



**STATEMENT OF
JUDI CADDICK
ON BEHALF OF
THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
MODERN PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES:
INVESTING IN THE FUTURE**

February 13, 2008

Chairman Miller and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the urgent need to address our nation's public school infrastructure.

I began my teaching career 19 years ago and I have spent the last 17 years teaching math to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders at Memorial Junior High in Lansing, Illinois. Lansing is located just south of Chicago on the Indiana border. For years, Lansing was a solid blue collar middle class suburb, many of whose residents worked in the area steel mills. With the decline of area manufacturing jobs, we have seen an increase in the number of students from low income families.

Four years ago, our student enrollment was approximately 700, but rapid and significant increases have resulted in a current enrollment approaching 950. As a result, we have faced problems of overcrowding and outdated school facilities.

I would like to focus my testimony today on my first-hand impressions of the impact of school conditions on teaching and learning in my community. In my experience, and the experience of my colleagues, school modernization enhances student learning in many ways. For example, it:

- Addresses concerns for overcrowding – something we have seen in Lansing as our enrollments have grown.
- Allows educators to plan an environment that is more conducive to curriculum integration, engaged learning, and technology integration.
- Builds the infrastructure to support and meet the demands of modern technology.
- Addresses safety and environmental concerns brought about from aging structures which used unsafe materials, such as asbestos.
- Improves student and staff morale by establishing learning communities instead of isolated classrooms in a long hallway.
- Enhances the inclusion of new cutting edge technology.
- Adds to property values, thereby improving the community. However, without federal and state dollars, the tax burden is placed squarely on homeowners, many of whom are senior citizens on fixed incomes.
- Enhances the school as a community center.
- Improves the offering of extra curricular activities for students, giving them a constructive avenue for learning through teaming and physical accomplishments.

- Improves the environment for offering after-school learning activities to meet the needs of the community, such as tutoring services, clubs, etc.

I have seen these principles at work in my school. The original section of our building was built in 1945 and there were three subsequent additions. The age and the condition of the building presented our teachers with many challenges. While the district was able to purchase new technology with grant money, it was difficult to use three computers, a printer, and a television hook-up for demonstration with only two outlets in each classroom.

Our school board, anticipating an increase in enrollment and considering the limitations of the building, decided to build a new facility. The building is being constructed in phases with the sixth grade wing being completed in December 2006, and seventh grade and eighth grades expected to be completed this year. The final phase is to be completed by September 2009 and will include a second gymnasium, new music room, and office space for our administrators.

Our enrollment increased so rapidly that the district had to hire seven additional teachers before any of the new rooms were ready. This meant the teachers had to travel from room to room rather than have their own space. Our average sixth grade class size in 2006 was 36.3, in 2007 it was 29.7 and this year we are back above 30. Had we not built the new building with the additional classrooms, our class size average would now be 39 students.

We have seen an immediate, positive impact now that our sixth graders have moved to the new building. Our students are amazed at their new school building. Hallways in the old building were so narrow and crowded that it was difficult to navigate from one classroom to another, especially if you were a tiny sixth grader trying to get through the eighth graders. There were frequent fights as students pushed and shoved or accidentally bumped into each other and tempers flared. Teachers often could not see incidents where adult intervention may have prevented bullying or harassment.

In the new building, there is ample room for students to move freely and teachers can more easily supervise behavior. The new classrooms have great lighting, new furniture, white boards, and sufficient outlets placed so that teachers and staff are not tripping over multiple extension cords. It is so nice not to have to unplug the television where the PowerPoint presentation is displayed so that you can plug in a second computer for a student.

Our old building had carpeting in the special education classrooms and the sewers had backed up numerous times, flooding those rooms. Even though our custodians cleaned the carpets as best they could, on hot days in September the odor was unmistakable. Many of our students and staff have asthma and allergies that were exacerbated by the conditions in those classrooms. They are all breathing easier in the new building.

As we walk from the old building into the new building it is like walking from a cave into sunlight. Adults and children alike have commented on how stressful it feels in the old building and how calm and safe it feels in the new one.

We are fortunate to have these new facilities available to us, but so many schools across the nation are not so lucky.

