

Better Buildings: Better Schools, Issue 58 January/February 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.**

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Last Week! Contest Ends March 7th- National Photo & Essay Contest about PK-12 Public School Building Conditions

Students, teachers, and community members are invited to submit their stories and photos at www.ThroughYourLens.org. By sharing what is seen every day at school, students and teachers will provide 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.

Selected photos and stories will be shown at a **special exhibition in Washington, DC** and many more entries will be **published** in a Through Your Lens book and online gallery. Five student winners will also receive a high-definition **digital camcorder!**

2011 Capital Budget Approved 2/15/2011

The D.C. Council of the Whole held a legislative meeting on the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) capital budget 2011 appropriations. The Council approved \$262 million dollars. Highlights of the meeting include:

- Rebuilding of Takoma Education Campus following the fire in Dec. 2010.
- \$2.5 million for the concept & design of Ballou High School.
- Muriel Bowser wants to utilize stabilization funds for Roosevelt High School.
- Marion Barry proposed that the CFO should not write school construction checks for projects that have not been approved by the Council.
- Harry Thomas voiced his concern of disparity in school construction in the city and the need for middle schools in ward 5. "Underground parking for some schools while others in this city don't have the basics."
- Jim Graham mentioned that it is important that Cardozo High School receive enough funds to completely rehabilitate the school.

[To see the OPEFM portion of the Council Hearing](#) forward to 27 minutes and 40 seconds into the video.

Neighborhood Schools: Reprieve for River Terrace

DCPS recently decided not to close River Terrace Elementary School. The proposal to close River Terrace brought up a number of questions about educational attendance rights and also points to a need for public discussion around the value of neighborhood schools.

Neighborhood boundary schools like River Terrace were designed to provide a walk-to education for almost every address within the District - - with shorter distances for elementary schools and increasing distances allowed for secondary schools. Having schools within walking distance offers convenience and financial savings for families and fulfills the city's responsibility to provide an adequate, free and accessible education to every child.

Because of its [unique location on an "island" encircled by highways and the Anacostia River](#), closing River Terrace would have left this unique neighborhood of about 800 densely packed row houses and a dozen small apartment buildings without **any** civic infrastructure: no post office, no recreation center, no library - - no public location at all. River Terrace is truly a school at the center of its community and the hub of the neighborhood in many ways—but its 2010-2011 enrollment is only 142 and it has been declining.

But these families are isolated from other nearby schools because of traffic and public transportation routes. Without a private car, parents would have had great difficulty taking part in activities at the consolidation school and the problems involved in taking toddlers on the school bus or picking up a child in an emergency would also have been challenging. The River Terrace school community is currently exploring possibilities for increasing their early childhood enrollment and holding on to their 6th grade students - - as happens at a handful of isolated Ward 8 schools. They are also working on strategies to attract out-of-boundary students who may want to share their unique small school on the edge of the Anacostia River.

After DCPS closed 23 schools in 2007-08, the existing network of by-right boundary schools has been stretched just about to the limit: if just a few more DCPS schools are closed, the District may have to start bussing students in order to make it equally possible for every child to get to a school that they have an absolute right to attend ([See map of DC ES students not within .5 miles of a DCPS or Public Charter School](#)). Without bussing, if more DCPS schools are closed, new laws may have to be imposed requiring charter schools to accept neighborhood students - - otherwise the city will not be able to provide a free and accessible education to every child in the District.

As an alternative to bussing, DCPS could look for fiscally responsible ways to maintain small schools with, for instance, shared administrators, leasing excess space or by scheduling itinerant teachers for specials classes (art, music, physical education, world languages). By developing policies that can economically support both neighborhood schools AND choice, the District should avoid the enormous expense, traffic congestion and pollution associated with school busses - - and our neighborhoods will be able to sustain core educational institutions that over the years form an important foundation for civic life.

How Much is Your State Spending on PK-12 Public School Construction Per Student?

In a recent report, [State Capital Spending on PK-12 School Facilities](#), the 21st Century School Fund examined each state's capital outlay from 2005 to 2008 for elementary and secondary public education facility construction and modernization and also surveyed every state on what share of these funds were provided from state sources as compared to local sources. The ***States at a Glance*** chart has state rankings and totals for average capital outlay per student, a state's percentage of capital outlay for school construction, and other information.

21CSF Helps Chicago Task Force on Educational Facilities - Update

The Illinois State Legislative Task Force on School Actions—closings, consolidations, phase outs, turnarounds, and capital investment has finished its information collection stage and prepared recommendations for public review. Key recommendations are for greater transparency in decision making and in doing educational facility planning with public input and participation. Hearings on the recommendations were held the last week of February.

The Task Force is made up by a 15 member committee and was created in early 2009 to help guide Chicago Public Schools in planning for PK-12 school closings, renovations and new construction. 21CSF is an advisor to the Task Force and among the key participants include [Designs for Change](#) and Grand Boulevard Federation who are partners from our national educational collaborative, [Building Educational Success Together](#) (BEST).

- [Review the recommendations, meeting agenda and notes.](#)
- [See a recent story in the Catalyst Magazine](#) for further details of the recommendations proposed for Chicago School Facilities.

For more information, contact Jackie Leavy (wleavy8396@aim.com), Pro Bono staff to Task Force—also long time BEST partner and advisor.

Call for Papers on School Facilities Issues

[The American Clearinghouse on Educational Facilities](#) is looking for original articles from a wide variety of interest areas regarding school facilities, including: Environmentally Sound Practices, Facility Design, Facility Improvement, Facility Maintenance, Student Learning, Facility Planning, Facility Construction, Facility Operations and Facility safety.

The deadline for submission is March 31, 2011. For more information contact, ortiz@acefacilities.org.