The House and Senate Address Disparities in Spending in School Construction

House
On July 21, the House Committee on Education and Labor (Chairman, Miller, D-CA) approved HR3221, the Student Aid Fiscal Responsibility Act, an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965. In addition to using savings from a transformation of the student loan program to make college more affordable, increase investment in community colleges, and support early childhood education, the bill incorporates school modernization provisions modeled after the 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act. Through HR3221, school renovation, repair and modernization would be funded through mandatory appropriations at the level of $4.1 billion nationally over two years.

The bill now goes to the full House for approval. The Senate is expected to introduce and vote on similar legislation later this summer.

Senate
On May 22, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) introduced the “School Buildings Fairness Act of 2009” (S1121). The act would provide $6 billion a year in grants for the repair, renovation and construction of elementary and secondary schools predominately in school districts that have a high percentage of children below the poverty line. Funds will be allocated by formula to states, which will award the grants competitively. This act will help reduce disparities in school building quality between low-income and affluent communities.

Senator Harkin (D-IA) also included $700M for school construction, renovation, repair, and modernization in the FY10 Labor HHS Education Appropriations bill. These funds will be distributed according to the provisions in S1121, introduced by Harkin in May. The Appropriations bill was voted on and passed the full committee on Thursday, July 30th. The full Senate is expected to vote on the Labor HHS Education Appropriations bill after the August recess.

Opponents of federal support for school construction argue that there should be no federal role. However, the lack of federal funds has left millions of children who live in low-wealth school districts in sub-standard buildings. And, research shows that high-quality teachers avoid and middle-class parents abandon substandard buildings. The students left behind suffer adverse health and educational consequences.

For more information on a fair federal share for public school construction, check out the Building Educational Success Together website.

21CSF Funded to Track the Recovery Funds for School Infrastructure
The Ford Foundation awarded a grant to the 21st Century School Fund and its Building Educational Success Together (BEST) Collaboration to track whether, where, and how much of the American Recovery and Reconstruction Act's (ARRA) stabilization and tax credit school construction bond funding is used for school building improvement projects. 21CSF and BEST will evaluate how these ARRA school construction funding streams impact children who attend schools with large shares of students from low income families and that are located in low income communities.

A majority of state stabilization applications have been approved with little indication of funding being used for K-12 school construction. The reporting and dissemination systems for ARRA funds are still being
developed and need to be completed by October when state reporting to the Department of Education is required to start.

**Planning for DCPS' Bruce-Monroe at Park View Elementary School**
The Bruce-Monroe at Park View elementary school community has asked the 21st Century School Fund to help develop education specifications this summer. The parents, faculty, administration, and staff and neighborhood organizations are being interviewed in-depth about the educational program needs of the school and how all those components might best fit together. A draft of the education specs should be available soon for review, outlining a range of space requirements and desired adjacencies.

Bruce-Monroe and Park View elementary schools were consolidated last year at the Park View location with the expectation that a public/private partnership would be pursued to re-build a school at the former Bruce-Monroe site in conjunction with mixed-use development. Possibilities for development remain open-ended but the educational specifications will be a basic planning document for any re-design of the facilities.

**2009-2010 DCPS Feeder Patterns for PreK-8th Grade Schools**
A comprehensive chart of destination schools for all DCPS schools can be found at the [21st Century School Fund Data Shop Archive](http://www.21centuryschoolfund.org/data), look under DC public school data. This information was compiled from the DCPS website. The chart is organized according to the comprehensive high school into which individual middle schools, PK-8 schools and elementary schools feed.

Note that students who are out-of-boundary at their current school now have the right to continue along that school’s destination feeder pattern without reapplying through the out-of-boundary lottery. Strong feeder patterns are associated with vigorous systems of schools that coordinate curriculum from pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade and encourage real community ownership.

New PreK-8 education centers are shown in yellow. Many of them are growing to add 8th grade this year so they had no designated high school last year. These twelve ward 4 and 5 education centers are listed together at the bottom of the chart.

Schools communities in these neighborhoods will want to be involved very soon in determining where students will attend high school. For many neighborhoods it is unclear which high school would be the best fit with respect to proximity, public transportation, terrain and program.

Also, with Eastern high school in construction this year, those Ward 6 schools that would have been expected to feed into it are currently designated to feed to Spingarn or Dunbar. When Eastern re-opens (fall 2010), it is anticipated that most of these schools will again feed to Eastern as their neighborhood comprehensive high school.

**DCPS and OPEFM Open Five New Or Totally Modernized Schools!**
By the time school opens on Aug. 24th, DCPS will have cut the ribbon on 5 new and/or fully modernized facilities: H.D. Cooke Elementary School, School Without Walls High School, Webb-Wheatley Education Center, Walker-Jones Education Center and Savoy Elementary School. The newly occupied Deal Middle School will also have an official opening in August. Watch the mayor’s schedule ([www.dc.gov](http://www.dc.gov)) for details. These are all either entirely new or totally modernized, like-new facilities, not merely “Phase I” modernizations. For general information on individual DCPS schools please visit [School Close-ups on the 21st Century School Fund website](http://www.21centuryschoolfund.org).