



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

April 28, 2021

Representative Bobby Scott
Chairman
Education & Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Education & Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx,

As a coalition of some 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. 604, Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2021 (RRASA).

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)'s 2021 Report Card gives America's schools a "D+" grade, unchanged from the last report card four years ago. In the United States, some 50 million K-12 students and 6 million faculty and staff occupy 100,000 public schools. These school buildings are estimated to have a cumulative \$380 billion in deferred maintenance costs. The condition of school facilities affects student attitudes, health, and achievement, and can also affect staff morale and retention. As students, staff and teachers transition back into schools following COVID-19, it is more important than ever that schools are safe and healthy places for learning.

Many of these facilities have maintenance issues that seriously affect student performance, and may have lasting, negative health impacts on their occupants. 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 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.

Public schools are largely funded by property taxes, with major disparities between schools in high and low income neighborhoods. For example, facilities in low income areas are often the least efficient. Modernizing school facilities 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. 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. The Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act provides this opportunity with a \$130 billion investment to address critical infrastructure needs in schools. Recently, President Biden's American Jobs Plan proposed reducing the grant program from \$100 billion to \$50 billion. It is imperative that Congress restores this funding to a full \$100 billion in any infrastructure package. Bonds are heavily reliant on local property values, putting low-income areas at a disadvantage in this funding stream. This \$100 billion in grant funding is absolutely necessary for the low-income schools that need it the most to afford infrastructure repair.

Importantly, the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act also includes a Buy America provision in Section 305, which requires projects funded under H.R. 604 use American iron, steel, and manufactured products. Additionally, Section 304 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 RRASA ensure any school infrastructure project covered under the bill follow crucial high-road standards. BlueGreen Alliance research has found that with these standards, this legislation would create upwards of 1.9 million jobs and put Americans back to work.

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, strengthen our communities, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create quality, family-sustaining jobs. The Reopen and 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.



Jason Walsh
Executive Director BlueGreen Alliance