Rhode Island

State Roles and Responsibilities for PK-12 Public School Facilities

2025 State Profile

National Center on School Infrastructure

Authors & Acknowledgements

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This profile was created as part of the National Center on School Infrastructure (NCSI).

Disclaimers

This state profile represents our best understanding of state policies, standards, and laws governing public PK-12 educational facilities. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors. This document should not be considered an officially approved statement of state policy.

Contents of this profile were developed under Award #S184R230005 from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the individuals from each state who reviewed and fact-checked each profile. We are grateful for their expertise and attention to detail.

National Center on School Infrastructure

The National Center on School Infrastructure is a national resource hub that supports states and school districts in the stewardship of America's elementary and secondary public school facilities.

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Rhode Island Executive Summary

This document provides an overview of the state of Rhode Island's roles and responsibilities regarding public elementary and secondary (PK12) school facilities. It is part of a National Center on School Infrastructure technical assistance project to document public school facility policy and practice across all U.S. states and territories to help build state capacity for aiding districts in their efforts to provide students and staff with healthy, safe, resilient, and educationally adequate public school buildings and grounds.

The governance and management of PK-12 public school facilities are primarily managed at the local level.[1] Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have the authority and responsibility for the day-to-day operations and maintenance of public school facilities, as well as for long-term planning, design, financing, and construction.

States, however, also assume a range of roles and responsibilities regarding the governance and management of school facilities. These include establishing and implementing state policies and practices to support local PK-12 public school facilities planning, facility data collection, capital and maintenance funding for buildings and grounds, facilities management, and facility standards and implementing systems for accountability.

State agencies may additionally offer technical assistance and training to help districts meet modern facility standards, mitigate risks, and enhance the overall quality of local stewardship for public school buildings and grounds. The extent of state involvement in public school facilities varies widely across states.

[1] This is true in all states, except Hawaii, which is a unitary state and local education agency.

Governance Rhode Island public school facilities governance involves legislative, executive, and administrative bodies. The Rhode Island General Assembly authorizes and funds state programs through committees such as the House and Senate Committees on Education and Finance. The Governor proposes school construction bonds and appoints members to the Rhode Island Board of Education and School Building Authority Advisory Board. The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, a component of the Rhode Island Board of Education, has statutory authority under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-4 to adopt school construction regulations and approve project plans. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6, certifies necessity and design compliance of school construction projects and oversees facility-related financial administration.

Management Day-to-day school facility operations are managed by local districts. At the state level, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) administers the Necessity of School Construction process and reviews project documentation for compliance with applicable standards. RIDE also manages design reviews at multiple project stages and coordinates communication between districts and the Council. The Rhode Island School Building Authority (SBA), established under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-2, administers the state's school housing programs. SBA is responsible for reviewing project applications, maintaining construction regulations, prioritizing capital funding requests, managing data systems, and producing public reports.

Planning School facility planning is governed by the Necessity of School Construction process, defined in 200-RICR-20-05-4. Districts are not required to maintain long-term master plans outside this process. Planning is conducted through the submission of a multi-stage application beginning with a Letter of Intent and Identification of Need (Stage I), followed by schematic design and budget development (Stage II). The SBA is required under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(14) to ensure that a comprehensive facility needs assessment is conducted every five years to support state-level capital planning. Enrollment projections are a required component of both local and statewide planning.

Data Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(11), the SBA must collect and maintain data on all public school facilities. This includes inventory, condition, and utilization data used to inform capital investment decisions. A comprehensive statewide assessment was

last completed in 2016–2017 and published as the State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses report. SBA is required under § 16-105-3(12) to publish quarterly reports on all active school construction projects. Local districts must submit project-specific data as part of the Necessity process. Facility data is made publicly accessible through the SBA Facilities Map.

Funding Capital funding is provided through the School Housing Aid Program, authorized under R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 16-7-35 to 16-7-47. This program reimburses approved projects based on a state-determined share ratio. The School Building Authority Capital Fund, authorized under § 16-105-4, provides upfront grants to support districts with limited fiscal capacity. Maintenance funding requirements are defined through Article 9 of the FY2019 State Budget. Districts must spend at least 3% of their operating budgets, replacement value, or square footage-adjusted amount on maintenance to remain eligible for housing aid. Local borrowing is governed by R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 45-38.2-4 and 45-12-19 through 45-12-20, and conduit financing is available through the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC).

Accountability The School Construction Regulations (200-RICR-20-05-4) set statewide standards for design, construction, and planning. RIDE and SBA review district submissions for compliance with these regulations. Districts must submit annual Asset Protection Plans pursuant to c(c). Health and safety compliance is monitored by RIDOH, DEM, OER, and local officials under laws including R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-3 (annual inspections), § 23-61-2 (radon), c (pesticides), and § 46-13.3 (drinking water). State building code compliance is overseen by the State Building Office. Environmental and energy standards are enforced through the School Construction Regulations, Green Buildings Act (§ 37-24), and RIDEM permitting requirements. Projects must meet design and performance standards to remain eligible for state funding.

RHODE ISLAND ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

Public education is a state responsibility established in the Rhode Island State Constitution.

> **R.I. Const. Art. 12, § 1**
> *"The diffusion of knowledge, as well as of virtue among the people, being essential to the preservation of their rights and liberties, it shall be the duty of the general assembly to promote public schools and public libraries, and to adopt all means which it may deem necessary and proper to secure to the people the advances and opportunities of education and public library services."*

This constitutional provision establishes the General Assembly's responsibility to promote public education and authorizes the legislature to adopt laws in support of that goal. The state's policy for school housing is formally declared in **R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-7-35**, which states that the provisions of §§ 16-7-35 through 16-7-47 are designed to (1) guarantee adequate school housing for all public school children in the state, and (2) prevent the cost of school housing from interfering with the effective operation of the schools. This statute sets the foundational policy for Rhode Island's system of state-supported school construction and renovation, establishing adequacy and affordability as central objectives of the school housing program.

SCALE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL HOUSING

315 Schools	66 Districts/Charters	24,112,691 Sq. Ft. *Reported*	20,719 Staff	138,458 Students

Rhode Island's 66 local education agencies (LEAs) (hereafter referred to as 'school districts') reported to the U.S. Census of Governments that they operated 315 PK

through 12th grade (and adult education) schools in fiscal year 2022.[2] These schools enrolled 138,458 students and are the workplace for 20,719 staff.[3] These schools encompass an estimated 24 million gross square feet of building space statewide.

The following sections describe Rhode Island's state-level roles and responsibilities for public school facilities.

Rhode Island PK-12 Public Educational Facilities Governance

State-level engagement in PK-12 public school facilities is firmly embedded in state systems. State boards of education, state education agencies, state legislatures, governors, and in some cases, independent commissions and facilities authorities make decisions about state roles and responsibilities associated with the quality and delivery of public school facilities. These bodies govern through state codes, regulations, standards, and budgets, which direct and influence local policies and practices regarding public school buildings and grounds. In some states, education finance equity and adequacy court cases have also played a role in defining state responsibilities for public school facilities.

