



CHS President Kate Davis, 264



F O R W A R D

The *Leading the Way* Campaign for Central High School





THE ASSOCIATED ALUMNI OF
CENTRAL
HIGH SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“At Central, we enter to learn and go forth to serve.” William H. Cornog, 146, Ninth President of Central High School

Do you remember our first assembly? We sat as strangers, but the challenge issued by Central’s president was clear: some of us would be gone by year’s end. It wasn’t a warning; it was a Call to Action. Central demands commitment, and that commitment continues to shape the lives of its alumni today.

Central’s rich history of providing inspiration, access and economic mobility persists, but our physical space hasn’t kept pace with our ambitions. Despite superior academic, artistic, and athletic training, our facilities are aging and overcrowded, hindering our students’ potential.

That’s why we’re excited to present today’s Call to Action - the AACHS Leading the Way Capital Campaign, aiming to transform and expand Central’s facilities. Our plan includes:

- A Performing Arts Center (PAC) in a new wing to be constructed, to cultivate artistic talent and presentation.
- STEM Center Expansion and Renovation to support scientific innovation.
- Student Commons areas to facilitate collaboration, study, and socialization.
- A Digital and Media Technology Center to provide technology-focused classrooms for a digital age.
- Historic Facility Modernization and Departmental Consolidation to revitalize infrastructure and bring related disciplines into contiguous spaces while preserving the nationally recognized historic status of the building.
- Departmental and Facility Upgrades to enhance educational delivery in each discipline and improve general physical conditions throughout the building.

This investment isn’t just in infrastructure; it’s a commitment to nurturing our students’ intellect and creativity, preparing them to excel in an increasingly complex world.

We have an opportunity to match a **\$15** million lead gift for a new Center for the Performing Arts and go beyond. This challenge demands our response. Together, we can make Central as great in form as in function, ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Join us in embracing this new *Call to Action* – a generational challenge. Will you commit to the future of Central High School?



Do you remember our first assembly?

We were strangers from across the city, seated side by side in that weathered auditorium. Central's president of those days took the stage.

"Look to your right. Now look to your left," he said. "At the end of this year, one of you will be gone."

This was not a warning. It was a call to action - a challenge issued to all entering students to make an extraordinary commitment to themselves and their school. Not for a day, a semester, or a year, but for a lifetime.

That commitment continues today. Central was and still is a place for those with the intellect, ambition, and grit to work hard, put in the hours, and excel.

Today's students get the same superior academic, artistic, and athletic training that Central provided us. But the physical space we knew and loved is aging and overcrowded. It has not kept up with the dreams and ambitions of its students and alumni.

Old and confining infrastructure, combined with growing demand and new technology challenges, require a new look at what Central can and should provide to current and future generations.

Let's take a look back at the extraordinary Central story, a look at Central today, and then a look at what is possible in the years to come: A design for the future of Philadelphia's most treasured school. Our "Dear Old High!"

"The most frequently asked questions I get from members of our alumni community are, 'What is Central doing next? What do we need? How can they support us?'"

– President Katharine Davis, 264

A Look Back and A Look at Now

Founded in 1836, Central High School is the second oldest continuously operating public high school in the United States. Unlike the private academies of that earlier era, Central was established to address the need for a high-quality public education to prepare then current and future generations of young people for collegiate and professional success.

Central has a rich history of providing inspiration, access, and economic mobility to students across the city. Generation after generation. Alumni speak highly of the fact that Central was a gateway to a better life. Today, 87% of students' families participate in state and/or federal public assistance programs. This number has increased dramatically from 62% in the 2021-2022 school year. *The impact Central can make in changing their futures is incomparable.*

Public prep schools – tuition free sanctuaries of learning at the highest levels of excellence - are rare; and Central is unique, among other distinctions being the only high school in the United States granted the authority - in 1849 by Act of Assembly - to confer academic degrees upon its graduates.

