



WHITE HOUSE TOOLKIT FOR SUSTAINABLE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS

**2024 UPDATE TO FEDERAL RESOURCES
TO ADDRESS K-12 SCHOOL
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS**

APRIL 2024



**THE WHITE HOUSE
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Introduction

K-12 schools should offer environments where all students can reach their fullest potential – with rigorous learning opportunities, support for health and wellbeing, and strong preparation for careers and higher education. They should not only house students and educators, but inspire them and facilitate their productivity and educational success. The physical school environment plays an [important role](#) in helping students learn.

Unfortunately, modern, high-quality learning facilities are not consistently available to all of America’s youth, and there is work to do in ensuring that more students have access to sustainable and healthy school buildings and grounds. Poor air and water quality, in addition to other environmental health hazards, continue to curtail students’ health and ability to learn. In addition, the climate crisis poses new challenges to students, educators, and school facilities through more intense and frequent climate disasters and extreme events.

Because of climate change, schools are cooling down slower at the beginning of the school year and heating up faster at the end of it. An estimated [36,000](#) public schools nationwide lack adequate HVAC systems, and due to rising temperatures, close to [14,000](#) public schools that did not need cooling systems in the 1970s will need them by 2025. Ten years ago, school districts canceled classes an average of three or four days a year for heat; according to [recent studies](#), today, that figure has nearly doubled.

Hotter schools with lower air quality can reduce the quality of [learning](#) and may lead to [lower test scores](#). Generally speaking, heat is associated with lower cognitive function and reduced ability to concentrate or learn. Additionally, access to air conditioning (A/C) in schools varies by demographic group. Black and Hispanic students are [1.6%](#) more likely to be in schools with inadequate A/C than white students, and lower-income students are [6.2%](#) more likely to be in schools with inadequate A/C than higher-income students. Similarly, reduced air quality, such as in schools with increasing exposure to wildfire smoke, can also impact children’s development and learning; Poor air quality in schools also [leads](#) to higher rates of absenteeism for students and staff, especially among those with respiratory diseases such as asthma.

In contrast, healthy, sustainable learning environments have been [shown](#) to decrease absenteeism, reduce the incidence and severity of asthma and other health conditions, and improve overall learning outcomes. Sustainability and efficiency improvements can also help reduce operational costs to school districts, allowing for more funding to be invested in the classroom and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. Furthermore, innovative technologies and strategies offer opportunities for hands-on, real-world learning that excite students about science, technology, engineering, math, and good-paying sustainability-related careers.



Thanks to the Biden-Harris Administration’s Investing in America Agenda, an unprecedented amount of new federal funds is available to support school leaders and ensure healthy, sustainable, climate resilient, and modern learning environments for America’s students, families, and educators. The federal government remains committed to ensuring every child learns at school facilities and on grounds that support a [healthy learning environment](#), including by improving air quality, lowering energy bills, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing school vulnerabilities to extreme weather, reducing the heat island effect and addressing extreme heat, managing stormwater runoff, and offering world-class learning opportunities for all students.

As part of the largest-ever federal investment in K-12 schools in U.S. history, the U.S. Department of Education awarded Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds through the American Rescue Plan that have provided critical resources to address critical health and safety facilities issues. An early expert [analysis](#) of districts’ plans project that they planned to spend \$9.8 billion of these funds to upgrade heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems and another \$4.9 billion on repairs to prevent illness, which includes lead abatement, removing mold and mildew, or replacing leaking roofs. In particular, a large percentage of schools in under-resourced communities are using federal COVID-19 recovery funds to invest in facilities projects and improve environmental health and safety, likely to compensate for years of deferred capital improvements.

Between the [first](#) publication of this toolkit in 2022 and today, schools have begun seeing the benefits of new opportunities for federal funding and technical assistance. In 2023, for example, the U.S. Department of Energy [announced](#) that 24 Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) would receive \$178 million in funding to upgrade HVAC systems, improve building performance, and install solar panel and battery systems, among other critical improvements. And in January 2024, the Environmental Protection Administration [selected](#) 67 applicants to receive nearly \$1 billion in funding to purchase over 2,700 clean school buses, benefitting 7 million students across 37 states. These game-changing funding opportunities are already transforming school sustainability and will drive positive change for years to come.

