



## ACLU-MD releases a visionary report, urging a State and City action plan to modernize Baltimore City school buildings

### What Would New And Modernized School Buildings Do For Baltimore City Students, Teachers, and Neighborhoods?



***Buildings for Academic Excellence***, a new report released by the ACLU of MD's Education Reform Project, urges city and state leaders, with community support, to move forward vigorously to modernize city school buildings. The ACLU contends, and a number of courts have concluded, that the constitutional guarantee of an adequate education includes school facilities that support a modern day academic curriculum. The current conditions of Baltimore City's school buildings are inadequate to support the academic standards of a rigorous 21st century education. New and modernized school buildings can enhance the academic gains seen among city students in recent years, revitalize neighborhoods, and attract new families to the city school system, while creating many new jobs in construction and related industries in Baltimore City.

New and modernized school buildings can be a reality for Baltimore City! Download the report on our website and read more about it below.

[Click here to view or download the full ACLU report](#)

[Click here to read about the report in today's Baltimore Sun](#)

[Click here to read the Baltimore Sun's editorial](#)

[Read the Abell Report Newsletter: "Baltimore City's School Buildings Not Making the Grade: Nearly 9 in 10 Need Modernization to Accelerate Academic Gains"](#)

### Why Does Baltimore Need Buildings for Academic Excellence?

#### FACTS about Baltimore City School Facilities:

- City schools are the OLDEST in the state

- 70% of 162 city-owned school buildings are in POOR CONDITION
- Most city schools are in need of a major renovation and some need to be built completely new.
- \$2.8 billion is needed to completely modernize all city school buildings
- \$1 billion of the total is needed to simply address the backlog in basic systemic needs (heating, roof repair, electrical upgrades, etc.)

#### **Benefits of Modernized School Buildings:**

- Increase academic achievement
- Improve student attendance, graduation, and morale
- Attract and retain high quality teachers
- Mitigate health and safety risks (potable water, air quality)
- Help revitalize city neighborhoods
- Attract and retain middle-income families and increase enrollment in city schools
- Stimulate the economy by creating many jobs in construction and related industries
- Save on utility bills by using new and efficient systems

## **Why Are Baltimore's School Buildings In Poor Condition?**

While some may blame the school system for the current condition of school facilities, the fact is that government funding (local, state, and federal), has not kept pace with the rate at which city schools have fallen into disrepair. Although state and city funds for school infrastructure improvements have increased over the past 5 years, current funding levels fall far short of the \$2.8 billion need.

#### **FACTS ABOUT FUNDING:**

- City, State, and Federal funding for city school renovations/construction averaged \$57 million per year (over the past 5 years)
- The State does not direct funding to the greatest need (as per a state assessment of all Maryland school facilities)
- The City, like other low wealth districts, has much less capacity than wealthier districts to fund school infrastructure improvements
- The City gives 31% of its capital budget to improving school facilities, slightly higher than the statewide average. However, 31% of a small capital budget results in a relatively small amount of funding.
- The State does not balance out the disparity in local wealth and capacity
- The federal government has played a small role in funding school infrastructure improvements

## **It Can Be Done!**

### **Three Localities That Transformed Their Schools**

**Greenville, South Carolina:** Greenville's school board developed a public-private partnership and used innovative financing to renovate and/or build new 86 schools within five years for a total of \$800 million. The strategy involved leveraging existing funds, avoiding \$1.5 billion in additional inflation costs by completing construction within 5 years, and using a private partner to manage the construction and maintenance of the schools.

**New Haven, Connecticut:** The State paid 80% of New Haven's \$1.5 billion school modernization plan. New Haven used innovative financing and sold delinquent property tax liens and city-owned property assets to meet the remaining 20%.

**Georgia:** To address school infrastructure problems statewide, Georgia gave districts the option to hold referenda for voters to choose whether to increase the sales tax by 1% for school construction/renovation. Out of 159 counties and 21 cities, 98% of voters chose to pay the extra penny for new and renovated schools in their communities.

## **Recommendations to Make Modernized City Schools a Reality**

1. Drawing on successful initiatives in other districts, city and state leaders must collaborate with Baltimore City Public Schools to devise a plan in 2010 to finance the \$2.8 billion facilities plan.
2. The State should commit to bring all school buildings in the state 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.
3. Baltimore City can increase its capital funding for school facility improvements and examine various options to expand revenue to support additional borrowing.
4. Baltimore City, state, and federal leaders must advocate for a federal program to help low-wealth districts improve their school facilities.

## American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland Education Reform Project

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