



BASIC

[Re] Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition

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To: Roberto Rodriguez & Carrie Pugh,
Biden-Harris Education Agency Review Team

From: Kevin Sullivan & Mary Filardo, 21st Century School Fund/BASIC

Re: First 100 days: How BASIC can help Secretary Cardona &
Deputy Secretary Marten

Thank you for your time with us on this important issue related to facilities conditions and equity. [BASIC](#) offers the Secretary its experience and national network to help the Secretary open schools properly, build capacity inside the Department quickly, facilitate the passage of Rebuild the America's Schools Act (RASA) and to create a national narrative on how rebuilding our nation's schools is a commitment to equity, racial justice and a key way to help revitalize poor neighborhoods using community schools as "anchor institutions." The founders, leaders and nearly 100 members of BASIC have been in the trenches on this issue for a very long time.

Together, in the last five years we have grown the BASIC coalition to lead the national dialogue on the urgency to address structural inequity in public school infrastructure and bring the federal government to the table with the states and districts. The lead organization in the BASIC coalition is the [21st Century School Fund](#), which also manages the [National Council of School Facilities](#), an organization of state school facilities officials.

Nomination Process: The BASIC coalition and the state school facilities officers have been working for five years to raise awareness and to prompt action on the gross inequities in the conditions of the nation's schools. Our advocacy has focused the importance of including public school facilities in an infrastructure package—specifically the inclusion of RASA. With state facilities officials from at least 25 states working to educate their representatives on facilities conditions, we have held over 200 meetings with Republicans and Democratic Members of the House and Senate, as well as the Democratic leadership of both chambers.

We have worked closely with Senator Reed and Congressman Bobby Scott on the development and passage of their RASA bills providing data and technical assistance. The result has been the inclusion of a multi-billion-dollar investment in school buildings in every plan announced by the Democratic leaders, and the successful inclusion of RASA in the HR 2 Transportation and Infrastructure package in the last Congress. We can engage all the Democratic members of the Senate HELP committee as well as Republicans Senators Collins, Murkowski, Scott and Burr.

Reopening schools: Since April, Cooperative Strategies executive (David Sturtz) and The National Council on School Facilities and 21st Century School Fund director (Mary Filardo) have been holding [weekly webinars on operating school facilities in a pandemic](#) with a national network of school facilities experts. This network includes 500 people representing 300 school districts and education organizations and reflects the intense interest for guidance from people on the ground. These are the direct stakeholders with specific experience and knowledge about local school conditions. This network can be put immediately at your disposal. As detailed in our [letter of December 2nd](#) our primary recommendation is that the CDC guidelines for reopening schools be urgently updated--in many cases they simply cannot be implemented on the ground.

State of our Schools Report 2021: The 21st Century Schools Fund, Center for Green Schools @ USGBC and the National Council on School Facilities, and other partners, will release their third State of Our Schools Report timed for the Congressional debate on the President's infrastructure proposal that will include RASA. It will provide an updated capital outlay adequacy and equity analysis nationally and by state, with public data. There will be a strong thematic emphasis on the structural inequities on how we finance schools and why passing RASA is very much a civil rights and racial justice issue. We will also place a strong emphasis on how community schools can be "anchor institutions" that can help build back better in low-income communities and the role that public school facilities can play in support of the President's Climate Change Agenda.

There is very strong support among the public to see schools as part of our national infrastructure policy going forward. We believe that this support will only grow stronger given the positive role that schools play during the pandemic, as feeding centers, delivering education in various formats: on-site with mitigation strategies, hybrid and virtual instructional delivery, and providing connections to family supports and social services even without students in school buildings. The release of the Report can be a unique opportunity for the Secretary to make the case for the passage of RASA.

The National Narrative: Twenty-five years ago Education Secretary Richard Riley was able to use his bully pulpit to make school facilities a national issue. The incoming Secretary has an even greater opportunity to elevate the condition of our school facilities as a health issue, an equity and racial justice issue and how community schools can take an active role in helping to rebuild low-income communities. He can certainly make the case that "equity is the superior growth model" to quote Angela Glover Blackwell.

- Long before COVID closed our nation's schools, millions of low-income children went to outdated, unsafe and unhealthy school buildings that prevented them from learning to their best potential. The drinking water was unsafe, hundreds of thousands of children had to live with asthma and crumbling schools resulted in rapid teacher turnover. This history is not lost on me as a teacher. I have worked in some of those buildings.
- We urgently need to reopen our nation's schools, so we can reopen our economy and build back better. So, in my first 100 days I will be working with educators, teachers and parents on how we can open all of our nation's public schools safely.
- We must go forward together in a transparent way to reopen our nation's schools to make sure they are safe and healthy places that demonstrate to the parents of our 50 million school children that we have done everything possible to keep their children safe.

- This is an enormous task. We have to rebuild the connections and the trust that has been lost and President Biden is committed to giving us the funding we need to re-open our nation's schools and operate them safely.
- I will immediately be appointing a task force to work with the CDC to update their school facilities guidelines and I will create a new Office of School Facilities to build the capacity we need inside the Department to get the job done.
- And when we have reopened our schools we will take up the second great challenge which is to secure the passage of the Rebuild the America's Schools Act (RASA) to modernize our schools and to build a new generation of schools that will be healthy, safe, modern and resilient.
- Last summer the GAO released a report that found that 36,000 schools, about a third of all our nation's schools, need new or upgraded ventilation systems. This is a more pressing issue given COVID. We must make the needed investment; local school districts can't do it alone.
- I am a great supporter of community schools which can be the anchor institutions that can help us "build back better" helping to rebuild in our low income rural, urban and suburban communities across America. The modern school building is more than just a bunch of classrooms, these facilities have multiple purposes: they serve breakfast and lunch to millions of children every day, they house health clinics and after school programs; they are safe havens for children and they provide recreational facilities for the entire community and shelter in times of natural disasters and emergencies. At their best they are at the very center of our communities.
- I believe we should look at our nation's school facilities from many angles. How can we make sure they are healthy? How can we keep them open longer during the summer to make up for the learning loss of the last year? How can we use the very best technology to make sure all of our children can learn and have access to the Internet? How do we build a new generation of resilient schools that will help us address the challenges of climate changes?
- Healthy and safe school facilities will help us reopen our economy and allow millions of Americans to get back to work. Healthy school facilities that stay open longer and all through the summer will allow us to catch up on the learning loss of so many children. And healthy and safe school facilities will allow us to begin the process of overcoming decades of educational inequity and allow us to take a step in the right direction to overcome racial injustice.
- Now is the time to build back better. Start with our public schools.