In 1983, Central experienced a major change with the admission of girls to the student body. Today, Central boasts a highly diverse student body of 2,400 students attracting applicants from every part of Philadelphia's broad spectrum of communities. Central is an environment where students receive exceptional academic instruction and grounding, find paths to self-discovery, learn to think big and dream big, and build lifetime bonds with peers from a rich variety of backgrounds.

“Education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.”

– Horace Mann

Central continues to be celebrated for its academic achievements, consistently ranking among the top schools in the nation and recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue-Ribbon School.

Housed in three different buildings during its first century of operation, Central relocated to its current facility at Ogontz and Olney Avenues in 1939. Since then, just two major improvements have been made: an art, science, and physical education center was created in 1994 and the Barnwell Library was renovated and restored in 2005.

Despite these needed improvements, much of Central's



The original Central High School Building

physical plant remains as it was nearly a century ago, even as the student population continues to grow and the demands of the world evolve. According to a recent assessment done by the School District of Philadelphia, Central received a poor assessment for the condition of the facilities.

Activities for current students are limited by space constraints, structural inflexibility, and early twentieth century design which, though historic, is confining in the 21st century. Performing arts and STEM offerings are held in spaces that are both outdated and overcrowded. While Central's academic instruction remains without peer, classes take place in facilities made for an earlier era.

The onsite Central community – students, faculty, and administration – offer their unique and critical insights concerning the situation. Respecting Central's historic legacy, they understand that sustaining that legacy means modernizing and improving the physical plant of the School.

As Music Department Chair Ben Blazer says, “The space doesn't really match what [the students] are capable of. We've completely outgrown our space. We have no storage. The rooms are just barely big enough to accommodate our numbers right now. So that means there's really no room for expansion.”

And Brianna Hess, 282, former President of Orchestra, Principal Cellist, and Cellist for the Central String Quartet, now in college, informed us that rehearsal space is so limited, different ensembles have to take turns utilizing the one multi-use room available for music practice; and space is so cramped that even when practicing, she couldn't use the entire bow of her instrument “without hitting my stand partner.”

Shouldn't the Central students of today have a space that matches their ability and potential?

Central has a plan to renew and expand its facilities and give current and future generations of students the environment they need to flourish.

“At Central, we enter to learn and go forth
to serve.”

– Dr. William H. Cornog, 146,
Ninth President of Central High School

“With the addition of both the CPAC and the STEM Center, we would be offering the future generations of Lancers an opportunity to become more and grow into the leaders this world needs them to be.”

– Stephanie B. Mattei, Psy.D., 249

A Central High School Its Students Deserve

Our vision is for transformative, new facilities that will provide specialized environments fostering creativity, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving skills.

New and renovated facilities will also act as incubators for talent, enabling students to explore and refine their abilities in artistic expression, scientific innovation, digital media and technology, and other areas, as well as having spaces for collaboration, study, and socialization.

Moreover, these transformative changes will enable students to be prepared for the future by offering hands-on experience with the tools and emerging technologies they will encounter in higher education and the professional world.

PHASE 1:

Phase I of the Project Master Plan, already completed, involved *Site and Campus Preparation*. The School District of Philadelphia committed **\$8.1 million dollars** to create a new vehicular entrance and exit and other improved access for fire safety, a well-designed parking area where the old blacktop used to be, and areas for tennis courts to be placed, as well as installing the underground infrastructure under the North Lawn for Phase II.

Both Phase II and Phase III described below are groundbreaking projects that will help create the Central High School of the next century and perhaps beyond.



PHASE 2:

Performing Arts Center (PAC): The PAC will serve as a crucible for cultivating artistic talent and expression and bringing it to public realization.

Why It's Needed: Nearly 800 students – a quarter of Central's student population - are currently engaged in music, theater, dance or visual arts coursework and activity. A concert hall provides unique features including its acoustics, performance and staging spaces, and sight lines. The creation of a dedicated performing arts center will provide our students with the environment and resources that match their passion and potential, fostering robust learning and artistic growth. The PAC is envisioned to be created in a newly built wing on Central's North Lawn connected to the main building by an inside walking bridge. The building of the PAC also will provide the space needed to enable the other innovations and renovations envisioned in Phase III.

