ND School Construction Coalition



TO ENSURE ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOL FACILITIES IN NORTH DAKOTA.

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Coalition Leadership Team

The Coalition Leadership Team is composed of educational leaders and representatives from school districts across North Dakota. Formed in July 2023, this coalition aims to address the needs of school facilities statewide by advocating for adequate and equitable learning environments for all students.

Coalition Leadership Members

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Coalition Member School Districts

The following school districts have joined the North Dakota School Facility Coalition in support of addressing the critical needs of school facilities throughout the state. This coalition represents a group of educational institutions committed to ensuring that all students have access to adequate and equitable school facilities. The list of member districts is current as of September 16, 2024.

Member Districts

Alexander Public Schools
Belfield Public Schools
Beulah Public Schools
Bowman Public Schools
Cavalier Public Schools
Central Cass Public Schools
Devils Lake Public Schools

Dickinson Public Schools

Divide County Public Schools

Garrison Public Schools
Griggs County Public Schools

Hazen Public Schools Hillsboro Public Schools LaMoure Public Schools
Larimore Public Schools
Langdon Public Schools
Maple Valley Public Schools
Midkota Public Schools
Midway Public Schools
Minet Public Schools

Midway Public Schools
Minot Public Schools
Oakes Public Schools
Stanley Public Schools
Valley City Public Schools
Watford City Public Schools

Williston Public Schools

Why a Coalition?

The primary goal is to study the current state of school facilities across North Dakota and propose recommendations to ensure that every student has access to adequate and equitable school facilities.

Purpose and Formation

The coalition was formed in response to growing concerns about the state of school facilities throughout the state. Initial efforts focused on gathering data, including conducting a survey of school districts, which revealed a widespread issue of aging and deteriorating school buildings. Recognizing the significance of these findings, the coalition further researched evidence-based actions used by other states to address similar challenges. These actions were incorporated into the development of plans to address and prepare for the future of school facilities in North Dakota.

The Unchanging "Why"

Over the past 15 months, the coalition's discussions and strategies have evolved, but the core mission remains the same: To ensure that all students in North Dakota have access to adequate and equitable school facilities, irrespective of their school district, demographic background, or geographical location. This foundational belief is driven by the understanding that quality school facilities are directly linked to the quality of education. Properly maintained and well-designed schools support and strengthen the learning process, whereas inadequate facilities can negatively impact both student and teacher performance, health, and safety.

Key Findings and Concerns

Aging Infrastructure: Many schools in North Dakota are facing issues related to outdated and deteriorating facilities.

Adequacy and Equity: Disparities in school facility conditions across districts pose challenges to providing an adequate and equitable educational experience for all students.

Impact on Learning: Research shows that poor facilities can hinder student learning outcomes and adversely affect teacher performance and well-being.

Moving Forward

The coalition is dedicated to advocating for and implementing solutions that will address these challenges. By working collaboratively with legislators, educational leaders, and stakeholders, the coalition aims to create a future where all North Dakota students have access to safe, healthy, and equitable learning environments.

The coalition's vision is clear: to foster educational spaces that support the academic growth and well-being of every student, ensuring that school facilities are not a barrier but a foundation for success.

Survey Results

In February 2024, the North Dakota School Facility Coalition conducted a comprehensive survey of all 166 school districts in the state. The survey aimed to gather detailed information regarding the current condition of school facilities, financial limitations, debt limits, and recent efforts to address facility needs. Out of the 166 districts surveyed, 111 responded, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by schools across North Dakota. The key findings are summarized below:

1. Participation:

 111 out of 166 districts completed the survey, representing a broad cross-section of the state's students and school districts.

2. Primary Challenge- Aging Facilities:

 Aging facilities and deferred maintenance were identified as the number one challenge facing school districts. This indicates a widespread need for updating and maintaining school infrastructure to meet current educational standards.

3. Debt Limits:

o 77 respondents reported having a current debt limit of 5%, while 26 schools reported a 10% limit. These limits pose significant constraints on the districts' ability to fund necessary facility improvements.

4. Facility Assessments:

 Only 46 out of the 111 schools had completed a facility assessment in recent years. This highlights a gap in the evaluation of school facility conditions, which is crucial for planning and implementing improvements.

