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School Construction

BACKGROUND

The quality of education offered by a school district is directly affected by the quality of permanent facilities available to the district. Many districts deal with inadequate housing for students because of failed bond elections, particularly in high-growth districts where portable buildings are almost a way of life.

The need for modernization and new construction for school facilities has reached a critical stage throughout the state. Schools face the enormous challenges of record high enrollments, new demands for education technology, the need for school-based before- and after-school programs, and the health and safety hazards of deteriorating facilities. The overwhelming need to improve the condition of Washington's schools and to construct new buildings to accommodate rising enrollments affects school districts throughout the state.

SUPPORT HB 1484 / SB 5144 & HJR 4205 / SJR 8202 — SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION LEVIES

The Washington Constitution requires a supermajority of three-fifths of voters to support a school maintenance, remodeling or new construction levy before it can be passed. This extraordinary burden has left many school districts with inadequate housing for students because of failed bond elections. Several school districts have had to go back to the ballot several times to pass a levy. Because of this situation, the AIA/WA supports legislation to allow voters to approve school district bonds by a simple majority vote and eliminate the sixty-percent majority and the forty-percent voter turnout requirements.

SUPPORT HB 1169 — DESIGNATE PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES AS “ESSENTIAL PUBLIC FACILITIES.”

The AIA/WA believes schools should be considered as a necessary service and subsequently expedited through the permitting process. Because of the amount of land needed to place a new school, it can be difficult to find a location that complies with the requirements of the Growth Management Act.

HB 1169 amends the Growth Management Act to recognize public school facilities as “essential public facilities.” This designation would speed site selection and permitting for new schools. HB 1169 puts elementary and secondary schools in the same category as state education facilities, airports, correctional facilities and hospitals.

SUPPORT HB 1272 / SB 5509 — HIGH PERFORMANCE GREEN BUILDING STANDARDS

Schools built to sustainable design standards improve student performance and employee satisfaction. The other obvious benefits include lowered energy costs, reduced maintenance needs and improved air quality.

AMERICANS SUPPORT SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION FUNDING

In a recent nationwide poll of voters conducted December 16-22, 2004, (1,000 sample, margin of error +/- 3.1) by two respected national pollsters - The Tarrance Group, a Republican firm, and Lake Snell and Perry, a Democratic firm - it was found that when considering projects that government could spend tax dollars on, an overwhelming 91 percent of voters surveyed said that “repairing unsafe and dilapidated school buildings” was an important priority. Of those, a large 66 percent rated it “very important” and 25 percent “somewhat important.”

On another question, 77 percent of voters polled said they agreed with the statement, “We are in urgent need of renovating existing school buildings.” Moreover, a majority of the electorate polled - 51 percent - said they “strongly agreed” while 26 percent said they “somewhat agreed.” High percentages of all demographic groups were in agreement on the need for renovating schools - notably, 82 percent of women and 86 percent of Hispanics were in agreement.

Additionally, the survey found that voters nationwide believe state and local governments are not doing a particularly good job when it comes to repairing dilapidated school buildings. Only 27 percent positively rate “state and local governments’ ability to repair dilapidated school buildings.” In fact, a whopping 11 times more voters rate them “poor” than “excellent” on this issue.