

A photograph of a modern school hallway with a large glass skylight and a person on a staircase. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The text is in white, bold, sans-serif font. The word 'SAMPLE' is written in a large, outlined font across the middle of the image.

How Better Schools

Build Better Communities

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*Education is the foundation of a healthy community,
and providing a quality education requires your help.*

Good schools affect everyone:

- *Students* get the skills they need to become productive citizens.
- *Business and industry* are attracted to locations where good schools create a well-qualified workforce and a higher standard of living.
- *Local residents* reap the benefits of increased property values.
- *Communities* experience economic growth, lower crime rates, increased participation, volunteerism, and charitable giving.

Your local school should be a source of pride, a symbol of your community's determination to ensure a better future for everyone who lives there. The support you give your local school reflects the value you place on learning, a value that is imitated by our children.

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Cover photo of Taconic Hills Central School, Craryville, New York, courtesy of Rhinebeck Architecture & Planning PC and H. Durston Saylor photographer

According to a National Alliance of Business report, “the second most often cited reason for a business selecting a particular location is the quality of the schools.”



The quality of schools in your area plays a key role in the decision by businesses to locate or remain in your community. The public elementary and secondary schools in your community are the primary educators of their workforce. Local businesses need skilled workers to survive and grow.

Photo of Thompson Middle School, Newport, Rhode Island, courtesy of HMFH Architects, Inc., Wayne Soverns, Jr., photographer.

During the next 20 years we will lose about 46 million skilled workers as baby boomers retire. We need a well-educated workforce to support such a large group of retirees.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics states that by 2020, there will be a 22 percent increase in the number of jobs that require education beyond high school. Yet during the next 20 years we will lose about 46 million skilled workers as baby boomers retire.

Communities need a well-educated workforce to sustain growth and raise productivity in order to support such a large group of retirees. The increased wages paid to these skilled workers will also add to the gross domestic product and to tax revenue, providing communities with the dollars needed to provide other valued services for residents.

Not providing an adequate education can have a profound impact on students, the labor market, and the local economy.

The high school degree that once opened doors to a promising career opportunity is now a minimum requirement in the job market. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the 2001 unemployment rate for adults over age 25 without a high school diploma was 7.2 percent. That figure dropped to 4.2 percent for high school graduates with no college education and to 2.3 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Failure to complete high school has severe consequences for students and for the community. On average, dropouts earn less money than high school graduates throughout their lives. Dropouts also make up a larger percentage of persons on public assistance and a disproportionate percentage of our nation's prison population—costing the community.

Supporting technology in schools can decrease absenteeism, lower dropout rates, and motivate students to achieve more.

Technology excites and engages students. Students spend more time working on a project, acquiring and organizing information, and using a variety of media to get their ideas across. Students who become engaged in their studies learn more about the subject and are more likely to use what they learn throughout their lives.

Students at risk of education failure show significant improvement when learning includes the use of computers. Technology makes it possible for teachers to customize the curriculum to match the individual's needs so that all students can reach their potential. Research shows that students learn even the basic skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—better and faster if they have a chance to practice those skills. Computers in the classroom provide a non-threatening and motivating environment for these repetitious learning tasks.

Investing in technology makes for smarter students and a more productive workforce.



An analysis of more than 500 different studies found that students who use computers in school ranked an average of 14 points higher on achievement tests than those who did not.

Students who use computers are generally more interested in:

- their work
- sharing their new-found knowledge with others
- learning to work cooperatively.

These qualities prepare our students for a successful future in business and industry, making them more valuable assets to the workforce and the community.

Computers aid in our quest to keep kids in school, but computers don't work in classrooms where the roof leaks.

A 1999 report states that 21,100 schools, housing nearly 12 million students, have roofs that are in “less than adequate” condition. Leaky roofs can do thousands of dollars of damage to schools and equipment, preventing students from getting the education they deserve.

In most communities, even when education is a priority, the facilities where learning takes place often do not receive adequate public attention. While a quality education does not require a plush facility, it cannot be accomplished in a building that suffers from neglect—and many of America's school buildings have been neglected.

Schools scored a D- on the American Society of Civil Engineers “Report Card for America's Infrastructure: 2003 Progress Report.” This was the lowest score given to any part of America's infrastructure—roads, bridges, transit, aviation, drinking water, wastewater, dams, solid waste, hazardous waste, navigable waterways, or energy.

School buildings begin to deteriorate rapidly at age 40.

This poor grade was caused by problems that range from growth and overcrowding, to lack of funds for maintenance and repair, to age and obsolescence.