5. Bond Referendums:

61.2% of the responding schools had held a bond referendum in the past 10 years.
 This suggests a substantial effort by districts to secure funding for facility upgrades, despite financial and legislative hurdles.

6. Building Levy:

• The average building levy reported by districts is 10.16 mills.

Implications

The survey results underscore the pressing need for a coordinated statewide effort to address the aging and deteriorating condition of school facilities in North Dakota. With the majority of districts facing financial constraints due to the rising cost of construction, tax impacts, and outdated debt limits, it is clear that many schools are struggling to provide adequate learning environments for students. The North Dakota School Facility Coalition used these survey findings to guide the recommendations provided in this report.

Coalition Recommendations

The North Dakota School Construction Coalition asserts that ensuring adequacy and equity in school facilities across the state is essential. Regardless of a school's location, district size, or demographic makeup, every student deserves access to a safe, supportive, and effective learning environment. To address the disparities and challenges currently faced by many school districts, the coalition proposes the following four key actions:

1. Minimum Facility Adequacy Standards

Objective:

Establish a set of minimum standards for school facilities in North Dakota.

2. Facility Condition Assessments

Objective:

Ensure adequate and equitable school facilities by funding a statewide facility condition assessment program.

3. State Funding

Objective:

Create a state funding program to provide financial support for school facility improvements.

4. Legislative Action

Objective:

Make legislative changes to address current challenges facing school districts in their efforts to improve school facilities.

The North Dakota School Construction Coalition firmly believes that taking these four actions is critical to providing every student in the state with access to high-quality educational facilities. By establishing minimum standards, conducting thorough facility assessments, securing state funding, and enacting supportive legislation, North Dakota can ensure that all schools are equipped to provide a safe, healthy, and effective learning environment for every student.

Minimum Facility Adequacy Standards

In the context of school facilities, a standard is a set of criteria used to measure and judge the adequacy and equitability of educational environments. Across the United States, many states have adopted minimum facility adequacy standards to serve as a benchmark for evaluating school buildings. These standards help guarantee that all students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment, no matter where they reside or which school they attend.

The North Dakota School Construction Coalition has reviewed minimum facility adequacy standards from states such as Texas, Arizona, Wyoming, and Minnesota. These states have implemented clear criteria that provide a common measurement tool to evaluate school facilities' condition, safety, and suitability for learning.

Consideration

Currently, North Dakota does not have minimum facility adequacy standards for school facilities. This absence of standardized criteria makes it challenging to assess and compare the conditions of school buildings across the state. While the specific standards adopted by each state may vary, the essential element is the establishment of a consistent framework that ensures all school facilities are measured against a common set of requirements.

Examples of Facility Adequacy Standards Include:

Compliance with Codes: School buildings meet local, state, and federal building and fire codes.

Environmental Regulations: Facilities comply with state and federal environmental regulations, ensuring a safe and healthy environment for students and staff.

Structural Integrity: Buildings are structurally sound and capable of withstanding various environmental conditions.

Accessibility: Facilities meet all accessibility codes, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ensuring that all students have equal access.

Educational Spaces: Schools provide adequate space and facilities for required educational programs, including classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and recreational areas.

Coalition Recommendations

The School Construction Coalition recommends that the state of North Dakota take the critical step of establishing minimum facility adequacy standards for school facilities. This foundational action is essential for assessing and ensuring acceptable and impartial educational environments for all students across the state. Without established facility standards, it is impossible to effectively evaluate the current state of school facilities or plan for necessary improvements. By adopting minimum facility adequacy standards, North Dakota can take a significant step toward ensuring that all students, regardless of their school, district, or geographical location, have access to facilities that support and enhance their educational experiences.

Facility Condition Assessment

Introduction

A facility condition assessment (FCA) is a research-based method used to evaluate the physical state of a building, including its infrastructure, systems, and finishes. This evaluation helps determine the estimated lifespan of a school building and the cost of necessary repairs or replacements. FCAs are critical tools for planning and budgeting maintenance and renovations to ensure that school facilities remain safe, functional, and conducive to learning. Nationally, eleven states fund facility condition assessment programs, and an additional 15 states require school districts to complete facility assessments. These programs provide a systematic approach to understanding the condition of school facilities, identifying areas in need of repair or upgrade, and allocating resources effectively.

