

IMPROVING SCHOOL BUILDINGS

ANCHORING COMMUNITIES



BEST
BUILDING EDUCATIONAL
SUCCESS TOGETHER

21st Century School Fund

Education Law Center

KnowledgeWorks Foundation

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

National Trust for Historic Preservation

Neighborhood Capital Budget Group

Mark Schneider, State University of New York

ALL CHILDREN SHOULD

LEARN IN SCHOOLS THAT

ARE SAFE, HEALTHY AND

EDUCATIONALLY

APPROPRIATE — THAT

SERVE AS COMMUNITY

ANCHORS IN VIBRANT

NEIGHBORHOODS.



URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES

AN OBSTACLE TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND NEIGHBORHOOD VITALITY

The public is demanding that public school teachers and students meet higher academic standards.

Millions of dollars are being invested to revitalize urban communities. Yet in too many urban public school systems, school buildings are poorly maintained, unsafe, unhealthy, crowded, educationally inappropriate and not designed for community use. The poor condition of public school facilities undermines the ability of teachers to teach and students to learn and contributes to neighborhood blight and flight.

For many, the learning environment is an obstacle to teacher and student success. Overcrowded and oversized schools challenge rather than support students, teachers and administrators. Classrooms with limited natural light and poor ventilation dull the senses needed for mental exercise and make it difficult for students to concentrate. Poorly designed and maintained school buildings limit curriculum and teaching methods; reduce time available for teaching and learning; and demoralize administrators,

"It is undisputed that the school buildings in Abbott districts are crumbling and obsolescent and that this grave state of disrepair not only prevents children from receiving a thorough and efficient education but also threatens their health and safety."

Majority Opinion
New Jersey Supreme Court
Abbott v Burke V, 1998

teachers, students, and parents. And some schools do even worse — they make teachers and students physically ill.

Deteriorating public school buildings also harm the communities that surround them. Public schools are often located in residential areas and are usually the only public building in a neighborhood. Schools that are in disrepair and inaccessible to the larger community send a stark message to surrounding neighborhoods: "Your kids, your community, don't matter."

Across the country, communities are taking action, declaring that they do matter and will meet the challenge of high standards. Educators and community leaders have recognized that we need the tools and building blocks for educational success — including high quality school buildings — to meet that challenge. States and local school districts have begun to respond, spending more than \$20 billion on construction in 2001 alone.

Much more work is needed to provide high quality school buildings. The local community must be involved in the planning of new projects; schools must be made accessible to the community, and districts must develop policies to ensure effective, efficient and honest management to get high quality work from architects, designers, engineers and contractors. With estimates of facility construction needs exceeding \$300 billion nationally, we have a long way to go to provide all of the needed funds to improve our nation's learning environments.

85% of Chicago teachers think facilities impact their ability to teach but 46% grade their school facilities with a C, D or F.

38% of District of Columbia teachers have considered leaving their schools because of poor facilities and 25% have considered leaving teaching all together.

BUILDING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS TOGETHER

A NATIONAL COMMUNITY BASED COLLABORATION

Building Educational Success Together is an initiative of experienced, committed leaders working towards a common agenda of policy reform, improved facilities management and full funding for public school facilities in low income urban communities.

Led by the 21st Century School Fund (Washington, DC) and supported by the Ford Foundation, BEST is a constituency building, research and communications collaboration of the Education Law Center (Newark, NJ); the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (Chicago, IL); KnowledgeWorks Foundation (Cincinnati, OH); National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, DC); National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (Washington, DC) and Mark Schneider, State University of New York at Stony Brook (Stony Brook, NY).

Our actions are motivated by experience, research and court findings that show that better school buildings can:

- increase the academic success of students;
- increase schools' ability to attract, retain and support teachers; and
- help revitalize urban neighborhoods.

Barbara Diamond (KnowledgeWorks Foundation), Mary Filardo (21st Century School Fund), and Bill Phillis, (Director, Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy), talk at a KnowledgeWorks Foundation symposium on school facilities in Columbus, OH.



KEYS TO CHANGE:

A FOUR-PART POLICY REFORM AGENDA

Public schools are public goods, and community members have the right and the responsibility to be involved in decisions about their school facilities. Parents, teachers, other local school staff, and community members have intimate, first-hand knowledge of what is needed from a school facility and must be fully involved in the school planning and design process. Without their participation, we are likely to get new buildings but lose the opportunity to improve schools and neighborhoods.

