CONDITION OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES: 1999

The report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides national data about the condition of public schools in 1999 based on a survey conducted using the NCES Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). The FRSS results based on a nationally representative sample indicate that even though most school facilities are in good condition, many are in less than adequate condition, and 3.5 million children attend schools where at least one building is non-operational or significantly substandard. The report provides information about the condition of school facilities, school plans for renovations, the age of public schools, and overcrowding. Key findings include the following:

- Three-quarters of schools reported needing to spend money on repairs, renovations, or modernizations to put the school's buildings or building features into good overall condition.
  - ◊ The total amount needed for this work was estimated to be $127 billion.
  - ◊ Among the schools needing to spend money, the average dollar amount needed per school was about $2.2 million.
- Twenty-four percent of schools reported that at least one type of building was in less than adequate condition. Approximately 11 million children were enrolled in about 19,000 schools reporting at least one type of onsite building in less than adequate condition.
- Fifty percent of schools reported that at least one of nine building features (roofs; framing, floors, and foundations; exterior walls, finishes, windows, and doors; interior finishes and trim; plumbing; heating, ventilation and air conditioning; electric power; electrical lighting; and life safety features) at the school was in less than adequate condition. Schools in central cities and schools with the highest concentration of poverty were most likely to report at least one building feature as less than adequate.
- Twenty percent of schools rated the condition of their life safety features (e.g., fire alarms and sprinkler systems) as less than adequate.
- Ventilation was the environmental condition most likely to be reported unsatisfactory. One-fourth of schools reported needing air-conditioning. Schools in rural areas and small towns were more likely than schools in large towns and urban fringe areas to report that at least one of their environmental conditions was unsatisfactory.
- Over half of the schools reporting less than adequate conditions of at least one building feature had no plans for improvement.
- The most accurate indication of a school's age is not the actual age of the building, but the functional age, which takes into account the history of its maintenance and renovations. The functional age is defined as the age of the school based on the year of the most recent renovation or the year of construction of the main instructional buildings if no renovation has occurred. The average age of public schools in 1999 was 40 years, based on years since original construction. The average functional age of schools was 16 years. Schools that were relatively old in terms of functional age were more likely than newer schools to report inadequate or unsatisfactory conditions.
- About a quarter, 17,400 schools, were overcrowded (enrollment more than 5 percent above their capacity). Large schools were more likely than other schools to be seriously overcrowded, and small schools were most likely to be seriously underenrolled. Schools with a high minority enrollment (more than 50 percent) were most likely to be seriously overcrowded. Schools that were classified as overcrowded were more likely than other schools to report that at least one type of onsite building was in less than adequate condition. 36 percent of schools reported using portable classrooms, and 20 percent reported using temporary buildings. Most reported using portable and temporary instructional space as a result of overcrowding.

This report can be found on the Department of Education's School Construction Website at: www.ed.gov/inits/construction/