



CREATING GOOD JOBS, A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, AND A FAIR AND THRIVING ECONOMY

February 26, 2019

Representative Bobby Scott
Chairman, Education & Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member, Education & Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx,

As a coalition of the nation's largest labor unions and environmental groups, collectively representing millions of members and supporters, we write to express the BlueGreen Alliance's support for H.R. 865, Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2019.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)'s 2017 Report Card gave America's schools a "D+" grade. In the United States, some 50 million students attend almost 100,000 public schools in grades K-12. These school buildings are estimated to have a cumulative \$271 billion in deferred maintenance costs. But the Report Card also recognizes that these are just estimates, identifying a lack of strong data on school facilities. Even though there have been several reports over the last few years, the actual condition of school infrastructure in the U.S. remains difficult to quantify. What we do know for sure is that the condition of school facilities affects student attitudes, health, and achievement, and can also affect staff morale and retention.

Many of these facilities have maintenance issues that seriously affect student performance, and may have lasting negative health impacts on their occupants. Take one major issue with aging building stock is lead exposure from drinking water and paint: A report issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in July of 2018 found that 43 percent of surveyed school districts had tested for lead in the prior two years, and that 37 percent of those schools found elevated lead in their drinking water. Even very low levels of lead exposure can cause damage to the brain and other organs, resulting in developmental delays, IQ loss, and behavioral issues.

Modernizing school facilities also provides opportunities to reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions, and also improve the quality of indoor learning environments. The second-highest operating expenditure for schools is energy, with schools spending more than \$8 billion on energy every year. Green schools, which achieve the maximum level of water and energy efficiency and are built with the health of occupants in mind, utilize an average of 33 percent less energy and 32 percent less water, lowering utility costs of a typical green school by around \$100,000 annually. These savings can be achieved from a variety of efficiency initiatives such as energy efficient heating and AC systems, lighting, window replacement, water efficient fixtures, as well as obtaining LEED certification and choosing healthy building products.

School facilities affect the entire community. Schools can also be a way to demonstrate the effectiveness of green practices and energy efficiency to communities. Additionally, since school funding often comes mostly from property taxes, there is a large disparity between schools in high-income and low-income neighborhoods. The lowest quality facilities are often the least efficient. Therefore, not only will greening facilities impact achievement and attendance, it will also dramatically lower energy costs, freeing up much needed money.

Clearly, there is a major opportunity to overhaul our school infrastructure, which has the potential to improve the safety and health of our students, improve our communities, and reduce greenhouse gases, while creating quality, family-sustaining jobs at the same time. The Rebuild America's Schools Act provides this opportunity with a \$100 billion investment to address critical infrastructure needs in schools. This legislation would also create upwards of 1.9 million jobs and put Americans to work while ensuring labor standards are upheld.

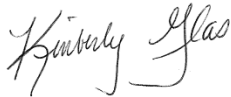
The Rebuild America's Schools Act achieves these ends by taking a four-pronged approach, including a grant program and a tax credit bond program; leveraging federal, state, and local resources; developing a comprehensive national database; and expanding broadband. We have already seen the positive impacts that creating space for an infrastructure database can create. For example, in Philadelphia, students and parents can use a smartphone application called Healthy Schools Tracker, which enables them to photograph and report issues in buildings directly to the city's chapter of the American Federation of Teachers. These problems can then be communicated to the school district so that the issues can be fixed before they become major repair projects. Since its release, almost 25 percent of some 300 schools in the district have reported an issue using the app.

Importantly, Section 304 of the legislation includes a Buy America provision, which requires projects funded under H.R. 865 use American iron, steel, and manufactured products. Additionally, Section 303 of the bill requires educational agencies funded by the legislation use a percentage of the funding on "green practices," like ensuring LEED certification. These critical elements of the Rebuild America's Schools Act ensure any school infrastructure project covered under the bill follow crucial high-road standards.

The state of America's schools is dire, and we need a robust set of solutions to repair our educational infrastructure, improve the health and safety of our students, help fortify our communities, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create quality, family-sustaining jobs. The Rebuild America's Schools Act is a critical step in moving these priorities forward. For these reasons, BlueGreen Alliance urges Congress to swiftly pass this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kimberly Glas".

Kim Glas
Executive Director
BlueGreen Alliance