This toolkit highlights how schools across the nation can further use the opportunities ushered in through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to address school infrastructure needs and make school buildings healthier and more sustainable for our kids and communities. It provides an overview of the federal funds, programs, and other resources related to school infrastructure available to support state and local educational agencies and individual schools. School leaders can use this guide to identify sources of funding and technical support available from federal agencies to achieve important health and sustainability goals, including:

- Improved energy efficiency;
- School electrification;
- Clean energy use;
- Lower embodied carbon building materials;
- Improved indoor and outdoor air and water quality;
- Reduced exposure to environmental health hazards;
- Cleaner school transportation; and,
- Overall resiliency to climate change hazards.



The President’s **Investing In America Agenda** puts equity front and center through the [Justice40 Initiative](#), which set the goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits from federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. Environmental justice begins in our nation’s schools with these foundational opportunities.

Disclaimer:

This toolkit is designed to help users familiarize themselves with federal resources on sustainable and healthy schools. Nothing contained in this document constitutes formal guidance from the U.S. government on any law, program, policy, application process, or funding eligibility. Applicants for funding should consult official agency or program specific guidance for additional information. This document was published in April 2024.

This document is non-exhaustive as new federal programs become available over time. Agencies may provide additional information on specific topics upon request (see federal contacts). For the latest information on federal grant programs, go to [Grants.gov](#).

Acronyms

- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
- U.S. Department of Education (ED)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
- U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)



The Clement Avenue School (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) schoolyard redevelopment project can manage over 88,000 gallons of stormwater every time it rains. The school has removed approximately 22,000 square feet of asphalt and has replaced it with green and a mixed-use recreation and educational space.



Topical Areas

Healthy Environments



The Frank D. Spaziano Elementary School (Providence, RI) features new construction that emphasizes design with breakout spaces, daylighting, and healthy indoor environments conducive to learning.

The indoor and outdoor environment of a school has important impacts on student and staff physical and mental health, attendance, and academic performance. Healthy school indoor environments – including those free from exposures to environmental contaminants – [help](#) reduce absenteeism, improve student performance, enhance student and staff productivity, and advance the health of students and staff. Unhealthy school indoor environments can expose children to allergens, pollutants, chemicals, and suboptimal classroom conditions (e.g., poor ventilation, lighting, acoustics, and temperature control) that might cause their health, attendance, or academic performance to suffer. Environmental health in schools includes such components as indoor and outdoor air quality, water quality, mold and moisture, daylighting, and the presence of contaminants, such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), asbestos, and lead. These issues are particularly stark for schools in communities with environmental justice concerns. Significant disparities exist in health outcomes, with Black, Hispanic, and low-income children more likely to experience poor [air quality](#), higher rates of [asthma](#), and inadequate school [facilities](#).

Indoor Air Quality and Environmental Exposures

Funding

EPA [Grant Funding to Address Indoor Air Pollution at Schools](#) assists schools in developing and adopting indoor air quality management plans.

Resources & Programs

EPA [Healthy School Environments](#) presents information on key topics about establishing and enhancing healthy school environments. The website includes guides for schools to mitigate or remediate various environmental exposures, such as mold, PCBs, asbestos, lead, wildfire smoke, and mercury.

EPA [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) in Schools](#) provides information to schools interested in establishing new or improving existing IPM programs, including [toolkits](#) for implementation.



EPA [Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools](#) website and action toolkit provides best practices, industry guidelines, sample policies, and a sample indoor air quality management plan.

EPA [Clean Air in Buildings Challenge](#) is a call to action and set of guiding principles and best practices that helps building owners and operators reduce risks from airborne viruses and other contaminants indoors, including in schools.

EPA [Air Quality Flag Program](#) publishes local data about air quality, articulated through the colors of EPA's Air Quality Index. Participating schools raise a flag that corresponds to the color indicating the status of air quality. On unhealthy days, communities can use this information to adjust physical activities to help reduce exposure to air pollution.

EPA [Best Practices for Reducing Near-Road Pollution Exposure at Schools](#) publication helps school communities identify strategies for reducing traffic-related pollution exposure at schools.

EPA [ABC's of Asbestos in Schools](#) guidance helps local educational agencies achieve compliance with regulations governing asbestos-containing materials in schools.