Considerations

In North Dakota, fewer than half of the school districts have completed a facility condition assessment. Currently, the state does not have a standardized method to evaluate the condition and needs of K-12 public schools. This lack of data creates challenges in understanding the full scope of facility-related issues and making informed decisions regarding facility improvements.

Examples of the Costs to Address Facility Needs Based on Facility Condition Assessments:

Devils Lake School District: \$63 million Oakes School District: \$27 million Valley City School District: \$37 million Williston Basin School District: \$225 million

These examples illustrate the significant financial investment required to address facility needs adequately. Without a comprehensive and standardized assessment process, many school districts struggle to identify and prioritize these needs, leaving students and staff in substandard learning environments.

Coalition Recommendations

The North Dakota School Facility Coalition believes that implementing a facility condition assessment program is a critical step in supporting school districts and ensuring that all school facilities meet minimum adequacy standards. A facility condition assessment program is essential for identifying the current state and needs of school facilities in North Dakota. By implementing a fully funded and standardized assessment program, the state can take a proactive approach to ensure that all students have access to safe, adequate, and equitable school facilities. This initiative will not only support the long-term sustainability of school buildings but also enhance the educational environment for students and staff statewide.

State Funding Program

Introduction

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average age of public schools in the United States is 49 years old, with approximately 40% of schools constructed before 1970. In 2012, the estimated cost to bring schools nationwide to good overall condition was \$197 billion.

This figure underscores the immense challenge of maintaining and upgrading school infrastructure. In North Dakota, the cost to ensure all school facilities are in good condition in 2024 is yet to be fully assessed, but it is expected to be substantial given the age and condition of many schools in the state. The average of public schools in North Dakota is 55 years old.

Considerations

Across the United States, more than half of the states provide state-supported funding for school facilities, recognizing that adequate and equitable educational environments are essential for student success. However, North Dakota currently allocates no state funding specifically aimed at ensuring the adequacy and equity of school facilities. This gap places a significant burden on local school districts and their communities.

In recent years, the cost of construction has increased dramatically due to inflation and labor shortages. These factors have made it increasingly difficult for local efforts to address aging and deteriorating school facilities without imposing a significant tax burden on residents. For many districts, particularly those in western and rural North Dakota, construction costs now exceed \$500 per square foot, a steep rise from \$250 per square foot just five years ago.

Key Challenges:

Lack of State Support: No current state funding is allocated specifically for school facility improvements.

Rising Costs: Construction costs have doubled in some areas, making it more difficult for districts to fund necessary upgrades and repairs.

Tax Burden: The financial burden of improving school facilities falls heavily on local taxpayers, often leading to challenges in passing bond referendums and levies.

Coalition Recommendations

The North Dakota School Facility Coalition advocates for the creation of a state funding program aimed at guaranteeing that all K-12 students in North Dakota have access to adequate and equitable school facilities. The coalition believes that providing state support for school facilities is not only a responsibility of the state but also a strategic investment in the future of North Dakota's education system. Additionally, state funding can provide much-needed property tax relief to residents.

With rising construction costs and the significant burden on local taxpayers, it is imperative that the state takes an active role in supporting school infrastructure. The coalition urges the state legislature to establish a state funding program, drawing from the substantial resources of North Dakota's trust funds, to invest in the future of education and the well-being of its students.

Legislative Action

High-quality school facilities are essential for creating safe and effective learning environments for students. However, many school districts face difficulties in maintaining and upgrading their facilities due to outdated school construction financing laws. To overcome these challenges, our coalition advocates for legislative action to enforce that all schools can meet current standards.

Considerations:

Scott D. Wegner, a North Dakota attorney, has written a comprehensive guide on school construction finance laws, offering strategies for school districts to achieve adequate and equitable facilities. In his guide, on page 25, Wegner suggests seven legislative actions to enhance school facilities. After a thorough review of this resource and multiple discussions with Wegner, the coalition has identified key recommendations for legislative actions.

