

Colorado Association of School Boards

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Bill proposes school capital needs assessment

If the state has \$12 million for school district capital needs, is it better to fund actual projects or finance a statewide needs assessment to examine every school facility in the state?

[SB 41](#), the Public School Facilities Equity Act, creates a 14-member advisory committee for public school capital construction to review yearly grant applications and propose minimum facility and safety standards. The standards will form the basis for the statewide needs assessment and grant determinations. In addition to health and safety needs, the standards will also address each building's functionality both in the classroom and in the other services it provides to students and staff.

The bill, sponsored by **Sen. Gail Schwartz (D-Snowmass)** and heard in the Senate Ed Committee Thursday, received widespread support from the education community, including **CASB**. The most compelling testimony in favor of the bill came from three school administrators from Sheridan, Center and Cortez who said many school districts lack the expertise and the resources to thoroughly examine their own facility needs and prioritize capital projects.

The needs assessment will enable the state to prioritize its funding decisions in a responsible manner, said the bill's sponsor. Several witnesses said when grants are approved, the information is incomplete and the committee has no idea if the project at hand is a higher priority than other proposals submitted or if it is a prudent use of funds. The needs assessment will also benefit local districts and their communities because they can use the information to prioritize needs and seek funding.

Most every other state has a robust school capital facility needs assessment program, testified **Mary Wickersham, director of special projects for the Donnell-Kay Foundation**. The foundation produced a report recently called, "Colorado's Crumbling Classrooms—It's Worse Than You Know." That study estimated the school capital facility needs statewide between \$5.7 and \$10 billion.

It's the dollar amount of the unmet school capital facility need that concerns several Senators. "What good does it do to identify the problem if there is no money?" said one. There is also concern that the state assessment will be used as evidence in a future lawsuit.

Based on information from other states, it is anticipated the needs assessment will cost approximately \$12 million. Three million dollars from the "spillover" in the Powerball fund, which already goes for school capital projects, will be set aside for 4 years to fund the assessment. Those districts with the lowest assessed valuation will be the first studied once the needs assessment begins. SB 41 will next be heard in Senate Appropriations.

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