

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR CHILDREN

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031



children
FIRST
THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS

Vision and Mission

Our Vision

We see a future where every child grows up supported, confident, and ready to succeed – strengthening families and communities for generations to come.

Our Mission

We champion policies that expand access to quality education, promote health equity, and strengthen economic mobility, so children across southeastern PA and beyond have every opportunity to pursue a fulfilling future.

About the Plan

Our five-year plan reflects the voices of hundreds of parents, partners, leaders, and advocates who generously shared their perspectives and experiences. Together, their insights reveal a growing challenge: the policies that once ensured children's health, education, and stability are no longer keeping pace with the realities families face today.

In response, we are committed to protecting the proven policies that work – and pushing boldly for new solutions that help children learn, grow, and thrive. Over the next five years, we will focus on building broad, nonpartisan partnerships that bring public leaders together around stronger, more effective investments in kids.

This work is grounded in facts, research, and the lived experiences of families and communities. We remain steadfast in confronting systems that create racial disparities and block opportunities, and we will continue advancing solutions that give every child a fair chance at a bright future.



Our Focus Areas to Ensure All Children Can Thrive

We advocate for access to quality education, health, and economic opportunities so children and families attain lifelong stability, upward mobility, and meaningful engagement in their communities.



Educational Success



Healthy Lives



Economic Mobility

How We Work

TRUSTED AND NONPARTISAN

We are a trusted, long-standing advocate for children, bringing people together from all backgrounds to push for positive change. As a nonpartisan voice, we work closely with leaders at every level to make sure children and families get the support they need.

AMBITIOUS AND INVENTIVE

We are always evolving, expanding our reach, refining our methods, and strengthening our impact while staying rooted in the strategies that have consistently worked for kids and families.

RESEARCH AND GRASSROOTS INFORMED

We listen closely to our families, caregivers, and youth. Together with fact-based research, their experiences guide us in the actions we take.

EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

A strong education opens doors – helping children break cycles of poverty, earn more over their lifetime, and stay engaged in their communities, strengthening families and neighborhoods.

WE ADVOCATE FOR:

Early Childhood Education: High-quality early childhood programs that set children up for lifelong learning

- Implement policies that prevent the suspension and expulsion of children in early childhood education programs
- Increase payments to early childhood education programs that reflect the true cost of providing high-quality care
- Make child care and pre-k more affordable for working families
- Expand access to early childhood education in Philadelphia

K-12: Fairly funded K-12 schools that offer rigorous instruction to support every student's success

- Increase funding for public education for low-wealth school districts
- Hold cyber charter schools accountable through tuition reimbursement reform
- Expand access to algebra for all eighth-grade students in Philadelphia
- Support school districts in ensuring literacy instruction is rooted in the science of reading

Juvenile Justice: Educational opportunities in the juvenile justice system that heal and prepare youth for a thriving future

- Reduce the number of children entering the juvenile justice system through raising the minimum age of prosecution and expansion of youth diversion
- Reduce the negative impacts of youth incarceration by limiting the use of facility placements and strengthening oversight and accountability



HEALTHY LIVES

Improved health outcomes boost educational success and workforce participation, strengthen family systems, and promote future economic stability.

WE ADVOCATE FOR:

Public Health: Policies that increase access to high-quality physical health services so children can learn and grow

- Boost the number of insured children by removing barriers to enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP
- Increase childhood vaccine adherence to promote herd immunity levels

Environmental Health: Policies that reduce, prevent, or eliminate harmful exposures to keep children safe and well

- Decrease the number of children poisoned by lead paint
- Protect children from currently unaddressed environmental health hazards

Mental Health: A full continuum of mental health support for caregivers and children so that families experience greater stability and well-being

- Create access to preventative mental health care for all children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP



ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Economic mobility strengthens families, improves child and youth outcomes, and fuels local economies - creating a virtuous cycle of investment and growth.

WE ADVOCATE FOR:

Child Welfare: A foster care system that promotes and maintains family stability so that children can thrive

- Reduce family separations resulting from involvement in the child welfare system as a result of poverty
- Implement policies that increase access to community-based services for children in the foster care system and promote successful transitions to adulthood

Economic Mobility: Stronger economic support for families that reduce child poverty and expand upward mobility

- Ensure every working Pennsylvanian is guaranteed paid family and medical leave
- Establish a state child tax credit for families with children under six years old
- Promote economic security for working families through increased state investments

Career Readiness: Career and Technical Education that opens pathways to prosperity for teens and young adults

- Boost recurring state funds for Career and Technical Education
- Reform Instructor certification requirements to expand the Career and Technical Education teacher workforce



Strategic Planning Committee

Thank you to the parents and Children First Board members and staff who served on the Strategic Planning Committee.

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Give Every Child the Chance to Thrive

Volunteers and donors make this work possible. Find out how you can bring educational success, healthy lives, and economic mobility to Pennsylvania families. Contact Steven Fynes at stevenf@childrenfirstpa.org to get connected.

JOIN US!

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