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## **Jeffco school construction challenges**

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**Contributed by Illana Poley**

Crowded schools and deteriorating buildings statewide show Colorado faces school construction crisis

A new online report documents the troubling conditions of school district buildings across Colorado, including Jefferson County.

Colorado's Donnell-Kay Foundation developed [crumblingclassrooms.com](http://crumblingclassrooms.com) to highlight the urgent construction needs facing Colorado's public schools. A comprehensive study commissioned by the foundation estimated Colorado's school construction and maintenance needs at between \$5.7 billion and \$10 billion.

The review includes summaries of the specific maintenance and construction challenges facing 18 different school districts throughout Colorado, including Jefferson County.

The review identified a \$577 million backlog of maintenance needs in addition to a \$324 million bond measure recently passed in Jefferson County.

The report also identified an additional \$444 million in lower priority capital needs including security upgrades, roof repairs, ventilation renovation, fire and security alarms, handicap accessibility and permanent buildings for the district's preschool program.

Changing demographics in the district and the cost for new schools or school additions are not even included in the district's maintenance estimates.

The report also includes regional summaries.

Some districts on the Western Slope cannot keep up with exploding student growth from new development.

In the Central Mountains, economically depressed school districts away from resort towns have found that their residents cannot afford property tax hikes to pay for school repairs and maintenance.

Many districts on the Eastern Plains do not have the tax base to support even one new school building, though some schools in the region were built as many as 80 years ago.

On the Front Range, fast-growing districts or older communities with aging buildings struggle to raise enough money to meet their school construction needs.

The report says that one way to help address these pressing school construction needs would be for the state to raise the "severance tax" on companies that extract oil or gas from Colorado. Currently, Colorado's severance tax is substantially lower than other western states.

"This report clearly demonstrates that many Colorado school districts simply are unable to address their pressing construction and maintenance needs," said Tony Lewis, executive director of the Donnell-Kay Foundation. "As a result, students face serious health and safety threats and seriously compromised classroom conditions that undermine learning. It's clear that the state has to step up and take responsibility for solving this problem."

To view the complete summary of Jefferson County schools, visit [crumblingclassrooms.com](http://crumblingclassrooms.com) and click on "School Profiles."

The Denver-based Donnell-Kay Foundation focuses on funding systemic reform and state level policy in the areas of early childhood, K-12, and higher education.

*Illana Poley is a media consultant for the Donnell-Kay Foundation.*

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