Final Product: A comprehensive, state-of-the-art complex featuring a 400-seat theatre, acoustically optimized music, theater, choral and dance rehearsal and practice rooms, digital production labs, and visual arts areas. It will also include gallery spaces for exhibitions and performances, elevating the profile of the arts within the Central community and beyond.

Estimated Cost for Phase II – the PAC: \$44 million.

PHASE 3:

There is currently no space to allow for significant, needed renovations to our historic, 85-year-old building. The completion of Phase II and the moving of the Music Department to the PAC are necessary to provide the space for the innovations, renovations and restoration envisioned in Phase III to proceed.

STEM Innovation Center Expansion and Renovation: An overhaul of the current STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math - facilities is planned to match the enthusiasm, achievements, and potential of Central's students.

Why It's Needed: Despite the remarkable accomplishments of student groups like the RoboLancers - which joined the global robotics Hall of Fame in 2023 - the school's capacity to nurture STEM excellence is hindered by outdated and insufficient facilities. A new center will provide the specialized spaces required for high-level STEM education, research, and interdisciplinary learning. Robotics, for example, has transformed the world of medicine, particularly surgery. Giving Central students the most up-to-date STEM opportunities will enable them to fully utilize their talents and abilities, for the betterment of all.

Final Product: A state-of-the-art STEM complex, complete with flexible lab spaces, collaborative research areas, and a technology-rich environment that will facilitate innovative teaching and hands-on learning. This will support a curriculum that prepares students for cutting-edge careers and leadership in STEM fields.

Student Commons areas:

Why It's Needed: The very tight space in the building currently does not provide our students with the spaces they need for the most fruitful and synergistic collaboration, study, and socialization. The anticipated new spaces will foster these goals with a range of furniture and working environments.

Final Product: Spaces anticipated include a Student Commons Lounge, a study suite in the connection bridge to the PAC, a Multipurpose Room, and other areas.

PHASE 3:

Digital Media & Technology Center:

Why It's Needed: To provide the best technology-focused classrooms for digital media and general computer use in an ever-evolving digital world.

Final Product: Graphic computing labs, Recording studio, and Green Screen rooms.

.....

Other critical needs for the existing building that will accrue or be undertaken in Phase III include:

Historic Facility Modernization and Department Consolidation: This initiative will enable the renovation and revitalizing of Central's infrastructure, making the School an ongoing beacon for educational innovation, while preserving it as a nationally recognized historic site, maintaining its educational heritage and sustaining its historic architecture.

Why It's Needed: The current facilities do not fully support the collaborative, high-tech, and interdisciplinary learning that modern education demands. Upgrades are essential to accommodate advanced pedagogical tools, promote accessibility, and adapt to new learning paradigms that incorporate digital fluency alongside traditional teaching. Presently, related disciplines are often not contiguously situated, and departments are fragmented.

Final Product: The reinvented spaces will be modular, technology-rich environments capable of hosting a multitude of learning activities – from robotics to digital arts, ensuring that every student has access to the resources needed to thrive in a global and digital society. Moreover, placement of related disciplines and consolidation of departments in contiguous areas will enhance collaborative endeavors while making more efficient and effective use of building space.

Department Upgrades and General Betterment: Detailed departmental and overall consultations have highlighted the need for specific enhancements to better serve each discipline's unique requirements and for improved general conditions throughout the existing building.

Why It's Needed: Each department has distinct spatial and technical requirements that are unmet. Addressing these will not only improve departmental cohesion but also enrich the educational delivery to align with Central's high standards. General conditions upgrades are also necessary.

Final Product: Custom-designed spaces, innovative labs with flexible configurations, well-ventilated art studios with natural lighting, and improved interior finishes, classroom technology, cafeteria facility, and general conditions throughout the building.

