

April 16, 2007: Sanchez Reintroduces "Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act"

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Sanchez Reintroduces "Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act" to Alleviate School Overcrowding

Bill would create new bond class to increase local control of school construction

WASHINGTON- This week, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) reintroduced H.R. 1862, the "Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act." The bill would establish a new class of bonds to provide interest-free financing for school districts, and a tax exemption for participating financial institutions.

Recent reports indicate that overcrowding in California classrooms is far greater than estimated. According to a recent PolicyLink and MALDEF report, more than 1.5 million students attend critically overcrowded schools while the state's definition of critically overcrowded schools underestimates the scale of students affected. According to the state, almost 1,000 California schools -- housing more than 1 million children -- were considered Critically Overcrowded Schools (COS) in 2002. The study suggests that if schools on multi-track systems were added to the overcrowding definition, the number of students attending critically overcrowded schools would increase to 1.5 million, or 25 percent of the state's public school enrollment.

Representative Sanchez's Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act (H.R. 1862) will encourage new school and classroom construction through the creation of a new class of tax-exempt bonds. These bonds are similar to the Qualified Zone Academy bonds created in the Tax Payer Relief Act of 1997 for the purpose of school renovation. Sanchez's bill focuses on using these new bonds specifically for the construction of new classrooms and/or schools, and to assist overcrowded, high growth rate schools that are struggling to adequately house their students.

Research has shown a direct correlation between the condition of school facilities and student achievement, with students assigned to schools in poor condition falling 10.9 percentage points below those in buildings in excellent condition. Similar studies have demonstrated up to 20 percent improvement in test scores when students were moved to new educational facilities.

To be eligible to participate in the program, schools must be able to fulfill certain requirements:

- Schools must seek out more assistance from local, private businesses and corporations through public-private partnerships
- They must demonstrate that programs to alleviate over-crowding have already been implemented
- They must have high growth rates and high student-teacher ratios

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