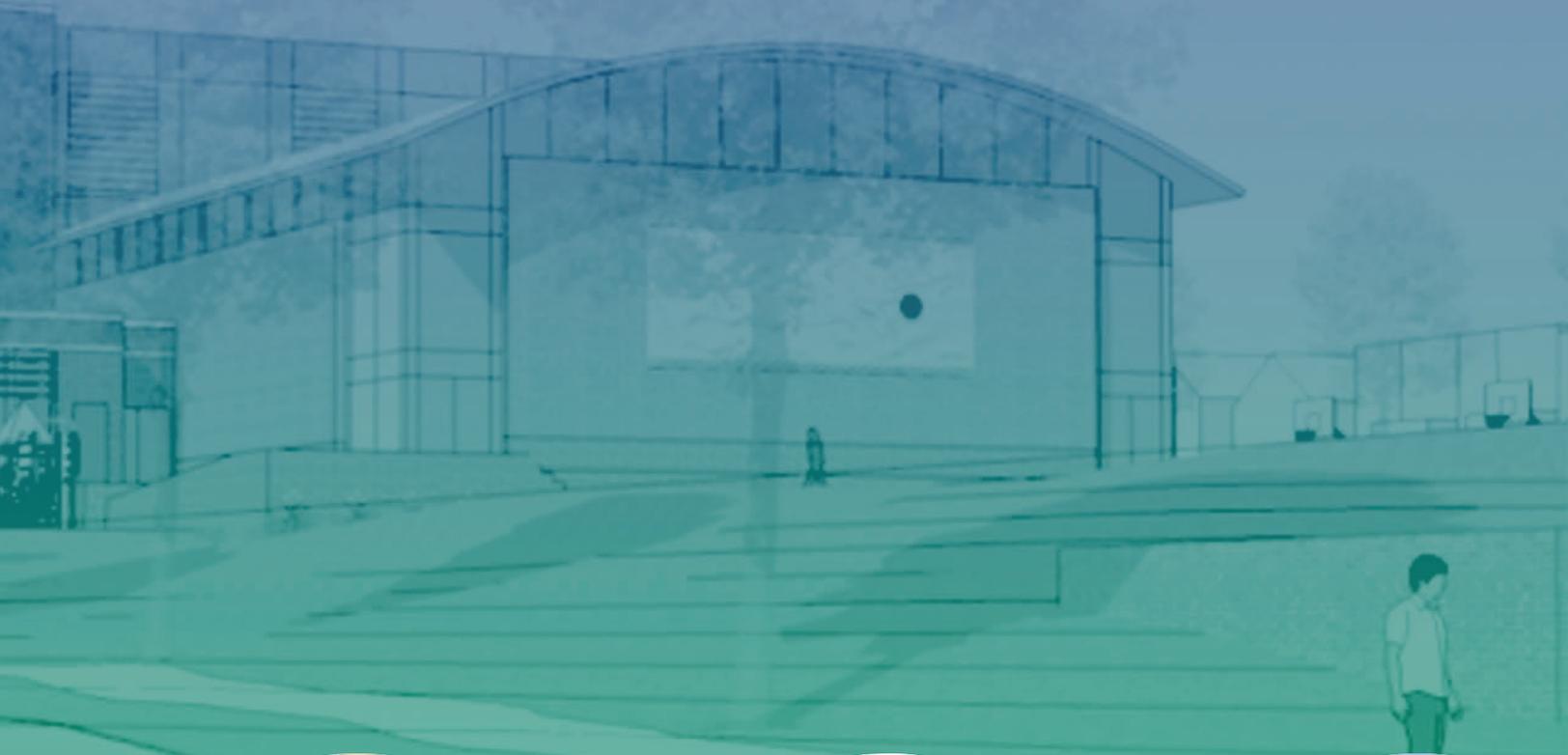


# Buildings for Academic Excellence

A Vision and Options to Address  
Deficient School Facilities in Baltimore City



# BUILDINGS FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: A Vision and Options to Address Deficient School Facilities in Baltimore City

A Report by the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland Foundation  
Education Reform Project

By Frank Patinella and Bebe Verdery • June 2010

The ACLU-MD Education Reform Project works to ensure that children in Maryland public schools, particularly those at risk of failure, are accorded an education sufficient to meet educational standards and lead productive lives. The Project advocates on a variety of education policy, legislative, and budget issues, including state and local funding of education, access to pre-Kindergarten, school facilities, high-stakes testing, and discipline issues, with a focus on Baltimore City Public Schools.

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Dedicated to the children of Baltimore City and the school staff who work daily to educate students and keep the buildings safe, warm, and inviting.

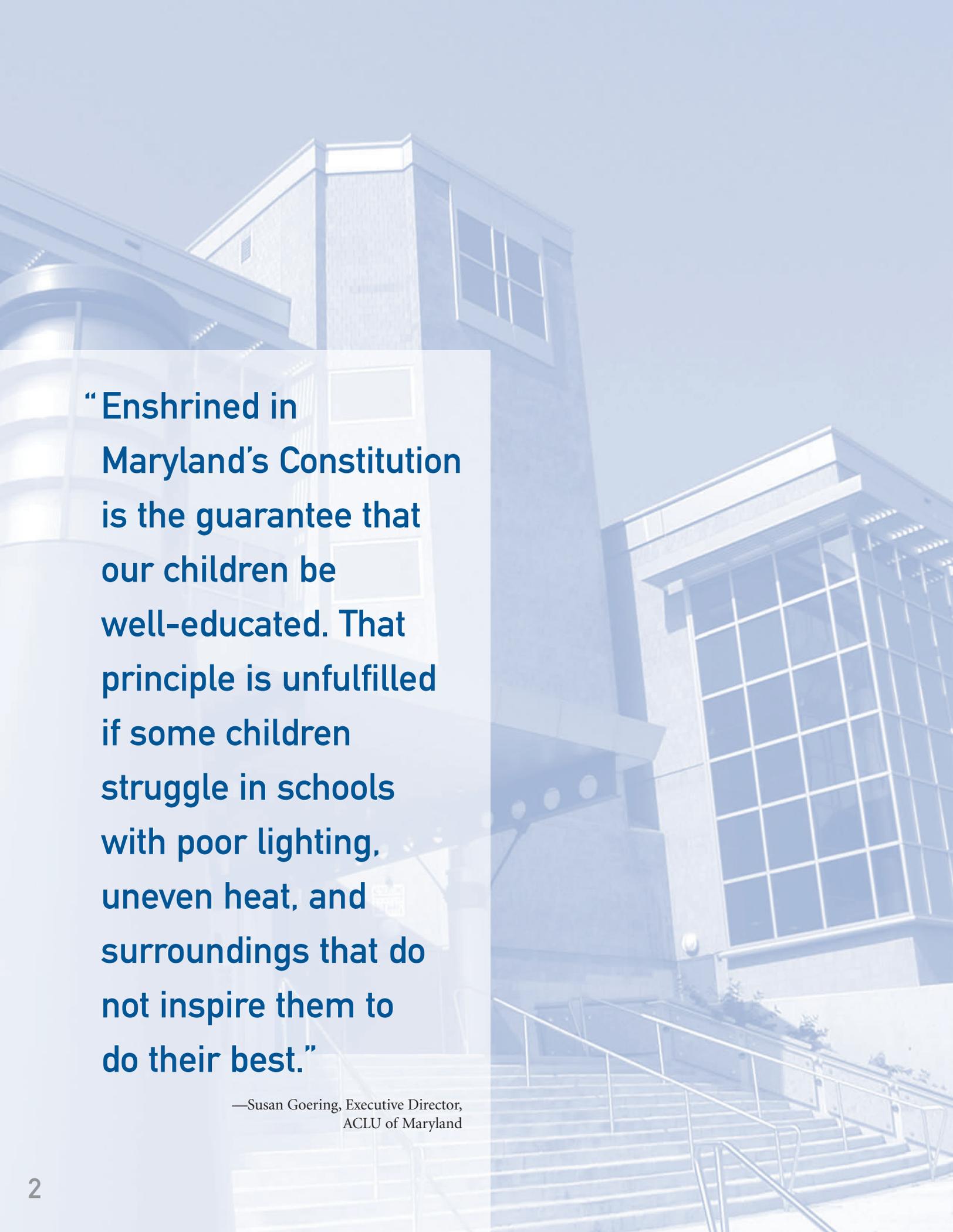
# Buildings for Academic Excellence

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## A Vision and Options to Address Deficient School Facilities in Baltimore City

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**“Enshrined in Maryland’s Constitution is the guarantee that our children be well-educated. That principle is unfulfilled if some children struggle in schools with poor lighting, uneven heat, and surroundings that do not inspire them to do their best.”**

—Susan Goering, Executive Director,  
ACLU of Maryland

# Executive Summary

Several years ago, Chris, a Baltimore City 9th grade student, visited a public school in a nearby suburb and was utterly shocked by what he saw. Unlike the common conditions in Baltimore City schools, this suburban school was inviting and warm: bright hallways, a modern computer lab, transparent windows, and a well-equipped library. The stark disparity in school facility conditions between the city and surrounding suburbs that Chris saw prompted him to become an education advocate for all Baltimore City school students. While his and other student efforts are critically needed, the broader Baltimore community must join him and face this glaring disparity.

**This report, *Buildings for Academic Excellence*, urgently asks city, state, and federal officials, and the greater Baltimore community, to act now to improve the substandard physical condition of city school buildings.** It is unacceptable - as well as unconstitutional - to deprive city students of adequate school facilities and an equal opportunity in education. The modernization of school buildings is integral to Baltimore's education reform effort. To help both students and teachers succeed, state and city leaders must make school facility improvements a higher priority.

## BUILDING ON THE ACADEMIC GAINS IN BALTIMORE CITY

The increased state funding for school districts as a result of the enactment of the Bridge to Excellence Act of 2002 ("Thornton"), has proven that wisely investing in education and implementing reforms, produce laudable and invaluable outcomes. Since the "Thornton" formula was enacted, Baltimore City students have been achieving at higher levels each year on standardized tests. Student enrollment and graduation rates are increasing, while dropout and absentee rates have fallen. However, teachers

and students are struggling to make these gains in deficient and unhealthy school facilities.

Studies have consistently shown that high quality school facilities have a measurable positive impact on student learning, attendance, and graduation rates. In Baltimore City, Digital Harbor High School and Abbottston Elementary School, which were recently renovated, demonstrate that modern and high quality infrastructure enhances academic performance.

## INADEQUATE SCHOOL FACILITIES ADVERSELY AFFECT EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN BALTIMORE CITY

Adequate science and computer labs, wired classrooms with modern technology for learning, well-equipped libraries and media centers, art and music rooms, and well-maintained fields and playgrounds for physical activities are critical to the academic, emotional, psychological, and physical development of students. Yet, most Baltimore City public schools are outdated and deficient, depriving many students and teachers of very basic needs such as functional heating, as well as adequate electrical and ventilation systems.

After controlling for variables such as socioeconomic status, studies have documented that school facilities in poor condition adversely affect student achievement, and hinder teacher retention and effectiveness. Further, older school buildings with faulty and inefficient systems can be a threat to the health and safety of students and school staff. Maryland's Constitution directs that a "thorough and efficient system of Free Public Schools" be established. A number of court decisions have concluded that an adequate education requires safe and healthy school buildings that support the academic curriculum demanded in the 21st century. Inadequate buildings deprive children of this fundamental right to educational opportunity.

### THE COMMUNITY WILL BENEFIT FROM NEW AND REHABILITATED SCHOOLS

In addition to improving student academic gains, a large investment in rehabilitating and building new schools in Baltimore City will help to stabilize neighborhoods by attracting investment from homeowners and commercial developers. Modernized school buildings will send the message that education is valued and restore hope in struggling communities across the city. A long-term commitment to improving public school infrastructure will also create many jobs in construction and related industries for Baltimore City, stimulating the local economy. Further, schools in good repair will save tens of millions in utility costs, now wasted due to inefficient and aging systems and drafty windows.

### CURRENT STATE AND CITY FUNDS ARE INSUFFICIENT TO ADDRESS THE \$2.8 BILLION NEED

Over the past 4 years, Baltimore City Public Schools have greatly improved their maintenance system for school buildings and process for implementing repairs and renovation projects. However, substantial funds are needed to bring Baltimore's schools into acceptable physical condition so that children can learn in an adequate environment. An estimated \$1 billion is required to address the backlog in needed repairs and more than 100 schools need a significant renovation or completely new building. Based on a comprehensive assessment for Baltimore City Public Schools' facilities master plan, approximately \$2.8 billion is needed to modernize all city school buildings. Over the past 5 years, the City and State have jointly contributed an average of \$55.4 million per year toward the improvement of city school facilities. While this represents an increase from previous years, current funding levels fall considerably short of addressing the need.

### STATE FUNDING DOES NOT TARGET THE GREATEST NEEDS

In 2004, the State reported that Baltimore City had the greatest need for state funding to bring school facilities to minimum adequacy. However, the State has not targeted the greatest facility needs as recommended by the state report. Baltimore City has received about a third of the state funding required to bring its schools to minimum adequacy, while other districts have received more than their state share. Large districts in Maryland tend to get similar amounts of state funding, regardless of the need and local capacity to invest in school facility improvements.

### THE CITY'S LOW WEALTH IS A LIMITING FACTOR

One might wonder why Baltimore schools need state assistance instead of relying primarily on local funding to improve its school buildings. The reason is simple; Baltimore City has neither the wealth nor the capacity to raise the wealth needed to fund the \$2.8 billion facilities master plan. Baltimore City contributes a significant portion of its capital budget toward school facility upgrades, as much or more than other counties. But that capital budget is small, due to the City's low wealth. While this report calls on the City to find innovative ways to finance and generate revenue to address its school facility deficiencies, the State must play a larger role in this effort due to Baltimore's limited capacity to borrow.