EPA [Safer Choice](#) pollution prevention program helps purchasers find products that perform and contain ingredients that are safer for human health and the environment. This includes practices that reduce, eliminate, or prevent pollution at its source, such as using safer ingredients in products.

Water Quality

Funding

EPA [Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation \(WIIN\) Act](#) addresses, supports, and improves America's drinking water infrastructure. Included in the WIIN Act are three drinking water grants that promote public health and protection of the environment. The [Voluntary School and Child Care Lead Testing and Reduction Grant Program](#) awards non-competitive funding to local education agencies for voluntary lead testing and remediation.

USDA [Rural Development Water and Environmental Programs](#) assist rural communities in obtaining technical assistance and financing for safe drinking water and waste disposal systems.

Resources and Programs

EPA [3Ts \(Training, Testing, and Taking Action\) Program for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water](#) provides technical and outreach information to assist states and territories, schools, and childcare facilities to implement programs that reduce lead in drinking water. The 3Ts program includes technical and outreach resources such as plan eBuilders, data eTrackers, recorded training, customizable templates, fact sheets, and other interactive tools.



EPA [WaterSense at Work: Best Management Practices for Educational Facilities](#) resource promotes water-efficient techniques that can be applied across a wide range of facilities with varying water needs.

Energy Efficiency, Decarbonization, and Clean Energy

Schools use energy every day to keep their doors safely open for students, and to maintain their learning environments with adequate lighting, heat, and power for operating buildings. School districts spend [\\$6 billion](#) a year on energy – one of the largest school district expenditures, [second only to salaries](#). The Biden-Harris Administration has bolstered funding opportunities and resources for schools to implement energy efficiency, clean energy, and decarbonization measures, all of which save districts money and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from school operations.



*Students in **Batesville School District** (Batesville, Arkansas) receive a tour of a tracking solar array, which is estimated to be 25% more efficient than fixed panels and excites the next generation about a clean energy future.*

Funding

DOE [Renew America's Schools](#) grant program, funded by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, provides \$500 million for competitive grants to make energy efficiency, clean energy, and alternative fueled vehicle upgrades and improvements. This funding aims to help school communities make energy upgrades that will lower utilities costs, improve indoor air quality, and foster healthier learning environments.

DOE [Energy Champions Leading the Advancement of Sustainable Schools Prize \(Energy CLASS Prize\)](#) is a two-phase, \$4.5 million competitive award promoting capacity building and energy management in school districts across America. The competition was designed to help some of the nation's highest-need K–12 schools make clean energy and health improvements by establishing, training, and supporting energy managers—or champions—in their districts.

DOE [State Energy Program \(SEP\)](#) provides annual funding to 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories to support a nationwide infrastructure of state energy offices. SEP supports public facilities, including K-12 schools and universities. Find your [state energy office](#) for information on energy policies, programs, and financial incentives.



EPA [Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund](#), created by President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act, is a historic \$27 billion investment to mobilize financing and private capital to combat the climate crisis and ensure American economic competitiveness. The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund delivers capital to financing organizations for projects that lower energy costs and catalyze economic revitalization to communities, particularly those that have historically been left behind. There are several ways that schools and school districts could interact with Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund grantees and access financing resources, including (but not limited to): energy efficiency in buildings, solar (energy generation and storage), and school buses. The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund has been implemented via three grant competitions: the [National Clean Investment Fund](#), [Clean Communities Investment Accelerator](#), and the [Solar for All](#) competition.

IRS [Clean Energy Tax Credits](#) are accessible to schools, as established by the Inflation Reduction Act. Elective pay, or “direct pay,” allows school districts which would otherwise be unable to claim tax credits (because they do not owe federal income tax) to benefit from clean energy tax credits. A school district that makes a clean energy investment that qualifies for the [Investment Tax Credit](#) may file a tax return with the IRS to claim the full value of the Investment Tax Credit, including potential bonus amounts. Solar installations, for example, may qualify for a credit of up to 70% of the project’s cost; ground-source heat pumps may qualify for up to 50% of the cost.

USDA [Rural Development Electric programs](#) provide reliable, affordable electricity in rural areas, including energy efficiency relending in partnership with local utilities for school retrofits, renewable energy installations and charging stations.

USDA [Rural Development Energy programs](#) support energy audits, renewable energy development, efficiency improvements, and installation of renewable energy systems.

