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## **America's School Infrastructure Needs a Major Investment of Federal Funds to Advance an Equitable Recovery.**

The federal government plays a small but significant role in funding public school operations and programs designed to even out disparities in student opportunity based on income, race, and ethnicity, and those facing students with disabilities. But no comparable federal program addresses the disparities in financing school construction and maintenance, leaving these significant costs to states and localities and tying schools' condition directly to the wealth of the surrounding community. Estimates suggest that American schools have hundreds of billions of dollars of unmet capital construction needs that local districts cannot make up. In recovery legislation Congress will soon consider, it should include a significant infusion of federal funds — at a minimum, the \$50 billion in grants proposed in President Biden's American Jobs Plan — to build and repair K-12 schools.

As a nation, we have not kept up with school maintenance. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to prevent the spread of virus by, for example, improving school ventilation systems and creating ways for students to be socially distanced, but these are only some of many significant repairs facing schools. Due in part to longstanding federal inaction, the estimated cost of bringing all schools to good condition had reached nearly \$200 billion by 2013, according to the U.S. Department of Education,[1] and is likely even higher today as a result of disinvestment since the Great Recession. One estimate puts the cost of needed ventilation system improvements alone at \$72 billion.[2] The need for improvements is particularly acute in schools with high populations of students from low-income families and of Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other children of color.

Fixing school buildings can improve both health and student learning, research shows, while also creating jobs. Better lighting, acoustics, and accessibility all help students learn. And modern heating, ventilation, and cooling systems can slow the spread of airborne diseases such as COVID-19. While the federal government has provided significant support for schools' increased operating costs during the pandemic — and to help children recover unfinished learning — support for school construction and other infrastructure needs is long overdue.

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