

Better Buildings: Better Schools, Issue 52 October/November 2009

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

H.D. Cooke Elementary at 2525 17th street, N.W in Ward 1 celebrated the complete modernization of the 100 year old H.D. Cooke building near Malcolm X Park. H.D. Cooke is one of seven new or fully modernized schools to open this fall. While the school looks and feels completely new, the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) stated the modernized structure reused more than 75% of existing walls, floors, and roof; and reuses more than 50% of existing interior non-structural elements.

The spirit of the original building shines through again with the re-discovery of the original multipurpose room put to new use as a dramatic media center with its original massive double-story columns restored and the huge skylight and perimeter galleries re-opened.

Many of the new classrooms take full advantage of the basic layout of spacious early 20th century classrooms improving on the generous natural lighting provided by large windows. The old cloak rooms allow ample square footage for locker and cubby areas that is critical for storing instructional materials. The 100 year-old hardwood floors were re-surfaced beautifully and put back into service.

A new front entrance meets front office functions without sacrificing the ornamental entrance and is ADA-accessible. The huge new auditorium/gymnasium/cafeteria addition should be a boon to the whole neighborhood particularly with the kitchen re-designed to make possible actual cooking on site. Along with the improved meals now available, the school also hopes to reduce cafeteria food waste by composting the waste to enrich the school garden. A multitude of new oak trees should rapidly provide shade to the parking and play areas - - another boon to one of the most densely populated, urban areas in the District.

H.D. Cooke serves 313 PS-5th students with a unique Spanish/English program and has room to enroll 129 more students.

DCPS Enrollment – Showing Growth

The October 2009 reported enrollment figures indicate that for the first time in nearly a decade, public school enrollment increased in the District. The publicly reported October counts for 2009-2010 show that public school enrollment increased by 3,430 students over last year's audited counts, an increase of 4.9 percent. The public charter schools increased by 9.1 percent and DCPS increased by 2.4 percent.

The 21st Century School Fund, Urban Institute, and The Brookings Institution are working with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to develop citywide public school enrollment projections for the 2010-2011 school year and a regular process for the development of single and multi-year enrollment projections.

School Facilities Photo Exhibit Opening a Success

Over 50 legislative staffers, students, parents, and advocates attended the opening reception for the Through Your Lens photo and essay exhibit at the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. Of the over 400 entries received from students, teachers, and community members in 23 states, photos and stories from 25 student and teacher finalists about their school building conditions were showcased in the Russell Building rotunda during the first week of October.

Attendees at the reception enjoyed talking to students from Washington D.C. and Baltimore, MD about their photos, stories, and experiences in their school buildings. Briauna Wills, a student at Baltimore Freedom Academy, sharply contrasted the positive academic opportunities at her school with the dismal building conditions and their negative impact on her education. Among other concerns, Briauna explained that "because of the lack of air conditioning and poor ventilation we often miss a lot of class time, especially when the seasons change." Erik Fatemi, who works on the Senate Appropriations Committee for Senator Tom

Harkin, a long-time advocate of a targeted federal role in school construction, discussed the importance of advocacy to raise attention about the condition of school facilities and the need for improved school buildings.

The photos and stories in the exhibit speak with clarity about our school building conditions around the nation and are especially relevant as Congress considers legislation for school modernization and repair. To view the virtual gallery and see how you can help spread the message about the importance of increased investment in school facilities, visit www.throughyourlens.org.

Federal School Construction Legislation Update

Legislation to provide federal support for school building improvements is moving forward in both chambers of Congress. The House of Representatives passed the [High Performance Green School Buildings Act HR 3221](#) in July 2009, which authorized federal funds to be paid directly to local school districts for school modernization, repair and renovation. However, the language from this bill was incorporated into the [Student Aid & Fiscal Responsibility Act](#) (Reauthorization of Higher Education Act), which passed the full House in late September. This bill directs \$4B in savings from changes in the student loan industry to PK-12 school building improvements in Title I school districts.

The Senate version of the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act is also expected to include funding for school construction, modernization, renovation, and repair with federal funds distributed to the states for allocation to local school districts based on the level of need for school improvements and wealth of students. Like much federal legislation, the Higher Education Act, is unlikely to be debated in the Senate until health care legislation is voted on by the full Senate. Once the Senate Higher Education bill passes, it will have to be reconciled with the House Higher Education legislation passed in September.

In addition the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$700M for school construction, renovation, and repair (following the language in [S1121, the School Building Fairness Act](#)) as part of the Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill passed prior to the August recess. Floor debate has not yet been scheduled for any FY10 Appropriations legislation.

For more information regarding federal school construction legislation, contact Marni Allen at mallen@21csf.org.

Only \$14 Million in ARRA Grant Funds Spent for K-12 Infrastructure

Of the \$58 billion dollars in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) awarded to states by the U.S. Department of Education, spending for \$14 billion was reported by October 15 (see required [expenditure report](#)). Only \$14 million dollars of infrastructure expenditures were reported for K-12 public school facilities. This is consistent with the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund applications, where only 3 states identified school facilities spending as part of their plan for Government Services Funds.

With the elimination of the nearly \$16 billion in dedicated school construction grant funds proposed for ARRA, states have used their stimulus funds for other educational purposes. Once again school districts, lacking funds, are deferring critical maintenance and repair improvements to existing buildings. ARRA provided some relief through \$22 billion in interest free bonds, which school districts have been eager to secure. Where school districts are able to incur more debt and have the ability to repay the principal, there has been more demand than supply for the allocations the states have had for the interest free Qualified School Construction Bonds (QSCB). In fiscally healthy districts, Build America Bonds, another ARRA reduced interest bond program, have been used where the QSCBs interest free bonds can not be secured.

The 21st Century School Fund tracks ARRA K-12 school facilities information including [articles in the media](#) and will continue to do so in the near future.