USDA [Rural Energy for America Program Energy Audit & Renewable Energy Development Assistance](#) provides energy audits, renewable energy technical assistance, or renewable energy site assessments to increase American energy independence and help decrease the cost of energy for small businesses and agricultural producers.

Resources and Programs

DOE [Efficient and Healthy Schools Program](#) engages schools – especially those serving low-income populations and rural areas – to reduce energy bills and improve student and teacher health. The program provides year-round technical assistance to schools and offers annual opportunities to recognize schools that seek to implement high-impact indoor air quality and efficiency improvements.

DOE [Better Buildings Challenge K-12 Schools](#) asks that partners commit to reduce portfolio-wide energy use by 20-25% in 10 years or less and share replicable pathways for the deployment of energy efficiency and showcase projects that result in significant energy savings. Schools can partner with DOE’s network of technical and industry experts to develop innovative cost-effective energy solutions, and earn recognition for their leadership and innovation.



DOE [Better Climate Challenge](#) challenges school districts to set ambitious, portfolio-wide GHG emission reduction goals. This effort provides opportunities for peer exchange and technical assistance to meet the urgent call to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Through the Better Climate Challenge, organizations partner with DOE to reduce portfolio-wide Scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions by at least 50% within 10 years. Participating organizations can tap into the Better Buildings network, engage with other market leaders, access peer-to-peer exchange opportunities, and leverage technical assistance from DOE and the national labs.

DOE [Building Energy Codes Program Technical Assistance](#) (BECP) offers a comprehensive collection of information, resources, and technical assistance designed to answer questions and address issues related to energy codes. This includes publications, compliance software and tools, and training modules based on best practices. BECP's team of building energy codes experts is also available to answer specific questions submitted through the web-based [help desk](#).

DOE [Zero Energy \(ZE\) Schools](#) resources page has information about benefits, best practices, and detailed implementation strategies for achieving zero energy. [A Guide to ZE and ZE Ready K–12 Schools](#) outlines the process of creating a ZE school and can provide a strong foundation for future projects.

EPA [ENERGY STAR® Portfolio Manager®](#) is a free online tool available for [schools](#) to track their facilities' energy, greenhouse gas, and water performance. State and local education agencies can use benchmarking data to help determine opportunities for improvement and track results annually. EPA provides training and technical support to states and school districts using ENERGY STAR® Portfolio Manager® in their facility improvement programs.

EPA [ENERGY STAR® Certification for K-12 Schools](#) saves energy and money, and helps protect the environment by generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions than typical schools. To be certified as ENERGY STAR®, a school must meet indoor environmental quality and energy performance standards verified by a licensed professional, as described in the [scoring criteria](#).



Transportation

Across the nation and every day, students and staff travel to and from schools. Vehicle transportation represents a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. Resources and funding opportunities in the transportation category aim to increase the use of lower and zero-emission school buses and vehicles and to improve outdoor air quality. School buses in the United States travel more than [4 billion miles](#) each year, providing the safest transportation to and from school for more than [25 million](#) American children every day. However, many school buses on the road are powered by diesel-fueled engines that [predate](#) EPA's latest emission standards. These buses emit higher levels of pollutants, including nitrogen oxides and particulate matter. These pollutants can contribute to poor air quality in our communities and negatively impact human health, especially for children. Replacing diesel buses with low- and zero-emission vehicles has been associated with improved student attendance and academic [performance](#).



***Moreno Valley Unified School District** (Moreno Valley, California) electric vehicle fleet and charging infrastructure is designed to meet the district's school transportation needs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve air quality.*

Funding

EPA [Clean School Bus Program](#) provides \$5 billion over five years (FY 2022-2026) to replace existing school buses with zero-emission and low-emission models. EPA administers both grant opportunities and rebates under this program. Local Education Agencies, Tribes, non-profit transportation associations, and certain contractors providing transportation or buses are eligible for the grants and rebates.

EPA [Clean and Heavy-Duty Vehicle Program](#) invests \$1 billion to replace heavy-duty vehicles with clean, zero-emission vehicles, support zero-emission vehicle infrastructure, and train and develop workers. EPA will be distributing funding for clean heavy-duty vehicles through 2031 with grants and/or rebates to eligible recipients to replace existing heavy-duty vehicles with clean, zero-emission vehicles.

