



BASIC

[Re] Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

May 13, 2021

Dear Mr. President,

As you negotiate with the Congress on your American Jobs Plan, we urge you to include public school facilities in any legislation to modernize our nation's infrastructure. With the \$100 billion in grants and \$30 billion in bonds in the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, states and school districts will be able to leverage these federal funds to modernize nearly 10,000 of our nation's worst school facilities. This work will create good-quality jobs. It will improve communities and the daily lives of millions of students and school staff.

Our nation's public schools should have the same priority as traditional infrastructure and be recognized for their role as essential public infrastructure in every American community. Bridges, ports, roads, transit, broadband, and water works are in the American Jobs Plan for the same reason public schools belong in an infrastructure package: because they are essential public infrastructure and cannot raise sufficient capital from local and state sources to meet the 50 year reconstruction requirements of aged and crumbling infrastructure.

Public school facilities are like "traditional" infrastructure in other ways:

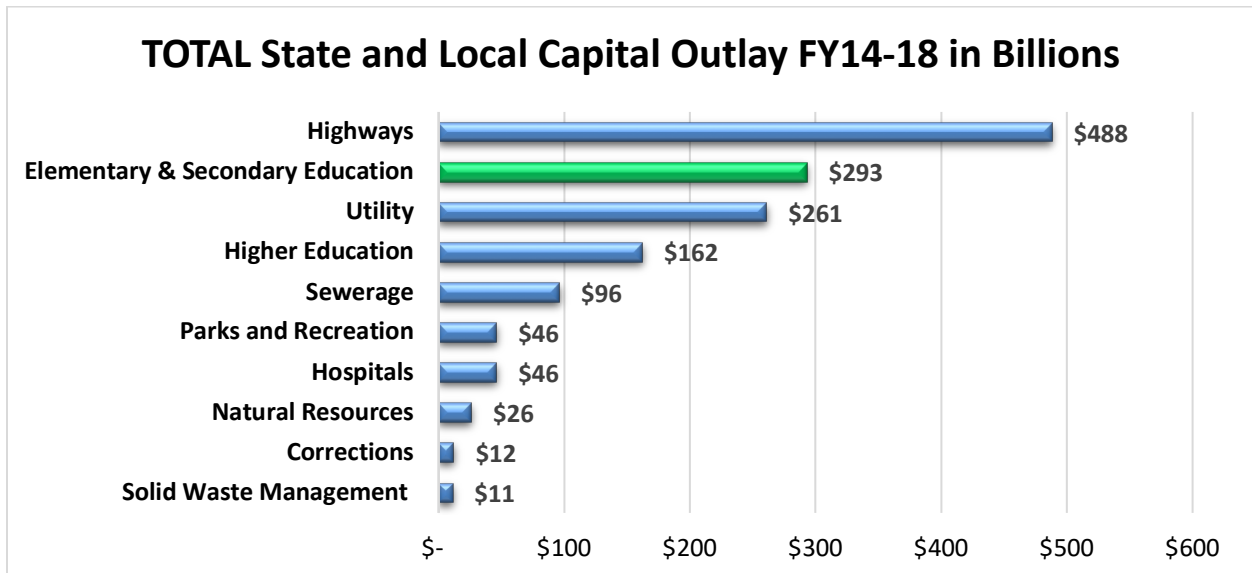
- Elementary and secondary public schools are publicly owned, accessible, and required to support an essential public obligation—a system of free and universal K-12 public education.
- School construction will create good-quality jobs that pay prevailing wages in safe and healthy workplaces.
- Capital improvements are delivered through private contracts, under public oversight.
- Capital improvements use skilled labor from the private sector—and \$130 billion for our public school facilities will create 2 million jobs in the building trades, U.S.

manufacturing, and in the economies of rural, town, suburban, and urban communities across the nation.¹

- Capital improvements projects provide building trades pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship opportunities for underprivileged communities.
- Capital improvements projects invest in and develop a robust, highly skilled and trained workforce necessary to build and maintain the Nation’s infrastructure.
- Public support for federal funding for school facilities is bi-partisan.²

Public schools are the nation’s second largest area of capital outlay for state and local government, next to highways. Our nation’s 100,000 public schools serve 56 million school age children, teachers, and administrative staff during the school year—one-sixth of the American population goes to school or works in a public school facility every workday.

