



June 25, 2021

Via Email

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jamaal Bowman, Yvette Clark, Adriano Espaillat, Hakeem Jeffries, Nicole Malliotakis, Gregory Meeks, Grace Meng, Carolyn Maloney, Jerry Nadler, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Tom Suozzi, Ritchie Torres, and Nydia Velazquez
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives,

We are writing to you today to ask for your support on a critical issue that is impacting New York City's children, families, and hardworking employees. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we look towards the future with optimism – and urgency. As you and your fellow members of Congress develop a new infrastructure bill, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in our children and rebuild our schools. Together, we can make New York City Schools a model of green infrastructure, make schools healthier and safer for students and the school community, create good union jobs, and save schools millions in energy costs. The time to act is now.

Throughout the pandemic, longstanding safety and health issues in public school buildings have been magnified, and the work we did to make a return to in-person school possible is only the beginning. Our members go to work every day and face outdated heating and air conditioning systems, faulty electrical grids and plumbing, and deteriorating rooftops.

These infrastructure issues make it difficult for our members to work and for our students to learn. As we embark on summer school, more important this year than ever, at least twenty percent of New York City classrooms are without air conditioning. Throughout the year, our members often work in overheated kitchens and maintain aging buildings. This is especially true in too many Black and Brown communities that have been historically underserved and are most in need of investment.

These challenges have brought public and private sector unions together, along with parents, teachers, students, and the school community, to embrace the climate movement that's needed in New York. We must invest now. There are clear, simple, and actionable solutions to get this done, and that is why we call on all New Yorkers and our representatives to join our support of the [Carbon Free and Healthy Schools](#) initiative.

Structural issues in these buildings are wasting precious energy and costing the City millions of dollars every year. The New York City Department of Education spends around \$275 million annually on energy bills for schools in the five boroughs. Even a modest 25 percent improvement in efficiency would save about \$70 million every year, money that should go towards improving classroom instruction.

And while we are saving money, creating jobs, and rebuilding schools, we can take bold action on the climate crisis. With solar panels and energy-efficiency retrofits on New York City schools, it's estimated we can save more than 75,000 tons of carbon emissions every year, the equivalent of planting 400,000 trees.

To build the future we want for our city, we need leadership from our federal delegation to secure necessary funding and financing, as well as a commitment from city leaders to successfully implement this initiative. As taxpayers invest trillions to rebuild our economy, this is exactly the kind of investment we need to prioritize.

We want to work with you all to ensure that new infrastructure investments include funding for energy audits on our schools and low-cost financing for retrofits and solar power. By building on what the City has already allocated and funds available through the American Rescue Act, we can make all New York City schools healthy and carbon free – a model for the rest of the country.

If our students truly represent the future of New York City, then we must invest in creating safe and healthy environments for them to learn and grow – while creating jobs and saving money and energy along the way. We call on you, our federal delegation, to step up for our children and the hard-working members of the school community to make our city safer and more equitable for years to come.

Sincerely,
The Carbon Free and Healthy Schools Initiative

Vincent Alvarez, President, New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Kyle Bragg, President, 32BJ SEIU

Henry Garrido, Executive Director, AFSCME District Council 37

Gary LaBarbera, President, Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and New York State Building and Construction Trades Council

Michael Mulgrew, President, United Federation of Teachers

Jeff Vockrodt, Executive Director, Climate Jobs NY