



National School Boards Association
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July 28, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitchell McConnell
Republican Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Inclusion of School Facilities in the National Infrastructure Package

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

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is pleased that Congress is prioritizing several important measures to help our school boards and their districts and communities reopen and recover safely from the COVID-19 pandemic. Your negotiations for a national infrastructure package to invest in construction, repairs, and modernizations for facilities and resources that are critical to the health and safety of our children and families, businesses, and their communities is timely, as this measure will provide both a long-term and immediate investment in the economy. ***As decisions about specific allocations for transit, surface transportation, broadband deployment, healthcare facilities, and other areas are in progress, we strongly urge you to prioritize an investment of at least \$130 billion in our school facilities.***

Our nation's public school districts educate more than 50 million schoolchildren. Collectively, public school districts are the largest employer in the United States. There must be a strong investment in school facilities to accommodate new school construction, science and technology laboratories, career and technical education facilities, and further repairs and upgrades to building systems, such as HVAC and water systems. By making our students and future generations the priority for the infrastructure package, a much-needed investment to help sustain and improve our schools and communities can be achieved.

Current efforts to mitigate the proliferation of COVID-19 and subsequent variants through repairs and upgrades to ventilation systems is one step towards ensuring the health and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff throughout the county. However, this is not a comprehensive solution to meet the increasing demands that our school facilities must address. Throughout the country - and especially in rural communities - our public school facilities are the major service provider for K-12 education, early childhood education, adult education, job training programs, community meetings, storm shelters, voting precincts, vaccination sites, and more.


The leading advocate for public education

Hence, a significant federal investment in our country's school infrastructure is an invaluable asset to the prosperity of our communities for generations to come.

Specifically, a targeted federal investment in school facilities of at least \$130 billion through direct grants and municipal bond authority will help many school districts and their communities address multiple capital improvement needs that have been deferred because of the lack of resources. **There are three major bipartisan bills from which we urge the House and Senate to include provisions from in a final infrastructure package: the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, the Investing in Our Communities Act, and the LOCAL Infrastructure Act.**

The Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act would increase capacity within school buildings to address public health directives; and, it would equip more classrooms with modern broadband connections, state-of-the-art science laboratories, and energy efficient green building design which helps advance equity and excellence in public education. This legislation would increase funding for school infrastructure in Impact Aid districts that educate large populations of students who reside on military installations, tribal trust lands, and other federally impacted properties. In addition, the measure would prioritize access to funding to schools with the greatest need. Further, the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act would generate millions of new jobs for the workforce and contracting opportunities for large and small businesses.

Both the Investing in Our Communities Act and the LOCAL Infrastructure Act would allow school districts, counties, municipal governments, states, and other units of government to refinance outstanding bonds at lower interest rates. The result would yield a savings of millions of dollars each year to taxpayers that can be redirected to classroom instruction, teacher recruitment and retention, career and technical education, and other priorities. Even for communities that may not have the tax bases to support new construction bonds – especially due to the economic impact of COVID-19 – this legislation would help those areas by reducing finance costs for existing school facilities and other infrastructure.

Enacting these measures would be a major federal investment that will help us close achievement gaps in education, provide safe and modern learning environments for millions of our students, as well as provide new jobs and better school buildings constructed for effective instruction and personalized learning, technology transfer, research and development, public-private partnerships, and more. For example, some school districts have partnered with their local industry leaders and businesses to advance career and technical education (CTE) opportunities by housing equipment within their facilities that is used in CTE courses for students and also in job training programs for adults. Partnerships such as these would be greatly advanced through a substantial federal investment in school infrastructure, to allow more services that help equip our students and local workforces with the skills needed to grow both local and national economies.

According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) national survey of school districts published last year¹, an estimated 54 percent of public school districts need to update or replace multiple building systems or features in their schools. As part of its survey, GAO conducted site visits to fifty-five schools in six states where officials described HVAC-related problems, such as older systems that leaked and damaged flooring or ceiling tiles. “If not addressed, such problems can lead to indoor air quality problems and mold, and in some cases caused schools to adjust schedules temporarily,” GAO wrote. Additionally, school officials cited critical needs for lighting, roofing, repairs regarding structural integrity of buildings, public safety and security improvements, technology, and environmental quality.

In its 2021 Infrastructure Report Card², the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has also noted the acute need for repairs to and replacements of several major systems in schools across the country – windows, plumbing/ lavatories, security systems and lighting, energy management systems, roofing, internal communications systems, exterior walls and framing, floors, and foundations. This ASCE report card goes on to state that, “More than one-third of public schools have portable buildings due to capacity constraints, with 45% of these portable buildings in poor or fair condition.”

The need for safe, resilient, modernized school facilities is prevalent throughout the country in communities that span all sizes, demographics, and geographies. A federal investment in our school facilities is a matter of equity and access to 21st Century skills and learning for all public schoolchildren. Every school day, 50 million K-12 students and six million adults occupy close to 100,000 public school buildings on an estimated 2 million acres of land.³ Our children and educators should not have to face unsafe building conditions each day that compromise their ability to learn and teach effectively.

As Congress continues negotiations for the national infrastructure package, we convey the position adopted by NSBA’s Delegate Assembly regarding the right of local school boards to retain all necessary decision-making authority when contracting with private companies in the operation of public schools; and, to uphold the right of school boards to pursue the most efficient and cost-effective means of delivering education and related services.

On behalf of our state associations and the 90,000 school board members who govern our country’s 14,000 local public school districts, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) appreciates your leadership to provide much-needed investments in our children and schools.

¹ Government Accountability Office, “K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement” (GAO-20-494), June 04, 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-494>.

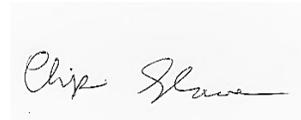
² American Society of Civil Engineers, “2021 Infrastructure Report Card,” <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Schools-2021.pdf>.

³ National Center for Education Statistics, “Forum Guide to Facility Information Management: A Resource for State and Local Education Agencies,” May 2018, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/nfes2018156.pdf>.

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We are committed to working with you as this legislation progresses. Please contact Deborah Rigsby at drigsby@nsba.org regarding any further assistance we can provide to support this investment in our students and local districts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chip Slaven". The signature is written in black ink on a light gray rectangular background.

Chip Slaven, Esq.
Interim Executive Director & CEO

cc: U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Senate