TOTAL State and Local Capital Outlay for FY2014 to FY2018 (in thousands) for



Data Source: U.S. Census of Governments, F-13 Fiscal Survey FY2014-FY2018

However, the majority of our nation’s school buildings are now over 50 years old and have never been modernized. In its June 2020 national report on public school facilities, the GAO found that nearly one quarter of all school districts have half or more of their schools that need

¹ Updated employment multipliers for the U.S. Economy, Josh Bivens, January 23, 2019, [Economic Policy Institute, and A public investment agenda that delivers the goods for American workers needs to be long-lived, broad, and subject to democratic oversight. December 8, 2016.](#)

² Politico poll shows 70% of Americans, including 62% of Republicans think schools are infrastructure. <https://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000178-cfbd-d112-a97e-ffbde6ef0000> April 9-12, 2021 poll.

a major system replaced or upgraded.³ Mechanical heating, ventilation, and cooling (HVAC) systems were found to have the most deficiency. Nationally, 41% of school districts reported their HVAC system needed major upgrade or replacement to function properly. The GAO study did not investigate whether school facilities were educationally adequate, resilient, or energy or water efficient, but it is clear tens of thousands of school facilities across the country are also deficient in these areas.

Our country needs 21st century public school facilities that uphold public health standards, support best educational practices, prepare 21st century workers, conserve natural resources, and advance the Administration's climate goals. The forthcoming (2021) State of Our Schools Report estimates that, nationally, we should be spending about \$112 billion *per year* on capital outlay for our public school facilities in addition to the ongoing annual costs for operations and maintenance. However, over the last five years, districts and states only spent about \$52.7 billion per year (2020\$) on capital outlay facilities improvements — about half of what is needed, leaving an annual gap of \$47.1 billion for our existing facilities, and a nearly \$12.7 billion annual gap for new school construction.⁴ At the end of FY2018, school districts in the US already held nearly one half of a trillion dollars in long-term debt from their efforts to provide adequate school facilities.

These trends illustrate that, despite their continuing effort, many school districts and states are not able to raise the capital needed to address the shortcomings of their facilities. The result is gross disparities in school facility conditions between wealthier and poorer districts — a reality that undermines education quality and achievement in already disadvantaged schools.⁵ Federal inaction to address these issues is exacerbating educational inequalities across the country. Lower-wealth communities need federal and state assistance and incentives to modernize their schools, not just patch and repair obsolete schools so they are minimally adequate.

The [Re]Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition (BASIC) is dedicated to getting public schools their rightful place at America's infrastructure table. The American Jobs Plan can do this. It can build back better with jobs and public education construction projects that will

³ K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement. June 2020 GAO -20-494

⁴ Preliminary analysis of U.S. Census of Government Fiscal Data, data collected from state facilities offices, and application of industry standards forthcoming in State of our Schools 2021, from the 21st Century School Fund, National Council on School Facilities, International WELL Building Institute and the Center for Cities + Schools at UC Berkeley, June 2021.

⁵ Filardo, M., Vincent, J.M., & Sullivan, K. (2019). How crumbling school facilities perpetuate inequality. Phi Delta Kappan, 100 (8), 27-31.

secure a new generation of resilient 21st century school facilities in low-wealth and high-need rural, town, suburban and urban communities across the nation. This work is non-partisan in our communities. It can be bipartisan in Congress.