The problem is that the “average” school building in America is 42 years old. Twenty-eight percent of all public schools in use today were built before 1950. Almost half (45 percent) were built between 1950 and 1969, years during which the baby boom generation attended school.

In a 20-year-old building, maintenance costs consist of minor repairs. Between years 20 and 30 equipment will need more frequent replacement and repair. Between years 30 and 40 original equipment, including the roof and electrical system, will need to be replaced. At 40, rapid deterioration begins.

A community's values are reflected in the buildings it erects.

As buildings deteriorate or are being used beyond their intended capacity, the cost of maintaining these buildings increases.

There comes a point when it is wiser to build a new school instead of paying the higher costs of maintaining aging facilities not designed to accommodate the electrical, mechanical, and instructional technology needed to provide a quality education.

Many recent studies highlight the correlation between facility condition and student achievement. Other reports speak to the relationship between facility condition and student behavior. Perhaps most important is the message that school facility condition sends to our kids:

We cannot expect them to strive to be the best when our example says that mediocre will do.

Many reports conclude that old, obsolete, poorly maintained buildings have negative consequences for learning.

ACHIEVEMENT: Students in school buildings that were in poor condition scored 6 percent below students in buildings in fair condition, and 11 percent below students in buildings in excellent condition.

(Edwards, 1991)

TEACHER TURNOVER: Poor facilities contribute to the high teacher turnover rates typical of central urban school districts. In turn, high teacher turnover leads to increased recruitment and training efforts that drain schools of financial and human capital, both of which are essential to educational success.

(21st Century School Fund & Ford Foundation Report, 2002)

HEALTH: Children miss more than 10 million school days each year because of asthma made worse by poor indoor air quality.

(NCEF, 2003)

SAFETY: Crime sprouts from a disorderly environment plagued by broken windows, graffiti, and similar disruptions because criminals get the message that no one cares what happens here.

(James Q. Wilson, "Broken Windows")

Our educational institutions reflect the value we place on our children and on education.



Photo of Moreland Hills Elementary School, Pepper Pike, Ohio, courtesy of Fanning/Howey Associates, Inc., Emery Photography, Inc.

A sound public education system is the most important investment a community can make in its future.

For communities, funding schools is both a responsibility and a concern. Primary funding for public education comes from local property taxes, state income and sales taxes, and federal income tax dollars. Often these funds are not adequate to meet the need. This is especially true when paying for technology infrastructure or for new school buildings.

There are two basic types of school funding.

Operating funds pay for day-to-day expenses like salaries, transportation, utilities, materials, supplies, and textbooks. In addition to educating students, these funds are also used to feed them, sponsor special programs, and maintain buildings.

Capital funds pay for new schools, major renovations to older buildings, and technology infrastructure. Capital funds also help schools meet the requirements of new laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The most common ways of financing these capital improvement programs are through tax levies or the sale of **bonds**. By passing a bond, you, the voter, authorize the state or county to borrow money. This money is then paid off over a number of years through taxes. Bonds allow districts to complete projects (like building a new school) now and pay them off gradually over time—much like a mortgage on a home.

If we are to compete in a global economy, our investment in education must be sufficient to produce good citizens and a world-class workforce. This includes making investments in educational technologies and school facilities.

Without an adequate investment in education, students will suffer, communities will stagnate, businesses will leave, and property values will drop.



For many communities, new schools provide an avenue to greater economic development. School, community, and business partnerships create tremendous opportunities for the redevelopment of inner city and suburban neighborhoods.

For other communities, simply funding upgrades to existing facilities and technology infrastructure will do the job.

Remember—good schools affect more than just the students in your community. They affect you, too!

Help get your school district's bond issue passed

Finally, a self-contained, mailable booklet — from a reliable independent source — that will help you build support for a YES vote!

- How do good schools affect your community's standard of living, property values, and safety/crime rate?
- Why do most businesses select a location that is in or near a good school district?
- What messages — based on the state of our educational institutions — are sent to our children about the importance of education?

How Better Schools Build Better Communities answers these and other important questions. This authoritative 16-page booklet is easy to read, chock full of important facts, and an invaluable tool to help you help voters understand how their communities and they, personally, are affected by the quality of their educational facilities.

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How Better Schools Build Better Communities is published by *School Planning & Management*, the leading publication in the education facilities and management field, and written by Executive Editor/Publisher and industry expert Deborah Moore. Ms. Moore has drawn from more than 20 years of experience to author *How Better Schools Build Better Communities*, the first community public relations booklet of its kind.

How Better Schools Build Better Communities explains once and for all, in easy to understand terms, that good communities revolve around good schools.

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