

BEST Recommendations

Federal and State Education Policy

Closing the disparity gap in school building quality should be an integral part of closing the achievement gap and should be an explicit objective of state and federal educational law, including No Child Left Behind.

Public school facilities should be incorporated into programs and funding of a wide range of federal and state agencies.

The National Center for Educational Statistics should expand the Common Core of Data to include public school buildings inventories, condition, design, utilization and funding.

School Construction Funding

Construction and related capital outlay for schools should be targeted to the neediest children and funded from the federal and state governments in at least the same proportion as operating budget expenditures: 9% from the federal government and 47% from the states (in advance, rather than as a reimbursement).

“BEST has illustrated the disparities in provision of funds for school construction, and provided valuable policy suggestions that should receive serious attention.”

– Senator Barack Obama

ABOUT BEST

Under the leadership of the 21st Century School Fund and with support from the Ford Foundation, a group of local and national organizations working to improve public school facilities created Building Educational Success Together (BEST) in 2001. BEST is dedicated to identifying, developing and sharing experience and knowledge about policy and practices, to improve public school facilities but also to promote educational quality and community vitality.

The BEST partners that participated in the research:

- **21st Century School Fund**
Washington, DC
- **Center for Cities and Schools**
University of California, Berkeley
- **Education Law Center**
Newark, New Jersey
- **KnowledgeWorks Foundation**
Cincinnati, Ohio
- **National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities**
Washington, DC
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation**
Washington, DC
- **Neighborhood Capital Budget Group**
Chicago, Illinois
- **New Visions for Public Schools**
New York, New York

View the complete report at:
WWW.21CSF.org/GrowthandDisparity

GROWTH and DISPARITY

A Decade of U.S. Public School Construction

Report Brief



October 2006

BEST | BUILDING EDUCATIONAL
SUCCESS TOGETHER

Background

Our country has long struggled to improve public education and achieve equity in public schools. The condition of public school facilities was highlighted as a social justice issue in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* challenge to segregation and poignantly described in Jonathan Kozol's 1991 landmark book, *Savage Inequalities*. But inadequate facilities remain largely unrecognized as an education quality issue even though facility conditions affect teaching and learning. In addition, the important role public school quality—including building quality—plays in neighborhood and community revitalization is just beginning to be understood.

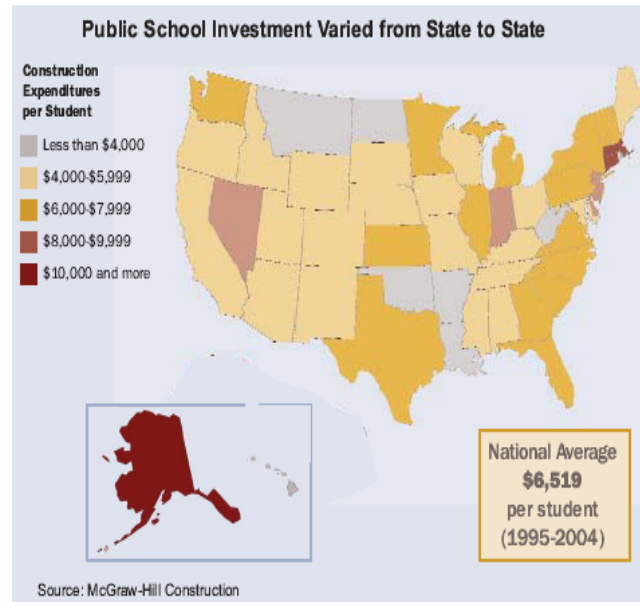
Growth & Disparity provides a comprehensive analysis of who benefited from public school construction spending across the nation. In this report, the Building Educational Success Together (BEST) research team looks at how much was spent, what was accomplished, and which students and communities saw benefits. The analysis looks at the decade from 1995 through 2004.



Findings

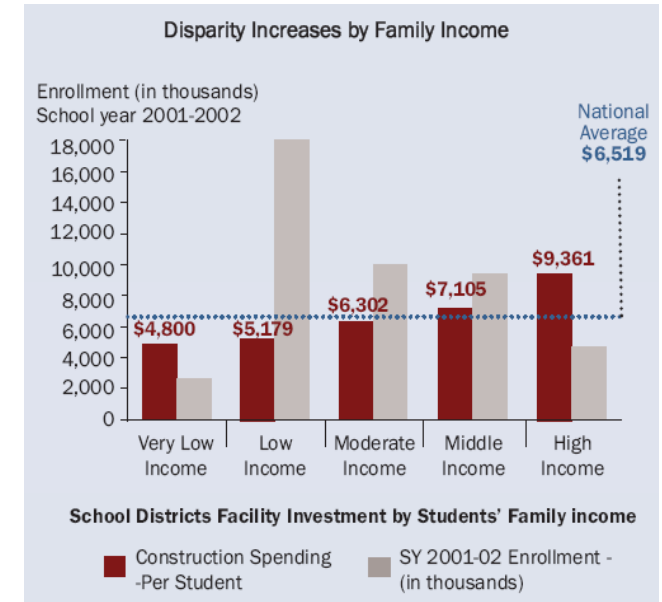
We found **unprecedented spending and growth** in school facility investment across the country between 1995-2004:

- Public school districts spent more than **\$304 billion*** in bricks and mortar - hard costs for public school renovation and new construction contracts.
- When you add interest payments, soft costs like architectural and engineering fees, and land acquisition, school construction spending was **nearly \$600 billion.**



View the complete report at:
www.21CSF.org/GrowthandDisparity

*All numbers in 2005 dollars



But this report confirms what many educators and communities have suspected for years: **There is extreme disparity in school facility spending.** Billions of public dollars have not been equally spent across affluent and low-income communities.

- Poor school districts made the lowest facility investments (\$4,800/student), while the affluent school districts made the highest investments (\$9,361/student).
- The lowest investments (\$4,140/ student) were made in the poorest communities, while the highest investments (\$11,500/student) were made in the wealthiest communities.
- An exception was New Jersey where court challenges forced state funding expenditures in poor districts to a comparable level with affluent districts.