Sincerely,



Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21st Century School Fund

On Behalf of the BASIC Coalition

21st Century School Fund

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Abruna & Musgrave, Architects

Afterschool Alliance

Air Equipment Company

Air-Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration
Institute

American Federation of School Administrators

American Federation of Teachers

American Institute of Architects Committee on
Architecture for Education

American Library Association

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Planning Association

American Society of Civil Engineers

Artcobell

Association for Learning Environments

Association of School Business Officials
International (ASBO)

Baltimore City Public Schools

BAMA Kids, Inc.

Blackridge Health & Educational Solutions

BlueGreen Alliance

BRICK Education Network

Bristol Virginia Public Schools

Build Up California | Early Learning Facilities

BuildingAction: The Coalition for Sustainable
Buildings

Californians for School Facilities

Campaign for Environmental Literacy

CARRIER GLOBAL CORPORATION

CBRE Heery, Inc.

Center for Cities + Schools

Center for Green Schools @ USGBC

Children & Nature Network

City of Austin Parks and Recreation
Department

CITYGREEN DC

CMTA Engineers

Collaborative for High Performance Schools
Inc.

College Achieve Public Schools

Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education

Communities In Schools Pittsburgh - Allegheny
County

Connecticut School Indoor Environment
Resource Team
Cooperative Strategies
daVinci Planning, PC
DLR Group
Durham Public Schools
EARTHDAY.ORG
Ed-Space Consulting and Project Management
Edmonds School District
Education Market Association
enVerid Systems
Facility Adviser
Fairfield Enterprise, LLC
Go Green Initiative
Great Northwest Education Cooperative
Green Building Initiative
Green Schools National Network
Green Schoolyards America
Green Schoolyards America
Greenbank Associates
Grimm + Parker Architects
Healthy Schools Campaign
Healthy Schools Campaign
Healthy Schools Network, Inc.
Heart of America
High Performance Learning Environments
Honeywell
Impact Fitness Foundation
Inclusive Prosperity Capital
International Council of Employers of
Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied
Craftworkers
International WELL Building Institute
International WELL Building Institute

iXero
Johnson Controls
Jones Whitsett Architects
KABOOM!
Kansas City Public Schools
Kansas Green Schools Program/Kansas
Association for Conservation and
Environmental Education
KCI Technologies Inc.
KIPP
LaBella Associates
Living Classroom
Maine Parent Teacher Association
Mark Design Studios Architecture, PC

Maryland ACLU
Michigan Education Justice Coalition
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
National Association for Music Education
(NAfME)
National Association of Elementary School
Principals (NAESP)
National Association of Energy Service
Companies
National Association of Federally Impacted
Schools
National Association of Secondary School
Principals
National Council on School Facilities
National Education Association
National Indian Education Association
National Parent Teacher Association
National Rural Education Association
National Wildlife Federation
nature+play designs
New America

NJ Education Law Center
North American Association for Environmental
Education
Out Teach
Parents For Students Safety
PBS Engineering and Environmental, Inc.
pcbinschools.org
Perkins Eastman
Philadelphia Healthy Schools Initiative
Public Economics, Inc.
Public Private Action
Public Schools Interest Group - American
Planning Association
Quattrocchi Kwok Architects
Reflo
Rhode Island Environmental Education
Association
Richmond Forward
School Board Of St. Lucie County
School Board Partners
School Energy Coalition
School PRIDE Foundation
School Site Solutions, Inc.
School-Based Health Alliance
SGA/Narmour Wright
Shawnee Heights Unified School District (KS)
SMART California Sheet Metal Workers' Local
104
Southern Echo Inc.
Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative
SRBWI/BAMA Kids, Inc.
Strategic Energy Innovations
StudioGC architecture + interiors
Susan Epstein and Associates
Ten Strands

Texas Fast Growth Coalition
The American Society of Interior Designers
The Low Income Investment Fund
The Portal Coalition
The Wild Center
UndauntedK12
Urban Pathways K-5 College Charter School
Women for a Healthy Environment