

Federal Update: What's in the Infrastructure Bill for Schools?

On November 15, [H.R. 3684](#) the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (also known as the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework](#), or BIF) became law. It authorizes \$550 billion in new spending over five years to support a variety of infrastructure projects. Several provisions of interest to school business leaders are summarized below.

Safe Routes to School Program: More than \$550 million over five years will be awarded to states to help make it safer for students to walk and/or bicycle to school. ([Learn more.](#))

- Funds will be distributed to states proportionately based on their total student enrollment in primary, middle, and high schools (no state will receive less than \$1,000,000 in a fiscal year). Funds will be administered by each state's department of transportation, so please consult with your state agency for more information.
- Funds can be used for infrastructure projects within a two-mile radius of a primary, middle, or high school to enable and encourage children to walk and bicycle to school; to make these modes of transportation safer and more appealing; and to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution near schools. This may include improvements for sidewalks, traffic calming and speed reduction, pedestrian and bicycle crossings, on-street bicycle facilities, off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and traffic diversion in the vicinity of schools.
- No more than 30% of funds may be used for non-infrastructure activities, such as public awareness and outreach campaigns to press and community leaders; traffic education and enforcement; student sessions on bicycle/pedestrian safety and health; and funding for training, volunteers, and program managers.

Climate Change Grants for Charging and Fueling Infrastructure: Establishes a competitive grant program for state and local governments and other eligible entities to apply for funding to invest in charging and fueling infrastructure that will help make electric vehicle (EV) charging and hydrogen, propane, and natural gas fueling infrastructure publicly available. Project locations may include public roads, parking facilities at public buildings, public schools, public parks, etc.; however, this is not a school-specific program. ([Learn more.](#))

Highway Traffic & Safety Review: US Department of Transportation (DOT) Reports on School Bus Safety:

- Requires DOT to review and publish several reports and share educational materials concerning state laws, safety measures, and technologies to enhance school bus safety. Topics include:
 - Illegal passing of buses, safety in school bus loading zones, and reporting violations to law enforcement, and best practices to address these issues.
 - The effectiveness of safety technologies (e.g., cameras, audible warning systems, enhanced lighting).
 - State driver manuals, handbooks, and other materials to determine whether illegal passing of buses is addressed. DOT will make recommendations on how states can improve driver education.
 - The relationship between illegal passing and other driver safety issues (e.g., distracted driving, poor visibility, illumination of vehicle headlights, speed limits, and specific school bus stop characteristics).

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act: Reauthorized and extended until 2023. Provides funding for schools, roads, and other municipal services for over 700 counties that rely on [Forest Service funds](#).

Grants for Energy Efficiency Improvements and Renewable Energy Improvements at Public School Facilities:

Establishes a \$500 million competitive grant program over five years administered by the US Department of Energy (DOE) for districts, schools, and other entities to carry out energy improvement projects in schools.

- Funds may be used for any improvement, repair, renovation, or installation project to a school that:
 - Results in a direct reduction in school energy costs (including improvements to the envelope, air conditioning system, ventilation system, heating system, domestic hot water heating system, compressed air system, distribution system, lighting system, power system, and controls of a building).
 - Leads to an improvement in teacher and student health, including IAQ, and achieves energy savings.
 - Involves the installation of renewable energy technologies.
 - Involves the installation of alternative fuel vehicle infrastructure on school grounds for the exclusive use of school buses, fleets, students, or the public.
 - Involves the purchase or lease of alternative fuel vehicles to be used by a school, including buses, fleet vehicles, and other operational vehicles.
- Applications submitted to the DOE must include the following:
 - A needs assessments of the current condition of the school and school facilities that would receive the energy improvements if the grant were approved and a draft work plan of intended achievements.
 - A description of the energy improvements to be carried out if the application were approved and of the capacity to provide services and comprehensive support to make the improvements.
 - An assessment of the expected needs for operation and maintenance training funds, and a plan for use of those funds, if applicable.
 - An assessment of the expected energy efficiency, energy savings, and safety benefits of the energy improvements, and a cost estimate of the proposed energy improvements.
 - Any other resources that are available to carry out the activities for which grant funds are requested, including the availability of utility programs and public benefit funds.
- Grants will be prioritized to applicants with high renovation, repair, and improvement funding needs; those serving a high percentage of students eligible for free/reduced-price meals; and those who leverage private sector investment through energy-related performance contracting.
- Considerations for awarding grants include: the extent of the applicant's fiscal capacity to carry out energy improvements; the actual need for the project; the ability to raise funds for construction projects, issue bonds or receive other funds to support infrastructure needs, and the district's bond rating; how likely the facility receiving the improvements will be maintained; and the potential energy efficiency and safety benefits that can be achieved from the proposed project.
- No more than 5% of funds can be used for operation and maintenance training for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements, such as maintenance staff and teacher training, education, and preventative maintenance training. A portion of funds can be used for a third-party analysis of the energy improvements (i.e., for energy audits and existing building commissioning). No more than 3% can be used for continuing education related to the energy improvements.
- If carrying out a repair or renovation via a contract, the contract must follow a full and open competitive bid; allow small, minority, and women-owned businesses to participate; and give priority to businesses in the state/area where the contract will be carried out.
- Grant recipients must submit a report that describes the use of funds; estimated cost-savings realized by energy improvements; the results of any third-party analysis conducted for the project; the use of any utility programs and public benefit funds; and the use of performance tracking for energy improvements (e.g., Energy Star, Green Building Council LEED, or another rating system).