### OTHER STATES AND DISTRICTS HAVE PROVEN LARGE SCALE SCHOOL MODERNIZATION IS POSSIBLE

Some states and districts in the country have successfully upgraded their school facilities. This report highlights case studies of initiatives that have led to the comprehensive modernization of school facilities in several districts. If education is a priority for Baltimore City and the State, public officials and the city community at large must consider replicating the achievements of these districts.

- Connecticut funded 80% of the costs to modernize all of New Haven's school facilities.
- Greenville County Public School System in South Carolina used innovative financing structures to borrow the capital necessary to renovate or build new all 86 of its schools buildings within 5 years.
- The state of Georgia passed legislation to allow counties to hold referenda, giving communities the ability to vote on whether or not to increase their sales tax by 1% for school renovation or new construction. The referenda were successful in approximately 98% of Georgia's 159 counties and 21 cities, leading to unprecedented school modernization efforts.

## Recommendations

**The State of Maryland and Baltimore City must collaborate with City Schools to devise a plan in 2010 to fund the \$2.8 billion Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan.**

Greenville, South Carolina, New Haven, Connecticut, and Georgia have proven that there are many ways to approach modernizing school infrastructure on a large scale. Whether these solutions involved innovative financing, expanding revenue, or relying on a large influx of state dollars, these comprehensive efforts to improve school facilities required a firm commitment from public officials. While these models may not be an exact fit for Baltimore, city and state officials can learn from them and commit to working closely with City Schools to develop a feasible financing strategy to implement the \$2.8 billion facilities master plan, in the short term.

**The State should commit to bring all school buildings in the state up to at least minimal adequacy in the short term, and implement a rational allocation for capital funds that directs funding to the greatest needs. Distribution of state funds should factor the total facility needs and each district's ability to contribute.**

The State is not currently targeting capital funding to the greatest needs, which has contributed to the disparity seen in the condition of school facilities among districts statewide. Baltimore City and other low wealth districts have less local capacity to contribute capital funding to improve their facilities. To ensure that school facilities are “equalized” according to the mission of the State’s Public School Construction Program, the State must complete an assessment survey of all Maryland school facilities (to be compared to the survey released in February 2004), and develop a way of distributing capital funding according to the total facility needs and relative wealth of each district in Maryland.

**Baltimore City can increase its capital funding for school facility improvements and examine various options to expand revenue to support additional borrowing.**

Baltimore City and its school system have taken initial steps toward developing a report on innovative financing strategies, public-private partnerships, and other cost saving measures for improving school facilities. Many of the recommendations in the report can be implemented, but the City must also look at ways to increase revenue for school construction. The City can increase borrowing to renovate and build schools by increasing its debt limit to 3-4% of the assessed property tax base. Increasing the debt limit to this level is in line with maintaining a good bond rating, however, additional revenue will be needed to pay off the increased debt. The city should look at revenue options, including the use of projected slots revenue, for increasing borrowing for improving school facilities.

**Baltimore City, state, and federal leaders must advocate for a federal program to help low-wealth districts improve their school facilities.**

Traditionally, the federal government has played a very small role in improving school facilities. However, urban school facilities nationwide are in poor condition, having received much less investment than their suburban counterparts. National education and youth advocacy groups are working to bring more attention to this issue on Capitol Hill, in an effort to establish a federal program to provide funding for deficient school facilities nationwide. Due to the high level of need in Baltimore, city, state, and federal officials, as well as the greater Baltimore community, should collectively urge Congress to support federal funding for ailing school facilities in low-wealth districts.

# Building on Academic Success

## BALTIMORE CITY SCHOOLS SHOW MARKED IMPROVEMENT

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) have been undergoing extensive reforms and are showing a new upward trend in student achievement and success. Enrollment has increased by several thousand students in the past two years, ending many decades of pupil loss.<sup>1</sup> City Schools are replacing unsuccessful programs with innovative programs and bringing new resources and organizational partnerships into schools. In an effort to use school buildings more efficiently, academic programs have been reorganized and several school buildings have closed, lowering operating costs. Pre-kindergarten programs have expanded substantially and the percentage of city students beginning kindergarten “fully ready” has more than doubled in the last five years. First and second grade students exceeded the national average and achieved the city’s highest scores on the 2009 Stanford 10 standardized math and reading test. City elementary school students made significant gains on the Maryland School Assessments (MSA) in 2009, moving the system out of Corrective Action status with the State. For high school students, SAT scores rose by nine points in 2008 while the average in the country and in Maryland declined or remained flat from the previous year; the number of students taking the SAT test has grown by 71% since 2001. For school year 2008-09, there were 1000 fewer dropouts than there were two years ago.<sup>2</sup> These gains coincide with increased operating funding for City Schools under the State’s Bridge to Excellence commitment; they demonstrate that an investment in education brings real returns.

However, these gains and the possibility of continued progress are jeopardized by the poor condition of the school buildings themselves. Most city students and teachers are confined to old and outdated school facilities that undermine the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. Impressive academic successes contrast with the deficient, and in some cases, deplorable physical conditions of city school

buildings. In addition to lacking modern amenities such as adequate science labs, libraries, and media centers, many city schools lack even basic utilities like functional and adequate heating, cooling, and electrical systems. Keeping roofs from leaking, old boilers running, and computers powered are common problems in city school buildings. These substandard conditions are unacceptable. They have an adverse impact on student achievement, teacher retention, and the health and safety of those who spend most of the day in these buildings. They send a strong message to children that they, and their education, are not valued. Dilapidated schools are also an eyesore, undermining revitalization efforts in neighborhoods citywide and discouraging prospective homebuyers. The current condition of city school buildings hinders the growth of students as well as the vitality of Baltimore City.

## MODERN SCHOOL FACILITIES: A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF EDUCATION REFORM

In July 2007, City Schools estimated that they needed \$2.8 billion to provide new or renovated school facilities to support modern-day academic, safety, and health standards.<sup>3</sup>



*Children at Medfield Heights Elementary School in Baltimore City have become among the highest achievers in the city, and have outscored 80% of all Maryland elementary students on the state math and reading tests.*

Both the State and City have shown some commitment to improving school buildings and recent increases in city and state capital funding have led to the major renovations of two city high schools. The Mayor’s administration and City Schools have recently conducted a feasibility study to explore alternative financing options to increase the capacity to renovate and build new schools.

Despite some progress in recent years, the total need outlined in the City Schools’ facilities master plan and the rate in which buildings fall into disrepair greatly outpace current funding resources. Most of the city’s 162 school buildings are in poor condition and need extensive renovation or replacement. However, current annual government funding, even though it has been higher in recent years, typically allows only for the full renovation of a single large school building and a few dozen critical systemic repair and replacement projects in various schools throughout the city (i.e., boiler/HVAC, electrical, windows, fire safety, etc.). At this rate, Baltimore City principals will continue competing for scarce capital funding while most students and teachers struggle in unhealthy and inadequate classrooms and buildings for decades to come.

There can be no dispute – and numerous studies and court decisions have concluded – that an adequate education requires safe and healthy schools that support the academic curriculum demanded in the 21st century economy. City students are proving that they can make enormous strides in achievement under innovative reforms when the necessary investment is made. However, in the current inadequate buildings in which they struggle to perform, students and teachers can only accomplish so much. The quality of the schools, and their buildings, also contribute in large measure to the quality of life in Baltimore. The modernization of outdated and deficient school buildings must be part of education reform and the City’s revitalization plans to fully realize the potential of city students and Baltimore City as a whole.

“What you are doing collectively here in Baltimore is absolutely remarkable,”  
Duncan said.

“This is a great, great day for the city of Baltimore, a great, great day for the state, and for the country, but most important, for these children sitting here.”

—Arne Duncan, Secretary of the  
US Department of Education,  
*The Baltimore Sun*, July 22, 2009  
(Celebrating City Schools’ success on  
state standardized tests and its removal  
from “Corrective Action” status.)

# Proposal: Buildings for Academic Excellence

*Buildings for Academic Excellence* provides a detailed look into the challenges we face to improve school facilities and offers the Baltimore community solutions to ensure that all students and teachers in Baltimore City work in functional, healthy buildings, and learn in adequately equipped classrooms. This report presents case studies of initiatives that

**“All city schools should look as good as the new alternative school at North Avenue”**

—Mary Pat Clark, City Council Member,  
*The Baltimore Sun*, October 8, 2008

have led to the comprehensive modernization of public school buildings in several school districts around the nation. For the well-being and competitiveness of the city, all city residents and leaders have a vested interest in the education of our youth. This report offers recommendations and options for the Baltimore community to share, discuss, and act upon.

The Maryland Constitution directs that the General Assembly, “shall by Law establish throughout the State a thorough and efficient System of Free Public Schools; and shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance.”<sup>4</sup> This “thorough and efficient” system includes safe and educationally adequate buildings, as courts in a number of states with similar constitutional provisions have concluded.<sup>5</sup> In one of the most celebrated cases, *Abbott vs. Burke*, the New Jersey Supreme Court reasoned, “the condition of school facilities always has been of constitutional import. Deteriorating physical facilities relate to the State’s educational obligation, and we continually have noted that ade-

quate physical facilities are an essential component of that constitutional mandate.”<sup>6</sup> The court noted, “We cannot expect disadvantaged children to achieve when they are relegated to buildings that are unsafe and often incapable of housing the very programs needed to educate them.”<sup>7</sup> And, although the Maryland court decisions have focused primarily on operational funding needs, Maryland courts also have recognized that City Schools lack sufficient funding to address facility needs.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the Baltimore City Charter calls for “the passage of ordinances as it deems proper to maintaining the peace, good government, health and welfare of Baltimore City.”<sup>9</sup> To fulfill constitutional and charter decrees, city and state governmental leaders must make the improvement of city school buildings a priority, and work together to ensure that all city students and teachers have healthy and safe school buildings that maximize academic, emotional, social, and physical development. Our children are overcoming barriers and doing their part to improve their performance in school -- now the adults must step up to the plate to support them.



After a \$50 million renovation in 2002, Digital Harbor High School is one of only a few modernized high schools in Baltimore City. More students and teachers apply to Digital Harbor than any other high school in the city. Its popularity is attributed to the facility, which has modern computer rooms, a library and media center, and high tech labs.

# The Negative Impact of Deficient School Buildings

Schools that are in poor repair, with visible deficiencies such as broken windows, flickering lights, missing ceiling and floor tiles, and flaking paint, send the message to students that they, and their education, are not valued.<sup>10</sup> These conditions reinforce the harsh reality of unstable environments that many students endure in the city, naturally leading to greater apathy among students. Research has shown repeatedly that schools in poor condition stifle student achievement and increase absenteeism and dropout rates. Reports have also shown that school districts with old and deficient facilities face problems of attracting and maintaining high quality teachers. Moreover, at a rudimentary level, school facilities in poor condition are a threat to the health and safety of school staff and students.

## ADVERSE EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Numerous studies show that poor physical conditions of school buildings negatively impact student academic achievement. In a study commissioned by the ACLU of Maryland, research expert Dr. Glen Earthman outlined the school facility factors most related to school achievement. The Maryland Task Force to Study Public School Facilities noted the criteria priorities in their 2004 report.

The categories of facility deficiencies and conditions that have the most demonstrable impact on student achievement are: **Human Comfort (Temperature Control), Indoor Air Quality, Lighting, Acoustical Control, and Secondary Science Laboratories.**<sup>11</sup>

**Human Comfort (Temperature Control).** A report by the New York Commission on Ventilation as far back as 1931 showed that the thermal environment in classrooms had a significant impact on student achievement.<sup>12</sup> Over the next 80 years, many follow up studies have confirmed these findings and further suggest that the thermal environment is the most important environmental factor that impacts student academic achievement. Student productivity, efficiency, and test scores have been found to be significantly less in classrooms that were outside of the human comfort zone (~67-74°F).<sup>13,14</sup> Also, students in buildings without air conditioning perform lower on tests than students in air-conditioned buildings.<sup>15,16,17</sup> There is also evidence that suggests that the thermal environment has a cumulative effect; the longer students attend an air-conditioned building, the higher their achievement scores will be over time.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to regulating the thermal environment, HVAC systems also control Indoor Air Quality (IAQ). Numerous studies have indisputably shown the deleterious effects that

**“There is sufficient research to state without equivocation that the condition of the building in which students spend a good deal of their time learning does in fact influence how well they learn.”**

—Dr. Glen Earthman, Expert on School Facilities,  
Professor Emeritus, Virginia Polytechnic Institute

“My school looks and feels like a prison.”

— Baltimore City Student

*This Baltimore City high school is one of the 70% of facilities in poor condition.*



“It looks like a university.”

— Harford County Student

*The new Bel Air High School in Harford County opened in 2008.*

There’s nothing that speaks to the expectation that we have of our children quite so much as the condition of the buildings in which learning and teaching take place.

—Martin O’Malley, Governor, State of Maryland, *The Baltimore Sun*, January 18, 2008

poor IAQ has on the health of students and teachers, which inevitably has a negative impact on academic achievement (discussed in section, “Threat to Health and Safety”).

**Adequate Lighting.** Adequate lighting in classrooms is the second most important environmental factor to optimal student achievement. Students in modern classrooms that received substantial natural daylight progressed significantly faster in math and reading than students exposed to much smaller amounts of daylight.<sup>19</sup> The students in modernized classrooms with the greatest amount of light scored between 7%-18% higher on tests. Higher student absentee rates have also been correlated with other facility deficiencies such as poor lighting and inadequate ventilation.<sup>20, 21</sup>

**Acoustical Environment.** If students cannot hear well, it is common sense to conclude that they could become frustrated or get distracted, and miss important lessons in the classroom. Noise distraction in the classroom has been correlated with lower achievement.<sup>22</sup> Mitigating distracting noise from students in gymnasiums, music rooms, crowded hallways and classrooms is possible. And loud noises from cars and outside activity coming in through windows that are open due to a lack of air-conditioning can certainly be controlled.