Legislative Committees Affecting Facilities

In the Rhode Island General Assembly, multiple committees review legislation and appropriations that affect school construction, maintenance, and capital funding:

- House Committee on Education: Reviews legislation related to public education, including matters involving school infrastructure, construction policy, and state education regulations.

[2] SOURCE: U.S. Census of Governments Fiscal Survey

[3] National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core Data

- Senate Committee on Education: Considers education-related legislation, including school construction programs and standards for educational facilities.
- House Committee on Finance: Reviews and approves state budget proposals, including funding allocations for the School Housing Aid Program, capital project reimbursements, and other education-related expenditures.
- Senate Committee on Finance: Oversees state fiscal policy, including capital outlay appropriations and state bond measures that support public school infrastructure.

These legislative committees hold hearings, review budget proposals, and consider legislation that governs or allocates resources for school facility programs.

State Board of Education

In 2013, the Rhode Island General Assembly enacted legislation to establish the Rhode Island Board of Education, consolidating the former Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Governors for Higher Education into a single entity. This restructuring, codified in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-97-1, aimed to enhance coordination across all levels of public education in the state. The Board comprises 17 members appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, with eight members designated to each of the two councils: the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education. The chairperson of the Board serves on both councils.

In 2014, further legislation under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-97-1.2 established two distinct councils within the unified Rhode Island Board of Education:

- Council on Elementary and Secondary Education: Assumes responsibilities related to pre-K through 12th-grade education, as outlined in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-1.

- Council on Postsecondary Education: Oversees public higher education institutions in Rhode Island, as specified in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-59-1.

The Rhode Island Board of Education maintains overarching governance and oversight of both councils, ensuring alignment and coordination across the state's educational system.

Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, holds statutory authority over Rhode Island's public PK–12 education system, including responsibilities related to school facilities. Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-4, the Council is responsible for establishing regulations and standards for school construction and facility design, determining the necessity of school construction projects, and approving final plans for building design and scope. The Council also reviews and approves the annual education budget submitted by the Commissioner, which includes appropriations related to school construction and renovation.

In accordance with 200-RICR-20-05-4, the Council adopts regulations that govern the state's capital project approval process. These regulations set criteria for project evaluation, facility design, and asset protection requirements. The Council may also adopt supplemental policies, procedures, or technical guidance in support of program implementation. Facility-related responsibilities extend to nonpublic elementary and secondary schools where applicable, as defined by the Rhode Island Basic Education Program (200-RICR-20-10-1), which sets minimum standards for educational adequacy and facility conditions.

Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education is appointed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and serves as the chief executive officer of the Council and the chief administrative officer of the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE), as provided in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6. The Commissioner's responsibilities include oversight of public PK–12 education policy implementation, regulatory

compliance, and statewide administrative functions, including those related to school facilities.

Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6(9)(iv), the Commissioner is responsible for certifying the necessity of school construction projects. The Commissioner also approves project designs and ensures that proposed school facility improvements comply with regulations adopted by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

In addition, the Commissioner oversees the development of standards and procedures for accounting, budgeting, and auditing by local education agencies, pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6(9)(x)–(xi). This includes financial oversight of school construction projects and distribution of state funds authorized under the School Housing Aid Program. Through these responsibilities, the Commissioner supports implementation of state policies governing school construction, maintenance, and facility-related financial administration.

Gubernatorial Role in School Facilities

The Governor of Rhode Island holds formal responsibilities related to public school facilities through the state's budget process, bond proposals, and appointments to education oversight bodies. The Governor submits the annual state budget to the General Assembly, which may include funding recommendations for school construction and renovation programs administered by the Rhode Island School Building Authority (SBA) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE). Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-5(b), the Governor must include in the budget recommendation the total amount that the SBA may commit to new projects in the ensuing fiscal year.

School construction bonds must be authorized by the General Assembly and approved by voters through a referendum. The Governor may include proposed general obligation bond measures for school facilities in the capital budget, as was done in 2018 and 2022.

The Governor appoints members to the Rhode Island Board of Education, including to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, subject to

Senate confirmation, as authorized under R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 16-60-2 and 16-97-1. These appointments affect governance and regulatory oversight related to public school infrastructure. The Governor also appoints four public members to the School Building Authority Advisory Board under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-8, with required expertise in education, construction, real estate, or finance.

Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-7, the SBA is required to submit an annual report to the Governor and the chairs of the House and Senate Finance Committees detailing expenses incurred under the School Housing Aid Program and the School Building Authority Capital Fund. The Governor's office receives and reviews this report as part of the state's overall education finance oversight responsibilities.

Rhode Island School Building Authority Advisory Board

The School Building Authority Advisory Board was established by R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-8 to provide recommendations to the Rhode Island School Building Authority regarding the use and prioritization of the School Building Authority Capital Fund. The Board advises on statewide priorities, project approval criteria, and the relative priority of submitted projects, but does not hold approval or implementation authority.

The Advisory Board consists of seven members. Three members serve ex officio: the General Treasurer or a designee; the Director of the Department of Administration, who serves as chair; and the Chair of the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation. The remaining four members are appointed by the Governor and must have expertise in education, construction, real estate, or finance. At least one of the Governor's appointees must represent a local education agency and at least one must be an educator.

Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-8(b), the Board may also provide recommendations on a range of capital planning and school facilities issues. These include guidance on the development of enrollment projection models; processes for applying for and managing grants or appropriations; criteria for eligible cost components, including for shared-use facilities; and policies to reduce reliance on borrowing through increased use of pay-as-you-go funding

mechanisms. The Board may also advise on the maintenance of a clearinghouse of prototypical school plans and incentives for their use, as well as long-term capital planning based on identified needs and available resources. All recommendations are advisory in nature and are submitted to the SBA for consideration in its administration of capital programs.

Ad Hoc Committees, Boards, and Commissions

Senate Task Force on School Housing Aid (2014)

In 2014, the Rhode Island Senate established the Senate Task Force on School Housing Aid to evaluate the state's school construction reimbursement program following a moratorium on new project approvals that had been in effect since 2011. The task force conducted hearings to assess the program's fiscal structure and long-term viability. Its final report identified that approximately 40 percent of state school housing aid reimbursements were directed toward bond interest payments rather than direct construction costs. The task force found that the existing program lacked prioritization mechanisms, caps, or controls to manage the scale and timing of state reimbursements. It also documented a backlog of approximately $600 million in local school facility needs that had accumulated during the moratorium.

The Task Force issued a series of recommendations to address these deficiencies. These included establishing a consolidated administrative structure to oversee school construction financing—referred to as a “State Infrastructure Authority”—by merging functions from existing entities including the Rhode Island Clean Water Finance Agency, the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC), and the School Housing Aid program then managed by the Department of Education. The Task Force also recommended implementing a comprehensive statewide facility assessment every five years and shifting from a traditional bond reimbursement model to a pay-as-you-build structure to reduce long-term borrowing costs.