1 Broad public involvement in decision-making

2 Schools as centers of community

Schools are often the most important public building in our neighborhoods. Beyond serving a core teaching mission, schools need to be planned, designed, constructed, renovated and operated to serve the larger community, including adult learning courses, health and social services, and recreation activities. Also, historic schools are important civic landmarks, and when properly maintained and renovated, they can contribute to a community's identity and cohesiveness and serve as first-class learning environments. Architects and planners must consider community needs and history when evaluating a school building's adequacy and planning its future.

Effective management and external oversight of school planning, design, construction, renovation and maintenance is essential to maintain public trust and build high quality school facilities. New

policies, governance structures and processes are needed to ensure honest and competent management. Only then will the public get quality design and construction, solid value for its investment, and the best possible educational facilities. If the public has no confidence in government's ability to manage facility construction, it will be difficult to secure funding for the work that needs to be done.

3 Effective management and oversight

4 Adequate funding for repairs and construction

Schools must be supported with stable and sufficient funding for regular maintenance, renovation and new construction to keep them in good working order for students, educators and neighbors; relieve overcrowding; and contribute to neighborhood vitality. According to the National Education Association, \$300 billion is needed for school construction and modernization. It will take a combination of local, state and federal resources and creative use of non-tax revenues to provide such a level of investment. These resources must be equitably distributed, based on community needs, and available over the long term.

A SHARED APPROACH

A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY FOR LASTING IMPROVEMENT

The BEST initiative is focused in the public schools and communities of Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Newark,

Trenton and Paterson, NJ; and Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, OH. We are working in our local communities and with each other to:

- Build constituencies in our target cities to involve teachers, parents, business leaders and the community in facilities issues;
- Research existing facilities conditions; the effects of inadequate buildings on teaching; learning and neighborhoods; and the equity of capital fund distribution.
- Develop a standardized national database of school facility data for public use.
- Communicate our research findings, make the case for better school facilities, and share advocacy strategies and success stories with local, state and national advocates and policy-makers.

THE BEST TEAM

EXPERIENCE AND COMMITMENT

The BEST team is a diverse group of leaders with experience in education reform, community development, facilities management, social justice advocacy, historic preservation, community involvement,

academic research and philanthropy.

This team has been brought together by a sense of urgency and the realization that we can be more effective as a collaborative. Decisions about school buildings are being made at the state and district levels today that will affect our public education system and communities for generations to come. We have an opportunity to build new buildings, better schools and better neighborhoods. Each BEST partner brings a unique perspective and expertise to meet this challenge.

21ST CENTURY SCHOOL FUND (21CSF)

WASHINGTON, DC

21st Century School Fund, the nation's non-profit community-based leader on public engagement in school-facilities planning and best practices in facilities planning and management, initiated and manages the BEST initiative. Locally, 21CSF works to improve the District of Columbia's public school facilities. It was responsible for creating and managing the Oyster School Public-Private Development Partnership that built the first new public school in DC in 20

years. Moreover, because of 21CSF's advocacy, in December 2000 the school system approved a Facilities Master Plan to replace or modernize every school in DC over the next ten years. 21CSF has used this local success to spur national efforts to improve school facilities.

21CSF serves on the advisory board of the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, is working to develop standard facility data definitions with the National Center for Education Statistics, and supports the work of local organizations in other cities to improve their local schools. 21CSF brings an understanding of community organizing, planning, management, information technology and funding; and a broad view of the impact of facilities on teaching, learning and communities to the BEST initiative.

Chicago parent and community organizers, supported by NCBG, attend a KWF school facilities symposium in Ohio.



The new Oyster Bilingual Elementary School financed through a public private partnership.

EDUCATION LAW CENTER (ELC)

NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

The Education Law Center is a pioneer in equitable school funding litigation. As a result of the *Abbott v. Burke* lawsuit brought by ELC, the New Jersey Supreme Court mandated that the state pay for early childhood education, whole school reform and school facility improvements in 30 poor urban school districts in the state. ELC, as representative for the children of the Abbott school districts, is responsible for monitoring and assisting in the implementation of the court decisions, including the \$6 billion facilities construction program approved by the New Jersey Legislature. ELC brings more than three decades of litigation and policy reform experience to the BEST team.



