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21CSF and Center for Cities and Schools Release Free Web Tool for Joint Use

School Facilities Cost Calculator: A Joint-Use Tool for Fair Fees. The Calculator is a free tool that helps school districts determine the costs of owning and operating their facilities and provides a way to develop a fair and transparent joint-use fee structure. It is available in an interactive web-based format and includes facilities data from nearly 15,000 school districts across the country. Learn more about the Calculator by viewing a recorded webinar sponsored by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and Active Living Research.

A Statewide School-Facilities Program is Recommended for Oregon

Oregon public K-12 schools have over $7.6 billion in deferred maintenance. 43% of the state's school districts have not passed or tried to pass a school capital bond since 1997. The state has positive education mandates without providing the necessary funding for school facilities in support of these mandates. In response, Oregon State Senator Richard Devlin sponsored Senate Bill 540 establishing the Task Force on School Capital Improvement Planning to recommend "a) funding for PreK-12 capital needs, b) the types of technical assistance required by school districts for capital construction, c) the appropriate role of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) in supporting the system and providing technical assistance, and d) to acknowledge the need for ODE to establish and maintain a public education facility information database."

The 12-member volunteer task force completed their final report to the Oregon legislature and have released their recommendations:

1. "Authorize $125 million in new bonding for PreK-12 matching grants in 2015, maintain or increase this level of funding for the next five biennia, and explore permanent funding arrangements to sustain the commitment to PreK-12 capital needs beyond ten years;
2. Establish and fund an Office of School Facilities in the Oregon Department of Education as a resource for local school districts;
3. Provide technical assistance and small grants to assess district needs, support long-term capital programs, and inform statewide capital planning; and
4. Launch the Oregon School Facilities Database to start building a repository of data for local district and statewide capital planning."
Bill to Modernize and Revitalize Public Schools is Proposed by Congressman Maloney (D-NY)

H.R. 4826 was introduced in Congress by Congressman Patrick Maloney (D-NY) in early June. The act "requires the Secretary of Education to make grants to states for the modernization, renovation, or repair of public schools, including early learning facilities and charter schools, to make them safe, healthy, high-performing, and technologically up-to-date." There is an appropriation of $6.4 billion each year through 2015 to 2020. The act also provides supplemental funding of $100 million each year in grants through 2015 to 2020 to "LEAs that serve areas in which the President, during the preceding 10 fiscal years, has determined that a major disaster exists for the construction, modernization, renovation, or repair of public schools."

D.C. Mayor Accepts Student-Assignment Reform Recommendations

Appointed last October by the Deputy Mayor for Education, the 22-member D.C. Advisory Committee on Student Assignment delivered Final Recommendations on Student Assignment Policies and DCPS School Boundaries to the Mayor, who promptly accepted them. Working with input from extensive focus groups, nine large community meetings, numerous neighborhood gatherings, and copious comments via e-mail and an interactive website -- and with full web-based documentation -- the process initiated the first extensive public dialogue on public education and school access since the D.C. Council placed the D.C. public schools under mayoral control eight years ago. Overwhelmingly, the vision for public education in the nation's capital was described as a "core system of high-quality neighborhood public schools of right complemented by a set of high-quality public-school options."

Vigorous discussion continues as a group of education activists have formulated six principles that spin off from the recommendations. Principle No. 3 grapples with the difficulties of facilities planning when traditional and charter sectors are both strong: "Require coordinated planning between the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the Public Charter School Board (PCS) to build a core system of stable DCPS neighborhood schools with a complementary set of alternative options."

D.C. Advocates Challenge Charter Schools' Demand for Funding Parity

In July, two District of Columbia public charter schools and an association representing D.C. charter schools filed suit against the D.C. government. In the suit, the charter schools claim that D.C.'s current school-funding approach illegally underfunds the D.C. charter schools in comparison with D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), the school district operated by the District of Columbia. Pointing to a D.C. law passed by Congress in 1996 that mandates that the District provide operating funds to DCPS and to the D.C. charter schools on the basis of a "uniform" per-student formula, the plaintiffs argue that the District may not provide additional funding or support services to DCPS without providing equal value to D.C. charter schools. The plaintiffs allege that D.C. has been providing between $1,600 and $2,600 per student each year to DCPS by way of supplemental funding allocations, interagency transfers, in-kind services provided by other city agencies, and city funding of the DCPS retirement plans. The plaintiffs demand that DCPS and D.C. charter school per-student funding be equalized going forward.

To support the city in defending against the lawsuit, 21CSF and other organizations and individuals have secured representation through the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and filed an amicus brief on October 24, 2014. In the brief, the group points out that the federal law that granted home rule to Washington, D.C. in 1973 gave D.C. broad authority to legislate on local matters such as education. They note that the charter complainants do not claim that they are inadequately funded. In fact, the 59 organizations
operating charter schools during school year 2013 finished the year with nearly $200 million dollars in unrestricted assets. The group also notes that D.C. has amended the charter law numerous times since 1996, often to the financial benefit of the charter schools. Although Congress could have blocked any or all of those changes to the law if it had so desired, it has never done so. Congress has also expressly approved D.C.’s expenditures under the amended charter law.

The lawsuit is significant for D.C. not only because it demands equal rather than equitable funding for charter schools but also because it takes a position that the D.C. Council may not pass laws that contravene or change D.C. laws that Congress has passed. This argument—if successful—may greatly undermine the already limited local autonomy and self-governance of D.C. residents under Congress’s grant of home rule. For case documents and more information, see 21CSF’s Datashop webpage.

**School Facilities News from Around the Country**

- **CA** - More than 37,000 LA school repairs backlogged; fire safety at risk in some schools
- **DC** - D.C.’s New Ballou High School Also Meets Community Needs
- **DC** - "School-based health centers" could be the future of medicine for teens
- **IL** - Reports of garbage, vermin in Chicago public schools
- **National** - EPA Releases Guidance to Improve Schools’ Indoor Air Quality and Energy Efficiency
- **NY** - Parents: Bronx Housing Boom Could Crowd Classrooms
- **TX** - Competitive construction market hits growing school districts

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