**Secondary Science Laboratories.** In secondary schools, high school students are expected to develop skills in science.

Reports have illustrated that student academic achievement suffers in schools that lack adequate science labs.<sup>23, 24</sup> Even elementary-aged students, who attended schools inadequately equipped for science lessons and projects, were found to have lower achievement. In its most recent facilities master plan, City Schools reported that science labs were lacking and that current facility conditions do not support modern academic programs.<sup>25</sup>

Related to its impact on academic achievement, school facilities in disrepair and use of temporary buildings instead of permanent structures, have been correlated with an increase in student drop-out and absentee rates.<sup>26</sup> In addition to more than 100 school buildings in poor condition, City Schools currently use 211 relocatable or modular classrooms, most of which —by default— have become permanent structures.<sup>27</sup>

Most students in Baltimore City attend one of the schools reported to be in poor condition, including many that lack sufficient natural daylight and adequate ventilation. Old boiler systems in many schools distribute the heat unevenly throughout the buildings, making some classrooms too cold and others too hot. Temperatures in the warm months are typically far above the human comfort zone, due to the lack of air conditioning in most city schools. Implementing a comprehensive school facilities modernization plan could significantly improve student attendance and achievement, and reduce the dropout rate.



*In some Baltimore City high schools, the science lab is completely inoperable or nonexistent. In other schools, the science labs are commonly inadequate to support the curriculum.*

## DIFFICULTY IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TEACHERS

Studies also show that poor physical conditions in schools adversely affect teacher satisfaction, retention, and success. Not surprisingly, teachers who work in facilities in disrepair are more likely to leave due to poor working conditions. Surveys in Chicago and Washington, DC, found that more than 40% of teachers who rated the condition of their school with a C or below, considered changing schools, and 30% thought about leaving teaching due to poor conditions.<sup>28</sup> Baltimore schools still face challenges in attracting and retaining high quality teachers. Though the percentage of highly qualified teachers in City Schools increased sharply in 2008-09, the figure still stands at only 69%.<sup>29</sup> Nineteen of Maryland's school districts have at least a 90% highly qualified teacher population, and the remaining 4 districts have at least 80%. Improved facilities are an obvious way to attract more highly qualified teachers and improve teacher retention in City Schools.

## A THREAT TO HEALTH AND SAFETY

Baltimore's school buildings average 40 years in age and many are equipped with outdated and faulty systems. (The State "updates" the age of a school building when a certain percentage of that building is renovated. The actual age of construction of city school buildings is considerably greater than forty years.) An adequate ventilation system, which filters various contaminants from the air, is of vital importance to the health of those who spend a lot of time in any building. Proper ventilation systems prevent the accumulation of contaminants that come from people's exhalations and skin, building materials and cleaning products, human care prod-

ucts such as shampoo and deodorant, and pathogens that reside in carpets and bathrooms. Schools are on average more densely populated than other buildings, giving them a greater need for adequate ventilation systems.

Inadequate ventilation systems can lead to poor Indoor Air Quality (IAQ), which is the greatest health threat to those that teach and learn in school buildings. Poor IAQ can lead to sick building syndrome and exacerbate asthma, which has been linked with a decrease in student and teacher productivity and increased absences.<sup>30, 31</sup> Baltimore City students have a higher rate of asthma than children statewide and 80% percent of students enrolled in Baltimore City's Children's Health Initiative Program suffer from asthma.<sup>32</sup> High temperatures also pose a health risk to school staff and students during the summer months.

A good central air-conditioning system would mitigate the ill effects of poor IAQ. School facilities in Anne Arundel and Howard counties are fully air-conditioned, compared to only half of school buildings in Baltimore City.<sup>33,34</sup> City Schools have estimated that it would cost about \$276 million to retrofit all city school buildings for air conditioning, not including the existing older air conditioning systems in school buildings that do not work properly and require ongoing maintenance.

Potable water, fire safety, adequate lavatories, and security systems are also of critical concern when considering the

**"I can take the time to prepare a terrific lesson plan, accounting for different learning styles, and improve upon previous lessons. I can spend hours preparing materials for an engaging hands-on activity. But none of this really matters to students when it's above 90 degrees in the classroom."**

—Baltimore City School Teacher



*Many city schools have make-shift ventilation systems and air conditioning units. Many windows are broken or do not open. Also, faulty heating systems in schools make some classrooms too hot while others are too cold.*

**Approximately 28% of high school students in Baltimore City reported having been diagnosed with asthma. Poor indoor air quality, which can exacerbate symptoms of asthma, is the greatest health risk to students and teachers.**

—Centers for Disease Control,  
2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

health and safety of students and teachers. Water fountains in just about all of Baltimore City public schools have been completely shut off due to old plumbing systems that have not been abated of harmful contaminants such as lead. Systemic renovations and repairs related to fire safety at schools are also common items on City Schools' request list for infrastructure funding each year.

### **A BARRIER TO THE REVITALIZATION OF BALTIMORE CITY**

The quality of local schools is a significant factor in families' decisions about where to live,<sup>36</sup> and businesses' decisions about where to locate. Unattractive school buildings with asphalt playgrounds may be the first and last image that potential families and businesses have of a community and will likely send them toward other choices. Over the past decade, cities have experienced an influx of new residents and families seeking a more exciting living experience and proximity to their jobs. Many young professionals continue to move into Baltimore City; however, most are not choosing to send their children to City Schools. Many feel compelled to leave the city or send their children to non-public schools in search of better educational options. New or fully renovated school buildings will welcome families and businesses to Baltimore neighborhoods, attracting and keeping them in the city.



*This relocatable classroom or "modular," built with a steel frame on concrete slabs, was supposed to be for temporary use while City Schools await funds for the renovation of the main school building. As of November 2009, 211 moduls are being used by City Schools*

# Success Through Modernization

The investment in modernizing schools pays off in gains in student achievement and community pride. In 2003, Digital Harbor High School was completely renovated for approximately \$50 million. This facility – one of the few modernized schools in the city – has received the greatest number of student applications of any high school, 2002 through 2008. More than any other reason, students and teachers are drawn to the school’s modern facility, which includes wired classrooms, high tech computer and science labs, and a media center – not to mention the working heating and cooling system. The building’s previous tenant, Southern High School, had a graduation rate below 30% and a dropout rate of 16.1%. Since the renovation, Digital Harbor boasts a graduation rate close to 90% and a 3.3% drop out rate.<sup>37</sup>

A similar encouraging outcome can result from even a moderate investment. Abbottston Elementary School was renovated in 2004 for \$6.4 million. Prior to the renovation, only 6.7% of 5th graders at Abbottston were ranked as “Advanced” in reading on the Maryland State Assessments (MSA). In MSA Math, none of the 5th graders scored in the Advanced category in 2003. Abbottston’s academic progress has increased exponentially since the renovation. In school year 2008-09, Abbottston became the leading city school in MSA Reading with 95% of 5th graders ranked Advanced. In Math, 36% of 5th graders scored in the Advanced category, 56% Proficient, and only 8% Basic. While a number of factors impact student achievement, school leaders credit the renovation, and the message of success it sent, as an integral part of the school’s progress. Abbottston’s renovation and subsequent gains made the school an ideal site for a City Schools press event in July 2009. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan joined city and state leaders to celebrate the city’s academic accomplishments.

Nearly 30 elementary and middle school buildings need a “moderate” renovation, like the one that Abbottston received. Approximately 90 elementary/middle schools require “major” renovations, and more than 20 are in such poor condition that

they need to be completely replaced with a new building. Major renovations of two large high schools, Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School and Carver Vocational Tech, are near completion. About 20 additional Baltimore high schools need a moderate to major renovation. Further, at least three high schools are unsalvageable and need to be replaced.

The enthusiasm and academic gains shown at Digital Harbor and Abbottston could ripple across Baltimore City, if other school buildings were renovated or rebuilt. However, the enormous immediate need and the rate in which city schools continue to fall into disrepair greatly outpaces current government funding for school renovations. At the current pace, fully modernized city school buildings will never be realized and gains in achievement will continue to be undermined by deficient physical facilities. City Schools need an innovative and comprehensive funding approach that allows for a timely and full modernization of school facilities citywide.



*Abbottston Elementary School, with a 90% Free and Reduced Meal student population ranks in the top 5% of elementary schools in Maryland. “Before the renovation, the windows were cloudy and the halls were so dark. The new windows really brighten up the classrooms. And the kids love their school building,” says Principal Angela Faltz.*

# Benefits of Revitalized School Buildings Transcend Classrooms

## UPLIFTING COMMUNITIES AND LONG-TERM ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Schools are commonly viewed as the anchor and one of the most important institutions in any city neighborhood. Schools are beacons of hope for children in Baltimore communities where drugs and violence are sometimes prevalent. As students make their way to school, vacant housing, trashed alleys, and empty lots are common sights along the way. City school buildings in poor repair reaffirm the message that children's education and future are not valued. Modernized school facilities can boost morale among students, teachers and school staff, as well as the community at large. Attractive, functional buildings can be used for neighborhood events and services to build stronger communities.



*At Barnard Elementary School in Washington, DC, teachers and students worked to install a rain garden to mitigate runoff and enhance the grounds of their newly renovated school. Leaders in Washington, DC, committed to a \$3.5 billion school facility modernization plan as part of an aggressive education reform strategy. The new and rehabilitated school buildings bring a sense of renewal into historic communities and neighborhoods burdened with disinvestment.*

A comprehensive modernization of school buildings could bring long economic benefits for Baltimore City. In addition to the benefits of improving the education of the city's future workforce, rehabilitated schools will enhance neighborhood revitalization efforts in all areas of the city by increasing curb appeal and attracting homeowners, families, and investors. Newer and middle class city residents, who often seek private school options for their children, may be attracted to City Schools' many new and innovative educational opportunities. Transformation schools and charter schools are being introduced every year and many of the established schools in the city have solid reputations.<sup>38</sup>

The enrollment of more middle-income families in urban schools can bring large academic gains for Baltimore City. In recent years, several school districts have seen higher academic scores as a result of their efforts to increase the percentage of middle-income students in their schools.<sup>39,40</sup> In Wake County, North Carolina, which includes the City of Raleigh, about 64% of the low-income high school students passed the state's End-of-Course Exams in 2005. Less than 49% of low-income high school students passed in Durham and Mecklenburg Counties, where school districts did not make a concerted effort to integrate middle-income students.

Coupled with reforms and academic gains, the restoration of school buildings could encourage families to choose or remain in City Schools. Moreover, Baltimore City could realize a significant jump in academic achievement among low-income students, and ultimately, significant progress could be gained in the effort to stabilize and restore the economic vitality of city neighborhoods.

## A LARGE BOOST IN LOCAL JOBS

Baltimore City continues to feel the burden of the ailing economy as unemployment remains high. In the midst of the city's renaissance, revitalization efforts and development in Baltimore have slowed. Since the onset of the recession, con-



*Waverly Elementary/Middle School will be the first new school built in nearly two decades.*

struction jobs shrunk about 1.4 million nationwide.<sup>41</sup> In September 2009, the Associated General Contractors of America reported a 12 percent decline in construction jobs in Baltimore over the past year, according to an analysis of federal employment data.<sup>42</sup> Investing in a comprehensive school modernization initiative in Baltimore City will create many local jobs in the construction sector and produce long-term benefits by building quality learning environments for future generations.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the nationwide economic downturn, Baltimore City is faring better than the national average as reported by the Brookings Institution in July 2009.<sup>44</sup> There is no certainty about the economic recovery; however, Baltimore City has the opportunity to stimulate the local economy by investing in school infrastructure. Construction costs for materials and labor have decreased significantly since development has slowed.<sup>45</sup> Every state in the country reported winning bids 5% to 12% below the estimate on construction jobs during the first round of federal stimulus funding. Contractors are bidding low and materials are being sold at cheaper costs as demand languishes. Also, modernized schools will greatly reduce the school system's expenditures on utility bills, which are very high at many schools, due to inefficient heating systems, old roofs, and drafty windows.

**“The disinvestment seen in school facilities in lower income and minority urban areas is yet another factor continuing to drive families with children from core cities and older suburbs; these families are seeking better schools for their children and the public investment that helps support them.”**

— Mary Filardo  
21st Century School Fund

# School Building Conditions, a Comprehensive Plan, and a Lack of Funding

## CITY SCHOOL BUILDING CONDITIONS: A STATE OF CRISIS

Baltimore City Public Schools manage 162 buildings and have the oldest schools in the state. Nearly 45% of Baltimore’s schools were built during the 1960s or before.<sup>46</sup> Another 33% of Baltimore’s schools were built 30-40 years ago. Just 3% of city schools have been newly renovated in the past 10 years. Approximately 70% of the buildings are judged to be in “poor” condition, by industry standards.<sup>47</sup> Over the decades, inadequate funding has mostly performed a stopgap function -- allowing for limited repairs of critical systemic facility deficiencies to keep the buildings minimally functional. Compared to other districts, Baltimore City school buildings are lagging far behind in terms of basic health and safety measures, not to mention the equipment and facilities necessary to meet minimally adequate academic standards.

Unlike their suburban counterparts, city students typically attend old schools, surrounded by concrete, with damaged and opaque windows that don’t open. Some of the doors are damaged and/or do not shut securely. In many schools, the custodians’ hard work in cleaning the building and buffing the floors is barely noticeable as students make their way through dimly lit hallways. Depending on the season, teachers often struggle to engage drowsy children due to the exces-

sive heat, and faulty boiler systems compel some children to wear coats during class in the winter. Old lead plumbing has forced City Schools to restrict the use of water fountains and instead provide bottled water. And while students in other Maryland districts enjoy adequate accommodations to support academics and extracurricular activities, many city students have to learn in inadequate science labs (if any exist at all), outdated computer labs, and libraries without media resources. Further, city students have an extra hurdle to jump to compete with their suburban counterparts in sports, because they are forced to use gymnasiums in disrepair and barren athletic fields.

