

Good Morning Senators, Representatives and Staff Members, I would like to thank Chairman Argall, Chairwoman Williams and the members of the Senate Education Committee for this opportunity to submit my testimony to the Committee regarding the history and use of PlanCon, data collection of facility needs and the potential future use of this program.

My name is Chris Linkey, and I am a registered architect and partner with the K-12 Education Group at RLPS Architects located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. RLPS has been in business for almost 70 years.

I am a member of AIA Pennsylvania and serve on the AIA Committee for Architectural Education and the AIA PA Education Subcommittee. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of AIA Pennsylvania which is the statewide component of The American Institute of Architects. Our Association represents nearly 3,000 members and is governed by a Board of Directors that represents eight local AIA chapters across the Commonwealth.

My peers and myself work diligently to provide the best educational environments for Pennsylvania children. Numerous studies, including one conducted in 2019 by Craig Gauden Davis Architects, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies at Morgan State University and Terrapin Bright Green, have shown that the built environment has a direct impact on student wellness, learning and overall educational outcomes. However, inadequate funding has caused major delays in moving school construction projects forward and oftentimes results in overcrowded, aging buildings being used to educate Pennsylvania's future workforce.

### **The Problem**

Today, over 50% of Pennsylvania schools are more than fifty years old. These aging facilities contain outdated systems which have frequently been subjected to years of deferred maintenance due to lack of funds. The buildings can often pose health and safety risks including hazardous materials being used in the original construction, dated ventilation systems and accessibility issues.

The lack of flexibility found in aged facilities does not allow districts to change classroom assignments by grade each year as needs of students change due to enrollment differences and individual student support services. Due to lack of flexible space in older facilities learning instruction is often conducted in

closets, offices, temporary facilities and even corridors. These spaces are inadequate, unhealthy and a distraction to a student's learning capacity.

The future is now here, and educational delivery systems have changed. The corporate world needs workers who possess a "Future Ready Education". These workers have the ability to think critically and solve problems as they emerge. This is vastly different than the education standards of the past where desks in rows and rote memorization was the norm. For future-ready learning, students need flexible classroom set-ups to support individualized learning.

### **Building Solutions**

Modern educational facilities need to be a safe space for those who enter. Buildings need to be able to provide physical safety as well as provide a welcoming environment and provide a refuge for students in need. These objectives can be accomplished by a team looking at individual district needs in a holistic manner and are supported and assisted by the laws and legislature of the Commonwealth.

Going forward, educational facilities need to be able to adapt to whatever the future holds. This includes being able to support enrollment increases and decreases, as well as provide space for special education needs and individualized learning plans. In addition to flexibility in physical spaces, our schools also need to be technologically flexible and allow teaching and learning to occur in the building anywhere, at any time. By reinstating PlanCon, school districts across the Commonwealth will be able to provide their students with facilities that meet these needs and provide the State with a workforce that is prepared to meet any challenges that may arise.

### **PlanCon Intent**

PlanCon was created in 1973 as an agreement between the Commonwealth and a school district. PlanCon was designed as a standardized system with the same checks and balances for all school districts. It was to provide financial support and equal opportunities for all 500 school districts in the Commonwealth to create quality education spaces for students and educators.

For example, under PlanCon a school district in rural Adams County would receive financial support similar to a wealthier school district elsewhere in the Commonwealth. State financial support is distributed on a weighted scale and allows rural and lower income school districts, like the Adams County School District, to receive a higher percentage of financial support. This support enables these districts to provide facilities similar to those found in wealthier school districts and not limit them based on their tax base.

PlanCon also ensured that the approach to school building design was holistic. This included the evaluation of building systems, capacity, educational delivery system, and financial accountability to mention some of the requirements. Act 70 of 2019 updated and modernized the original PlanCon process while maintaining the same intent. The revisions made significant improvements to PlanCon including the reduction from eleven steps to four steps and the provision for enhanced reimbursement for high performance buildings. Unfortunately, Act 70 of 2019 remains unfunded.

### **A Real-Life Example**

RLPS Architects is working with Littlestown Area School District which is located in a rural portion of Adams County. The School District is working through upgrading its secondary education facilities. The majority of their secondary education buildings are 35 years old or older. Even with maintenance completed in the facilities, the District has had to close school a handful of days per year because of a lack of air conditioning and temperatures being too high to conduct classes.

To further identify the deficiencies and needs of their buildings, the Littlestown Area School District completed a comprehensive master planning process. Financially, the school district is not able to address all the needs identified in their proposed secondary education facility project. While many areas of the existing building's needs are being addressed, there are still significant portions of the building that will not have air conditioning, upgraded educational spaces and more modern building systems at the conclusion of the construction. If PlanCon was in place, the additional financial support provided by its funding mechanism would allow the school district to address all of the building needs within this project.

**PlanCon is the best system to address the needs of public school facilities.**

As architects, we often talk about a holistic process and approach to problem solving. PlanCon gives a school district a fair, comprehensive evaluation and review of their facilities and provides equitable financial support for districts across the Commonwealth. This holistic process has been greatly improved with Act 70 of 2019. Not only did Act 70 improve the old PlanCon process but it also provided a means for funding school facility maintenance.

These changes allow for the entire scope of issues being addressed when constructing or renovating educational buildings. Additionally, by including funding of maintenance, these buildings will last even longer into the future and result in a better return on investment. Without PlanCon, school districts have had to rely on piece-meal projects that are triage for immediate or emergency situations. These projects are not a comprehensive solution to all the school district's facility needs.

PlanCon allows architect teams to lead a school district through a holistic building process and justify the financial needs of the district's building projects. The competitive bidding associated with the building projects ensures a cost-efficient return on investment. Without the PlanCon process being reinstated, there will be an increasing disparity between school districts' educational environments throughout the Commonwealth.

## **Conclusion**

The current issues that school districts are facing with their buildings are complicated, diverse and present across of great Commonwealth. PlanCon provides a comprehensive approach led by an architect that solves multiple issues through a holistic approach. This results in buildings that are safe, secure, efficient, and meet the educational needs of school districts. The AIA believes that PlanCon needs to be reinstated as a financial support system in which all school districts have an equal opportunity to provide appropriate school facilities and learning environments for the future.