



May 18, 2023

Prepared for the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies regarding the Education Department

Dear Chairwoman Baldwin and Ranking Member Collins,

On behalf of the undersigned national, state, and local organizations, we urge Congress to continue its investments in the Department of Education to support capacity building and technical assistance for school facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic expanded the understanding of the needs and challenges that school districts have in delivering healthy, safe, educationally suitable, energy efficient, resilient public school buildings and grounds. As a result, programs and funding for public school facilities have been included in key pieces of federal legislation over the last two years, including the American Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the FY23 appropriations bills. However, there is not a coherent approach to federal programs that advance the quality and equity of our public school facilities including thousands of small rural school districts.

A June 2020 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the state of school infrastructure—the agency’s first report on the subject since 1996—found that 54 percent of school districts across the country must replace or update major systems in more than half their buildings. The GAO report estimated that 4 in 10 districts need to update or replace Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems in at least half of their school buildings, which it projects to affect 36,000 school buildings nationwide. Research shows that poorly functioning ventilation systems are a barrier to teaching and learning, and disproportionately experienced by students of color concentrated in high-poverty, segregated schools. The 2021 State of our Schools: America’s PK-12 Public School Facilities report documented annual spending of \$110 billion for our nation’s K-12 public school facilities operations, maintenance, and construction. However, based on the age, condition, and modern standards for these important buildings and grounds, the level of spending for K-12 facilities falls short by \$85 billion every year, and this gap is greatest in low income, minority, and rural school districts.

Appropriate \$50 million for school facilities state capacity building: BASIC requests that Congress appropriate \$50 million to establish a program in the U.S. Department of Education that provides formula funding to State Education Agencies for states to assist LEAs with facilities

data management, governance and decision making policy, planning, facilities training and technical assistance, and accountability. The state facilities capacity program should be modeled after the state energy program of the U.S Department of Energy. This funding would provide increased capacity to provide technical assistance and training to local school districts on the increasingly complex responsibilities of local districts for public school facilities planning and management.

Establish an Office of School Facilities within ED: Irrespective of an authorized program for direct grants, the U.S. Department of Education should have an Office of School Facilities Infrastructure to be responsible for coordination with other federal agencies that have programs or responsibilities related to public school facilities, including the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, Homeland Security-FEMA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Treasury. BASIC requests that Congress and the Administration establish a permanent office within USED with capacity to work with other federal agencies on school facilities issues; provides input on how other U.S. Department of Education programs impact and are impacted by facilities condition, design, utilization, and location; staff the Green Ribbon Schools Awards program; manages the competitive facilities funding programs for states and charter schools, and for the national clearinghouse on school facilities. A total of \$2 million should be set aside to reestablish the National Clearinghouse on School Facilities.

Plus Up Impact Aid School Construction: There has long been bipartisan support for the Impact Aid program but funding for infrastructure funding has been flat leveled for years. A new bipartisan effort should be made to plus-up school construction funding in this program.

For these reasons, BASIC urges Congress to make these investments that will help reduce extreme inequity in facilities, and leverage existing local, state, and federal funding for school facilities.

Sincerely,

21st Century School Fund
AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Alberto Treves
American Industrial Hygiene Association
American Library Association
Association of School Business Officials International
Baltimore City Public Schools
BlueGreen Alliance
Californians for School Facilities
Carrier Corporation
Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council

Children & Nature Network
Collaborative for High Performance Schools
Education Law Center
Education Market Association
Fast Growth School Coalition
Go Green Initiative
Green Building Initiative
Green Schools National Network, Inc.
Green Schoolyards America
Healthy Schools Campaign
Heart of America
Impact Fitness Foundation
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades
Johnson Controls Inc.
National Association of Elementary School Principals
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 Rural Education Association
National Rural Education Association Consortium (NREAC)
North American Association for Environmental Education
Public Economics, Inc.
SafeTraces, Inc.
School Energy Coalition
School-Based Health Alliance
SMART California Sheet Metal Workers' Local 104
UndauntedK12