## CITY SCHOOLS DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE FACILITIES PLAN

In 2007, City Schools developed a Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan, which included an assessment of the condition and renovation needs of each school.<sup>48</sup> The plan, *Facility Solutions*, called for the investment of \$2.7 billion over 10 years to modernize and reconfigure school buildings. The 2010 master plan, which will be released for school year 2010-11, has estimated that the cost has increased to \$2.8 billion.<sup>49</sup> On a more fundamental level, the plan revealed that over \$1 billion was needed immediately for standard repairs of basic building systems. These are systemic items related to safety and health that deprive children of basic human and academic needs, including heat in the classrooms, roofs that don’t leak, electrical systems that can handle computers, windows that open, and doors that lock.

In addition to aligning City Schools’ facilities upgrades with educational reform initiatives, the plan set goals to convert various elementary and underachieving middle schools into K-8 programs and to create smaller schools by co-locating programs in larger buildings. And in response to concerns from the State’s Interagency Committee on School Construction about the city’s enrollment loss and excess

**TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF CITY SCHOOLS’ COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES MASTER PLAN<sup>50</sup>**

28 New or Replacement Schools	
69 Major Renovations	
46 Moderate Renovations	
5 Minor Renovations	
14 Buildings Needing General Maintenance	
<b>TOTAL ESTIMATED COST</b>	<b>\$2.8 BILLION</b>

facility space, City Schools initiated a process to evaluate and close school buildings in order to “right-size” its inventory. To date, eight school buildings have been closed and dozens of schools have converted to more promising K-8 grade configurations. David Lever, Director of the State’s Public School Construction Program, and Nancy Grasmick, Maryland’s State Superintendent of Schools, have stated that City Schools have made tremendous progress in reducing excess space and improving the management of construction projects and maintenance processes.<sup>51</sup>

Updated in August 2009, the new facilities master plan, *Expanding Great Options*, combines new educational reforms and school facility improvements. The new plan outlines a blueprint for the placement of additional programs, ensuring a geographic distribution of quality programs throughout the city so that families can choose from a range of educational options in their own community.<sup>52</sup> City Schools intend to use their limited capital funds to upgrade facilities in conjunction with the development of these new and innovative school programs.

In addition, school administrators want to prioritize *Career and Technology Education* (CTE) programs but are hampered by limited capital funding for equipment, technology, and facility upgrades. CTE programs prepare city students for careers and post-secondary educational options through a variety of strategies that include job readiness skills and career awareness, exploration, and preparation. Of the 24,000 city high school students, over 5000 are enrolled in 118 CTE programs.<sup>53</sup> The 93% graduation rate of students enrolled in CTE is higher than the state’s graduation average of 85.2%.<sup>54</sup> For school year 2009-2010, Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School had nearly 2000 more student applicants than it could accept. Limited funding for facility improvements is a major obstacle to the expansion of CTE.

While the development of new school academic programs in Baltimore City is an improvement, most are being located in buildings that cannot fully support their academic goals. It is imperative for the \$2.8 billion school facilities master plan to be funded for City Schools to develop high quality educational programs across the district.

### CURRENT FUNDING IS INADEQUATE TO CREATE BUILDINGS FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

City Schools receive funding primarily from the City and the State to improve its school buildings.<sup>55</sup> Over the past five years, FY06-FY10, the City’s contribution for school infrastructure through its Capital Improvement Program has averaged \$18.6 million per year.<sup>56</sup> The State’s contribution

**If current funding trends continue, Baltimore City students will never have high quality school buildings.**

#### AVERAGE CAPITAL FUNDING FOR CITY SCHOOLS PER YEAR (FY06-10)

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City: \$18.6 Million

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State: \$36.8 Million

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Federal: \$1.5 Million

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**Total: \$56.9 Million Per Year**

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**With only \$56.9 million per year, it would take 50 YEARS to finance the \$2.8 billion school facilities master plan. A new approach is needed.**

has been approximately \$36.8 million per year.<sup>57,58</sup> From city, state, and federal sources, Baltimore schools have received a combined average of \$57 million per year for improving buildings over the past five years.

Funding for school buildings began to increase in FY06 after decades of neglect; sadly, even with funding at its highest levels in decades, current funding falls far short of what Baltimore City schools need to provide for the basics of a quality education. With an immediate need for hundreds of millions of dollars, it is clear that \$57 million per year does not begin to address the need.

City schools are falling into disrepair more quickly than repairs can be made. Under the current system, city students and teachers will continue to be subjected to inadequate conditions, undermining improvements in student achievement and continuing to limit the potential of city students. The state, city, and federal governments must increase the funding available to City Schools so that these critical renovations can take place.

# State Funding Has Not Been Directed Toward Greatest Need

## STATE SURVEYS ALL BUILDINGS AND ASSESSES THE NEED

State studies confirm what the City Schools' master plan found – City Schools need substantial funds to provide minimally adequate physical facilities. In February 2004, a Task Force to Study Public School Facilities, headed by State Treasurer Nancy Kopp (Kopp Task Force), reported that \$3.85 billion (in 2003 dollars<sup>59</sup>) was needed to bring all Maryland school buildings to minimum adequacy.<sup>60</sup> The task force recommended that “addressing the facility needs identified by the Facility Assessment Survey, at a minimum over the next eight years should be a goal of the State and local governments.” Even under standards that concededly “clearly did not encompass many of the elements that most school systems – as well as most parents, teachers, and students – believe are necessary for a good education,” Baltimore City was estimated to need \$571 million for school facilities to reach minimum adequacy.<sup>61,62,63</sup> (See Appendix for statewide cost estimates and a breakdown of Baltimore City deficiencies). In August 2004 the State Superintendent testified that at least \$1 billion in additional funding would be required to bring city facilities to adequacy.<sup>64</sup>

The Kopp Task Force also examined the ability of each district to finance its school facility improvements, and what percentage the State should bear.<sup>65</sup> Out of the total needs assessed, the task force recommended that the State would need to devote approximately \$2 billion as its share of the total \$3.85 billion required to bring all school facilities in Maryland up to minimum standards. Local districts were to be responsible for a portion of the cost of facility upgrades, based on their relative wealth. The task force concluded that Baltimore City, due to its low wealth, was capable of funding only 4% of the estimated cost (See Appendix for state share of all districts).

Notwithstanding its conclusions regarding county wealth and capacity, however, the task force recommended retaining the State's policy that no less than 50% of costs on a facility

improvement project would be covered by the State, a “floor” for state funding.<sup>66</sup> That means that the State would continue to fund at least 50% of the cost of capital projects even in counties with much greater wealth and capacity to fund their own projects.

Based on the task force's report, the State enacted the Public School Facilities Act of 2004, which recommended that at least \$2 billion in state funds (\$250 million per year for 8 years) be invested into improving school infrastructure statewide. The State has met the Kopp Task Force's goal of allocating \$250 million per year, since 2006. State school construction funding for all Maryland districts has averaged \$317.4 million per year for FY06-FY10, compared with \$195.3 million for the previous 5 years.

This increased funding is deprived of its most efficient effect, however, because state capital dollars have not been targeted to the defined need. A school system's allocation from the State is not based on its overall school construction funding needs or its local capacity to fund school construction. The distribution of dollars since the Kopp Task Force's survey is a clear illustration of this mismatch of funding and needs.

Chart 1 shows the minimum adequacy need found by the Kopp Task Force survey, with the state cost share for each district. Baltimore City, due to its high need and relative low wealth, requires the largest contribution from the state in order to meet the State's goal that school buildings are safe and adequately equipped for learning. Chart 1 then shows the distribution of state funds to districts since the Kopp Task Force's report in 2004.

## STATE NEGLECTS THE GREATEST NEEDS

While many districts have received most of the state funding that they need to achieve minimal adequacy since the task force released its report, Baltimore City and Prince George's County have only received about 1/3. Districts with high need have received insufficient funding. Because state fund-

ing has not been targeted to established need, the State has not successfully met its goal of bringing school facilities to even minimum adequacy. Indeed, the target for minimal adequacy is receding in Baltimore City, as funds fail to keep pace with growing needs. Consequently, state funding is not closing the gaps as intended but exacerbating them. The State continues to give similar amounts of capital funding to Maryland's largest school districts, regardless of each district's defined need outlined in the Kopp Task Force. Each year, City Schools continue to fall into disrepair while struggling to use their limited funds wisely to keep schools open and functionally safe.

**STATE GIVES SIMILAR AMOUNTS TO LARGE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEMS, REGARDLESS OF NEED OR WEALTH**

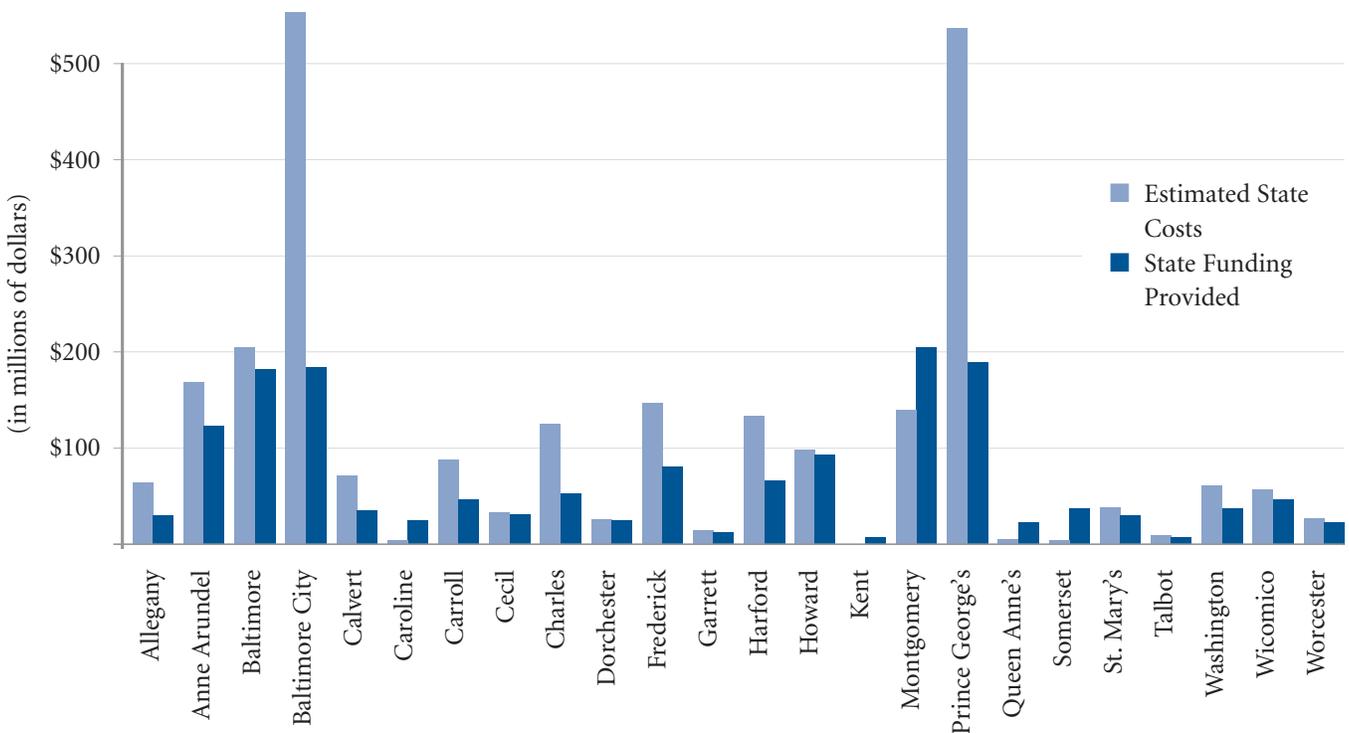
The largest school districts in Maryland each receive roughly the same amount of school construction aid from the State, putting Baltimore City, with its high need, at a greater disadvantage. Chart 1 indicates that the State contributes a similar amount of funding for school facilities in the larger juris-

dictions. The distribution of state capital funding to districts is not based on a formula, on overall defined need, or on local capacity to pay for new schools or renovations. Giving roughly equal amounts of funding to the large districts severely disadvantages those with high need (Baltimore City and Prince George's) and low wealth (Baltimore City).

In order to gauge the impact of state capital funding on the condition of school facilities, the Public School Facilities Act of 2004 requires that the State Department of Education "adopt regulations that provide for periodic surveys of the condition of public school facilities in Maryland at least every 4 years." The Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2009 reiterated the requirement for the survey to be completed.<sup>67</sup> There is no doubt that the increase in state capital funding has improved school buildings. However, the goal of "equalizing" educational facilities statewide remains unmet and school building conditions in high need districts such as Baltimore City and Prince George's County, are still far from meeting minimally adequate standards. The State must complete the follow up survey to guide the capital funding decisions of the Interagency Committee on School Construction.