Grants to Address Lead Contamination in School Drinking Water: Provides \$200 million over five years for a voluntary lead testing, compliance monitoring, and lead reduction program for schools and childcare facilities.

- Funds are administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and distributed to states for assisting local education agencies (LEAs), public water systems that assist schools and childcare programs, and other eligible entities. \$30 million will be available during federal FY 2022; \$35 million during FY 2023; \$40 million during FY 2024; \$45 million during FY 2025; and \$50 million during FY 2026.

Water Infrastructure Investments: Provides \$55 billion administered by the EPA to help states improve drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. This includes \$11.7 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), \$15 billion for the DWSRF for Lead Service Line Replacement, and \$4 billion for the DWSRF for Emerging Contaminants. It also includes \$5 billion to Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Grants to address emerging contaminants. ([Learn more](#) and contact state agencies [here](#).)

Broadband Investments: Provides \$65 billion to improve broadband infrastructure, access, and affordability. Includes \$42.5 billion administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for block grants to states to deploy affordable networks in low-income homes and promote broadband adoption. Also includes \$2.75 billion in Digital Equity Grants over five years for states to expand broadband access to underserved communities, seniors, and schools. ([Learn more](#).)

Clean School Bus Program: Provides \$5 billion to help local and state governments, contractors, and other eligible entities modernize bus fleets with clean and zero-emission (electric) buses. Clean buses have low or zero emissions that operate entirely or in part on alternative fuels (e.g., liquified natural gas, compressed natural gas, hydrogen, propane, or biofuels).

- Grants are administered by EPA, with \$2.5 billion each for zero- and low-emission buses. Funds will be awarded in \$1 billion increments (\$500 million for each over five years).
- EPA will award grants and rebates on a competitive basis to eligible recipients to replace existing buses with clean and zero-emission buses, and award contracts to eligible contractors to provide rebates for replacing existing buses with zero-emission buses.
- Criteria for grant consideration include the lowest overall cost of bus replacement; local conditions (e.g., bus route lengths, weather); technologies that most reduce emissions; and whether funds will bring new technologies to scale or promote cost parity between old and new technology.
- Priority will be given to applicants with proposals to replace buses in high-need districts and tribal/bureau-funded schools; that serve in rural or low-income areas; that will complement assistance received by securing additional sources of funding through public-private partnerships, other grants, and bonds.
- All buses acquired with funds from the grant must be operated as part of the school bus fleet for no less than five years; be maintained, operated, and charged or fueled according to manufacturer/state requirements; not be manufactured or retrofitted with a power unit or other technology that creates air pollution within the bus (e.g., unvented diesel passenger heaters).
- Awards may be made for up to 100% of the costs for replacing existing buses with clean and zero-emission buses and charging or fueling infrastructure. Requires EPA to develop an education and outreach program about the grants by March 2022. EPA will inform stakeholders about how to apply and comply; describe available bus technologies; explain costs and benefits for participating; and make available best practices regarding clean/zero-emission school bus acquisition and deployment, associated infrastructure, workforce development and training, etc.

Questions? Contact Elleka Yost, ASBO International's Director of Advocacy at eyost@asbointl.org.

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