

May 12, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy:

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) provides an extraordinary commitment to K-12 schools throughout the country. The support comes at a crucial time for schools as they face a gauntlet of daunting challenges: reopening schools safely and keeping them open, implementing robust academic recovery interventions, and addressing an avalanche of student mental health needs. Although ARP positions K-12 schools to confront these challenges head on and lays the foundation for recovery, longstanding public school infrastructure deficiencies and disparities [remain a barrier for school districts](#). As Congress debates infrastructure proposals, the undersigned organizations strongly urge the inclusion of at least \$100 billion in direct grants and \$30 billion in bonds for K-12 public school facilities, which is consistent with the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2020.

To unleash ARP's immense potential and enable optimal student learning, Congress must address an issue that preceded the pandemic: outdated and crumbling K-12 facilities due to decades of underinvestment. According to the [2016 State of Our Schools Report](#), state and local governments underfund K-12 facilities by \$46 billion annually. Even if school districts were able to use 15 percent of ARP funding to meet CDC mitigation guidelines and reduce some of their deferred maintenance, school buildings would still be in need of major repairs and upgrades. A recent [GAO study](#) found that in about one quarter of all school districts, at least half of their schools needed upgrades or replacements to major building systems, such as heating ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, plumbing, wiring, or windows. Further, the study found 41 percent of districts need to update or replace HVAC systems in at least half of their schools. A leaking roof or HVAC system can cause water damage, exposing students and staff to mold or asbestos. Strong federal funding is needed to address these health risks, as well as other hazards such as airborne polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and lead in drinking water.

This longstanding neglect of school facilities is not equally shared. Low-income school districts and those districts with particularly aging facilities lack a robust local tax base that can be leveraged to upgrade building systems. The result is millions of students attending school in buildings that need major repairs and upgrades, creating unsafe conditions that depress student and educator performance. Providing robust federal investments in school infrastructure would shorten maintenance backlogs, help these districts upgrade and modernize their school buildings, and be a critical commitment to equity.

Investments in school infrastructure should be viewed as complementary to ARP funding and core to the recovery work already underway in schools. While ARP funds are being deployed to implement layered COVID-19 prevention strategies to support safe school reopenings, to boost academic recovery efforts, and to address student mental health challenges, these are only pieces of a larger student support puzzle. To fully maximize ARP, students also need safe and healthy learning environments. By supporting the funding levels for K-12 infrastructure included in the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, Congress can help bring America's school buildings into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and provide students the greatest opportunity to recover from this tumultuous period. We look forward to working with you on this matter of critical importance for K-12 schools, which provide educational opportunities for millions of students and serve an integral role in the civic life of communities across the country.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association  
American Federation of School Administrators  
American Federation of Teachers  
American School Counselor Association  
Association of Educational Service Agencies  
Association of School Business Officials International  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Council of Chief State School Officers  
Council of the Great City Schools  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Boards of Education  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Education Association  
National PTA  
National School Boards Association