**CHART 1. ESTIMATED STATE FUNDING NEEDED TO BRING SCHOOL FACILITIES TO MINIMUM ADEQUACY COMPARED TO THE ACTUAL FUNDING TO EACH DISTRICT FOR FY06-10**

*This chart shows the Kopp Task Force's assessment of the amount of state funding that would be required to bring each system's buildings up to minimal adequacy. The percent of state funding required was based on an assessment of wealth. The second bar (dark blue) shows the actual state funding provided.*









8	City Springs Elementary	fair	2	86	Lakewood Early Learning Center	poor	3	<i>High School (#365)</i>
307	Claremont School	poor	2	5	Langston Hughes Elementary	poor	2	<i>ConneXions Community Leadership Academy Middle/High (#325)</i>
31	Goldstream Park Elementary/ Middle School	poor	2	457	Laurence G. Paquin Building <i>Baltimore Rising Star Academy (#344)</i>	poor	3	<i>Institute of Business and Entrepreneurship High (#435)</i>
97	Collington Square School	poor	2	245	Leith Walk Elementary	poor	2	
27	Commodore John Rogers Elementary	poor	3	64	Liberty Elementary	fair	3	83 William Paca Elementary
247	Cross Country Elementary	fair	4	261	Lockerman Bundy Elementary	poor	3	28 William Pinderhughes Elementary
207	Curtis Bay Elementary	fair	2	313	Lois T. Murray	poor	2	301 William S. Baer School
39	Dallas F. Nicholas Sr. Elementary	poor	1	57	Lombard Building <i>Baltimore Freedom Academy (#423)</i>	poor	2	87 Windsor Hills Elementary
201	Dickey Hill Elementary/Middle	poor	3		<i>Middle Alternative Program (#734)</i>			209 Winston Middle
162	Diggs-Johnson Building <i>SW Baltimore Charter (#328)</i>	poor	2 or 1	88	Lynhurst Elementary	poor	2	23 Wolfe Street Academy Elementary
416	Digital Harbor High School	good	5	203	Maree Garnett Farring Elementary	poor	2	205 Woodhome Elementary/Middle
250	Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary	poor	1	53	Margaret Brent Elementary	fair	3	219 Yorkwood Elementary
160	Dr. Carter G. Woodson Pre-K through 8	fair	2	204	Mary E. Rodman Elementary	poor	2	335 Baltimore International Academy Charter <sup>a</sup>
254	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary	poor	2	29	Matthew A. Henson Elementary	fair	3	334 Bluford Drew-Jemison MST Academy Middle <sup>a</sup>
58	Dr. Nathan A. Pitts-Ashburton Elementary/Middle	good	5	249	Medfield Heights Elementary	fair	3	326 City Neighbors Charter <sup>a</sup>
25	Dr. Rayner Browne Elementary	poor	1	410	Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High	good	5	432 Coppin Academy <sup>a</sup>
82	Dr. Roland N. Patterson Jr. Building <i>KIPP Ujima Village Academy Elementary (Middle (#324)</i>	poor	2 or 1	44	Montebello Elementary	poor	2	323 Crossroads School <sup>a</sup>
62	Edgcombe Circle Elementary	poor	2	105	Moravia Park Pre K-8 Campus	poor	1	368 East Baltimore Community Charter School <sup>a</sup>
67	Edgewood Elementary	poor	2	220	Morrell Park Elementary/Middle	poor	2	262 Empowerment Academy <sup>a</sup>
400A	Edmondson Westside High	poor	3	66	Mount Royal Elementary/Middle	poor	3	332 The Green School Charter Building <sup>a</sup>
400B	Edmondson - Westside Skill Center	fair	3	221	Mount Washington	poor	3	<i>Afya Public Charter Middle (#337)</i>
11	Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary	poor	3	81	North Bend Elementary	fair	1	<i>The Green School Elementary (#332)</i>
456	Fairmount-Harford Building <i>Achievement Academy (#413)</i>	fair	3	49	Northeast Middle	poor	3	329 Inner Harbor East Academy <sup>a</sup>
	<i>Baltimore Antioch Diploma Plus High School (#366)</i>			402	Northern Building	poor	4	347 KIPP Harmony Lower Charter <sup>a</sup>
241	Fallstaff Elementary	poor	2		<i>Reginald F. Lewis High (#419)</i>			322 New Song Academy <sup>a</sup>
45	Federal Hill Preparatory School	good	5	401	Northwestern High	poor	3	321 Midtown Academy <sup>a</sup>
406	Forest Park High	poor	3	242	Northwood Elementary	poor	2	330 Northwood-Appold Community Academy <sup>a</sup>
85	Fort Washington Elementary	poor	1	163	Patapco Elementary/Middle	poor	2	327 Patterson Park Public Charter <sup>a</sup>
178	Francis M. Wood Building <i>Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy High (#429)</i>	good	4, 5	405	Patterson High	poor	3	370 Eager Street Academy <sup>b</sup>
413	Francis M. Wood High <i>Excel Academy (#178)</i>	fair	3	414	Paul Laurence Dunbar High	excellent	5	<b>KEY</b>
76	Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle	poor	2	133	Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle	poor	2	1 - New Replacement School
95	Franklin Square Elementary	poor	1		<i>Paul Lawrence Dunbar Middle (#133)</i>			2 - Major Renovation
450	Frederick Douglass High	poor	2		<i>National Academy Foundation High (#421)</i>			3 - Moderate Renovation
				223	Pimlico Elementary	poor	2	4 - Minor Renovation
				93	Professional Development Building <i>Friendship Academy of Engineering &amp; Technology Middle/High (#339)</i>	fair	3	5 - General Maintenance
					<i>NACA Freedom and Democracy II (#349)</i>			<b>NOTES</b>
				56	Robert Poole Building <i>Academy for College and Career Exploration High (#427)</i>	poor	3	a. Charter schools in Maryland are responsible for their own facilities and are noted on the map. Some charters are in City-owned buildings while others occupy other buildings. If the condition of the City-owned building is known, it is noted here.
				142	Robert W. Coleman Elementary	poor	2	b. This is an alternative program located within the Baltimore City Detention Center; the facility is not managed by Baltimore City Public Schools.

# The State Must Do More

## Districts with High Need and Low Wealth Require Additional State Support

**BALTIMORE CITY'S LOW WEALTH = SMALL CAPITAL BUDGET,  
COUNTIES WITH HIGH WEALTH = LARGE CAPITAL BUDGETS**

Baltimore City's average household income in 2007 was \$36,894, only about half of the state's average of \$67,989. Baltimore City's poverty rate was 19.9%, compared with 8.3% for Maryland overall.<sup>68</sup> And Baltimore City's wealth per student is the lowest in the state — \$206,803 per pupil, about half of state's average of \$397,614.<sup>69,70</sup> As the largest and one of the oldest cities in Maryland, Baltimore City has a much greater need to repair aging infrastructure, including schools, roads, sidewalks, and sewer systems. And most government

services, from education to public safety, require more intensive (and expensive) efforts in a central city environment than in suburban and rural jurisdictions.

The State addresses this imbalance to some extent by adjusting certain funding formulas for local wealth, and by operating some functions in Baltimore City, which are local functions in the counties (such as pretrial detention and community college). Despite these measures, the City is still at a considerable disadvantage. As illustrated in Chart 2, Baltimore County's wealth is nearly double that of the City's, and Montgomery County's is 3 times larger.

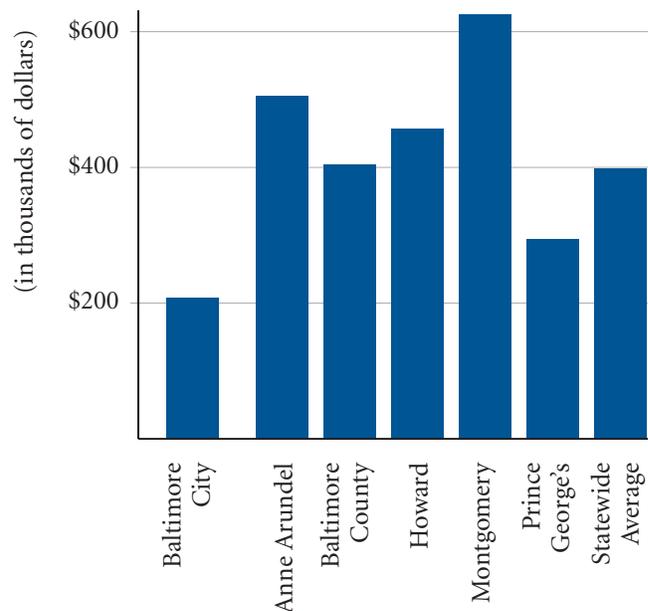
Baltimore City's low wealth also affects its ability to incur debt to fund school construction and improvements. The higher average income of citizens and property wealth of indi-

“Like most schools in Baltimore City, Historic Frederick Douglass High School continues to deal with many facilities-related issues which compromise our students' ability to achieve their maximum potential.”

—Patricia Rhodes, President of the Historic Frederick Douglass High School Alumni Association

**CHART 2. PER PUPIL LOCAL WEALTH FOR LARGE MARYLAND DISTRICTS (2009)**

*Baltimore City has much less local wealth than other large districts to invest in school facility improvements.*



viduals and businesses in many other counties allows those local governments to incur large amounts of debt to fund their overall capital projects, including school construction. The total capital budget for Baltimore City pales in comparison to other large counties. Over the past 4 years, the total capital budget for Baltimore City was only \$245 million (\$61.2 million per year), while other large districts in Maryland borrowed much greater amounts. Howard County, a district with less than half of the population of Baltimore City, was able to borrow over five times the amount of Baltimore City. Montgomery County, with a capital budget exceeding \$3 billion over the past four years, had the capacity to borrow 12 times the amount that Baltimore City does. In Chart 3, the contrast clearly illustrates the low capacity of Baltimore City to support its school facility needs.

**BALTIMORE CITY PRIORITIZES SCHOOL RENOVATIONS, BUT MUCH LESS FUNDING RESULTS**

The problem is not that the City does not make school construction a priority – it does, exceeding the state average for total capital spending on school construction and improvement (Chart 4). Statewide, on average, counties contribute 30% of their capital budgets toward school improvements (fiscal years 2007- 2010) .

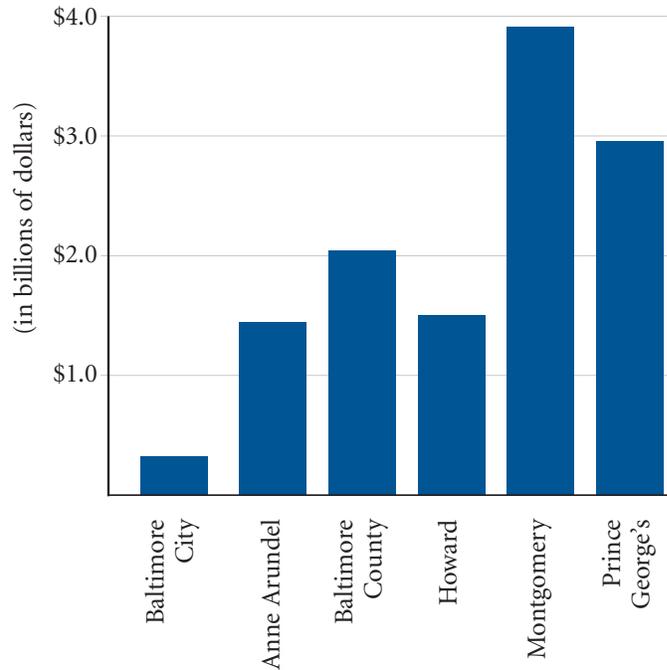
Baltimore City contributes 31% of its local capital budget toward schools. But even though Baltimore City’s effort in improving school facilities is above average, its low wealth keeps the total contribution far behind other counties. (This low capital budget also strains the City’s ability to deal with other infrastructure deficiencies.) Of the six largest jurisdictions, only Anne Arundel and Prince George’s County have contributed a greater percentage of their capital budgets to school construction.

So, the problem is not the City’s percentage of capital funds devoted to school buildings; it is making an effort similar to other counties. The problem is that a percentage of a small capital budget equals minimal total dollars to improve school facilities. The City’s low wealth does not allow it to borrow (and pay back) money on a scale similar to more wealthy counties, in order to raise enough to fund its \$2.8 billion facilities master plan.

The 24% of capital spending that Montgomery County contributed to school construction averaged nearly \$200 million per year, over the past four years. Anne Arundel County contributed on average, \$92.7 million, and Baltimore County, \$115.4 million, to their school system’s capital budgets. Baltimore City’s 31% of the capital budget generated only \$19 million for City Schools. The State must play a more significant role to address the huge funding gap created by the limited capacity of the City to direct more funds to city school buildings.

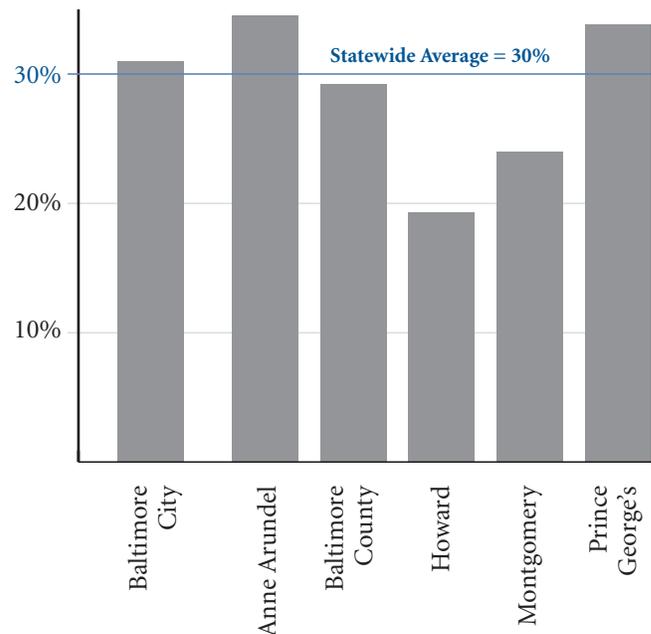
**CHART 3. TOTAL LOCAL CAPITAL BUDGETS (FY07-10)**

*Low wealth in Baltimore City limits its capacity to borrow money for infrastructure improvements. Its total capital budget is notably smaller than other counties.*



**CHART 4. PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LOCAL CAPITAL BUDGETS CONTRIBUTED TO SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION (FY07-10)**

*Baltimore City slightly exceeds the state average in the percentage of capital funding it devotes to school infrastructure renovations and repairs.*

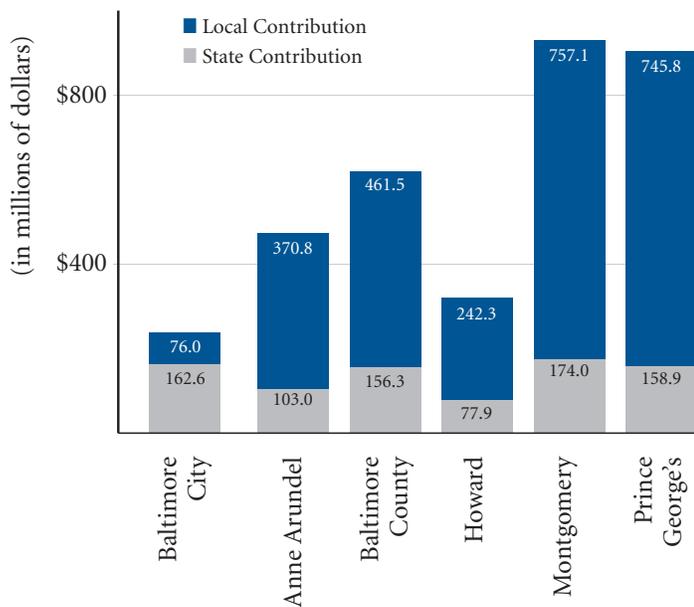


**MANY COUNTIES CAN ADD LARGE AMOUNTS OF LOCAL CAPITAL FUNDING TO THE STATE ALLOCATION**

As noted earlier, the largest school districts in Maryland receive roughly the same amount of school construction aid from the State, putting Baltimore City at a great disadvantage, given its higher facility needs. But when one adds another factor — the amount contributed to school facilities by the local government, the picture is one of gross disparity. There is undoubtedly, for example, a need for repairs and renovations of Baltimore County school buildings, as they are the second oldest in the state. However, Baltimore County is able to give its school system 6 times as much to upgrade school buildings than can Baltimore City. After the city school system gets its state capital allocation of \$36.7 million each year,<sup>72</sup> it turns to the local government and receives an additional \$19 million. But when the Prince George’s school system gets its \$37.7 million from the State, they can expect to receive another \$186.5 million from their local government. Viewing state and local funding together, school facilities in the other large counties gain much more investment due to county wealth. Chart 5 illustrates the great variation in jurisdictional wealth which results in a tremendous disparity in the amount of funding each school district receives from local government.