These recommendations directly informed subsequent legislative and administrative reforms, including the establishment of the Rhode Island School

Building Authority in 2015, the creation of the SBA Capital Fund, and the development of a statewide needs assessment process.

Rhode Island Schools Task Force to Improve the State of Rhode Island's K-12 School Facilities (2017)

In September 2017, Governor Gina Raimondo issued Executive Order 17-09, establishing the Rhode Island School Buildings Task Force. The Task Force was created in response to the findings of the *State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses* report and was charged with evaluating the condition of public school facilities and developing recommendations to address long-term capital needs. Executive Order 17-09 directed the Task Force to consider input from stakeholders and review current policies related to financing, project delivery, and maintenance of school buildings.

The Task Force met during the fall of 2017 and issued its final recommendations in December 2017. These recommendations included the proposal of a statewide school construction bond, which led to the General Assembly authorizing, and voters approving, a $250 million general obligation bond in 2018. The Task Force also recommended the creation of temporary incentive mechanisms within the School Housing Aid Program, including increased reimbursement "bonus points" for projects that addressed high-priority issues such as health and safety conditions, early childhood education spaces, and STEAM instructional environments. Additional recommendations focused on the use of prequalified owner's project managers for large construction projects, the establishment of standardized maintenance protocols, and the implementation of cost-control measures for capital projects.

Judicial Decisions Affecting Facilities

Rhode Island courts have not issued rulings directly addressing the constitutional adequacy of public school facilities. However, two decisions have examined broader education funding mechanisms with implications for local infrastructure investment.

In *Woonsocket School Committee v. Chafee*, 89 A.3d 778 (R.I. 2014), the Woonsocket and Pawtucket School Committees challenged the constitutionality

of the state's education funding formula, arguing that it failed to provide sufficient financial resources to meet student needs in low-wealth districts. The plaintiffs asserted that the system's reliance on local property taxes created disparities in school quality, including deteriorating school buildings. The Rhode Island Supreme Court upheld the funding structure, ruling that decisions regarding adequacy of educational funding fall within the legislature's discretion and are not subject to judicial enforcement under the state constitution.

In *Providence Public School District v. City of Providence* (R.I. Super. Ct. 2024), the Rhode Island Department of Education withheld state aid from the City of Providence, citing the city's failure to meet minimum municipal contribution requirements under the Crowley Act (R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-7.1-5) during state intervention in the district. The Superior Court upheld the Department's authority to enforce the statute through withholding mechanisms. While the case addressed operational funding obligations, the decision has indirect implications for the city's capacity to support facility investments and maintain eligibility for state school housing aid.

These cases demonstrate that while the judiciary has not required specific facility improvements, it has affirmed the state's authority to enforce funding statutes that may affect local capacity to invest in school infrastructure.

Rhode Island PK-12 Public Educational Facilities Management

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have authority and responsibility for the day-to-day operations and maintenance of public school facilities, as well as for long-term facilities planning, design, financing, and construction. Although PK-12 public school facilities are managed locally, there are state facilities management roles and responsibilities that may involve strategic planning, data collection, state funding programs, standards and systems for accountability. State agencies may also include programs for technical assistance and training that help districts meet standards, mitigate risk, and increase the quality of local district stewardship of public school buildings and grounds. State roles and responsibilities related to elementary and secondary public school facilities

vary widely across the U.S. states, with unitary districts in Hawaii and U.S. Territories, where the state agency and the local agency are combined.

Rhode Island Department of Education

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is responsible for administering school facilities regulations and procedures adopted by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, as authorized under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6 and implemented through 200-RICR-20-05-4. RIDE supports the implementation of these regulations through administrative review, coordination, and technical assistance.

RIDE manages the application process for school construction and renovation projects seeking state approval. This includes reviewing documentation submitted by school districts for completeness, ensuring compliance with applicable design and planning standards, and preparing recommendations for Council consideration. RIDE also monitors project adherence to approval conditions throughout the planning and construction phases.

RIDE administers and oversees the Necessity of School Construction process, which governs capital improvement projects requesting state reimbursement. This multi-stage process includes review of facility assessments, enrollment projections, educational program needs, and proposed project scopes. RIDE oversees design reviews at the schematic design, design development, and construction documentation phases and coordinates meetings with district representatives and design teams.

Rhode Island School Building Authority

The Rhode Island School Building Authority (SBA) was established within the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2015 under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-2. The SBA is responsible for administering the state's school housing programs and managing regulatory, financial, and planning processes related to public school facility construction and renovation. Its statutory responsibilities are outlined in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3.

The SBA oversees the administration of the school housing aid program and is charged with ensuring that the cost of school construction does not interfere with the effective operation of schools. It reviews applications for state housing aid and the School Building Authority Capital Fund, and makes recommendations to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, based in part on the input of the School Building Authority Advisory Board. The SBA is also responsible for maintaining and updating regulations governing school construction, including design and construction standards, submission requirements, and regulatory compliance procedures. These regulations are adopted pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(5).

The SBA manages the prequalification process for contractors, architects, and engineers on large-scale school construction projects exceeding $10 million. The criteria used in this process include project performance history, compliance with applicable regulations, and past utilization of minority and women-owned subcontractors, as required by R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(6). The SBA provides technical assistance and guidance to local education agencies on the school construction application process, maintenance planning, and regulatory compliance, and may also develop training resources for school officials and staff.

In addition to project review and regulation, the SBA establishes a system for prioritizing applications for the Capital Fund based on statutory criteria, including facility condition, accreditation status, compliance with educational programs, and energy efficiency considerations. The SBA is also responsible for collecting and maintaining data on all public school facilities and must publish quarterly reports on the status of ongoing school construction projects, as outlined in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(10) through (12).

Additional responsibilities assigned to the SBA under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(13) through (19) include developing enrollment projection models, maintaining a repository of prototypical school plans, assisting with long-term capital planning, identifying eligible project cost components, and making policy recommendations intended to reduce state and local reliance on debt for school construction. The SBA operates in coordination with other state agencies and

entities, including the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation, but retains distinct administrative and oversight functions under statute.

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-7, the Rhode Island School Building Authority is required to submit an annual report to the Governor and the chairs of the House and Senate Finance Committees on the status of the School Housing Aid Program and the School Building Authority Capital Fund. The Rhode Island School Building Authority (SBA) has produced several key publications that document its initiatives, assessments, and investments in public school facilities across the state. These publications document the SBA's assessment of statewide school facility conditions, its administration of capital funding, and its implementation of state programs intended to support renovation, modernization, and equitable access to school construction resources. Each report includes information on funding allocations, program initiatives, and project status updates.

State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses (2017): This comprehensive assessment evaluated the physical condition and educational adequacy of over 300 public school campuses. The report identified more than 50,000 deficiencies and estimated a need of $2.2 billion to bring all facilities to ideal conditions, with $627.6 million required for immediate health and safety improvements.

