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September 16, 2009

The Honorable George Miller
 Chairman
 Committee on Education and Labor
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

The Council of the Great City Schools, the coalition of the nation's largest central city public school districts, writes in appreciation of H.R. 3221, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act. By passing this bill, which includes provisions modeled after the 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, the Committee on Education and Labor acted to deliver needed assistance to improve the infrastructure of our nation's schools. The Council urges the full House of Representatives to approve H.R. 3221 immediately.

In urban schools, congressional efforts for modernization will help reverse ongoing facility deterioration, where students attend classes in the country's oldest buildings. These schools have long suffered from overcrowding, inadequate repair, and deferred maintenance, and the result can be seen in areas from student performance to teacher recruitment and retention. Improving these learning conditions is vital for helping schools meet high standards, improve student test scores, and keep instructional staff focused on the children they teach.

School facility support will also provide immediate assistance to school districts that are dealing with budget cuts and a slowing economy. The measure includes provisions to ensure that federal assistance reaches the local level quickly and with the least amount of bureaucracy and red-tape, especially important at a time when districts are faced with difficult spending decisions due to significant losses in state and local aid. School repair projects are often the first to be cut in these situations, and federal action will help districts protect their facilities from painful reductions. Provisions requiring facilities to be built in a manner that capitalizes on energy efficiency and other environmental measures will also provide long-term savings and the greatest return on the federal investment in school modernization.

Federal legislation that can help school districts address the problems of school modernization is needed and welcome at the local level. More importantly, it will provide districts with the support they need to improve the learning environment for all students. We ask you to vote YES on H.R. 3221.

Sincerely,

Michael D. Casserly
 Executive Director