**CHART 5. TOTAL LOCAL AND STATE CAPITAL CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR FY07-10**

*The State gives similar amounts of capital funding each year to the large school districts for construction and renovation. Counties then add varying amounts of local capital funding in addition to the state funding. The State does not balance out the disparity in local wealth and capacity.*



**STATE FUNDING CHOICES IGNORE THE DISPARITY CAUSED BY HUGE VARIABILITY IN LOCAL ABILITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOOL FACILITIES**

It is clear that the State does not ensure distribution of capital funding for school construction and renovation in a manner that will allow all districts to meet minimum standards for educational adequacy. Chart 5 shows that the State chooses to give similar funding amounts to the larger counties, even when counties have dramatically different capacities to fund their own school construction. Districts with substantial identified needs do not receive funding sufficient to address those needs. Districts with fewer needs, higher wealth, and greater local capacity to fund improvement, receive equal and in some cases even greater amounts of state funding. Based on the need for each district outlined in the task force report, Baltimore City and less wealthy districts with greater school facility deficiencies should receive a much larger allocation so that all state school facilities can meet adequacy.

**THE STATE MUST PLAY A LARGER ROLE TOWARDS FUNDING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS FOR BALTIMORE CITY**

The mission of the State’s Public School Construction Program is to “equalize educational facilities and opportunities throughout the State.”<sup>73</sup> It is incumbent upon the State to ensure that capital funds for school facilities are distributed equitably, according to district needs and local wealth and capacity, to ensure that all children can learn in buildings that meet adequacy standards. A simple redistribution of existing state capital dollars could go a long way toward improving school buildings in Baltimore City and in other low wealth districts. Alternately, a special fund could be established to devote additional funds to those districts whose buildings are still below minimal adequacy. Maryland may need to look towards expanding revenue to cover more projects.

The Kopp Task Force report noted that Maryland’s school facilities were in a state of crisis. The State responded by increasing its funding commitment to school construction. But it lost an important opportunity in not distributing the new funds toward the greatest identified needs. Maryland should not allow its public school infrastructure to fall further into disrepair, especially in those low wealth districts with limited means to address their needs. The Maryland General Assembly is bound by the state Constitution to establish a “thorough and efficient” public school system; and “shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance.” **If public school buildings are not adequate, the State has a responsibility to act.**

# The City Must Do More

Maryland counties with superior school buildings make school construction and renovation a high priority. If Baltimore is to succeed in modernizing all of its buildings, it must push school construction toward the top of its agenda. The State has to play a significant role, but the initiative, the push, must be clear from Baltimore's leaders at all levels. Elected officials have a bully pulpit and they should use it to proclaim that school modernization will lead the way toward city revitalization.

## REACHING BEYOND CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES TO IMPROVE SCHOOL FACILITIES

Albeit limited by its wealth, the City of Baltimore can explore alternative ways to increase the amount of funding available to improve school facilities. City Schools and the Mayor's administration should be commended for their initiative to develop a report on innovative financing strategies, procurement alternatives, and cost saving measures to increase capacity for renovating and building new schools. Now, they must act on the report's findings and recommendations. The Mayor's administration should work with City Schools to engage community organizations and school communities about the opportunities recommended in the study. Even though the City's report offers options to leverage existing funds and save on construction and procurement costs, there

is no doubt that more revenue is needed to address a full-scale modernization of city school buildings.

## THE CITY CAN INCREASE ITS BORROWING

Municipalities generally use bonds (usually general obligation bonds) for capital projects or improving infrastructure, which require taking on debt. Municipalities tend to borrow conservatively so as to maintain good bond ratings and low interest payments. Borrowing greater amounts requires additional revenue to pay the debt service on the bonds.

Baltimore City has stayed within its debt management guidelines and (though limited by its relatively lower wealth) has some capacity to take on additional debt. The recommended range for net general obligation (GO) bonded debt to the City's assessed property tax base is 3% to 4%.<sup>74</sup> At the close of fiscal year 2008, the City's debt was \$563.9 million (net of reserves for debt service), or 1.92% of the City's assessed tax base.<sup>75</sup> For fiscal year 2008, if borrowing had reached 3% of the City's assessed tax base, approximately \$155 million would have been available for improving school facilities.<sup>76</sup> Raising the debt limit to 4% would have generated about \$394 million. Based on the cost of Digital Harbor's renovation in Baltimore City, \$394 million could completely modernize up to 8 more high schools. It is possible that the

**“This is a civil rights issue. Our students need and deserve the best school facilities to learn the skills needed to compete in the 21st century global workforce.”**

—Dr. Andrés Alonso, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools

“Now that gambling is coming to Baltimore, our elected representatives, who promised more funds for education, should keep their promises and direct more funds to the improvement and renovation of schools such as Forest Park Senior High School.”

—Delnora Kelly, President of the PTA of Forest Park High School



*Students at Digital Harbor High School find inspiration in their new school facility.*

funds could go even further given the current low cost of labor and construction materials due to the economic downturn.

Although limited by its low wealth, Baltimore City can feasibly increase debt for school infrastructure improvements without compromising its bond rating. However, increasing debt up to the 3-4% range would require additional revenue to pay debt service on the bonds.

#### SLOTS AND THE PROMISE TO FUND EDUCATION

To support additional borrowing for school facilities, the City must look at a variety of possible revenue options to fund the debt service payments. One clear option for financing school facility improvements is the revenue anticipated from the prospective gambling development in south Baltimore, under the Video Lottery Terminals (“slots”) initiative. According to the law, “Baltimore City must use not less than 95% of the received revenues to reduce real property taxes and construct/rehabilitate public schools.”<sup>77</sup> At the time the state enabling law was passed, it was estimated that slots revenue would generate approximately \$19 million annually for Baltimore City. If slots revenue were used toward school capital projects annually, \$19 million could finance about \$200 million over 15 years, at 5% interest rate.<sup>78</sup> If actual slots revenue were lower, less might be borrowed using this funding stream. Baltimore City has the opportunity to use a dedicated stream of funding to improve school buildings for thousands of teachers and students. If the City increased its borrowing to 3-4% of the assessed tax base, the slots revenue should be considered to help pay off debt service.

There are other options to expand revenue to finance school infrastructure improvements in Baltimore City. Raising taxes to fill budget deficits is often not popular. However, when given the option, many people are willing to pay more taxes for improving education. In a case study cited later in this report, residents in almost all county and city districts in Georgia voted to increase their sales tax by 1% to fund school construction.

# The Federal Government Must Do More

## CITY, STATE, AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS MUST ADVOCATE FOR FEDERAL FUNDING TO IMPROVE SCHOOL FACILITIES

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (“ARRA”, or federal stimulus bill) provided an opportunity to expand federal involvement in improving school infrastructure. The bill proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives originally contained \$14 billion for school construction and renovation. From that amount, Baltimore City would have gained nearly \$65 million over 2 years for improving school buildings. However, the measure did not survive in the Senate and instead, \$22 billion in Qualified School Construction Bonds (QSCB) was approved in the ARRA package for 2009

and 2010. The QSCB are interest-free bonds, but they are essentially a loan. The principal amount must be paid back by school districts. City Schools are planning to use their allotment of \$116 million over the next 2 years to complete renovation projects and systemic repairs.<sup>79</sup> Although City Schools are taking advantage of these interest-free bonds, adding more debt service will be a strain on their operating budget.

National groups and state advocacy organizations continue to argue for a direct federal allocation for school facilities so that struggling districts nationwide can make improvements to their ailing buildings without the burden of having to pay off more loans. State and city legislators and the Baltimore City community must make this issue a priority for Maryland Congressional representatives.

## Through Your Lens: School Facilities Across America

The ACLU of Maryland and students from the Baltimore Freedom Academy (BFA) and Frederick Douglass High School participated in “Through Your Lens: School Facilities Across America,” a nationwide photo exhibition that featured pictures and stories of the nation’s dilapidated school buildings. The exhibition was organized by the 21st Century School Fund, the Healthy Schools, Campaign, and Critical Exposure, a national partnership that advocates for federal funding to improve school facilities.

### GIVE US LIGHT!

It’s dark in our school, some of the lights don’t work and the windows are cloudy. The old electrical system could not power the donation of computers we received, and the intercom system frequently cuts out. How can we be expected to learn when our leaders leave us powerless, in the dark?

—Briauna, Baltimore City High School Student



### BROKEN WINDOW

This broken window made it unbearably cold for a staff member to work on her computer. The heat is malfunctioning and there’s no resistance to the cold aside from the layers one has to wear to stay in there to get a decent amount of work done. But just as the girl in the picture wordlessly portrays by staring plainly at the break, defects like these are noticeable and powerful enough to disturb, but are no shock.

—Ian, Baltimore City Public Schools Graduate

# It Can Be Done!

## Three Localities That Transformed Their Schools

Funding a comprehensive school facilities master plan in a large school district is not an easy task. However, there are states, cities, and school districts that have developed creative ways to finance school construction and renovation on a large scale. While the laws and guidelines that determine how a government body can finance or incur debt may differ from state to state, the case studies outlined in the following section prove that a steadfast commitment of politicians and government officials can bring about innovative solutions to solve enormous infrastructure problems. Here are three different approaches for State and Baltimore City officials, and the greater Baltimore community, to consider.

### THE 5 YEAR PLAN— 86 SCHOOLS BUILT OR UPGRADED USING INNOVATIVE FINANCING

In November 1998, the school district in Greenville, South Carolina, was in crisis. Most of Greenville’s 83 school buildings were severe disrepair and about 9,000 of their 61,000 students were spending their days in 440 portables. The school district developed a 5-year plan to comprehensively modernize all of their facilities for a cost of nearly \$800 million. If done with traditional bond financing, implementation of the plan would have taken over 20 years with the district’s \$60 million per year debt limit. Inflation and construction costs would have risen over the years, adding an estimated \$1.5 billion to the total costs.<sup>80</sup> Believing that high quality school facilities were critical to education, Greenville’s school board was determined to find a new and innovative approach to modernize their schools in a timely and cost effective manner.

To increase their debt capacity and to allow for special financing arrangements, Greenville County Schools established a nonprofit organization, BEST (Building Equity Sooner for Tomorrow), which sold \$800 million in bonds to finance the modernization plan. This structure involved the transfer of ownership of the school facilities to the nonprofit, which also managed the construction. The school district

used their annual allotment of \$60 million in bonds, over 25 years, to effectively purchase the school buildings back from BEST (Greenville County Schools were already using just about \$60 million in bonds annually for facilities). Altogether, half of Greenville’s 86 schools were newly built and half received major renovations over 5 years.

**Greenville’s school facility master plan and innovative financing model involved renovating or building new, 86 schools within 5 years.**

**“Conventional wisdom says it can't be done.... With courage and commitment, and working together openly and in good faith, it can be done. The impossible is possible, and this project will prove that.”**

—William Herlong, Greenville County school board member

## A STATE PLAYS LEAD ROLE IN OVERHAUL OF URBAN SCHOOL FACILITIES

In 1995, the mayor of New Haven, Connecticut, launched the Citywide School Construction program, a long-term plan to modernize all New Haven's schools. New Haven has the 3rd largest school district in the state with about 20,000 students. It operates the largest school construction program in Connecticut. Most of New Haven's 44 schools will be completely renovated or replaced by 2012, for a total cost of approximately \$1.5 billion.<sup>81</sup> Many elementary and middle school buildings have been converted into Pre-K to 8 configurations as part of New Haven's education reform initiatives.

