

## Testimony on the School Building Enhancement Act

Representative Rush Holt  
“Modern Public School Facilities: Investing in the Future”  
Committee on Education and Labor  
February 13, 2008

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member McKeon, and members of the Committee, for inviting me to speak today on The School Building Enhancement Act (H.R. 3197). I am pleased that this legislation is being considered as part of our discussion on investing in our public school facilities.

As we on the committee know all too well, our nation’s K-12 schools face a number of challenges due to both increasing student populations and increasing community expectations. However, schools are hampered from being able to achieve needed improvements because of constrained operating budgets, aging infrastructure and ever increasing energy bills.

I introduced the School Building Enhancement Act in 2005 after learning that energy bills were the second-highest operating expenditure for schools after personnel costs. At that time schools were paying \$6 billion annually on energy, more than the amount spent on textbooks and computers combined. In 2007, due to the sky-rocketing costs of energy, the annual spending by schools on energy had increased to \$8 billion.

Fortunately, there are ways for schools to offset the soaring price of energy. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, thirty percent of energy consumed in buildings is used unnecessarily or inefficiently. By understanding where energy is used unwisely and implementing simple changes in the operations and maintenance of school buildings, a school’s operating costs can be reduced by 5-25 percent. Schools that are seeking even greater long term savings can retrofit their buildings with more efficient systems and replace old appliances. The \$2 billion saved could be used for purchases that directly benefit our America’s students - such as hiring 30,000 new teachers or purchasing 40 million additional textbooks annually.

However, cash strapped school systems are often unable to find the necessary financial resources to invest in these energy efficient upgrades. My bill would assist schools in making these improvements by providing grants to states and local educational agencies through the Department of Education for energy efficiency upgrades. These improvements would need to follow the guidelines of the EnergySmart Schools Program of the Department of Energy or the Energy Star for K-12 School Districts program at the Environmental Protection Agency.

Schools that have already implemented energy efficiency measures have succeeded in achieving significant savings. For example, the Summerfield Elementary School in my home state of New Jersey has implemented energy efficiency measures which have reduced their consumption by 32 percent, allowing Summerfield to save \$41,000

annually on energy costs. Summerfield is just one of many schools that are being built to use energy smarter and more efficiently; according to the Environmental Protection Agency there are over 800 schools that have been Energy Star certified and are saving 40 cents per square foot in operating costs annually.

Energy efficiency upgrades not only save schools money; there are potential health and learning benefits to students and teachers as well. For example, daylighting can dramatically decrease the use of energy in schools. According to a study by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, students who learn in daylit classrooms have 5%-14% better test scores than those who learn in non-daylit schools. My colleague and friend Darlene Hooley and a cosponsor of H.R. 3197 has already testified about these benefits as the chair of the Green Schools Caucus.

Twenty-six of our colleagues, including six of our fellow committee members, - Mr. Ehlers, Mr. Davis, Mr. Grijalva, Ms. Clarke, Mr. Hare and Mr. Payne- are cosponsors of the School Building Enhancement Act. I would like to invite all the members of the Committee to become a cosponsor of this important bill.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.