

Taking a Look at the State of Our Nation's Schools

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Everywhere I go, I see schools falling apart. On my way to work in D.C., I pass schools with broken windows and crumbling bricks. In the Bronx, I've been inside schools where only one out of four bathroom stalls is even remotely usable. In Georgia, I've met students and teachers forced to take time away from the classroom to treat headaches and asthma attacks. In my capacity as the director of the Center for Green Schools, I've visited schools in more than 27 states. I know that our schools are in desperate need of repair. But I, along with parents, elected officials and taxpayers alike, have no way of knowing just how much fixing there is to do.

This February marked the 18th anniversary of the last time that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a survey on the state of America's public school facilities. That's why we've released our 2013 "State of our Schools" report, which brings to light the fact that a whopping \$271 billion is needed to bring public schools in the United States up to working order and comply with the law. Adding modernization to this bill to meet the basic needs of students and teachers brings the total up to \$542 billion.

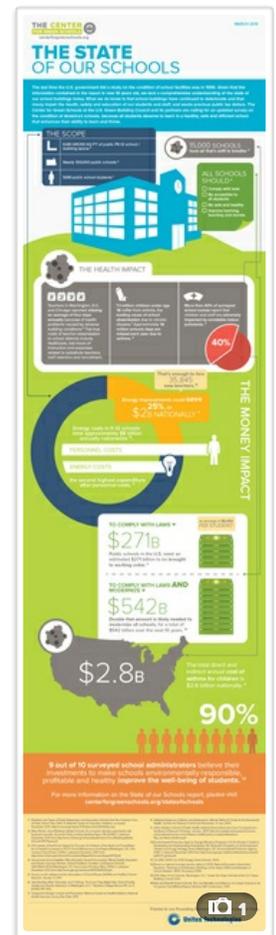
This report, which features an inspiring introduction from President Bill Clinton, brings to light the fact that we are lacking critical data that allow us to address the safety, health, education and environmental challenges of our public school facilities. Better understanding would allow us to not only demonstrate that green schools can bring significant benefits to school and district facilities, but prove that we can invest schools' limited resources more efficiently, effectively and equitably.

Our hope is that a new study will help paint a picture of deferred maintenance and modernization needs for the nearly 100,000 elementary and secondary schools in this country. We can't ignore a problem just because we don't know the extent of it.

The Center for Green Schools and many of our key partners, including the 21st Century School Fund, the National PTA, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers and the American Society of Civil Engineers, are calling for an updated survey from the GAO on the condition of America's schools.

Despite limited data, we've outlined key recommendations to start communities, states and our nation toward a better understanding of where our school facilities stand. These include:

- Expanding the Common Core of Data collected annually by the National Center for Education Statistics to include school level data on building age, building size and site size.
- Improving the current fiscal reporting of school district facility maintenance and operations data to the National Center for Education Statistics so that utility expenditures and maintenance expenditures are collected separately.
- Improving the collection of capital outlay data from school districts to include identification of the source of capital outlay funding and distinctions between capital outlay categories for new construction and for existing facilities.
- Providing financial and technical assistance to states from the U.S. Department of Education to incorporate facility data in their state longitudinal education data systems.
- Mandating a GAO facility condition survey to take place every 10 years, with the next one beginning immediately.



Readers can support our efforts by raising awareness about the impact that the conditions of school facilities have on student performance and health. Join a local Green School Committee (centerforgreenschools.org/chaptercommittees), work on the ground to improve community schools through our Green Apple Day of Service (mygreenapple.org), give the gift of our Green Classroom Professional Certificate (centerforgreenschools.org/GCP) to a teacher you know, or connect with your local legislator on these important issues.

This isn't a conversation about better buildings, it's a conversation about delivering better education to our students, and ensuring that the places where they learn don't make them sick, or in other ways jeopardize their future.

For more information and to view the full report, visit centerforgreenschools.org/stateofschools.

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