



Press Release

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

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GAO Report: More than Half of School Districts Need Significant Building Repairs; Ventilation Systems Are Major Concern

As states consider reopening schools amid pandemic, report estimates that HVAC systems in 36,000 public school buildings should be updated or replaced

WASHINGTON – A [new report](#) released today by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates that more than half of America’s public school districts are in need of significant repairs to their school facilities. According to the report – which was the GAO’s first study of school infrastructure needs since 1996 – 54 percent of school districts across the country must replace or update major systems in more than half their buildings.

Notably, GAO found that Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems were most frequently in need of repair, raising fresh concerns about the safety of school facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report estimated that 4 in 10 districts need to update or replace HVAC systems in at least half of their school buildings, which it projects to effect 36,000 school buildings nationwide.

According to guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ensuring that “ventilation systems operate properly” is among the key considerations for school leaders seeking to reopen schools.

“Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, outdated and hazardous school buildings were undermining the quality of public education and putting students and educators at risk. Now, the pandemic is exacerbating the consequences of our failure to make necessary investments in school infrastructure,” said Education and Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott (VA-03). “This report offers clear, irrefutable evidence that we must launch an urgent, nationwide effort to rebuild America’s schools. As workers face record unemployment, there is no better time for a historic investment in school infrastructure that will make classrooms safer and get millions of people back to work.”

Last year, the House Committee on Education and Labor advanced the [Rebuild America's Schools Act](#) (H.R. 865), which would authorize \$70 billion in grants and \$30 billion in bonds to help address critical physical and digital infrastructure needs in schools across the country. According to economic projections, the bill would create more than 1.9 million good-paying jobs.

The GAO report also found high-poverty were more likely to rely on state funding to cover the cost of building repairs compared to low-poverty schools, which were more likely to fund projects through local property taxes. As states face unprecedented budget shortfalls due to the pandemic, high-poverty schools could face even greater financial challenges.

The *Heroes Act*, which the House passed on May 15, [would provide \\$915 billion in emergency funding](#) for state and local governments to help avert devastating cuts to public education. The bill included an additional \$100 billion in direct education funding to support K-12 schools and institutions of higher education—however, funding cannot be utilized for capital projects.

To read “K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement,” click [here](#).

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