A Nationwide Problem

My personal experiences clearly illustrate the necessity for meaningful federal assistance for school construction and modernization. This need reaches far beyond Illinois. It is a nationwide problem that demands nationwide attention.

America's schools are in desperate need of repair and renovation. Across the country, students learn in overcrowded classrooms with peeling paint, leaking roofs, and faulty wiring. Some schools hold classes in "temporary" trailers, converted closets, and hallways. In fact, the Modular Building Institute estimated in 2003 that more than 220,000 portable classrooms were in use by public school systems in the United States.

Too many students attend schools that lack basic electrical and telecommunications equipment necessary for connection to the Internet or the use of new education technologies. Students attending public schools in less than adequate condition face not only direct impacts on their academic achievement, but also significant dangers to their personal health and safety.

According to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, in 1998, the average public school building in the United States was 42 years old. The mean age ranged from 46 years in the Northeast and Central states to 37 years in the Southeast. About one-fourth (28 percent) of all public schools were built before 1950, and 45 percent of all public schools were built between 1950 and 1969. Seventeen percent of public schools were built between 1970 and 1984, and 10 percent were built after 1985.

Impact on Student Achievement

My personal experiences regarding the impact of school conditions on student learning are backed up by a growing body of research supporting the relationship between the condition of a school's facilities and student achievement.

- A recent study (*The Walls Speak: The Interplay of Quality Facilities, School Climate, and Student Achievement*, 2006) found a positive correlation between a school facility's condition, school climate, and student achievement.
- Another study (*The Impact of School Environments*, 2005) analyzed 25 years of research and found that the majority supported the relationship between school quality and student performance. Conversely, a study of Houston schools (*The Wise Man Builds His House Upon the Rock*, 2004) demonstrated how poor school conditions related to poor school performance.
- A 1996 study by the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University found a significant difference in academic achievement between students in substandard classrooms and demographically similar children in a first-class learning environment.
- Similarly, a 1995 study of North Dakota high schools found a positive correlation between school condition and both student achievement and student behavior. A 1995 study of

overcrowded schools in New York City found students in such schools scored significantly lower on both mathematics and reading exams than did similar students in underutilized schools.

Modern Schools for the 21st Century

Educational technology is a crucial element of a quality education. Technology in the classroom both enhances the educational experience and prepares students for employment in an economy growing increasingly dependent on technology. In the classroom, students who have daily access to cutting-edge technology perform better academically. Studies have found students who use technology in the classroom show more enthusiasm, have higher attendance rates, develop better writing skills, and display a greater capacity to communicate effectively about complex problems.

Unfortunately, inadequate infrastructure limits access to classroom technology in many areas. The average school building in America was designed and built for a pre-technology era. Many schools are not ready to accommodate either basic connections to the Internet or the wider range of exciting educational technologies.

School Modernization and “Green Schools”

Modernizing our nation’s schools is also critical to ensure students and educators a healthy environment. Twenty percent of the American population spends their days in school buildings, and one quarter of these students and school staff attend schools that are considered substandard or dangerous to occupant health.

Every child and school staff person has the right to a school with healthy air to breath and conditions that foster learning. “Green schools” create a safe and healthy environment that is conducive to teaching and learning while saving energy, resources and money. Specifically, such schools provide an environment that has:

- Superior indoor air quality
- Superior acoustics
- Daylight and views
- Thermal comfort (temperature and humidity)
- Mold prevention

Studies demonstrate that green schools directly benefit student health and performance. These studies show that:

- Daylight improves performance
- Good indoor air quality improves health
- Acoustics increase learning potential
- Mold prevention decreases asthma incidences (asthma is the number one cause of school absenteeism due to a chronic illness)
- Comfortable indoor temperatures increase occupant satisfaction

Green schools serve to engage and inspire students and can be used as interactive teaching tools. For example, alternative energy sources such as solar panel roofs can be studied, organic vegetables can be grown and eaten at lunch, and ecosystems can be studied in constructed

wetlands. Green schools also increase staff satisfaction, and they commonly report reductions in teacher absenteeism and turnover.

If all new school construction and renovation used the “green” approach starting today, energy savings alone would total \$20 billion over the next 10 years.