Coalition Recommendations:

The School Construction Coalition proposes six legislative actions that would greatly strengthen the partnership between the state and school districts, facilitating improvements in school facilities to meet state standards. These recommendations are outlined below:

1. Debt Limits:

Current debt limits for school districts are half the amount intended by the constitution, measured against true and full value rather than full value. With the rising costs of construction, many districts are unable to fully utilize their debt capacity to address necessary facility needs.

Recommendation: Increase the debt limit for school districts or measure it against assessed values, aligning with the original constitutional intent.

2. Voter Requirements:

o Adjust the requirements for voter approval on General Obligation (GO) Bonds. Currently, a supermajority is needed, which can be challenging to achieve.

Recommendation: Lower the required voter approval to a simple majority if at least 40% of qualified voters participate in a school referendum election. If voter turnout is below 40%, a 55% voter approval would be required to pass a GO bond.

3. Miscellaneous 12 Mills:

 Historically, school districts have been allowed to levy mills for specific purposes (e.g., HVAC improvements). However, current regulations limit districts' ability to address various building needs.

Recommendation: Allow school districts to bond against the 12 miscellaneous mills in the general fund for specific building needs, similar to the authority counties have to borrow against their general fund without a public vote.

4. Building Fund:

 While most school districts have a building fund, only 29% levy beyond 10 mills. In contrast, counties and other local governments can access up to 10 mills for capital projects without a public vote.

Recommendation: Align school districts with other local governments, granting them the ability to levy up to 10 mills without voter approval to fund school facility needs.

5. Amending Referendum Ballot Language:

 The language on school bond referendum ballots was amended in 2015 to include mill amounts, causing confusion among voters unfamiliar with this terminology.
 Schools are required by law to use dollar amounts when presenting tax levies to the public.

> Recommendation: Amend the language on referendum ballots to revert to the original format, using dollar amounts to align with current tax levy requirements and reduce voter confusion.

6. Special Reserve Fund:

 School districts are currently authorized to levy three mills for the Special Reserve Fund without exceeding the value of 15 mills and can withdraw fifty percent each year.

Recommendation: Amend the regulation to allow school districts to transfer the full amount of funds from the Special Reserve to the building fund, enabling them to address school facility needs more effectively.

Next Actions of the Coalition

Following the presentation and feedback from the School Funding Task Force, the coalition will continue to engage with education and state leaders to gain support for the recommendations outlined in this report. The coalition remains committed to advocating for solutions that will provide students with adequate and equitable school facilities in North Dakota. The key actions moving forward are summarized below:

Meet with state educational associations and offices (NDU, NDCEL, NDSBA, NDDPI, NDSOS) to gather input and feedback.

Providing information, data, and school resources to assist legislators in their efforts to improve school facilities during the 2025 Legislative Session.

Continue to communicate with educational and state leaders in an effort to build support for achieving adequacy and equity in all North Dakota schools.

Appendix A: Letters of Support



Great Public Schools

Great Public Service

May 30, 2024

Dr. Josh Johnson, Superintendent Valley City Public Schools 460 Central Avenue North Valley City, ND 58072

Dear Dr. Johnson:

At a recent meeting of the ND United Board of Directors, Southeast Region Director Sarah Lerud asked that we support the efforts of the ND School Construction Coalition. After a conversation led by Ms. Lerud, the ND United Board of Directors voted unanimously to stand with the Coalition in its efforts to ensure that communities across North Dakota have the funding they need to provide safe, modern buildings that accommodate the educational needs of their children.

In our view, we do not do anything as a society more important than educate our future. Like you, ND United believes that students deserve modern and flexible workspaces in which to learn the skills they will need to prepare them to graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in the military, the workforce, or in higher education. Please know that ND United applauds your efforts to improve education in our state and we wish you great success in this endeavor.

Best Always,

Nick Archuleta

President

Phone: 701.749.2570

Fax: 701.749.2313

Maple Valley
School District #4

207 Broadway Street, Tower City, ND 58071 www.maple-valley.k12.nd.us

Dan Larson, Superintendent Michael Nygaard, HS Principal Courtney Storhoff, K-6 Principal Cathy Janish, Business Manager

To: Western Dakota Energy Association

3/26/24

I am writing to express Maple Valley Public School's support of the School Construction Coalition. North Dakota school districts are currently facing significant challenges in maintaining and upgrading their facilities to meet the evolving needs of our students and educators.

