

**Opening Statement of Rep. Michael N. Castle (R-DE)  
Senior Republican Member,  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and  
Secondary Education  
Witness Testimony on “Modern Public School Facilities:  
Investing in the Future”**

**February 13, 2008**

Good morning. Thank you Chairman Miller, for holding today's hearing. As the Senior Republican Member of the subcommittee that oversees K-12 legislation, I welcome the opportunity to testify before you today and look forward to hearing from my colleagues as well as the other witnesses on this important issue - modern public school facilities, particularly, the adequacy of existing public school facilities and whether there is a need for a federal school construction program.

I think we can all agree that one of the greatest challenges this nation faces is ensuring every child receives the academic means they need to succeed in the future, which includes learning in a physical environment which is conducive to doing so.

Before this Committee enacts legislation calling for new federal spending for school construction projects, however, it is necessary for Congress to consider a number of factors.

First, it is important that we understand the need for federal funding for school construction projects. Over the past decade, the condition of local public school facilities has become an important component of the education debate in communities throughout the nation. How much should be spent on school construction in urban, rural and suburban areas, along with how to modernize and renovate existing public elementary and secondary schools have become significant issues for many states and local school districts.

In general, the federal government has had an extremely limited, in fact, almost non-existent role in financing school construction projects. Historically, the primary responsibility for school construction has been at the state and local levels which have spent more than \$145 billion in just the last seven years according to reports from the construction industry.

The education needs in our country are great, and many areas face major challenges with overcrowding and

dilapidated space. In fact, we face similar challenges in several areas of education such as teacher shortages, teacher quality, educating those with disabilities, achievement gaps and the list goes on.

Additionally, it is important to understand the cost implications of federal funding for school construction. Both the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Government Accountability Office have attempted to project the needs and costs of construction on the state and local levels based on self-reporting by school superintendents and other school officials. The results have been astounding.

According to a report recently released by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) entitled *Public School Principals Report on Their School Facilities: Fall 2005*, the unmet need for school construction and renovation is estimated at \$112 billion and three-quarters of the nation's schools report needing funds to bring their buildings into a "good overall condition." It is also estimated that States and localities need \$11 billion to simply comply with Federal mandates to remove or correct hazardous substances such as asbestos, lead paint, and radon.

As we balance the current obligations of the federal government in educating our youth, our decisions must be based on existing commitments and greatest needs. While school construction is a factor, the federal government must continue to assist local schools and school districts in meeting the federally-imposed mandates, such as adequate funding for Title I, fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Act, assisting with compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and meeting various other requirements imposed by the Environmental Protection Agency.

From my perspective, these are the needs which compel us, on the federal, level, to provide funding to the programs which directly help improve student achievement and close the achievement gaps that have persisted for decades between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers.

We face challenges at every corner as we work to provide our students with the best possible education and provide them with the necessary tools to succeed. I hope we can continue to work together to balance these needs and

make decisions based on our current commitments and greatest needs.