

August 24, 2021

National PTA Urges The Inclusion of At Least \$100 Billion for School Infrastructure in Reconciliation Bill

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of National PTA and our 3.4 million members nationwide, we urge you to invest in our children and ensure that the upcoming reconciliation bill includes at least **\$100 billion in direct grants and \$30 billion in bonds for K-12 school infrastructure**, consistent with the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act (S. 96/H.R. 604). This level of investment will reverse decades of underfunding and help ensure that every student in our country—regardless of their family income—can attend a safe, welcoming and high-quality public school.

Underinvestment in K-12 facilities is an urgent matter that demands Congress' attention. Outdated and crumbling schools due to decades of underinvestment pose alarming health and safety risks, hindering a generation of students from reaching its full potential. A 2016 State of Our Schools Report found state and local governments underfund K-12 facilities by \$46 billion *annually*. A recent GAO study illuminates the scope of the problem: 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, 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 HVAC system or roof can cause water damage, exposing students and staff to mold or asbestos. Robust funding for K-12 facilities would strengthen state and local governments' capacity to address these pressing health risks, as well as others such as airborne polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Congress has provided the funding to reopen schools this fall but these funds are insufficient when it comes to the challenge of building a new generation of 21st-century school facilities. If states secure the federal funding commensurate with the importance, scale, and relevance of facilities responsibilities, then our low wealth and high need districts will be able to deliver significant facility improvements to support child health and nutrition, child care and PreK, teacher retention, college affordability, environmental sustainability, resilience, and good jobs.

Given state budget shortfalls and the need for economic recovery, now is the time for the federal government to invest in school infrastructure. The result will be meaningful, long-term improvements to our nation's education system, such as:

- **Child health:** With federal facilities funds, public school districts can implement and support permanent and holistic remedies to poor conditions to ensure that children are in healthy and safe facilities and that school facilities have school-based health clinics and school nurse offices that meet modern standards.
- **Early childhood education and childcare:** With federal facilities funds, public school buildings can be readily retrofitted for universal Pre-Kindergarten classrooms and child care spaces.
- **Child nutrition:** With federal facilities funds, districts can modernize their school kitchens, cafeterias, and create schoolyard gardens to improve the nutrition of children and their families, reducing chronic conditions like obesity & diabetes.
- **Teacher retention:** With federal facilities funds, school districts can improve teacher working conditions by providing air conditioning, reliable heating, good indoor air quality, lighting, and acoustics, but also retain teachers by providing them the technology and specialized teaching spaces they need for science, art, music, special education, and physical education.
- **Community college affordability:** With federal funds to modernize schools, poor facilities will not be a barrier to student success that leave students ill-prepared for post-secondary education, which increases costs, as families & community colleges pay for remedial education that should've taken place in high schools.
- **Environmental sustainability and resilience:** Federal funds will help modernize and replace old public schools so they conserve land, energy, and water, reduce carbon emissions, and in the face of climate change, can help save lives, and reduce the level of relief funding needed following disasters.
- **Good jobs in communities across the nation:** With federal funds to modernize, retrofit, and build public schools and grounds in low wealth urban, suburban, town, and rural communities, good jobs will help stabilize or grow the population and revitalize the economy of struggling communities

As Congress moves forward with negotiations on a budget reconciliation bill, we strongly urge the inclusion of at least \$100 billion in direct grants and \$30 billion in bonds for K-12 public school facilities—consistent with the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2020. We must support long term investments in education and guarantee schools have the proper resources needed to help all children learn, grow and succeed.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact our Senior Manager of Government Affairs, Leslie Lina Paluch, at lpaluch@pta.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Anna King
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
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