Temporary classrooms behind an East Orange high school relieve overcrowding but use up scarce open space.

KNOWLEDGEWORKS FOUNDATION (KWF)

CINCINNATI, OHIO

KnowledgeWorks Foundation was created in 1998 as Ohio's largest public education philanthropy. In 2000, KWF expanded its focus on improving public education to include community engagement in school facilities planning. Among other initiatives, KWF is working to help restructure urban

Ohio high schools as small, personalized learning communities,

"schools within schools." KWF is also engaging communities in creating community learning centers in Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland. KWF brings its understanding of education reform and a perspective from the foundation community to the BEST team.



MARK SCHNEIDER, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

STONY BROOK, NEW YORK

Mark Schneider, professor of political science at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, has extensive expertise in education, political and social science research. He has written and/or edited several books, and has published more than 50 articles in leading political science, sociology and public policy journals. He brings an independent and objective perspective to the BEST initiative. He will conduct research on the effect of facilities on teacher performance and student learning and on social justice issues related to public investment in school facility construction and maintenance.

NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION (NTHP)

WASHINGTON, DC

In 2000, growing concerns from communities across the United States about the fate of their historic public schools brought the National Trust for Historic Preservation into the facilities arena. NTHP placed historic schools on its list of America's most endangered historic places and has been working to eliminate policy and regulatory biases against existing schools and to educate decision makers and the public about the value of keeping and restoring historic schools that can meet state-of-the-art standards. Within the BEST initiative, NTHP will help advocates understand issues around modernizing historic schools that have served as neighborhood anchors for decades.



The Carl Shurz High School after an award-winning renovation in 1996. "The useable life of the 86-year-old landmark has been extended by at least a half-century, saving big bucks for the city treasury and, in the bargain, restoring a civic treasure."
— Blair Kamen, Chicago Tribune

NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES (NCEF)

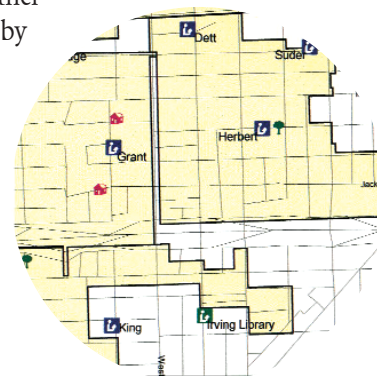
WASHINGTON, DC

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities gathers, organizes, and synthesizes information about educational facilities and makes it available through their website, publications, reference service, and partnerships with the educational facilities community. NCEF is a resource for policymakers, educators, advocates, planners, designers, and facilities managers. NCEF is a free public service, founded in 1997 by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by the National Institute of Building Sciences. NCEF is working with the BEST team to provide research support and to disseminate original research and other publications generated by BEST members.

NEIGHBORHOOD CAPITAL BUDGET GROUP (NCBG)

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Neighborhood Capital Budget Group is a unique citywide coalition of approximately 200 neighborhood-based groups, formed in 1988 to demand increased and equitable public investment in Chicago's neighborhoods. It is Chicago's leading advocate for stronger accountability over capital budgeting and spending. NCBG works through its members to develop schools as centers of neighborhood revitalization. NCBG also monitors and analyzes the interplay between public works spending and community development. NCBG brings an experienced view of schools in the context of urban development and municipal finance to the BEST team.



NCBG map of selected redevelopment areas, public housing, and Chicago public schools

REACHING OUT TO COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE

WHILE THE BEST INITIATIVE IS FOCUSED ON IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN EIGHT COMMUNITIES, YOU CAN HELP US BROADEN OUR EFFORTS TO NEIGHBORHOODS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

- Log on to our website — www.21csf.org — to find out about the latest research on school facilities, get news from districts across the country and download copies of our latest publications.
- Get involved in your local school. Find out what condition your facility is in, talk about the changes needed, and work with the neighborhood, local school staff and district administration to improve the quality of the schools in your community.
- Share your success stories, frustrations, and the lessons you have learned so that we can all work more effectively.



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