



American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
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April 29, 2008

Chairman George Miller
Ranking Member Howard "Buck" McKeon
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon:

On behalf of the more than 1.4 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), I urge your strong support of the 21st Century High-Performing Public School Facilities Act (H.R. 3021), as amended by the Loeb sack-Kildee Education and Labor Committee substitute. This important legislation will be marked up by the committee on April 30, 2008.

As states strive to meet new and higher standards, we can no longer overlook the fact that a safe and modern learning environment is integral to raising student performance. Too many of our students must learn—and too many teachers must teach—in overcrowded and aged school buildings. Under these conditions, teachers are struggling to meet the new expectations, making these goals even more difficult to achieve.

Across the nation, states are facing the most serious fiscal crisis in more than half a century. While their ability to repair and modernize schools may be limited, the need for federal assistance to help states and localities improve deteriorating and outdated school buildings remains urgent.

H.R. 3021, as amended, addresses this issue by authorizing \$6.4 billion a year to assist in meeting these goals. The bill would create over 100,000 well-paying construction jobs. This legislation also stresses the need for environmentally sound construction that will improve energy efficiency and air quality.

The bill correctly leaves the decision on what projects to undertake to local officials; but, when implemented, the bill will free up local funds to provide additional assistance to needed education programs.

In addition, the legislation prohibits the use of these funds to reduce the federal contribution to important education programs such as Title I and IDEA. This maintenance of effort requirement makes clear that it is not Congress' intent to address the issue of school modernization by undercutting the vital programmatic assistance that districts receive under Title I and IDEA.

Chairman Miller/Ranking Member McKeon/Ed & Labor Committee/H.R. 3021

The AFT has a long history of advocating for the federal government to be a more active partner in helping states and localities improve public school facilities. Preliminary studies indicate that student health directly affects academic performance, and these studies also suggest that green schools have a tremendous impact on test scores, school operational costs, teacher and school-related personnel attrition, and the environment.

To this end, the AFT published a report in 2006, *Building Minds, Minding Buildings*, which details the inadequate state of many of our public school facilities from the viewpoint of those who work in them. The report offers a framework for fixing schools and stresses the need for high performance schools to replace poor facility conditions that compromise learning and teaching. The AFT continues to conduct leadership training in this area, and has joined a number of organizations to assure that high performance and sustainable green schools are created.

The AFT believes that H.R. 3021, the 21st Century High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, as amended, represents an appropriate role for the federal government to play in this area, and urges your support for this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KWC', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kristor W. Cowan
Director, Legislation Department

KWC:emc opeiu#2 afl-cio

cc: Members of the House Education and Labor Committee