurrent of pessimism in the district's current, "flip the table and start over" plan. But I've been very happy with Pittsburgh Public Schools, and I'm always glad to say so to anyone who will listen. Most PPS families I know feel the same way, whether they are at the well-known marquee magnet programs or quieter success stories like Fulton. But now, when I talk to other parents, the conversations are filled with concern and frustration. Some families are already moving their children to private, charter, or parochial schools; others are making

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plans to do so. I worry that enrollment will drop significantly, and that we'll be closing schools again in five years.

While I offer my respect and gratitude to the district administration, what has made my children's education great is the communities of faculty and families at their schools. The good news about these schools has spread. It helped convince my family to move here, and it has won the district the opportunity to educate children whose families could afford a private school or suburban home instead. Losing those school communities means losing that hard-won good reputation. I am skeptical that the current plan will give my daughter access to the same music education at her new school that my son had at Dilworth, but I'm certain that it will disrupt and dismantle strong, successful school communities.

So I am asking the district to step back and draft a new plan. A plan that would bring necessary change gradually, thoughtfully, and feasibly. A plan that would evolve our district and schools for the future without cavalierly discarding the considerable successes we enjoy today—like Dilworth and Fulton.

#22

Jill Weiss

Community Member, Other Parent of Alum

THE SKY IS FALLING, REVISITED- Jill Weiss

Hello, my name is Jill Weiss. I am both a neighbor of Fulton Elementary School and a parent of a successful PPS Alum who attended 3 PPS schools, all that have since been closed. Fortunately, she only had to live through the closure of one school- Schenley High School.

At the time we were choosing a school for our daughter to attend, we did not choose Fulton for her elementary school because it was not part of the IB feeder program - and Fulton did not offer what we were looking for. Today, it would be different. It has been exciting to see how Fulton has grown to be a school where parents in the neighborhood and beyond are eager to send their children. Fulton's current student population is roughly 50/50 in terms of residence. Half are neighborhood kids, and half are moving through a magnet pathway. I have been told that the latter students include children of former Fulton students who no longer live in the neighborhood but still want their kids to experience the school they loved.

I am concerned about what will happen to the students who are experiencing a successful school environment both academically and socially as is found at Fulton. Will their families willingly move them to a reassigned, untested environment, or will they move to an already successful charter or private school? Will the district lose even more students while losing the faith of the families who have been part of the building of an already successful school ?

Having watched the closure of the extremely successful Schenley High School result in so many students from the neighborhood being sent to a newly formed school with an inadequate building and unsuccessful educational and social environment, I have little

trust in how the district is once again rushing into such closures. It has taken many years for those schools to recover and some of those schools are set to be refigured again! The announcement that the closure of Schenley was based on a falsity was even more distressing. The recommended testing for asbestos that was never done, was only performed when the district wanted to sell the building and that was found to be at a level proved to be safe.

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Why am I dragging all this old news back into the current situation with Fulton Elementary School? I am concerned that the students and the parents are once again being subjected to the “SKY IS FALLING” frame of mind of PPS and the PPS Board, and that more transparency and more study needs to be done to justify such large and abrupt moves for the sake of the students who are doing a wonderful job of learning, the teachers doing a wonderful job of teaching, and the parents who are supportive of this wonderful school.



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#23

Kathleen Schumacher

Teacher/Staff, Student, Parent, Community Member