DOT National [Safe Routes to School \(SRTS\) program](#) includes kindergarten through 8th grade schools. SRTS programs are eligible as special projects with the [Highway Safety Improvement Program](#). See also the [Surface Transportation Block Grant Program](#).

IRS [Commercial Clean Vehicle Tax Credits](#) establish that governmental entities, businesses, tribal organizations, and tax-exempt organizations that buy a qualified commercial clean vehicle may qualify for a clean vehicle tax credit of up to \$40,000 under Internal Revenue Code section 45W.



Resources and Programs

DOE [Electric School Bus Education](#) is a webinar series with handouts on the benefits and implementation of electric school buses.

DOT [EV Infrastructure Project](#) offers tools, guides, and resources for electric vehicle infrastructure projects in rural areas.

EPA [Clean School Bus Technical Assistance](#) offers resources regarding clean school bus charging and fueling infrastructure.

Natural Disasters

Schools across the U.S. are already experiencing the impacts of climate change: more frequent and more severe natural disasters, such as hurricanes, wildfires, and extreme heat. Natural disasters result not only in operational costs, but also in learning loss and risks to student and staff health. The resources in this section help schools prepare for, recover from, and become more resilient to natural disasters.

Funding

ED [Disaster Recovery Unit \(DRU\)](#) was created to spearhead disaster aid and recovery work across ED. The DRU supports school community stakeholders affected by federally-declared natural disasters—specifically, by providing immediate aid to restart school operations, assistance for homeless children and youth, emergency impact aid for displaced students, and emergency response to violence—and ensures a coordinated response from federal agencies.

EDA [Economic Adjustment Assistance Program](#) provides a wide range of technical, planning, and public works and infrastructure assistance in regions experiencing adverse economic changes—including from catastrophic natural disasters.

EDA [Economic Development Disaster Supplemental Funding](#) helps regions recover from the economic harm and distress resulting from natural disasters to rebuild stronger, more resilient economies.

FEMA [Grants](#) support school infrastructure following federally-declared disasters or through hazard mitigation, such as wind, snow load and seismic retrofits, backup power and dry flooding proofing.

NOAA [Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund](#) supports projects that assist coastal communities and ecosystems prepare for and recover from extreme weather events, climate hazards, and changing ocean conditions.



Resources and Programs

EPA [Schools as Cleaner Air and Cooling Centers Tips](#) provide factsheets on how to make schools safer during increasingly frequent and more severe wildfire smoke and extreme heat events.

EPA [Climate Resilient Schools Program](#) provides technical assistance on how to make school buildings safer during increasingly frequent and more severe climate change impacts.

FEMA [Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety](#) is a training that provides guidance on school operations and on the physical protection of school facilities. The training also includes some discussion of the FEMA supplements, which provide guidance specific to earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and tsunamis.

FEMA [Design Guide for Improving School Safety in Earthquakes, Floods, and High Winds](#) is a publication geared toward the protection of school buildings and their occupants against natural hazards, with an emphasis on the design of new K-12 schools, while also addressing the repair, renovation, and extension of existing school buildings.

FEMA [Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes: Guidance for Community and Residential Safe Rooms](#) provides criteria for safe rooms to provide protection from wind and wind-borne debris for occupants as well as related [resources](#).

FEMA [Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Handbook for Public Facilities](#) assists facility owners affected by wildfire disasters by offering mitigation measures to reduce the vulnerability of damaged facilities to future wildfire incidents.

FEMA [Contracting with Federal Funds for Goods and Services Before, During and After Disasters](#) is a toolkit reference for managing procurement under grant assistance to rebuild or retrofit school buildings that includes training opportunities.

FEMA [Hazard Mitigation Planning Resources](#) support state and local leaders in the development and review of risk mitigation plans.

FEMA [Cost Estimating Format](#) is a uniform methodology to determine eligible permanent work costs for large construction projects, including those related to schools.

FEMA [Emergency Management Institute](#) offers multiple courses related to multi-hazard emergency planning and safety for schools.

FEMA [Emergency Power Systems for Critical Facilities](#) includes recommendations for planning for emergency power in the event of a disaster to assist critical facilities in remaining operational.



Contracting and Financing

This section summarizes resources available for schools for complementary funding sources, such as contracting and financing for school infrastructure and capital needs. These resources are often used in conjunction with grants.