The State uses bonds to fund statewide school facility improvements and has a cost-share formula that covers 20% to 80% of school construction costs, depending on the local wealth of the district.<sup>82</sup> For each project in New Haven, the State covers 76.6% of the total costs. Interdistrict magnet schools, which receive a state reimbursement rate of 95%, are also part of the state's education reform efforts. The State's incentive for districts to develop magnet schools was a result of Connecticut's landmark desegregation case *Sheff vs. O'Neill*.<sup>83</sup> From 2002 to 2007, Connecticut invested an average of \$551.4 million per year into public school facilities.<sup>84</sup>

New Haven has struggled to meet the 20% local match to complete school construction projects. To generate funds, New Haven sold delinquent property tax liens, raising about \$17 million for the School Construction Trust Fund.<sup>85</sup> Other funds came from the sale of city-owned property assets. New Haven also used innovative financing to leverage existing revenue to implement their facilities master plan. Over the past two decades, Connecticut expanded revenue to cover growing expenses in the state, which included but were not limit-



*Wilbur Cross High School was completely abated of hazardous materials such as asbestos and reopened in 2002 with wired classrooms, new lighting, a music wing, and expanded library/media center. The new buildings consume on average 30% less energy, which will result in tens of millions saved in utility costs over the next two decades.*

“We’re finding that students do much better in an enhanced learning environment. We’ve improved our science labs, libraries, technology, and lighting. Student morale is much better now and student achievement has increased.”

—Susan Weiselberg  
New Haven Public Schools

ed to school construction. In 1991, an income tax of 4% was established for the first time and the state legislature recently increased the rate for higher income earners.

The mayor of New Haven set up a separate entity to manage the Citywide School Construction program, which ensures public input and oversight in the design, procurement, and implementation of each project. The school construction program also established provisions to ensure that New Haven residents are hired for the construction jobs.

**COMMUNITIES VOTE TO EXPAND TAXES FOR NEW SCHOOL BUILDINGS**

In Georgia, there were limitations as to how school districts could improve their school facilities. Local school districts had two basic options: ask the voters to approve issuance of general obligation bonds to be repaid from property tax revenues, or use current property tax revenues levied for the maintenance and operation of schools to fund capital improvement projects. Both of these options placed the burden for providing adequate local funding for capital improvements solely on property owners.

With limited revenue and the increasing demand for building new and renovating old school facilities, a constitutional amendment was approved in November 1996 to allow local school districts (statewide) the option of calling for a county referendum to ask their voters to approve a *Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax* (SPLOST). The SPLOST revenues were authorized for specific capital improvement projects for educational purposes, to retire outstanding debt, and to issue new bonds for specific capital projects. The local sales tax rate was set at 1%, over a period of time not to exceed five years.

Votes in Georgia’s 159 counties and 21 city districts resulted in 98% of referenda successfully passing.<sup>86</sup> The DeKalb County School System, with a school population of approximately 100,000 students, operates about 150 schools. DeKalb voters have approved SPLOST for 3 consecutive terms. From

**“The [one-cent additional sales tax] is a common-sense way to repair and improve our facilities without burdening the taxpayers with long-term debt**

—Board Chair Better Gray  
Cobb County School System

2002-2007, SPLOST raised a total \$456.2 million, or \$91.2 million per year in DeKalb.<sup>87</sup> During these five years, 13 new schools were built, 14 schools were completely renovated, and 5 schools received additions to accommodate growth and expand programming for career and technology and fine arts. Dozens of schools also received systemic renovations, such as new roofs, lighting, HVAC, and electrical systems.<sup>88</sup>

Increasing taxes to fund vague or general services may not be popular. However, when Georgia residents saw new and renovated school buildings in their communities, they have overwhelmingly chosen to pay the extra penny.



Funded by SPLOST, a new Fine Arts Center was constructed as a part of a total renovation of this Georgia high school, which has over 50% Free & Reduced Lunch eligible students.

## BUILDINGS FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

A Vision and Options to Address Deficient School Facilities in Baltimore City

# What's Next?

## Recommendations to Move Modern School Buildings to the Top of the Agenda

Despite the myriad of challenges in Baltimore City communities, students have improved their achievement in meeting state standards each year. The state investment in education under the Bridge to Excellence “Thornton” law and education reform initiatives are paying off — proving that urban students can overcome adversity and make huge strides toward closing the achievement gap with their peers in the surrounding counties.

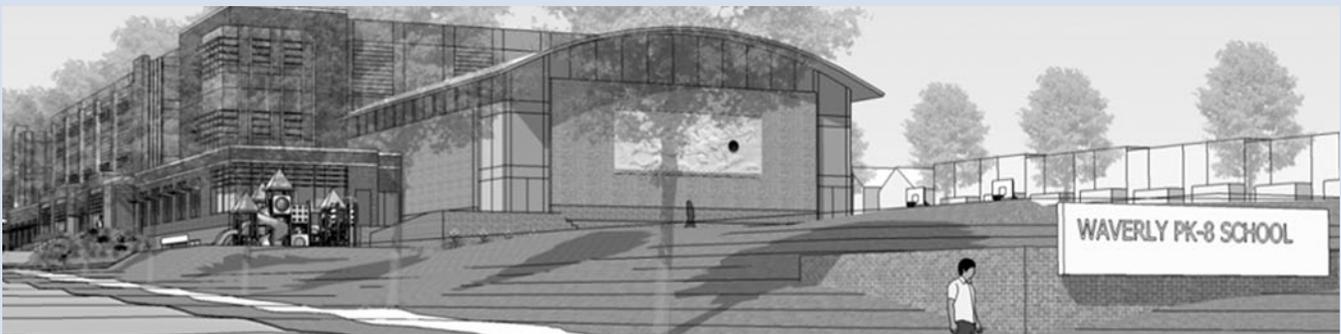
While the condition and adverse effects of Baltimore City’s inadequate school buildings have been known for many years, governmental leaders have yet to do more than put a band aid on the problem. City Schools’ facility staff have made dramatic improvements in maintenance and oversight of projects, boosting public confidence that capital

funds are being used effectively. However, current capital funding for City Schools is insufficient and does not ensure an adequate learning environment for children. The parents and children in Baltimore City have been made to accept these conditions. Any parent whose child attends one of the 106 schools in poor condition will tell you how hot the classrooms are in the warm months and how cold they are in the winter. And some teachers and students will tell you that their school building, with cages around broken windows and rusted barbed wire on the roof edges, looks more like a prison than a school.

With City Schools making steady and substantial progress over recent years, now is the time to support that progress by investing in excellent school buildings. Baltimore City has

## A Vision for Baltimore City Schools

What would the city look like with new or renovated school buildings in every neighborhood? How would city students and families respond if our government leaders prioritized the rehabilitation of our educational infrastructure? Would families choose to stay in the city and use public schools? Would the unprecedented investment restore faith in the education system, and improve parent involvement and academic outcomes? How much more progress can be made among students if all of Baltimore’s schools looked like Digital Harbor High School or Abbottston Elementary School? Modernized school buildings that support 21st century academic programming are not only essential to the success of city students, but also to success of Baltimore City as a whole.



*The new Waverly Elementary/Middle School will be the first new school built in Baltimore City in nearly 20 years. This building will be LEED certified, built with green/recycled materials, and equipped with sensed plumbing to conserve water, a green roof, and sloped ceilings to maximize natural light in the classrooms.*

been investing in the revitalization of many neighborhoods and commercial centers, and new or renovated schools in neighborhoods should be a key driver in this revitalization. Not only will this bring stability to communities but new families that otherwise have not been attracted to city schools will consider them.

The State has increased its commitment to improving school facilities over the past five years and there have been gains. However, in order to boost achievement for the most at-risk students in Maryland, the State must look at the disparity in funding and overall need among the local districts, and adjust its distribution of capital funding to ensure adequate facilities throughout the state.

Over the decades, state and city leaders have allowed Baltimore's school buildings to deteriorate and the situation has become almost too huge for leaders and the community to address. However, other districts and states have found creative ways to address their ailing school infrastructure, even in districts challenged with low revenue and capacity. Their success was only possible because city and state leaders prioritized and committed to making a significant investment in ensuring that their children and teachers have high quality educational facilities.

State and city funding invested in the renovations of Digital Harbor High School and Abbottston Elementary School has demonstrated that money has been well spent in Baltimore City, improving student achievement and community commitment. As educational reforms and the revitalization of city neighborhoods continue to progress, elementary and high schools must also be renewed for the well-being and success of students, teachers, and community members alike. The City and State can explore various options to fund the \$2.8 billion master plan for city school facilities. The recommendations below are intended to provide both governmental leaders and the greater Baltimore community with a path toward feasibly financing the modernization of all city school buildings.

## If School Buildings Were a Top Priority...

City and State leaders certainly care about the vitality of Baltimore. But Baltimore cannot truly be a revitalized, healthy city without good schools, which encompass both effective teaching and attractive school buildings. What would be happening differently if the condition of school buildings were a top priority? The Mayor and City Council would be holding sessions with the community about how the City and State could collaborate to develop a plan to finance the modernization of school facilities. State legislators representing the city, and the Mayor, would make school facilities funding for Baltimore a top priority in their legislative agenda for Annapolis. The Governor would be touring buildings and directing state staff to draft options for increased state involvement and funding. The State Superintendent and other state leaders responsible for making decisions about funding school improvement projects would set a goal to ameliorate all building deficiencies in Baltimore within a reasonable period of time. Parents, community leaders, students, and teachers would be calling for action and contributing toward solutions.

# Recommendations

**RECOMMENDATION: The State of Maryland and Baltimore City must collaborate with City Schools to devise a plan in 2010 to finance the \$2.8 billion Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan.**

Ensuring that all the school buildings in Baltimore City are adequate for learning is not a current goal of the City or State government. Each contributes a certain amount of funding to improve school buildings, but there is no stated goal or priority to work together toward a comprehensive plan that would renovate all schools in a short or long-term manner. And there is no time to waste. School buildings have been deficient for decades while the construction of stadiums, convention centers, and hotels has taken precedence.

The State and City are guided by constitutional and charter decrees that underscore the rights of children. The state guarantees a “thorough and efficient” education for public school students and the City is responsible for the well being of its citizens. Thus, city and state leaders should commit this year to find a way to finance the \$2.8 billion plan to rehabilitate city school buildings, set within a reasonable timeline.

Thankfully, Baltimore City is not the first large school system to include modernized buildings into its vision of educational excellence. There is much to learn from school districts that have found creative, progressive ways of financing their new and rehabilitated school buildings, in a relatively short timeline. The City and State should consider the following in developing a plan:

- Creating a successful partnership between the local dis-

trict and State, as demonstrated by the City of New Haven and Connecticut. Due to Baltimore City’s low wealth, **the State will have to play a large role in financing** the improvement of city school facilities.

- As used effectively in Greenville, South Carolina, Baltimore City and the State must explore **innovative financing structures and public-private partnership options** to increase borrowing capacity. Greenville was able to complete the renovation and/or new construction of 86 schools within 5 years, saving an estimated \$1.5 billion by avoiding inflation costs over a longer period of time.
- As a partner in the financing plan, **Baltimore City will have to expand revenue** to increase its commitment to improving city school infrastructure. Using Georgia as an example, Baltimore City would have to seek state authorization to increase its sales tax by 1%. However, there are many options that the City can explore to increase revenue.

While these options should be explored, the starting point in each of these examples was a determination to take up the challenge of renovating or building large numbers of schools quickly. Designing a plan and developing innovative financing structures and supporting revenue followed that determination to take up the challenge.

**RECOMMENDATION: The State should commit to bring all school buildings in the state up to at least minimal adequacy in the short term, and implement a rational allocation for capital funds that directs funding to the greatest needs. Distribution of state funds should factor the total facility needs and each district’s ability to contribute.**

While this report asks Baltimore City to do more to improve its school facilities, the State also must contribute higher amounts of capital funding to City Schools, due to the city’s lack of the wealth. The State’s Public School Construction Program (PSCP) has not “equalized” educational facilities statewide according to its mission, and troubling and persistent disparities, and inadequacies, continue to be the result. Many counties in Maryland have the benefit of having newer buildings and the local wealth to support a large contribution to school renovation and construction. The State has given some of the large counties similar amounts of capital funding

as it does to Baltimore City, even though the City’s school building needs are demonstrably higher and the City’s own capacity to fund renovations is lower.

The State of Maryland also must complete the follow up facilities assessment survey for all Maryland school buildings and play a much larger role in funding the improvement of city school facilities. And the distribution of capital funding should be based on the measured facility needs and the relative wealth and capacity of a district, to ensure that all Maryland students learn in the kind of physical facilities necessary for them to obtain an adequate education.

**RECOMMENDATION: Baltimore City can increase its capital funding for school facility improvements and examine various options to expand revenue to support additional borrowing.**

The Mayor's administration and City Schools took the initiative to collaborate in a recent feasibility study to pursue alternative ways to leverage existing funding through innovative financing and public-private partnerships, and to refine the procurement process. Both the City and school system should use this feasibility report to act on the workable recommendations. However, without increasing revenue, the scale of renovations will be limited.

Baltimore City can maintain a strong bond rating while increasing borrowing for improving school infrastructure. Increasing the debt limit to 3-4% of the assessed property tax base could generate \$155-\$394 million for improving school facilities. This increased borrowing will require additional revenue to pay off the debt. Baltimore City should look at various ways to increase revenue so as to be able to afford increased borrowing for school construction.

While advocating for voter approval of the slots referendum in 2007, government leaders repeatedly stated that future revenue from slots would be used for education. The referendum passed and state law authorizes the City to use its local slots revenue for both lowering property

taxes and the improvement of school facilities. With a majority of city students struggling to learn in deficient school buildings, the City should commit to using future slots revenue to pay down additional borrowing for school facilities.

There are only a few modernized high schools in Baltimore City, and most city students do not get the chance to learn in a 21st century educational environment with high tech science labs, libraries, media centers, and music studios. Increasing the City's debt ceiling to 4% could modernize up to eight high schools, approximately 1/3 of all high schools in the city. Having eight additional modernized high schools in Baltimore will allow thousands of city students into high tech classrooms, including Career and Technology Education programs, while improving academic achievement, attendance, and student and teacher morale.

Ultimately, keeping and attracting new families in the city will require the reformation of schools, including the improvement of school buildings. Devoting projected \$19 million a year in slots revenue to pay off bonds for school rehabilitation would be an important first step in modernizing school buildings in the city.

