



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RENEWED POLICY DISCUSSIONS on school facilities investments in Worcester Public Schools underscore the pressing need for strategic action. This report delves into three key areas: state and local partnerships, local discretionary spending, and an analysis of the District’s 2017 Facilities Master Plan. The Bureau’s work seeks to inform public debate in preparation for the District’s next Facilities

Master Plan. It is vital that the City and District continue to address issues such as aged school infrastructure, deferred maintenance, and limited revenue streams. By prioritizing collaborative, data-driven decision-making, with a focus on equitable resource allocation, Worcester can continue to improve its learning environments and enhance learning outcomes for its students.

PAGES 3-4 | INTRODUCTION: WHY DO SCHOOL FACILITIES MATTER? A LITERATURE REVIEW

- Reviews the literature on school facilities, highlighting important studies on the subject.
- Examines key topics, including student performance, health, climate-friendly construction, community engagement, equitable resource allocation, and school safety.
- **While the District addresses aging buildings and deferred maintenance issues, city leaders have made progress through initiatives such as HVAC upgrade and the commission of a safety audit, aiming to improve learning environments.**

PAGES 5-11 | THE MSBA AND WPS: IMPROVING SCHOOLS THROUGH STATE AND LOCAL COLLABORATION

- Examines the collaborative efforts between the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) and Worcester to address challenges related to aging infrastructure and budget constraints.
- Explains the necessary steps to complete an MSBA project.
- Analyzes the MSBA’s statewide involvement, then compares Worcester to peer Gateway Cities across the Commonwealth.
- **Despite facing challenges like budget overruns, Worcester has consistently collaborated with the MSBA, marking its position as one of the leading Gateway Cities in enhancing educational infrastructure.**

PAGES 11– 14 | LOCAL SCHOOL FACILITIES SPENDING: A FOCUS ON MUNICIPAL INVESTMENTS

- Analyzes trends in facilities-related spending across recent WPS budgets.
- Examines the City’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) allocation to WPS
- Highlights the continuous efforts of the City and District to enhance educational facilities through FY 2024.
- **Student enrollment projections highlight shifts across the District, emphasizing the necessity for strategic planning in future school consolidation and construction projects.**
- **In 2023, notable efforts include the City allocating \$1 million in new tax growth for school facility maintenance, the District adding a facilities section to its new five-year Strategic Plan, and conducting a safety audit for district-wide improvements.**

PAGES 14-19 | ANALYSIS OF THE WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOL’S 2017 FACILITIES MASTER PLAN

- Overviews the District’s 2017 Facilities Master Plan, including cost evaluations and recommendations for the oldest schools.
- Analyzes the report’s findings, providing secondary analysis and deeper insights.
- **Square footage emerges as the most significant factor correlating with higher repair costs for schools.**
- **Strong correlations exist between higher repair costs and increased numbers of Hispanic, African American, and Economically Disadvantaged students across the 28 schools in the Master Plan. No such correlation is found for White students. Further investigation is required to understand the underlying factors contributing to these disparities and to ensure equitable resource allocation. Note that correlation does not imply causation.**
- **All findings are based on 2017 demographic data and 2018 cost projections.**

PAGES 19-20 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Summarizes the importance of improving school facilities, which will drive student learning outcomes, and make recommendations for local leaders to consider.
- **The Bureau’s Recommendations: 1) develop a data-driven priority list of the district’s neediest schools, 2) ensure a transparent, and equitable selection process for school construction and repair projects, 3) further analyze correlations between schools with higher numbers of students from historically underserved backgrounds and higher repair costs, 4) consolidate pre-WWII schools as necessary, and 5) advocate for increased state investment in school facilities for Gateway Cities to address inflation, ADA, and land acquisition costs.**