The Need for Federal Assistance

Ensuring all of our nation’s students access to safe, modern schools that are not overcrowded requires a significant federal investment. Although school construction is, and will remain, primarily a state and local responsibility, states and school districts cannot meet the current urgent needs without federal assistance. In 1995, the General Accounting Office estimated that just repairing existing school facilities would cost \$112 billion.

NEA’s May 2000 report “Modernizing Our Schools: What Will It Cost?” estimated the nationwide cost of repairing, renovating, or building school facilities and installing modern educational technology at \$322 billion – nearly three times previous government estimates, and roughly ten times what states currently spend.

Federal assistance is particularly needed to ensure targeting of resources to communities with the greatest needs. The distribution of recent state and local investments has been overwhelmingly slanted to the most affluent communities, which are better able to fund new investments without outside assistance. A 2006 study released by the Building Educational Success Together (BEST) coalition found that the quality of children’s schools is dependent upon their racial or ethnic background and whether they live in a rich or poor neighborhood. Local spending on school facilities in affluent communities is almost twice as high as in our most disadvantaged communities, as measured on a per-pupil basis. The report also found that school districts with predominantly Caucasian enrollment benefited from about \$2,000 more per student in school repair and construction spending than predominantly minority districts.

NEA strongly urges Congress to help meet these needs by creating a federal school renovation grant program targeted to communities that have struggled to fund needed repairs. Specifically, NEA supports the *Public School Repair and Renovation Act* (H.R. 3902/ S.1492), introduced by Representative Loeb sack and Senator Harkin. Under this legislation, states would receive funding based on their Title I allocation for grants to poor and rural school districts. States would have the discretion to require matching funds from the local district, bringing the potential funding to much more than the \$1.6 billion federal investment.

The *Public School Repair and Renovation Act* builds on the highly successful Emergency School Repair program Congress authorized and funded in 2000. This very effective program provided grants to states and local school districts to make emergency school repairs. The program, which funded \$1 billion in repairs, was an excellent example of an appropriate federal-state partnership to renovate and repair schools.

NEA also supports the *21st Century High-Performing Public School Facilities Act* (H.R. 3021), introduced by Representative Chandler. This bill would require the Secretary of Education to make grants to school districts for the construction, modernization, or repair of kindergarten,

elementary, or secondary schools to make them safe, healthy, high-performing, and technologically up-to-date. The bill would give priority to districts serving a high number or percentage of disadvantaged children and those whose public schools are in relatively poor condition.

In addition to grant programs, NEA strongly supports legislation to provide tax credits for bonds for school modernization and new construction projects nationwide. *The America's Better Classroom Act* (H.R. 2470/ S. 912), introduced by House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Rangel, and Representatives Ramstad, and Etheridge, has received broad bipartisan support in the House over the last three Congresses and currently has 217 House cosponsors. The bill would provide for the issuance of more than \$25 billion in such bonds. Under the bill, the federal government would provide tax credits to bond holders in lieu of interest payments, and the state or school district would only be responsible for repaying the principal. This would save millions of dollars in interest payments for states and districts and help communities stretch limited resources to pay for additional school facility projects and essential education programs.

The *America's Better Classrooms Act* provides support for the building of new schools in America's urban, rural and suburban schools, and the renovation and repair of existing schools through the expansion of the Qualified Zone Academy Bond Program (QZAB). The small but well-utilized QZAB program is another example of an effective federal program providing federal support for local school facility repair and renovation programs. Since the QZAB program was authorized in 1997, school districts across the country have used the bonds to renovate and repair schools to create new and innovative school educational centers at a minimal cost to the U.S. Treasury.

We also support the School Building Enhancement Act (H.R.3197), introduced by Representative Holt. This bill would authorize grants to help schools become more energy efficient.

Finally, NEA would support a proposal to amend the federal rehabilitation tax credit program to create a level playing field for rehabilitation/modernization projects for aging public schools. Under current law, an owner who wants to rehabilitate/modernize an older building can have such projects qualify for federal tax credits equal to 20 percent of the costs. With just a small change to the existing program, this program could apply to public school renovations. Under such a proposal, local governments would then be able to enter into a sale/leaseback arrangement with private developers on public school renovation projects using these federal tax credits.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I urge Congress to act quickly to authorize school modernization programs that will help ensure every student in our nation the safe, modern learning environment so integral to success.

Thank you.