

News from the Healthy Schools Now Coalition

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Statehouse Photo Exhibit Exposes Deplorable Conditions Endangering Thousands of Students in New Jersey Public Schools

Trenton – An art exhibit on the Statehouse steps today exposed the shameful conditions in some New Jersey public schools. The exhibit, titled “*A Blind Eye: The Immorality of Inaction*,” highlights the shocking result that four years of delayed repairs, renovations and construction have had on our public schools and the students who attend them.

Powerful and disturbing photos in the exhibit depicted hazardous conditions that currently exist in several schools, including a leaking stairwell at Trenton Central High School known to students as “The Waterfall,” exposed pipes in a student bathroom at Elementary School No. 20 in Paterson, and the 31 long-term use trailers at Phillipsburg High School.

Another picture in the exhibit depicted an empty lot that was approved for construction of the Hazel and Marshall Elementary School in Paterson in 2003. That construction project was stalled in 2010 and reapproved in 2011. Today weeds gather in the empty lot where students should have gathered years ago.

These atrocious conditions are the result of years of delayed maintenance and stalled new school construction projects by the Christie Administration in the School Development Authority (SDA) Districts (former Abbott Districts).

In 2008, the New Jersey State Legislature approved \$3.9 billion in bond financing for new school construction and repairs in the SDA Districts as well as Regular Operating Districts. Despite having the money, in 2010 Governor Chris Christie issued a “stop work order,” halting 52 approved new school construction projects and hundreds of health and safety projects in existing schools.

In 2011, the SDA’s school repair program was restarted by asking the 31 SDA Districts to identify “emergent repairs,” defined by the Department of Education as “so potentially hazardous that they cause an imminent peril to the health and safety of students or staff.” SDA Districts submitted 716 “emergent projects.” After taking a year to respond, the Department of Education and SDA only agreed to address 68 projects. To date, many are not done. The Christie Administration released new lists of 30

approved capital projects in 2011 and 2012. To date, construction has not started on many of these projects.

This exhibit coincides with the Healthy School Day of Action. The Healthy Schools Now coalition is urging the public to make calls to Governor Christie and to demand the SDA take immediate action to repair and modernize our schools because going to school shouldn't make our children sick.

View photo of the exhibit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/sets/72157636799492285/>

View the booklet here: http://www.njwec.org/PDF/ABlindEye_ReaderSpreads.pdf

The exhibit was created by Healthy Schools Now, a coalition of parents, educators, students and public school advocates dedicated to ensuring that all New Jersey children and school employees learn and work in safe, modern school buildings.

Comments from Member Organizations of the Healthy Schools Now Coalition

"Deteriorating public schools are unhealthy and make our children, teachers and school staff sick. It's time Governor Christie makes safe and healthy public schools a priority."

- Mo Kinberg, New Jersey Work Environment Council, Campaign Coordinator.

"The conditions I have witnessed in some of these schools are appalling. It is shameful that we ask any child in New Jersey to learn in these conditions and ask any school employee to work in them. Withholding the resources that could fix these schools is indefensible and immoral."

- Marie Blistan, Vice President, New Jersey Education Association

"This art exhibit documents the shameful conditions that exist in some New Jersey public schools. I invite you to visit any one of these public schools depicted in this exhibit to see if you could work or learn in these deplorable conditions."

- Cheryl Y. Skeete, Executive Vice President Prek-12 Division American Federation Teachers New Jersey

"Trenton Central High School students deserve a suitable learning environment; one that is both healthy and safe. Our students are as valuable as any other children in the state of New Jersey. It is unconscionable that the School Development Authority has decided not to release any funding for Trenton Central High School until June 2014, and that this decision is being upheld by the governor. To have the funds and to refuse to use them while forcing children to be educated in unhealthy and unsafe schools is nothing less than neglect and abuse,"

- Naomi Johnson-Lafleur, President, Trenton Education Association.

"To allow even one child to attend a school that is in this condition is heartless and immoral. The fact that thousands of New Jersey children are forced to do so is unacceptable and must stop immediately."

- Julia Rubin, one of the founders, Save Our Schools New Jersey

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