Funding

ED [Credit Enhancement For Charter School Facilities](#) program awards grants that demonstrate innovative methods of helping charter schools address the cost of acquiring, constructing, and renovating facilities by enhancing the availability of loans and bond financing. This program helps enhance the credit of charter schools so they can access private-sector and other non-federal capital in order to acquire, construct, and renovate facilities at a reasonable cost.

ED [State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grants Program](#) provides competitive grants to help states establish and enhance or administer facilities aid for charter schools. The federal funds are used to match programs funded with non-federal dollars that make payments, on a per-pupil basis, to provide charter schools with facilities financing. The program is intended to encourage states to share in the costs associated with charter schools facilities funding.

ED [Impact Aid Program](#) supports local school districts with concentrations of children who reside on Indian lands, military bases, low-rent housing properties, and other federal properties, or have parents in the uniformed services or employed on eligible federal properties. Most Impact Aid funds are considered general aid to the recipient school districts; these districts may use the funds in accordance with local and state requirements, including capital expenditures.

Resources and Programs

DOE **[Energy Savings Performance Contracting \(ESPC\) Campaign](#)** engages public sector building owners to support and encourage the use of ESPC and expand the adoption of best practices to achieve significant energy, environmental, and cost savings benefits. Participants gain access to campaign resources and technical assistance, connect with peers, and earn recognition for achievements.

- DOE **[Energy Savings Performance Contracting \(ESPC\): A Primer for K-12 Schools](#)** explains how schools can use ESPC to save money by improving building energy efficiency and reducing operating costs while increasing occupant comfort and productivity.



Northland Pines School District (Eagle River, Wisconsin) has installed solar power on all three campuses, converted lights to LED, and implemented temperature and lighting controls. It has installed filtered water bottle filling stations, energy recovery, ventilation systems, and M.E.R.V. 13 filters.



- DOE [Energy Savings Performance Contracting \(ESPC\) Toolkit](#) is a collection of resources that enable state and local governments to learn and benefit from the work of the Better Buildings ESPC Accelerator. The toolkit includes the best practices and innovative approaches that states, cities, and K-12 schools have used to successfully establish and implement performance contracting.

DOE [Financing Energy Upgrades for K-12 School Districts Guide](#) focuses on comprehensive energy upgrades - those that involve multiple measures and are targeted toward achieving significant and persistent energy savings.

EPA [ENERGY STAR® Cashflow Opportunity Calculator](#) is a tool that helps users make decisions about when and how to finance energy efficiency projects. School facility managers and financial decision makers can estimate how much new equipment can be financed using anticipated savings.

COVID-19 Relief and Recovery

The federal government made emergency funding available to schools to achieve the safe reopening of buildings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, reopening required investments in school infrastructure to improve air quality and improve indoor environmental conditions.

Funding

ED [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds \(ESSER\)](#), delivered through the American Rescue Plan, have been used to keep schools open safely, including through investments in clean indoor air. ED provided [guidance](#) clarifying how remaining, timely obligated COVID-19 education relief funds can be used to support projects that improve indoor air quality and student academic achievement.

ED [Governors Emergency Education Relief Funds \(GEER\)](#) can also provide emergency support to schools and education related entities that meet certain eligibility criteria for carrying out emergency educational services.

Treasury [State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds \(SLFRF\)](#) delivered \$350 billion to state, local, and Tribal governments across the country to support their response to and recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency. SLFRF funds may be used to support schools, including improvements or new construction of facilities in certain communities, consistent with program requirements.



Additional Cross-Cutting Opportunities

This section includes cross-cutting resources to support school infrastructure needs. Many of the resources address Biden-Harris Administration priorities, such as advancing environmental justice.

Funding

ED [Supporting America’s School Infrastructure Grant Program](#) increases the capacity of states to support high-need Local Educational Agencies and schools in leveraging other available federal, state, and local resources to improve school facilities and environments through public school infrastructure improvements to ensure that their public school facilities are safe, healthy, sustainable, and equitable learning environments for all students.

EPA [Community Change Grants Program](#) funds environmental and climate justice activities to benefit disadvantaged communities through projects that reduce pollution, increase community climate resilience, and build community capacity to respond to environmental and climate justice challenges. School districts are eligible to apply in partnership with a community-based organization.

