

The Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2021

Even before the pandemic, chronic neglect of America's public schools forced students and educators across the country to learn and work in outdated and hazardous school buildings. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the consequences of our failure to make necessary investments in school infrastructure.

Crumbling school facilities pose significant health and safety threats to more than 50 million students and 3 million teachers in public schools. Without major repairs, many school districts will struggle to meet reopening guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- A [June 2020 report](#) from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the state of school infrastructure—the agency's first report on the subject since 1996—found that *54 percent of school districts across the country* must replace or update major systems in more than half their buildings.
- The GAO report estimated that *4 in 10 districts* need to update or replace Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems in at least half of their school buildings, which it projects to affect 36,000 school buildings nationwide.
- In its [guidance to school districts](#), CDC advises that ensuring "ventilation systems operate properly" is a key consideration for schools seeking to reopen amid the COVID-19 pandemic and health experts agree that [improving air quality](#) should be part of a layered approach against Covid-19 in school reopening.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, public schools across the country were in need of significant investment to make up for decades of neglect.

- In schools across the country, students and educators are learning and working in crumbling buildings with [asbestos](#), [contaminated water](#), and [mold](#). The average school building is roughly [44 years old](#).
- The 2016 [State of Our Schools Report](#) found that state and local governments spend \$46 billion less than what is required to updated and maintain their school facilities.

While the pandemic is highlighting the urgent need for major repairs to school facilities, states are confronting unprecedented budget shortfalls and schools are facing painful funding cuts.

- According to Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, states are facing a \$615 billion revenue shortfall over three years, which will force them to layoff teachers and make painful cuts to program and services that students rely on. Nearly [759,000 public school employees](#) across the country have already lost their jobs since March 2020.
- State and local budget shortfalls will disproportionately impact schools that serve low-income students and students of color. The GAO report found high poverty were more likely to rely on state funding to cover the cost of building repairs compared to wealthier schools, which were more likely to fund projects through local property taxes.

The Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2021 is critical to reopening public schools and providing students and educators a safe place to learn and work. It will also help restart the economy by creating good-paying jobs in communities across the country.

The Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2021 would:

- Invests \$100 billion in grants and \$30 billion in bond authority targeted at high-poverty schools with facilities that pose health and safety risks to students and staff;
- Creates over 2 million jobs based on an [Economic Policy Institute analysis](#) that each \$1 billion spent on construction creates 17,785 jobs;
- Allocates 2021 program dollars on an emergency basis to aid in safely reopening public schools in line with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) public health guidelines—such as for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems;
- Requires states to develop comprehensive state-wide public databases on the condition of public-school facilities; most states do not track school facility conditions and would provide much-needed insight into the condition of our public schools; and
- Expands access to high-speed broadband to ensure that public schools have the reliable and high-speed Internet access they need for digital learning.