Renewing the Dream (2022): This publication highlighted progress made since the 2018 school construction bond, showcasing completed renovations and ongoing projects. It also introduced the Facilities Equity Initiative, designed to provide underserved districts with greater access to construction funding.

Investing in Excellence (2023): This report detailed the SBA's investments totaling $76 million in school infrastructure. It outlined various initiatives, including the Facility Equity Initiative, the 21st Century Technology and Equipment Fund, and the ARTS program, all aimed at modernizing learning environments and promoting equity.

SUPPORTING AMERICA'S SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE (SASI) INITIATIVE

In 2023, the Rhode Island School Building Authority (RISBA) launched the Healthy Environments Advance Learning (HEAL) Program with $4.96 million in funding over five years from the U.S. Department of Education's Supporting America's School Infrastructure (SASI) program. The purpose of the SASI grant is to strengthen state-level administrative capacity to support high-need local education agencies (LEAs) in managing and improving public elementary and secondary school buildings and grounds. Rhode Island's HEAL initiative includes the development of a School Facility Adequacy Standard through public engagement, interagency collaboration to advance program objectives, and the provision of technical assistance, training, and professional development for facilities directors in five high-need districts: Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, and West Warwick. RISBA is also expanding its internal administrative capacity by hiring staff dedicated to infrastructure oversight, including a School Infrastructure Administrator, Coordinator, and Finance Officer, to support the implementation of school facility responsibilities at the local level.

Rhode Island PK — 12 School Facilities Data Management

Extensive data and information are needed for educational facility planning, decision making, and oversight. Relevant data helps stakeholders understand the broad impacts of their PK -12 infrastructure spending and investments on health, education, community and beyond. Facilities data falls into five major categories: (NCES Forum Guide to Facilities Information Management).

Inventory: *Data include addresses, geo-codes, building areas, site acreage, and year of construction.*
Design: *Data include space descriptions, number of stories, designed-for purposes (i.e., elementary school, performance center).*
Utilization: *Data includes school capacity for enrollment based on the educational programs provided, spaces that are shared, and the gross square footage per enrolled student.*
Condition: *Data includes facility condition assessment data on the age and condition of major components, systems, and finishes.*

Budget and Finance: *Data elements include the district expenditures for maintenance, operations, and capital improvements.*
Beyond these standard data sets, an increasing amount of data is also being collected and analyzed on building performance. This includes data on building performance metrics for energy efficiency, indoor air quality, lead levels in water, and the presence of hazardous materials like asbestos, mold, or PCBs.

Rhode Island's school facility data requirements are codified in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3 and implemented through 200-RICR-20-05-4. Under § 16-105-3(11), the Rhode Island School Building Authority (SBA) is responsible for collecting and maintaining data on all public school facilities to inform planning and infrastructure-related decision-making. This includes the creation and maintenance of a statewide database documenting facility inventory and condition.

Pursuant to § 16-105-3(14), SBA must conduct a comprehensive statewide needs survey every five years. The survey evaluates the condition of major building systems and the educational adequacy of school buildings, including public charter schools. The results are intended to support local and state capital planning and inform the allocation of funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance.

Under § 16-105-3(12), SBA is required to publish quarterly reports on all active school construction projects. These publicly available reports include information on project scope, cost, district, construction type, and completion status.

School districts must submit project-specific facility data through the Necessity of School Construction process. To be eligible for state funding, districts must provide documentation related to facility condition, enrollment projections, educational programming, asset protection plans, and space utilization. These submissions must align with findings from the most recent statewide needs assessment.

In 2016–2017, RIDE and SBA jointly commissioned a comprehensive statewide facility assessment, conducted by the consulting firm Jacobs. The survey

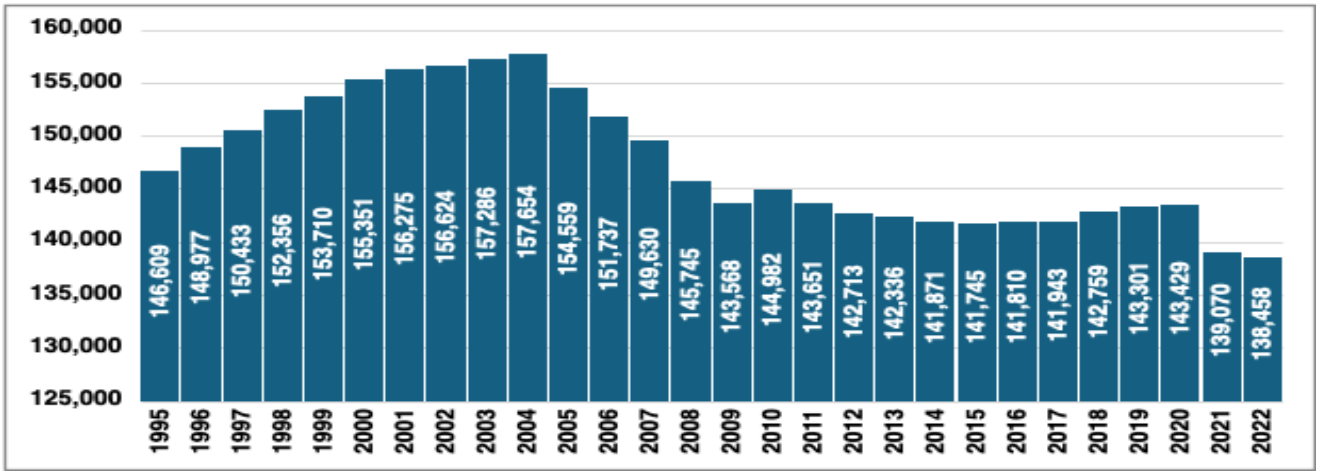
evaluated more than 300 school campuses and documented data on building systems, facility age, capacity, code compliance, and projected replacement needs. The assessment informed the 2017 State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses report and established the baseline dataset for current capital planning.

Facility-level results from the 2016–2017 assessment were published through the Facilities Map, a public resource maintained by RIDE and SBA. The map includes school-level data such as year built, gross square footage, functional age, and categorized facility condition ratings.

RHODE ISLAND PK — 12 SCHOOL FACILITIES PLANNING

School facilities require planning at many different levels to meet educational and community purposes. Educational facilities planning is needed for facilities operations, maintenance, and capital projects. Planning PK- 12 public school facilities enables states, districts, and communities to align their resources to their needs, ensure that priorities are met fairly, and that facilities are operated, managed, and built to modern health, safety, educational, and environmental standards.

CHART 1: STUDENT ENROLLMENT SCHOOL YEARS 1994-1995 THROUGH 2021-2022



Source: Data from the U.S. Census of Governments Fiscal Survey; www.school-infrastructure.org Data Dashboard, of the National Center on School Infrastructure (NCSI).