EPA [Environmental Justice Grants](#) include multiple funding opportunities that promote environmental justice in underserved and overburdened communities, for which schools are eligible alone or in partnerships with community-based organizations. Schools may also access technical assistance to identify, apply for, and manage funding opportunities through their local [Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center](#).

USDA [Rural Development Community Facilities programs](#) support essential community infrastructure in rural areas, including schools and school bus acquisition, through loans, grants, and loan guarantees.

USDA [Rural Development Telecommunications programs](#) offer grants to support distance learning and telemedicine and community-based internet access centers, and provide loans and grants to finance rural broadband deployment.

USDA [National School Lunch Program Equipment Assistance Grants](#) provides funding to state agencies and directs them to competitively award subgrants to local educational agencies and schools to purchase equipment, with a value of greater than \$1,000, needed to serve healthier meals, improve food safety, and to help support the establishment, maintenance, or expansion of the School Breakfast Program.



*At **Huntley Community School District 158** (Algonquin, Illinois), home to the largest solar installation on school district property in Illinois, buildings include interactive displays that communicate the energy usage and environmental design features of the school, helping inspire and educate the school community.*



Resources and Programs

DOE [Federal and State Resources](#) page outlines opportunities across agencies related to infrastructure programs, many of which can be used in schools.

ED [Green Ribbon Schools](#) recognizes early learning centers, schools, school districts, and colleges and universities that (1) reduce environmental impact and costs; (2) improve the health and wellness of schools, students, and staff; and (3) provide effective environmental and sustainability education.

ED [Infrastructure and Sustainability Initiative](#) within the Office of Communications and Outreach offers resources and serves as a general hub for information on school infrastructure and sustainability topics.

ED [National Center on School Infrastructure Program](#) supports a clearinghouse of resources for states and LEAs related to improving and developing safe, healthy, sustainable, and equitable public school infrastructure through public school infrastructure improvements. The national center provides technical assistance to states and high-need Local Educational Agencies seeking to leverage available resources to improve public school facilities for all students.

ED [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools](#) technical assistance center provides planning and training tools that can assist schools in preparing for or responding to challenges in the school environment.

EPA [Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers \(EJ TCTAC\)](#) offers a holistic government-wide framework for providing technical assistance and capacity building resources. EPA has selected 16 EJ TCTACs. These centers provide training and other assistance to build capacity for navigating federal grant application systems, writing strong grant proposals, and effectively managing grant funding. In addition, these centers provide guidance on community engagement, meeting facilitation, and translation and interpretation services for limited English-speaking participants, thus removing barriers and improving accessibility for communities with environmental justice concerns.

EPA [Community Change Technical Assistance \(CCTA\) and Community Change Equitable Resilience Technical Assistance \(CCER TA\)](#) provide dedicated technical assistance to organizations, including school districts, seeking to apply for the Community Change Grants Program. CCTA is open to all organizations. CCER TA is specialized assistance is targeted to communities that are disaster-prone and disadvantaged, meaning they are vulnerable to extreme heat and more intense heat islands, wildfire and smoke, floods, storms, or other climate impacts that pose a greater risk to disadvantaged communities.



Federal Points of Contact

U.S. Department of Education (ED)

- Infrastructure and Sustainability Initiative, Office of Communication and Outreach, InfrastructureandSustainability@ed.gov
- School Infrastructure Programs, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, OESE.school.infrastructure@ed.gov

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)

- Better Buildings Initiative, betterbuildingschallenge@ee.doe.gov.
- Efficient and Healthy Schools Program, Building Technologies Office, Efficient.Healthy.Schools@ee.doe.gov
- Energy Savings Performance Contracting (ESPC) Campaign, Office of State and Community Energy Programs, ESPCcampaign@hq.doe.gov
- Renew America's Schools Program, Office of State and Community Energy Programs, schools@doe.gov
- Energy Champions Leading the Advancement of Sustainable Schools Prize (Energy CLASS Prize), Office of State and Community Energy Programs, schools@doe.gov

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

- Healthy Schools Program, Office of Children's Health Protection, EPACHildren@epa.gov
- Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act) Grant Programs, WIINDrinkingWaterGrants@epa.gov
- Indoor Air Quality in Schools, IAQschools@epa.gov

U.S. Department of Treasury (Treasury)

- State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, SLFRP@treasury.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

- Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs, [FEMA Regional Office](#) or [State Hazard Mitigation Officers](#)