**RECOMMENDATION: Baltimore City, state, and federal leaders must advocate for a federal program to help low-wealth districts improve their school facilities**

Nationally, urban school districts and other low-wealth jurisdictions are burdened with deteriorating school buildings. City and state leaders must see the federal government as a potential funder of the rehabilitation of Baltimore City school buildings, and urge citizens to advocate collectively to bring these needed resources to the city. The time has come

to support the progress city students have been making and ensure their ability to compete in the 21st century economy. City and state leaders must advocate for federal funding for school facilities and Maryland's delegation should play a lead role in moving this issue to the forefront in Congress.

**With Baltimore City Public Schools and city student achievement on the rise, government leaders must make a significant investment in the City's educational infrastructure to ensure that students and teachers have the facilities they need to succeed. That includes ensuring that students and teachers are safe, healthy, and supported in their school buildings. And for the revitalization of Baltimore City to be fully realized and sustainable, school buildings must be made into assets to restore both hope in city communities and faith in government's capacity to provide for its citizens.**

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43. Good buildings, better schools: An economic stimulus opportunity with long-term benefits, 21st Century School Fund, April 2008.
44. Brookings Institution report – July 15, 2009.
45. Sunken economy boosts public construction projects, *National AP*, September 8, 2009.
46. Adjusted Age of Construction by Decade, Maryland Public Schools Facilities Inventory, October 2003.
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48. Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan, Baltimore City Public School System, July 2007.
49. City Schools is in the process of updating the Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan for 2010. The draft of the new plan includes the updated data regarding the condition and future plan for each building, which has slightly changed from the 2007 plan.
50. These are updated figures from the draft of the 2010 Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan. The Baltimore school system has incurred costs related to building closures and reconfiguring space to accommodate K-8 expansions during the Facility Solutions process. Also, charter schools are technically responsible for their own facility; however, the system has been helping charters get started and in some cases, have funded upgrades to house new charter programs in city school buildings.
51. Board Meeting, Interagency Committee on School Construction, July 2008.
52. Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan, Baltimore City Public Schools, August 2009.
53. Career and Technology Education, Office of Learning to Work (LTW), Baltimore City Public Schools, Presentation to the City Schools Board of Education, November 2009.
54. Graduation, Maryland State, Maryland Report Card, 2009.
55. The federal government has played a minimal role in funding school infrastructure improvements through the Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB) program, an average of \$1.5 million per year to City Schools since 1999. The program is meant to serve high poverty schools but requires a 10% match from the private sector, which has proven difficult for school districts to raise. The Maryland State Department of Education has decided to shift these funds towards non-capital uses such as professional development and other permitted uses under the federal guidelines. City Schools likely will receive even less from QZAB for school facility improvements in coming years.
56. Capital Improvement Program, City of Baltimore, FY01 through FY10.
57. Capital Improvement Program, Interagency Committee on School Construction, Funding Allocations, State of Maryland, FY01 through FY10.
58. The state also provides a small amount of funds under the Aging Schools Program, for small projects to improve older school buildings. Although the program is useful, the state allocation is too small for it to help districts bring their facilities to adequacy. Since FY06, Baltimore City has received an average of \$2.4 million per year.
59. Roughly \$6 billion in 2009 dollars.
60. Final Report, Task Force to Study Public School Facilities, State of Maryland, February 2004. [http://mlis.state.md.us/other/education/public\\_school\\_facilities\\_2003/MainPage.pdf](http://mlis.state.md.us/other/education/public_school_facilities_2003/MainPage.pdf).
61. The task force implemented a survey of every public school building in the state, measuring each building by 31 criteria to assess the basic, minimum facility standards critical to the health and safety of students and faculty and the ability to deliver basic, required educational programs. The assessment included criteria such as air quality, building systems, lighting, science labs and enrollment capacity. (See Appendix for the list of criteria).
62. Final Report, Task Force to Study Public School Facilities, State of Maryland, February 2004, Page 2.

63. The \$571 million identified by the Kopp Task Force for Baltimore City school buildings only looked at 31 criteria, which did not include many items assessed in Baltimore City Public Schools' facilities master plan. City Schools' master plan identified \$2.7 billion in needs, which includes the replacement of 27 old schools. Also, the need to alleviate basic deficiencies were minimized or completely left out of the task force's report. City Schools has completely shut off the water fountains in most schools as they have not been abated of lead; yet the task force reported that \$0 was needed to mitigate potable water deficiencies in city school buildings.
64. *Bradford v. Maryland State Board of Education*, Tr. 1586:5-10; see also (Tr. 1284:5-10, 1413:11-19).
65. The state-local cost share is applied to individual facility projects approved by the Interagency Committee on School Construction (IAC). If a project is approved, then the state-local cost sharing is applied to that project.
66. The state cost-share formula was revised in 2006 as mandated by the Public School Facilities Act of 2004. The IAC shall reevaluate the state's cost share formula every 3 years and make recommendations for changes to the Board of Public Works. (Administration of the Public School Construction Program, Board of Public Works, Public School Construction Program). The current cost share for State-Baltimore City cost share is 94%.
67. HB 101, 2009 Leg., 429th Session, (Md. 2007).
68. Source U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts.
69. Maryland Report Card, Maryland Department of Education, 2009.
70. Wealth is defined in The Code of Maryland Regulations COMAR Section 5-202 as the sum of a county's net taxable income, the assessed value of real property, and fifty percent of the assessed value of personal property. The denominator is the September 30 equated enrollment.
71. Adopted FY10 local district budgets in Maryland. Garret, Kent, Queen Anne's, Wicomico, and Worcester counties are not included (did not respond to data requests).
72. Interagency Committee on School Construction, Capital Improvement Program, Allocation to Local Districts, Fiscal Years 2006-2010.
73. Overview of the Interagency Committee on School Construction, Maryland Public School Construction Program, 23.05.03.
74. For discussion of Baltimore City's debt management guidelines, see "Summary of Adopted Budget, Fiscal 2009," Baltimore City Department of Finance, page 175.
75. "Consolidated Annual Financial Report, Fiscal Year 2008," Baltimore City Department of Finance.
76. FY07 is the most recent Annual Financial Report released by Baltimore City Department of Finance.
77. SB 3, 2007 Leg., 427th Session, 1st Spec. Sess. (Md. 2007).
78. Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute Analysis, November 2009.
79. SB 179, 2010 Leg., 427th Session. (Md. 2010).
80. Building on the Installation Plan: The Greenville Plan, William Herlong.
81. New Haven Public Schools, School Construction, September 2009 (<http://www.nhps.net/SchoolConstruction>).
82. New Haven Public Schools, School Construction, September 2009, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/dgm/reports/viewallperc.asp>.
83. In 1996, in response to the Sheff decision, New Haven developed an aggressive facilities program based on 100% state funding of magnet schools (in 2003, the percentage of state funding was reduced to 95%) awarded to districts under Sheff. They leveraged that state funding to provide more magnet schools in the district. Since then, additional school facilities that were non-magnet schools were funded using the state funding match. Some state funding levels were altered recently in legislation adopted by the state legislature in 2007 based on recommendations by the Governor's Commission of Education Finance.
84. Change in Connecticut Public School Enrollment, Connecticut State Data Center, University of Connecticut, June 2008, <http://ctsdc.uconn.edu>.
85. Conversation with Susan Weisselberg, School Construction Coordinator, New Haven Public Schools, October 2009.
86. SPLOST Data Collection Worksheet, Office of Administrative Services, Georgia Department of Education, August 2009.
87. SPLOST Tax Revenue Summary, DeKalb Board of Education, DeKalb County School System, April 2008.
88. Completed Projects, SPLOST II, DeKalb County School System, 2002-2007 (<http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/administration/operations/projects/2002-2007/completed.html>).

APPENDIX

# Task Force to Study Public School Facilities (Kopp Task Force)

## Estimated Costs to Bring All School Facilities to Minimum Adequacy With Total and State Share of the Costs, Maryland total and Baltimore City

**ESTIMATED COSTS TO BRING ALL MARYLAND SCHOOL FACILITIES TO MINIMAL ADEQUACY**

School Systems	Estimated Cost* (in thousands)	State Share of Total (%)	State Share (\$) in Thousands
Allegany	\$71,426	90%	\$64,283
Anne Arundel	\$336,458	50%	\$168,229
Baltimore City	\$570,599	96%	\$547,775
Baltimore	\$408,845	50%	\$204,423
Calvert	\$102,911	69%	\$71,009
Caroline	\$5,435	89%	\$4,837
Carroll	\$135,297	62%	\$83,884
Cecil	\$46,873	68%	\$31,874
Charles	\$178,419	70%	\$124,893
Dorchester	\$33,816	77%	\$26,038
Frederick	\$203,625	71%	\$144,574
Garrett	\$20,142	70%	\$14,099
Harford	\$204,666	58%	\$118,706
Howard	\$168,727	58%	\$97,862
Kent	\$1,180	50%	\$590
Montgomery	\$279,307	50%	\$139,654
Prince George's	\$778,225	69%	\$536,975
Queen Anne's	\$9,666	69%	\$6,670
St. Mary's	\$52,530	71%	\$37,296
Somerset	\$9,030	97%	\$8,759
Talbot	\$18,989	50%	\$9,495
Washington	\$93,827	59%	\$55,358
Wicomico	\$69,993	81%	\$56,694
Worcester	\$54,122	50%	\$27,061
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,854,108</b>		<b>\$2,581,038</b>

\*Costs reported by local school systems in July 2003 dollars.

**Note:** The Kopp Task Force acknowledged that the facilities assessment addressed minimum needs and conceded that the survey “clearly did not encompass many of the elements that most school systems – as well as most parents, teachers, and students – believe are necessary for a good education.”

**Source:** Final Report, Task Force to Study Public School Facilities, State of Maryland, February 2004

**ESTIMATED COSTS OF THE 31 CRITERIA STATEWIDE AND FOR BALTIMORE CITY**

Health and Safety Deficiencies	Costs Statewide* (in thousands)	Costs for Baltimore City* (in thousands)
Indoor Air Quality	\$150,217	\$20,043
Security	\$9,351	\$1,947
Potable Water	\$115	
Lavatories	\$9,150	\$7,033
Communication Systems	\$12,145	\$10,712
Fire Safety	54,728	\$13,324
Building Systems, Materials or Conditions	85,273	\$47,476
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>\$320,979</b>	<b>\$100,535</b>
<b>All Other Building Deficiencies</b>		
Human Comfort	\$642,002	\$154,592
Acoustics	\$247,515	\$18,683
Lighting	\$56,082	\$12,911
Accessibility	\$70,411	\$22,807
Telecommunication	\$25,749	
Student Capacity	\$1,543,349	\$101,214
Pre-k/Kindergarten Classroom	\$43,800	\$3,726
General Elementary Classroom	\$72,224	\$2,271
General Secondary Classroom	\$76,836	\$7,791
Special Education	\$35,236	\$9,258
Instructional Resource Rooms	\$17,942	\$5,985
Secondary Science Laboratory	\$57,262	\$14,091
Library Media Center	\$69,283	\$9,175
Technology Education	\$22,709	\$7,244
Physical Education	\$60,207	\$12,513
Fine Arts	\$142,998	\$71,970
Health Services	\$102,386	\$9,095
Food Services	\$70,914	\$1,350
Auditorium/Theater Arts	\$96,637	
Administration	\$13,979	\$333
Guidance	\$5,107	\$329
Itinerant Services	\$11,199	\$586
Site Layout	\$37,976	\$3,310
Teacher Planning	\$11,326	\$830
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,854,108</b>	<b>\$570,599</b>

**Cover Images** — Background: Grimm + Parker Architects’ rendering of the new Waverly Elementary/Middle School. Front cover inset images (*left to right*): Students at Medfield Heights Elementary School, Baltimore, MD; The new Fine Arts Center, Hart County High School, Georgia; Construction work at Violeteville Elementary School, Baltimore, MD. Back cover inset images (*left to right*): Student at Abbottston Elementary School, Baltimore, MD; Library at Bruce-Monroe Elementary School, Washington, D.C.; Student at Digital Harbor High School, Baltimore, MD.

The ACLU of Maryland and its attorneys represent at-risk Baltimore City public school children in *Bradford v. Maryland State Board of Education*, a case filed in 1994 seeking to enforce the Maryland Constitution’s “thorough and efficient” education clause. The court rulings in the case directed the State to meet the constitutional requirement to provide an “adequate” education, that is, one that is sufficient by contemporary educational standards, to City children. The “Thornton” Commission then examined the adequacy of funding for school systems statewide and made recommendations to bring all systems up to its defined level of adequate funding. The General Assembly enacted a revised funding formula and increases in funding in the 2002 “Bridge to Excellence” law. The *Bradford* case is under the authority of the Circuit Court of Maryland, in Baltimore City.

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## BUILDINGS FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: A Vision and Options to Address Deficient School Facilities in Baltimore City

*Buildings for Academic Excellence* puts forth a vision of new and renovated school buildings in every neighborhood in Baltimore City. City students have shown significant academic gains on state and national standardized tests in recent years, demonstrating that the increase in state education funding under the “Thornton” law adopted in 2002, and reforms implemented by Baltimore City Public Schools are working. Students, teachers, and principals are making these gains, however, in old and deficient school facilities that are not equipped to support a rigorous, high-quality 21st century education. Approximately 70% of Baltimore City’s 162 school buildings are in poor condition; current government funding is completely inadequate to provide the \$2.8 billion required to modernize all city school buildings. This report by the ACLU of Maryland Foundation’s Education Reform Project analyzes the status of the buildings and funding streams and links improved school facilities to increased academic progress and revitalized communities. After presenting examples of other localities which have ambitiously transformed their school buildings, the report ends with recommendations that the community and officials can undertake to ensure Baltimore City schoolchildren can attend safe and attractive school buildings.

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