



School Facilities – How You Can Help

Many things come to mind when you think of K-12 education – teachers, principals, curriculum, athletics – but one of the most important factors that is sometimes overlooked is the importance of school facilities. Quality school buildings and classrooms are a key element in education. Students' academic performance, attendance rates, discipline and health are all affected by the environment in which they spend their school days. It can be hard to stay focused and motivated if you're shivering through the cold months in a school with a broken heating system, or standing in line for your school's only working bathroom.

School facilities are also an important factor in attracting and keeping good teachers. Persistently poor facilities, and a lack of commitment by leaders to improve them, can impact teacher morale. Mold, temperature and other problems can affect teachers' health. Teachers commit themselves day in and day out to students' learning and growth, and should not have to deal with things like leaky roofs, too few desks and inadequate classroom tools.

In Louisiana, we have paid a lot of attention to education reform in recent years. Unfortunately, school facilities have not been included in the state's efforts. Far too many Louisiana children and teachers spend their days in inadequate facilities. Spending on school facilities in Louisiana is the fourth-lowest in the country, and we are one of only nine states that do not contribute any state funding to local school facilities. Education generally in Louisiana is a responsibility shared by the state and local governments. School operations, transportation, planning, and instruction all benefit from state-local cooperation. Facilities, however, are left for local districts to handle on their own, even though they often lack the resources to build and maintain adequate facilities. It is time Louisiana made school facilities a priority by giving them a measure of funding and support as it does other vital areas of education.

Schools are integral to our communities and our future, and because they are both a state and local responsibility, there is much that you can do to help. Parent and citizen involvement is crucial to focusing attention on problems and potential solutions. Here are some things you can do to help bring quality school facilities to all Louisiana students:

- Get informed by following the news and attending your local school board meetings.
- Visit your community's schools and see the condition of the facilities firsthand.
- Support increases in property tax millage rates, the fundamental component of school facilities funding.
- Write your state representative and senator to call for a sustained statewide commitment to school facilities.
- Support creative funding strategies. For example, state matching funds granted to local districts lessen the local burden and motivate more local districts to act.
- Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Talk to other parents and citizens about school facilities.

We can and must provide better school facilities to Louisiana's schoolchildren. With knowledge, passion and commitment, we WILL build the schools our students and teachers deserve!