Rhode Island's school facility planning policies are defined by statutory mandates and regulatory requirements administered by the Rhode Island

School Building Authority (SBA) and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE). At the state level, R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(14) requires the SBA to ensure that a comprehensive needs assessment is conducted for all public school facilities, including charter schools, at least once every five years. The assessment evaluates the condition of major building systems and the educational adequacy of school buildings and is used to inform long-term capital planning and guide the allocation of state construction and renovation funds. The state does not maintain or require a standing statewide facilities master plan.

District-level facility planning is conducted through the Necessity of School Construction process. Rhode Island does not require districts to maintain ongoing facilities master plans outside this process. However, to qualify for state construction or renovation funding, districts must complete a multi-stage application process that includes detailed analysis of current and projected enrollment, building conditions, educational program needs, and space use.

Planning at the district level is formalized through Stage I and Stage II of the Necessity process. In Stage I, districts submit a Letter of Intent and an Identification of Need to RIDE and SBA. The Identification of Need serves as a districtwide planning document and must include:

- Facility condition assessments
- Current and projected enrollment
- Alignment of facilities with educational program delivery
- Analysis of space use and building capacity
- Documentation of code and health and safety deficiencies
- Asset protection and maintenance planning

These materials are reviewed by RIDE and SBA to determine whether the proposed project qualifies to advance. In Stage II, districts develop feasibility studies and schematic designs that address the needs identified in Stage I, including building modernization, program adequacy, and cost reasonableness.

While there is no separate statute requiring ongoing enrollment forecasting or facilities master plans, enrollment projections are a required component of both

the statewide needs assessment and local applications. Districts may work with consultants to develop demographic projections and long-range capital plans in support of their Stage I submissions.

Planning criteria also include educational adequacy, as defined in 200-RICR-20-05-4 and the Rhode Island Basic Education Program. These criteria evaluate whether proposed facilities support grade-level configurations, program delivery models, and specialized instructional needs.

Rhode Island PK-12 Educational Facilities Funding

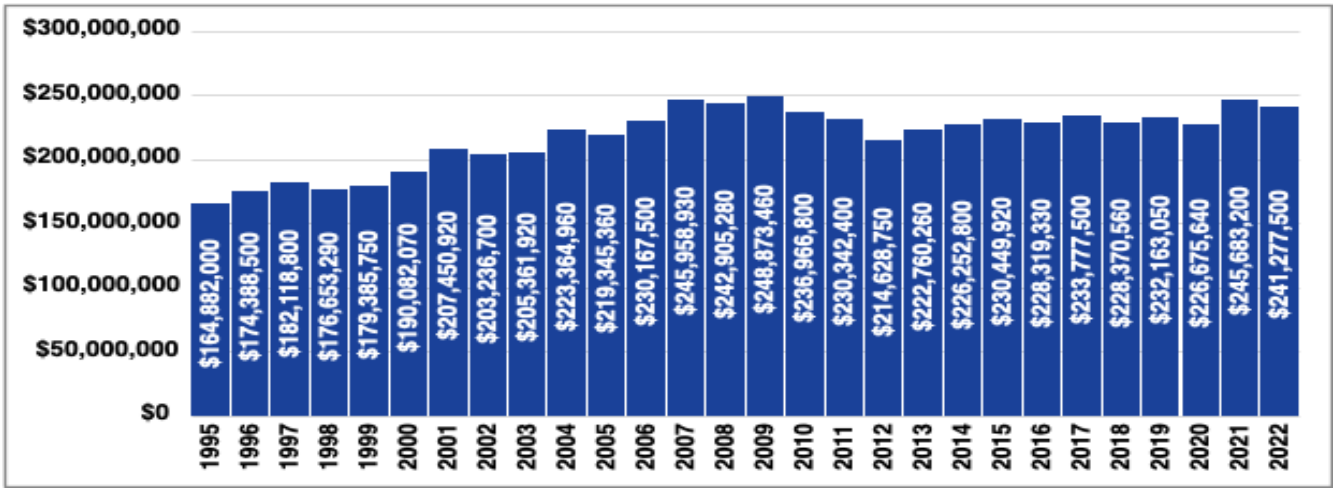
School facilities are funded with annually budgeted operating funds for utilities, cleaning, groundskeeping, maintenance and repairs; and periodically budgeted, and usually bond financed, capital funds, for school design, construction, renovation and major repair projects. State laws define how districts get access to local financing for school construction capital projects and whether or how states distribute state school construction funding. Federal funding for school construction is minimal—before pandemic funding—it was less than 2% of what districts paid for school construction capital outlay, with a major share of federal funding for rebuilding schools post weather related disasters.

Maintenance and Operations Funding

Maintenance and Operations expenditures include payment for utilities, custodial staff and services, groundskeeping, related custodial and repair materials, equipment, and maintenance contracts, as well as spending for security personnel, materials, and services.

Rhode Island school districts reported nearly $241.3 of M&O annual operating-budget expenditures to the U.S. Census of Governments for FY2022. Adjusting district annual expenditures with the Consumer Price Index for inflation for years 1995-2022—shown in Chart 2, this was an average of $1,740 per FY2022 student for the last three years.

CHART 2: M&O SPENDING, FY1995-FY2022 (INFLATION-ADJUSTED 2024 DOLLARS)



Source: Data from the U.S. Census of Governments Fiscal Survey; actual M&O spending data available at www.school-infrastructure.org Data Dashboard, of the National Center on School Infrastructure (NCSI).

Rhode Island school districts fund maintenance and operations (M&O) through their annual local operating budgets. To promote sustained investment in school building upkeep, the state established minimum maintenance spending requirements beginning in fiscal year 2019 under Article 9 of the FY2019 State Budget. These requirements apply to all districts seeking reimbursement through the School Housing Aid Program and were phased in over a five-year period, reaching full implementation in FY2023.

To remain eligible for full School Housing Aid reimbursement, districts must meet at least one of the following thresholds each fiscal year:

- Spend at least 3% of their operating budget on building maintenance, excluding utilities and security;
- Spend at least 3% of the replacement value of school facilities on maintenance; or
- Spend at least $3.00 per square foot of gross building space on maintenance, adjusted annually for inflation.

