Better Buildings: Better Schools  Issue #71, Late Winter 2015

News and commentary on public-school facilities from the local and national perspectives of the 21st Century School Fund (21CSF), a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit - working to build the public will and capacity to improve public-school facilities.

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State K-12 School Facilities Leaders Meet at Annual Meeting

Eighteen states and the Department of Defense Education Activity took part in the second annual meeting of the National Council on School Facilities (NCSF) in early December in Washington, D.C. The annual meeting included a tour of the innovative DoDEA Crossroads Elementary School on the Joint Base Quantico in Virginia. K-12 school facilities officials introduced their state's school-facilities organization and reported on school-facilities issues within their state. Read a full report of this important meeting.

Research on 17 years of School Facilities Spending

21st Century School Fund, in partnership with the National Council on School Facilities and the U.S. Green Building Council, is researching capital spending, maintenance and operations spending, and long term debt for school facilities by state (FY 1995 to FY2011). The study will also report on state and local efforts to fund school facilities from the public education operating budget and total taxable resources. State officials have been providing input and information to help with the study.

Training Videos on Public School Facilities Planning

The Education Facilities Clearinghouse, based at George Washington University is providing support for a series of seven training videos to be produced by the 21st Century School Fund in partnership with the National Council on School Facilities. The videos will focus on master planning, capital planning, maintenance planning, safety planning, energy planning, educational specification planning and an introduction video to the series. The purpose of these videos is to encourage districts to do more and better school facilities planning. The first of the seven training videos, facilities master planning, will be released soon on the Education Facilities Clearinghouse website.

District of Columbia Makes Major Investments in its Neighborhood Public School Facilities

After decades of neglect of its PS-12 facilities, beginning in 1994-under community pressure and with technical assistance from the 21st Century School Fund, the District of Columbia started planning for the full modernization of all of its public school facilities. Facilities initiatives started with major repair "blitzes" and then building "stabilization", in 2000, and, finally, it began a multi-billion dollar initiative to modernize or replace every District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) building, including making major improvements to schoolyards, athletic facilities and grounds.
By August 2015, 77 of the 108 active DCPS school buildings have met high quality and modern standards for health, safety and educational spaces. Fully 42 of the DCPS schools are new or completely modernized—more than a third of the total. An additional 35 buildings have received phased modernizations ranging in scope from extensive classroom modernizations and small additions to full modernizations of entire wings. The remaining 31 schools have been fully stabilized to ensure that they are clean, safe, well lighted, heated and cooled, and fitted with serviceable technology and playground equipment. View photo gallery on our Facebook page.

Center for Cities + Schools Weighs in on California Facilities Funding Debate

The Center for Cities + Schools at the University of California, Berkeley released, Guided by Principles - Shaping the State of California’s Role in K-12 Public School Facility Funding. This brief provides an analysis of data on school facilities spending by CA districts, proposes principles to guide policy decisions about the state's facility funding role, and provides data-driven indicators that can be used to evaluate the application of the principles. It offers approaches to a state and local partnership for K-12 facilities that would advance the principles of equity, local district accountability, fiscal stability and predictability, facility adequacy, and program simplicity.

New York Coalition Calls for Co-Location Moratorium

A Letter from community leaders and the Campaign for Educational Equity calls on the New York City Mayor and its Chancellor to place a moratorium on new public school building co-locations until the current violations of student's rights are addressed in the existing co-locations. The recommendations include:

- Assess the prevalence and extent of the violations of student's rights in co-locations.
- Disseminate information about the resources, services, and supports to which all students in all schools are entitled under state statute, regulations and constitutional law.
- Review and revise the instructional footprint to ensure sufficient space for all schools to meet sound-basis-education requirements.
- Amend the educational impact statement to include a review of the impact of any proposed co-location on students.
- Quantify the number of personnel that must be added to administer a co-location building.

GAO Reports School Facilities Conditions in Native American Schools Operated by the BIE

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released, Indian Affairs: Preliminary Results Show Continued Challenges to the Oversight and Support of Education Facilities. The preliminary report focuses on the known conditions of selected Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIE) schools and how effective Indian Affairs is in supporting and overseeing BIE school facilities. GAO stresses that there are issues with the quality of data collected by Indian Affairs including inconsistent data reporting by schools and inadequate quality controls. Because of this, GAO is encountering incomplete and non-accurate physical condition data on tribal school facilities from BIE.

Concerns uncovered through GAO's research include:

- Declines in staffing levels and gaps in technical expertise among facility personnel in Indian Affairs.
- Inconsistent oversight of some school construction projects provided by Indian Affairs.
- Poor communication between Indian Affairs and schools and tribes leading to confusion about whom to contact to address facility problems.

The GAO report was sparked by a series of recent reports about the physical condition of the BIE schools. BIE oversees 185 elementary and secondary schools that serve around 41,000 students in 23 states. A full report will be released later in the year.
Guinn Center Releases Report on the Need for State Funding for Nevada Public School Facilities

Guinn Center reports that Nevada public schools have an estimated $7.4 billion in unfunded repair, renovation and construction needs. However, current facilities financing is based on local funding capacity with each locale having different funding sources and capabilities, leading to funding disparities and districts being unable to maintain, improve or relieve crowding in their public school facilities. Nevada is one of 12 states that provide no state funding for school facilities. The Kenny C. Guinn Center for Policy Priorities released a policy brief, *Expanding Financing Options for Nevada's K-12 Facilities*, to encourage communities and officials to explore new funding options and policy reform to address this challenge. The brief proposed the following:

- Create a statewide funding mechanism for school facilities.
- Provide school districts with the ability to create Special Improvement Districts.
- Explore the feasibility of creating multi-county tax districts for rollover bonds.
- Change existing laws related to tax caps and abatements.

Encourage the Governor's Office of Economic Development to conduct a school facilities impact study and develop a funding plan prior to approval of development incentives.

Health Advocate Develops SchoolSitingInfo.com

Kathy Aragon, whose interest and passion for children's education and health recently developed a tool to help communities and school boards with school siting. The website, [School Siting, Money, Education, Health and Equity](#), will help school and community leaders make thoughtful, coordinated decisions about school siting. This website provides siting information and resources and outlines a process to help a community develop a school siting plan.

School Facilities News from Around the Country

- **AZ** - *Schools In 'Dire Straits' For Lack Of State Facilities Money*
- **CA** - *How An Earthquake Strengthened My School*
- **MA** - *Boston Looks To Close A 'Handful' Of Schools*
- **NE** - *New citizen board will guide bond spending for Omaha Public Schools*
- **NV** - *Sandoval signs emergency school construction bill*
- **NY** - *Exhibit at Cleve Hill teaches about 1954 school fire that claimed lives of 15 students*
- **OR** - *Lake Oswego School Board looks to address millions in school repairs*
- **WA** - *Schools are locking up tracks and play fields to keep out vandals*