Estimated Total Cost for Phase III: \$16 million.

With a clear focus on the future, the Central High School *Leading the Way* Project is more than an investment in infrastructure; it is a commitment to nurturing the intellect and creativity of our students, equipping them with the tools to excel, compete, and lead in an increasingly complex world.

While the investment in *Leading the Way* will be significant, the return on that investment is much greater and promises to last for many years to come.

As Stephen Kasloff, 228 has said, "the Performing Arts Center, the STEM Center, and all the other improvements will make Central the school of the 21st Century and beyond...

these things will enable future generations of Central students to discover who they are just as past generations did with the planetarium, the cyclotron, the rooftop gym, and other innovations. Central has always had a great past because Central has always been about the future."

The *Leading the Way* Campaign for Central High School will be transformative in every way. The only remaining question is who will join in making this initiative a reality.

Looking Forward

Now, after all we've come through together, we are being challenged once again.

A once in a generation opportunity has been presented to us—a lead gift of \$15 million from a generous alumnus to lay the foundation for the new Performing Arts Center. But this gift brings with it a challenge. It demands that we respond in kind, matching this extraordinary generosity dollar for dollar and beyond.

We can choose to rise to the occasion. We can make a commitment - **just as we did as Freshman so many years ago** - and meet this moment.

We can make our school - our Central - a place where academics and the arts meet in synergy. A place where every student who has the courage to apply and the grit to succeed can be as proud as we are to say, *"I am a Lancer!"*

Imagine a *Performing Arts Center* where the echoes of our Grammy-winning orchestra resonate, where the brush strokes of visual artists capture the vibrancy of our community, and where the voices of 600 students in the spring musical ring out.

Imagine the achievement of another long-sought dream: a new *STEM Innovation Center*. This will be the setting for

"Central afforded you these opportunities. Now, it's your turn to provide that for the next generation."

– Nevena Bosnic, 266



the next generation of Central's emerging scientific minds, engineers, mathematicians, and business leaders. New and properly outfitted classrooms, laboratories, and technology

"To donate to Central High is to donate to oneself."

– Jerry Walton, 231

will provide Central students and faculty the essential environment to dream bigger and achieve more.

Imagine a *Digital Media and Technology Center* that enables students to meet and exceed the highest standards of communication in this new age.

This is not just an expansion of Central's physical footprint. It is an expansion of achievement, and of our ability to prepare the next generation of leaders; and a pathway to inspiration and economic mobility for our students.

This is our singular moment to embrace a new challenge, one as great as when we first chose to attend Central. A challenge to commit not just to ourselves, and not only for Central today, but to the generations of Lancers who will follow in our footsteps.

This is our challenge. Will you join us to meet it?



Central High

*Let others sing of college days, Their Alma Mater true,
But when we raise our voices, 'tis only, High, for you.
We'll ne'er forget those days gone by, Those glorious days of old,
When oft we sang the praises of The crimson and the gold.*

*Dear High, dear Central High Thy mem'ries never die.
Thy honor we'll cherish and laud it to the sky,
On ballfield or in life, In peace or deadly strife,
For thee we all will labor, for thee, oh, dear old High!*

*But when at last we leave behind thy shelt'ring portals wide,
Thy honor still we'll cherish, whate'er may us be tide.
And when we congregate again with tuneful voice and strong,
with joyful hearts once more we'll sing this same old glorious song.*

*Dear High, dear Central High Thy mem'ries never die.
Thy honor we'll cherish and laud it to the sky,
On ballfield or in life, In peace or deadly strife,
For thee we all will labor, for thee, oh, dear old High!*



THE ASSOCIATED ALUMNI OF
CENTRAL
HIGH SCHOOL

Cynthia Lech, 263

Executive Director

The Associated Alumni of Central High School of Philadelphia

P.O. Box 26580

Philadelphia, PA 19141-6580

✉ alumnioffice@centralhighalumni.com

☎ (215) 845-3308

🌐 www.centralhighalumni.com