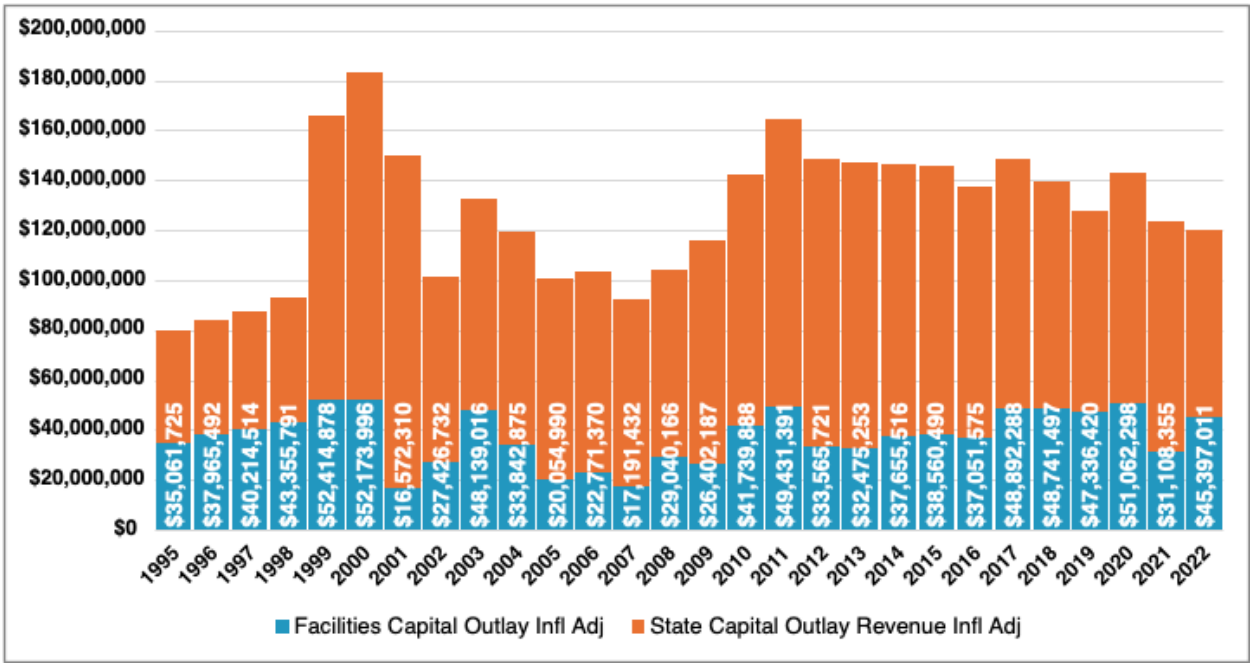
Districts are required to submit annual documentation to the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) to verify compliance. RIDE has issued administrative guidance describing allowable

maintenance expenses and reporting procedures. These expenditures may include preventive maintenance, system servicing, inspections, and other building upkeep activities necessary to sustain facility function and preserve eligibility for state aid. If a district fails to meet the required maintenance threshold, a portion of its housing aid may be withheld and redirected to a restricted fund for maintenance purposes (§ 16-7-23).

Facilities Capital Funding

In addition to annual operating funds for facilities, school districts are responsible for the long-range planning, design, financing, construction, and major renovation and systems renewals of public school buildings and grounds. These capital outlay expenditures are used for new school construction, as well as for such items as roof replacements and upgrades to mechanical systems. In 2022, the facilities capital outlay for school construction and other equipment expended by Rhode Island local school districts, including state revenue for school construction was nearly $120 million (inflation-adjusted dollars). This excludes the cost of land, existing structures, and instructional equipment reported as part of the total capital outlay by school districts to the U.S. Census of Governments. Chart 3 shows inflation-adjusted school construction and other equipment capital expenditures from 1995 through fiscal year 2022 and the revenue that the districts reported from the state for capital outlay and debt service to support their school construction and renovation projects.

CHART 3: CAPITAL OUTLAY FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND OTHER EQUIPMENT FY 1995 – FY 2002 (IN 2024$)



Source: Data from the U.S. Census of Governments Fiscal Survey; actual Capital Outlay spending data available at www.school-infrastructure.org Data Dashboard, of the National Center on School Infrastructure (NCSI).

The State capital funding process begins with LEAs submitting a Necessity of School Construction application, which is designed to assess and establish the need for construction or renovation projects. LEAs must first submit a letter of intent along with a commitment to adhere to School Construction Regulations (SCRs) to be eligible for state capital funds. This is Stage 1 of a five-stage process that involves close collaboration between Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and the Rhode Island School Building Authority (RISBA), with oversight and final approval from the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. Only capital projects approved through this process are eligible for state reimbursement under the School Housing Aid Program or supplemental funding through the SBA Capital Fund.

SCHOOL HOUSING AID PROGRAM

Rhode Island's primary source of state support for school capital investment is the School Housing Aid Program. This program provides annual reimbursement

to districts for approved school construction and renovation costs based on a share ratio formula. The program is authorized under R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 16-7-35, which declares the state's policy to guarantee adequate school housing without impairing operational capacity, and § 16-7-36, which limits reimbursement to projects approved in accordance with state law. Reimbursement is distributed in annual installments under the terms outlined in § 16-7-37, and the share ratio is calculated each year in accordance with § 16-7-40.

The base share ratio ranges from 40% to 92.7%, depending on a district's property valuation per pupil relative to the state average. Higher reimbursements are provided to districts with lower local wealth, as determined annually by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

To receive School Housing Aid, districts must meet all planning and project approval requirements, including compliance with School Construction Regulations and asset protection policies. Approved districts receive reimbursement in annual installments over the life of their bond or financing arrangement, subject to appropriation by the General Assembly.

Beginning in FY2019, the state also introduced temporary housing aid incentives to encourage high-priority capital investments. These incentive points, added to a district's base share ratio, are awarded for specific project types or policy alignments, such as health and safety improvements, educational program upgrades, consolidation, or energy efficiency. These incentives were introduced as part of the 2018 bond initiative and are periodically updated through SBA policy.

School Building Authority (SBA) Capital Fund

The School Building Authority Capital Fund, authorized under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-4, provides pay-as-you-go capital funding to local education agencies (LEAs) for school construction and renovation projects that have been approved through the Necessity of School Construction process. The fund is designed to support LEAs, particularly those with limited borrowing capacity, by offering upfront capital payments. Projects may receive progress funding of up to 15% of

the total state share of foundational housing aid awarded in a given year. The program is administered by the SBA in coordination with the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC).

In recent years, the SBA has used the Capital Fund to support targeted, time-limited infrastructure initiatives focused on improving access to educational spaces and modernizing school environments:

- FY2022 – ARTS Initiative:
  The ARTS Initiative (Art Reengages Talent in Students) allocated $5 million in Capital Fund resources to LEAs on a per-pupil basis to improve infrastructure supporting arts education. Eligible expenditures included lighting upgrades, acoustic and audio-visual equipment, renovations to existing art spaces, and the creation of new facilities for visual and performing arts and media-focused Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

- FY2023 – Facility Equity Initiative:
  The Facility Equity initiative directed $30 million toward capital projects in LEAs with base reimbursement rates above 45%. Funds were used for facility upgrades in districts serving higher concentrations of low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities. Projects focused on expanding access to modernized classrooms, multipurpose spaces, and specialized instructional environments.

- FY2023 – 21st Century Technology & Equipment Fund:
  The 21st Century Technology & Equipment Fund $15 million initiative (including $14 million from the Capital Fund) supported technology-related capital purchases for STEM and CTE program spaces. Funds were used for physical upgrades to classrooms and labs to accommodate new equipment, infrastructure for digital media centers, and renovations supporting modern instructional delivery.

- FY2023 – Menu for Success:
  The Menu for Success program awarded $1.875 million to 15 LEAs to support the acquisition of mobile food lab vehicles and associated

infrastructure. While the program served instructional goals in culinary arts and entrepreneurship, Capital Fund resources were used for vehicle retrofitting, secure equipment storage, and facility modifications related to health code compliance and food service operations.

