



The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-230, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232, Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-221, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-204, Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer & Madame Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Our Coalition has long held that Congress must enact into law Division K of HR2, passed by the House, which is the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act (RRASA) and would authorize \$100 billion for long-standing school infrastructure needs. But the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent need to reopen and operate schools safely, requires an additional and immediate appropriation for emergency repair funds.

Our nation's public schools need an immediate federal investment of \$10 billion for emergency building repairs and system renewals for our public schools located in our highest poverty communities. The children and staff returning to schools serving low income communities are far more likely to be in old and severely deteriorated buildings that are woefully unprepared to operate safely during this health crisis. Many of these schools in high poverty communities educate children from families who are essential workers such as first responders in healthcare and emergency services as well as childcare, public works, and public safety jobs where it is impossible to telework. These schools and communities are often where broadband and virtual schooling are most deficient.

For these reasons, we strongly urge Congress to include \$10 billion for emergency school facilities repairs in the next COVID-19 emergency relief package and to immediately pass the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act (RRASA) under Division K of HR2 to address the long-standing deficits to our nation's public K-12 infrastructure. The \$10 billion in emergency

funds should be targeted to at least 14,000 schools that serve children from the lowest income families, and are in the poorest condition. This \$10 billion program would provide an average of about \$700,000 per school and should go to school districts directly to ensure a safe and timely reopening.

There are two ways to operationalize this so that funding is targeted and gets to these schools quickly.

1. Allocate the \$10 billion by state according to the Title I formula with a set aside for Impact Aid and taking into account geographic diversity, and disperse the funds directly to school districts for their schools with 75% or more students are eligible for free lunch and have facilities in the greatest need.
2. Allocate the \$10 billion to every school district with public [schools located in the Opportunity Zones OZs \(3,049 school districts and 14,000 schools\)](#) with a set-aside for Impact Aid.

The recent [GAO study on the condition of our nation's public schools](#), found that thousands of school districts have at least half of their schools in need of updates or replacements of key building systems or features. The poor mechanical, plumbing, electrical, roof, windows, and other systems and components reported on have a detrimental impact on the health and safety of the staff and students in schools. Poor facilities conditions are not equally dispersed, but are far more likely to be present in schools in high poverty communities.

It is no secret that all of our nation's public schools will need additional funding for educational and staffing needs because of significant state revenue shortfalls in the wake of COVID-19. However, we face the reality that the public school facilities in our highest poverty communities also need emergency facilities repairs and upgrades to implement the CDC's public health recommendations for safe school reopenings. Without emergency repairs and system upgrades, we are asking students and staff to return to schools where:

- Inadequate mechanical heating and cooling systems and controls (where schools have them) are not optimized to mitigate the spread of the virus by increasing the circulation of fresh air and maximizing filtration of indoor air;
- Windows can't open to increase the fresh air in classrooms and offices without significant repairs or upgrades;
- Washing hands can't be required because bathrooms are in such poor condition and in some cases, have sinks that are completely inoperable;
- Physical distancing won't be supported by adapting common spaces to become classrooms with minor space and furniture modifications;
- Outdoor learning isn't possible because the district can't supply shade, acoustic supports, seating, or the safety or security measures to use this healthy option where outdoor space and climate make this possible; and

- Outdoor play and recreation areas aren't able to support requirements for physical distancing.

In addition to funds needed for immediate COVID-19 emergency facilities repairs, all schools in the poorest conditions will need to respond to work orders for better ventilation, roof leaks, flaking lead paint, friable asbestos, steam leaks, plumbing leaks, electrical shorts, moldy ceiling tiles, pest infestations, and broken doors and locks. These facilities deficiencies do not go away because there is a pandemic. In fact, the urgency to fix these issues actually becomes more dire during a health pandemic, as these deficiencies actually make it dangerous for individuals, especially children, to be in.

Congress must not wait to appropriate \$10 billion for emergency school repairs and must include these funds in the next COVID-19 relief package. If schools are to safely reopen in the fall so that parents can get back to work and our economy can start to recover, an investment in our nation's school facilities must be made now to ensure educators and children are returning to a safe environment. Beyond a safe and healthy school reopening, Congress must finally prioritize investing in our nation's school facilities by passing RRASA within Division K of HR2 so that our schools can be more resilient in the wake of a public health or other national crisis.

We sincerely appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and look forward to working with Congress to include these funds in the next COVID-19 package.

Sincerely,

[Re] Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition (BASIC)
21st Century School Fund
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers, AFLCIO
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American School Health Association
Artcobell
ASCD
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
BlueGreen Alliance
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Center for Cities + Schools, UC Berkeley
Children & Nature Network

Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education
Education Law Center
Education Market Association
Fast Growth Schools Coalition
Healthy Schools Network
Impact Fitness Foundation
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
KaBOOM!
Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE)
Los Angeles Unified School District
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Coalition for Healthier Schools
National Council on School Facilities
National PTA
National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)
National Wildlife Federation
North American Association for Environmental Education
PCBinschools.org
Rebuild America's Schools Coalition
Rhode Island Environmental Education Association
SMART California Sheet Metal Workers' Local 104
Teach For America
The American Society of Interior Designers
The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS)
U.S. Green Building Council
Women for a Healthy Environment (Healthy Schools PA)