

Better Buildings: Better Schools, Issue 59 March/April 2011

Monthly news and commentary on public school facilities with a local and national perspective from the 21st Century School Fund (21CSF), a Washington DC based nonprofit - **working to build the public will and capacity to improve urban public school facilities**. To subscribe/unsubscribe, please email: newsletter@21csf.org

National School Facilities Exhibit to Open on Capitol Hill

Through Your Lens, a national school facilities photo and essay contest will exhibit in the rotunda of [the Russell Senate Office Building](#) in Washington, D.C. The exhibit will take place from May 9th to May 13th and will feature winning and top photos selected from over 300 national entries.

Students, teachers, and community members were invited to submit their stories and photos of their school facilities, sharing what is seen every day at school. This exhibit of photos and stories provides elected leaders with a window into today's school buildings and encourage debate about state and federal funding for public school repair, renovation and construction.

Locally, D.C. had two [winning student photos](#) one from Cardozo Senior High school and one from Kimball Elementary school.

Through Your Lens is a collaborative project between the 21st Century School Fund, Critical Exposure, and the Healthy Schools Campaign. To view the virtual gallery and see how you can help spread the message about the importance of a federal, state and local partnership for school facilities, visit www.throughyourlens.org.

[Fact Sheet on PK-12 Public School Facility Infrastructure](#)

The 21st Century School Fund, along with its Building Educational Success Together (BEST) partners, has worked to answer questions about the condition and support of public K-12 school facilities so school districts increase their capacity to provide high quality buildings and grounds for all children and teachers. The fact sheet, available on the publications tab at www.21csf.org answers these questions:

- How much PK-12 infrastructure is there?
- What condition are our public schools in?
- What difference does facility condition make?
- How much does our PK-12 infrastructure cost?
- Where does funding for PK-12 infrastructure come from?

Legislation for a Chicago Educational Facility Planning Commission

The 21st Century School Fund advised the [Chicago Educational Facility Planning Task Force](#) of the Illinois Legislature on building greater transparency, equity and cost-effective strategies for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) capital and facility planning processes. Based on the Task Forces efforts, [the "School Action & Accountability Master Planning Act"](#) was written and passed the Illinois Senate in late April. It is awaiting discussion and a vote in the Illinois House of Representatives where it is sponsored by Representative Cynthia Soto, a co-chair of the Task Force.

The purpose of this legislation is to provide equal access to high-quality facilities and education for all Chicago public school students; and assure taxpayers that CPS will manage its publicly-funded resources and investments in facilities in an equitable, transparent, and cost-effective manner.

We believe this bill represents real progress in the planning and management of public PK-12 facilities. Please review a [summary of key provisions](#). If you have questions, please contact Jackie Leavy, who is providing pro bono staff support for the Chicago Task Force. I have copied her on this email and she can be reached at: (312)285-5773.

Once Again a New Agency Takes Over Public School Construction in the District

The Mayor's State of the District Address and the proposed 2012-2017 Capital Budget outline the District's intention once again to change the agencies responsible for school planning, construction, leasing, maintenance and repair. The Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) was set up with the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 as part of the Mayoral takeover of DCPS. The new agency was headed by Allen Lew who is currently the City Administrator.

Now, OPEFM is scheduled to close and a new DC Department of General Services is poised to consolidate all DCPS school capital projects with parks and recreation, fire and emergency, police, and other government building capital projects. Some agencies such as Libraries, University of the District of Columbia and the Department of Transportation and WMATA still retain control of their own building projects. Educational facility planning for PK12 public schools will be under the Deputy Mayor for Education.

There has been tremendous change in the management of public school capital programs over the decades. Between the 1960s and 1990s the Department of Public Works in the District Government was responsible for capital projects—including schools, during which time the public school buildings fell into great disrepair. In the early 1990s, at the recommendation of the Federal City Council, DCPS obtained procurement authority for its own capital projects. When the Control Board assumed power in the mid to late 1990s school facilities became their responsibility, along with the public schools, and with the support of General Becton, their choice for superintendent, enlisted the assistance of the Army Corps of Engineers to manage school facilities. Over the past decade both DCPS and OPEFM slowly built up expertise in school facilities construction, modernization and repair. When school opens next fall the District will have a total of 31 new and fully modernized DCPS schools, 26% of all DCPS facilities, all opened since 2001 - - slightly more than half of them since 2007 under OPEFM. This is in addition to major building stabilizations affect all of the DCPS schools.

It is unclear what problem is being solved by consolidating capital agencies. There is concern that the public schools will not be as well served in a consolidated agency as in their own agency.

DC Public School Construction Authority Time Line

Pre - 1960s:	Federal Government Services Administration
1960s – 1990s:	DC Department of Public Works
1990s – 2007:	DCPS Office of Facilities Modernization (early assistance by the Army Corps of Engineers)
2007 – 2010:	OPEFM – DC Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization