Modernizing Virginia’s School Infrastructure Can’t Wait

Virginia’s public school buildings are aging, underfunded, and leaving students to learn in worsening conditions.

Why Virginia Needs Updated Schools Now

- Over half of Virginia’s schools are over 50 years old, and the state has identified $25 billion of backlog infrastructure needs in 2021.
- Virginia contributed $1.25 billion for school infrastructure in the most recent budget for the next two years, a historic increase but likely not enough to meet the growing backlog in a typical year.
- Virginia's oldest schools are in many of the state’s poorest localities, where communities have the least ability to raise local revenue.
- Updated air filtration systems are essential to mitigating the spread of COVID in schools, and additional funding is needed to modernize all buildings.
- Many schools are not ADA compliant – preventing students with disabilities from fully engaging in safe and accessible public schooling.
- Investing in school infrastructure will yield returns over the long-term, boost local economies with new construction jobs, and, as numerous studies conclude, lead to improved student outcomes, school climate, health, teacher effectiveness, and stronger teacher retention.

Virginia Is Neglecting Its Students’ Learning Conditions

- The state covered only 10% of school infrastructure needs between 2009–2020, leaving localities with vastly different capacities to raise revenue to pay the rest. No student in a high-income state like Virginia should have to learn in a crumbling school, regardless of zip code.
- Virginia’s contribution to school infrastructure has been among the lowest of any state in the country, and every other neighboring state and D.C. offer ongoing direct support to school divisions for infrastructure needs. Virginia should commit to a sustainable state support model.
- Aging school infrastructure is related to worse instruction for students, negatively impacts student achievement, increased absenteeism, and increased dropout rates.
- Research has shown that poor infrastructure in rural schools negatively affected student outcomes more than teacher turnover and socioeconomic challenges.

Virginia Has the Resources To Bring Its Schools Into the 21st Century by:

- Implement the bipartisan Commission on Social Construction and Modernization recommendations.
- Identify sustainable revenue streams that can fund school infrastructure in the billion-dollar range each budget cycle and work to reduce our infrastructure backlog.
- Allow localities to hold referendums to increase their own sales tax for school infrastructure.