- FY2023 – Learning Inside Out:
  The Learning Inside Out initiative allocated $7.5 million to support the design and construction of outdoor learning environments, including outdoor classrooms, schoolyard habitats, and associated site improvements. The program funded infrastructure such as shade structures, seating, planting areas, and walkways. An additional $500,000 was dedicated to statewide professional development to support use of the outdoor spaces.

- FY2024 – Get the Foam Out!:
  In alignment with Rhode Island's ban on expanded polystyrene, the Get the Foam Out! initiative provided $2.7 million to 101 schools across 26 LEAs for the removal and replacement of foam furniture, cafeteria trays, and flooring materials. Projects supported by this initiative included procurement and installation of compliant materials and renovation of affected school spaces to meet sustainability goals.

Each initiative was implemented under the SBA's program authority and tied to statutory project approval requirements. All projects funded through the Capital Fund must meet eligibility criteria under the School Construction Regulations and demonstrate alignment with the State's capital planning objectives. Since its inception, the SBA Capital Fund has awarded more than $75 million to support eligible capital projects.

Facilities Financing

School districts often finance their school construction and major capital projects since the life of the building or improvement will last for many years. The level of debt per student varies widely across states and districts. In Rhode Island there was an average of $8,648 of long-term local debt per student outstanding at the end of FY2022—a total of nearly $1.2 billion, with $40.3

million in interest paid in FY2022 for this debt. The level of debt, and how districts can access the bond markets is defined in state law.
Rhode Island school districts finance the local share of school construction and major capital improvements through voter-approved municipal debt, supported by a system of state reimbursement and capital grant programs. The state does not maintain a dedicated or protected revenue stream for school facilities. Instead, appropriations for School Housing Aid and the SBA Capital Fund are approved annually by the General Assembly as part of the state budget process.

State policy permits districts to issue bonds for capital improvements under the conditions set forth in R.I. Gen. Laws § 45-38.2-4, which requires voter approval by a simple majority. Procedures for local debt authorization, issuance, and repayment are further governed by R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 45-12-19 and 45-12-20. Once authorized, districts may finance their local share of project costs through the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC) or other approved channels.

RIHEBC is the state's conduit bond issuer for school construction and renovation projects, operating under the authority granted by R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 45-38.1-1 to 45-38.1-24. It is authorized to issue bonds on behalf of municipalities and local education agencies for eligible school projects (§ 45-38.1-9) and to acquire or lease property for school infrastructure under § 45-38.1-6. RIHEBC does not issue bonds backed by the full faith and credit of the state, as clarified in § 45-38.1-19. In 2003, the General Assembly designated RIHEBC as the bond issuer for school projects eligible for state School Housing Aid reimbursement. In 2016, this role expanded to include co-administration of the SBA Capital Fund in coordination with the School Building Authority (SBA).

The state also uses general obligation bonds to fund a portion of its school construction support. These bonds must be authorized by the General Assembly and approved by voters through a statewide referendum. In 2018 , voters approved a $250 million general obligation bond for public school building improvements. A second $250 million bond was approved by voters in 2022. These authorizations provide funding to supplement the School Housing Aid

Program and the SBA Capital Fund, enabling the state to finance renovation and construction projects.

All state-supported capital projects must be approved through the Necessity of School Construction process, governed by 200-RICR-20-05-4. Projects must be reviewed by the SBA for financial and programmatic eligibility and included in the annual project priority list submitted to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. The Council determines project need under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-4 and submits funding recommendations to the Governor. Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-5(b), the Governor's budget must include a cap on the total amount the SBA may commit to new projects in the upcoming fiscal year, which is then subject to General Assembly approval.

Rhode Island PK — 12 School Facilities Standards and Accountability

Accountability systems for facilities involve facility standards, assessments, and reporting on the health, safety, education, and other factors associated with PK – 12 public school buildings and grounds. It involves systems for measuring and communicating conditions, and the authority to encourage or enforce changes in school design, construction, operations and maintenance.

Oversight of public school facilities in Rhode Island is distributed across multiple state and local entities, with responsibilities defined by statute, regulation, and programmatic requirements. The Rhode Island School Building Authority (SBA), under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-3(5), develops and enforces the School Construction Regulations, including standards related to planning, design, construction, and capital funding eligibility. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) monitors local compliance with maintenance expenditure thresholds, asset protection requirements, and submission of project documentation.

Maintenance and Operations Standards

Local education agencies (LEAs) in Rhode Island are responsible for the care and upkeep of public school facilities, as defined under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-2-9, which grants school committees the authority for the "care, control, and management" of public school property. LEAs are required to maintain facilities that are safe, functional, and supportive of the educational program. To remain eligible for School Housing Aid, LEAs must comply with minimum maintenance expenditure thresholds established by the state.

In addition to meeting maintenance expenditure requirements, LEAs must develop and annually submit Asset Protection Plans to the Rhode Island School Building Authority, in accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-5(c). These plans must outline a schedule of regular maintenance and capital renewal activities for each school facility and demonstrate the district's strategy for maintaining building condition over time. Failure to submit a compliant Asset Protection Plan results in ineligibility for School Building Authority capital funding in the following fiscal year.

To support effective facility operations, RIDE has adopted the Northeast Collaborative for High Performance Schools (NECHPS) Operations and Maintenance Guide as a reference document for LEAs. While not mandatory, the guide provides recommended procedures and strategies for improving indoor air quality, increasing energy efficiency, and supporting the long-term performance of school buildings. These operational practices may be referenced during SBA design review or technical assistance processes.

Building Standards

All public school construction and major renovation projects in Rhode Island must comply with the Rhode Island State Building Code, established under R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 23-27.3. This code incorporates nationally recognized standards, including the International Building Code (IBC), International Existing Building Code (IEBC), and ASHRAE standards for energy efficiency. These codes govern structural integrity, fire protection, accessibility, and energy conservation in school facilities.

The Rhode Island State Building Office, housed within the Department of Business Regulation, is responsible for the interpretation, administration, and enforcement of the State Building Code. This office includes the State Building Commissioner, who oversees code compliance for buildings owned or financed by the state, including public schools. The Building Code Standards Committee and its subcommittees support the development and amendment of building regulations. The Commissioner and local building officials jointly ensure compliance at both the state and municipal levels.

The Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM), under R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-11-2, is responsible for maintaining and inspecting state-owned properties, which may include educational facilities occupied by state agencies. DCAMM conducts periodic inspections and facility assessments to ensure compliance with operational and maintenance standards.

For projects receiving state construction funding, compliance with Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) participation requirements is also mandatory. Under R.I. Gen. Laws § 37-14.1-6, as referenced in § 16-105-3(6), at least 10% of the total project value must be awarded to certified MBEs. The Division of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (DEDI) provides guidance to school districts in meeting these participation requirements during the planning and procurement process.

