



## **\$20 Billion in Federal Investment in School Infrastructure Would Provide Major Boost to Education, Economy**

### **‘Sick,’ Crumbling Schools and Lack of Modernization Hurt U.S. Students’ Global Competitiveness, Study Suggests**

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Contact:  
Scott Treibitz  
703/276-2772 x11

Washington – Public schools are falling behind in basic repairs and maintenance of buildings and grounds, and are failing to make crucial improvements such as adding science labs, particularly in low-income communities, according to a study by Mary Filardo for the Economic Policy Institute. Federal investment to modernize infrastructure would stimulate the struggling economy by creating quality jobs, boost student and teacher morale and alleviate the financial burden of maintenance backlogs from states and school districts, the study concludes.

An infusion of federal investment also would help close student achievement gaps and improve the basic quality of teaching and the productivity of teachers, said EPI President Lawrence D. Mishel. “The issue is not just the buildings themselves, but what our society needs to get from the schools,” he said. “To graduate students who will successfully compete globally, we need world-class facilities, not crumbling buildings that don’t meet basic safety standards.”

While no one single entity keeps track of the state of infrastructure in the nation’s 97,000 public schools, Filardo, director of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, gathered data from a number of sources to reveal how states and localities are struggling to keep up with both basic maintenance and infrastructure modernization.

Many of the key educational initiatives designed to give our nation’s children the tools and knowledge they need have facility-related implications, including:

- Improving early childhood education and adding full-day kindergarten, particularly beneficial in low-income areas, require changes in classroom design. Bathrooms and furniture should be designed for young children, with easy access to the outdoors and additional space for extra adults and gross motor play.
- Schools need voice, video and data highways throughout their facilities and electrical upgrades to support computers, audio-enhanced classroom technology, smart boards and other technology aids.
- In an effort to improve U.S. science skills, the National Science Teachers Association recommends that students spend 50 percent of class time in hands-on, inquiry-based lessons that require uniquely adaptable learning spaces (labs), access to indoor and outdoor space for research, environmental study and reflection. Many schools are limited in reaching this goal by their current infrastructure.

“Public school buildings are community-based facilities that often define and anchor neighborhoods and communities,” Filardo said. “Their physical state says a lot about how we feel about our kids, communities and the future.”

States and school districts are struggling to maintain these facilities. Their budget shortages mean that custodial, maintenance and repair budgets often are under-funded, and maintenance may be deferred over a period of years. For instance, the Portland Public Schools estimate an \$800 million maintenance backlog. Los Angeles Unified Schools estimate a \$5 billion backlog.

A federal investment of \$20 billion not only would help eliminate some of this deferred maintenance, but also would generate 250,000 skilled jobs and increase demand for nearly \$6 billion in materials and supplies, EPI says. A ready pool of workers is available to do the work, since 360,000 construction workers lost their jobs over the past year. This economic stimulus would be an ancillary effect of an investment aimed at improving the health of student and faculty populations, and making the school environment more conducive to high-quality teaching and learning.

“Investment in school infrastructure naturally would have a positive impact on the national economy,” Mishel said. “But Americans also expect the federal government to assume a long-term responsibility to ensure that school districts – particularly those with high proportions of low-income, special education and English-language-learners – have adequate resources to provide appropriate schooling.”

Just as the federal government contributes, on average, 10 percent of local school districts’ operating budgets, Filardo proposes that the federal government provide a comparable amount for capital expenditures, roughly \$5.9 billion annually.

“Think of it this way: How are our students supposed to compete in a global economy when they are trying to learn in buildings that are making them and their teachers physically sick and uncomfortable, lack necessary modern upgrades and are eyesores in their neighborhoods?” Filardo asked.

*The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that researches the impact of economic trends and policies on working people in the United States and around the world. EPI's mission is to inform people and empower them to seek solutions that will ensure broadly shared prosperity and opportunity.*