

August 9, 2021

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

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
House Education & Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Senate Budget Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Yarmouth
Chairman
House Budget Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Chair Murray, Chairman Scott, Chairman Sanders, and Chairman Yarmouth:

As Congress moves forward with negotiations on a budget reconciliation bill, 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—consistent with the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2020. We are disappointed that funding for K-12 facilities was not included in the Senate bipartisan infrastructure legislation. The reconciliation bill, however, provides Congress with another opportunity to bring America's K-12 schools into the 21st century and help ensure students across the country can attend school in safe and healthy learning environments.

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 Outdated and crumbling schools due to decades of underinvestment pose alarming health and safety risks, hindering a generation of students from reaching its full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).

The longstanding neglect of school facilities disproportionately impacts low-income school districts and those districts with particularly aging facilities. These districts often lack a local tax base that can be leveraged for new school construction, major capital improvements, or building renovations and modernizations. The result is millions of students attend school in buildings in

need of major repairs, creating unsafe conditions that depress student and educator performance. Including strong funding for K-12 school infrastructure in the reconciliation bill would help reduce maintenance backlogs, positioning these districts to address long overdue school building upgrades and modernizations.

Our members are working vigorously to support students during this precarious moment in K-12 education, including marshaling American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to implement layered COVID-19 prevention strategies, boost academic recovery efforts, and address student mental health challenges. Still, these are only pieces of a larger student support puzzle. To fully realize ARP's enormous promise and help students emerge from this pandemic even stronger, Congress must embrace a holistic federal K-12 investment strategy, which includes robust investments in K-12 infrastructure. By supporting the funding levels in the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act, Congress can improve educational opportunities for millions of students and chart a new course for K-12 education.

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 Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association