The well-being and effectiveness of our educational environments are paramount, not only for the immediate educational outcomes they produce but also for the long-term benefits they provide to our communities and society at large. As a K-12 school district of approximately 240 students we understand numerous school districts in our state are grappling with the constraints of outdated infrastructure, which in turn impacts the quality of education our children receive. We have recently undergone a construction project that included an addition and extensive remodel of our school in 2018 that allowed us to close to aging facilities and put our resources into one location. This resulted in a significant payment each year that goes towards paying the cost of that project over time. This school year after an extensive fund-raising campaign in which over a million dollars was raised locally, we began a long overdue addition of a modern gym facility, classroom, and community wellness center. This project was planned with economy in mind and our board worked to stretch available funds to achieve our goals. Our project was initially expected to cost \$3.5 million dollars. When bids came in, they were well over \$4,000.000. We made cuts to the project that brough the costs down. Budget constraints was still daunting as the scope of the project still amounted to approximately \$4,200,000. This forced us to pursue a school construction loan from the Coal Development Trust Fund to meet the shortfall of available funds and the cost of the project. Due to our current financial obligation, we fully support the School Construction Coalition but are unable to allocate dollars for financial support.

The Maple Valley Public School District does not discriminate based on race color, national origin, sex, disability or age in its programs or activities and provides equal access to designated youth groups.



Phone: 701.749.2570 Fax: 701.749.2313

Maple Valley

School District #4

207 Broadway Street, Tower City, ND 58071 www.maple-valley.k12.nd.us

Dan Larson, Superintendent Michael Nygaard, HS Principal Courtney Storhoff, K-6 Principal Cathy Janish, Business Manager

Investing in our educational facilities is an investment in our future. Modern, well-maintained school buildings and resources are essential for fostering a conducive learning environment, encouraging student engagement, and enabling teachers to deliver the most effective education. Such investments also reflect our commitment to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographic location.

I understand that addressing these facility needs requires substantial financial resources, collaboration, and strategic planning. Therefore, I urge all stakeholders, including state and local government officials, community leaders, and educational authorities, to prioritize and allocate the necessary funding and support to ensure that our school districts can undertake the necessary upgrades and maintenance.

By coming together as a community and demonstrating our support for the North Dakota school districts, we can make a significant impact on the lives of our students and educators, paving the way for a brighter, more prosperous future for our state.

Sincerely,

Daniel Larson Superintendent

Maple Valley Public School

Daniel Lausan

RAIDERS

The Maple Valley Public School District does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age in its programs or activities and provides equal access to designated youth groups.

References

North Dakota School Construction Finance Guide

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18d16ju3krQtJRyWeGac1bA0Hu8B7DcCA/view?usp=drive link

Presentation to School Funding Task Force (11.28.2023)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12JTej98CWBHrWcOymdhntUZYHAXCRj9u/view?usp=drive link

School Construction Coalition Survey

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WJsUwB2nQoQzahx1Nu00sU8fQsRaqGzM/view?usp=drive link

Presentation to School Funding Task Force (02.21.2024)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WvA-eKfM rCWjsulrRmro3xDwMCv1pXI/view?usp=drive link

State Adequacy Standards for School Facilities

Wyoming

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QldhQBBc3kKrHWJiw3nBS1Fq5FMzSXx3/view?usp=drive link

Arizona

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RtW23gy4mP8hzTMOXXSVc9gDH cBaQc5/view?usp=drive link

Minnesota

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lrmGqUUcVElqPzfSUd53AJQz26GT_LY1/view?usp=drive_link

Texas

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i-1cDZX3vKUl89o2a5zI2-ZeQqlOVrVF/view?usp=drive link

Facility Condition Assessments

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qFnoXxMIt7Lb458q8gnlwUt2vhHko8xS/view?usp=drive link

Montana Bond Election Vote Requirements

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a0zzUm4vxi cOa251Vxebc2JLCjf8T0O/view?usp=drive link