Finally, R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-3 requires all public school buildings to meet minimum standards for the health and safety of students, including regulations related to lighting, ventilation, sanitation, and general building conditions.

Educational Adequacy Standards

All public school facilities in Rhode Island must support the delivery of educational programming in accordance with the Rhode Island Basic Education Program (BEP), codified in 200-RICR-20-10-1(B)1f. The BEP requires that schools provide educationally suitable learning environments, including classrooms of appropriate size, specialized instructional spaces such as science laboratories and libraries, and infrastructure capable of supporting instructional technology. Educational adequacy is distinct from compliance with building

codes and is defined in terms of a school's ability to meet programmatic needs outlined in the BEP.

Educational adequacy is a required component of the Necessity of School Construction process. In Stage I, LEAs must identify facility deficiencies in relation to their educational program, including gaps in space types, configurations, and support functions. These needs are submitted as part of the district's Identification of Need. In Stage II, LEAs are required to work with design professionals to develop solutions to these deficiencies. The stage includes preparation of schematic designs, budget estimates, and a proposed scope of work aligned with state standards. These documents are submitted to the SBA and presented to the SBA Advisory Board and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education for review.

In Stage III, LEAs develop full design documentation and submit it through the Design Review Portal managed by RIDE. This includes architectural, engineering, and cost documentation necessary to ensure that the proposed facilities align with educational adequacy standards and are eligible for state reimbursement. The SBA may provide technical assistance to LEAs during this phase to ensure the project design supports instructional delivery requirements and addresses any deficiencies identified in the Stage I assessment.

Health and Safety Standards

Oversight of environmental health and safety in Rhode Island school facilities is shared across multiple state and local entities. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is the lead agency for enforcing requirements related to indoor air quality, lead, asbestos, radon, drinking water, and pesticide exposure in schools. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) monitors maintenance compliance, collects required environmental health documentation, and coordinates school facility policy implementation through the School Building Authority. The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) regulates pesticide use, and the Office of Energy Resources (OER) supports HVAC and energy-efficiency upgrades through infrastructure programs. Local building inspectors, fire marshals, and health officials conduct annual inspections of all public and private K–12 school facilities as required

under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-3, certifying that each school complies with applicable building, fire, health, and occupational safety laws prior to occupancy each school year.

Each district is responsible for maintaining school facilities in compliance with these standards. Districts must submit annual documentation to RIDE demonstrating compliance, including fire and building inspection reports, radon testing results, asbestos management plans, and pest control protocols. Failure to submit required documentation or correct identified deficiencies may result in delayed building occupancy, state enforcement action, or ineligibility for state construction or capital funding. RIDOH, RIDE, and other regulatory authorities may require remediation or corrective action for any violation of health and safety regulations, and enforcement may occur under relevant public health, labor, or education laws.

Air Quality

Indoor air quality (IAQ) in Rhode Island public schools is regulated through a combination of environmental health statutes and building design requirements. Radon is governed under the Radon Control Act, codified at R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-61-2 and implemented through 216-RICR-50-15-2. All K–12 schools are classified as high-priority buildings and must conduct radon testing every three years. Schools must report results to the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and notify families of any readings at or above 4.0 pCi/L. Mitigation and follow-up testing are required if elevated levels are detected.

Broader air quality requirements are incorporated into school design standards through the Rhode Island State Building Code, which references the International Mechanical Code and ASHRAE standards for ventilation. In addition, the School Construction Regulations (200-RICR-20-05-4.5.1) require compliance with the NE-CHPS Version 3.0 protocol, which sets performance benchmarks for ventilation, filtration, and indoor environmental quality. For example, classrooms without operable windows must include mechanical ventilation or air conditioning systems.

Projects receiving state construction aid must also implement Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) Management Plans, which include scheduled HVAC

maintenance and ventilation performance monitoring. RIDOH may assist with IAQ assessments and complaints, particularly in cases involving mold or suspected ventilation problems. RIDE reviews facility documentation through annual asset protection plan submissions, which may include IAQ-related practices.

CHEMICAL HAZARDS

The use of pesticides in schools is governed by the Rhode Island Pesticide Control Act, R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-25-37, and implemented through 216-RICR-20-10-4.28. Schools must implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plans that prioritize non-chemical control methods. Pesticides may only be applied when students are not present, and advance notice must be provided to families and staff.

Asbestos is regulated under the Rhode Island Asbestos Control Act, R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-24.5, and the federal Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA). LEAs must maintain an asbestos management plan for each school building, conduct full inspections every three years, and perform surveillance every six months. These plans must be accessible and notifications must be sent to families annually. RIDOH and the Department of Labor and Training oversee compliance.

In Rhode Island, the Lead Poisoning Prevention Act (R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-24.6-14) mandates that all preschools, day care facilities, nursery schools, and both public and private elementary schools serving children under six years of age undergo comprehensive environmental lead inspections at specified intervals. These facilities must demonstrate that they are either lead-free or have maintained lead-safe conditions.

EXTREME HEAT

State policy addresses building design and ventilation requirements for heat mitigation through the Rhode Island School Construction Regulations (200-RICR-20-05-4). Under these regulations, any new or substantially renovated classroom that lacks operable windows comprising at least 4% of the room's floor area must be equipped with air conditioning. This requirement ensures that sufficient mechanical ventilation is provided in learning environments

where natural airflow is inadequate. The rule applies to instructional spaces but excludes areas such as gymnasiums, industrial shops, kitchens, and locker rooms. In addition, all new or renovated schools must be designed to maintain thermal comfort using either natural or mechanical systems that meet current ventilation and temperature control standards.

Districts are responsible for maintaining these systems as part of their facility stewardship obligations. Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-105-5(c), each district is required to develop and annually update an Asset Protection Plan for every school building, which must include schedules for regular inspection, servicing, and repair of HVAC equipment. These plans must be submitted to the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE). Districts that fail to submit a compliant plan are ineligible for School Building Authority Capital Fund support in the following fiscal year. These provisions ensure that HVAC systems used to mitigate extreme temperatures are maintained in functional condition as part of ongoing facility operations.

WATER QUALITY

Water quality in Rhode Island schools is regulated under the Lead and Copper Drinking Water Protection Act, R.I. Gen. Laws § 46-13.3, and the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) enforces these requirements and mandates periodic testing of drinking water outlets in schools for lead and copper. Schools must submit test results to RIDOH and notify families if lead or copper levels exceed action thresholds. If test results exceed action levels—15 parts per billion (ppb) for lead and 1.3 parts per million (ppm) for copper—schools must take immediate corrective actions, such as replacing fixtures or providing alternative water sources. Test results must be submitted to the RIDOH and communicated to parents and guardians.

Schools that operate their own water systems, rather than connecting to municipal sources, are classified as public water systems and are subject to additional requirements under 216-RICR-50-05-1, particularly in sections such as § 1.9.4 (Cross-Connection Control) and § 1.9.9 (Emergency Response Plans). These schools must monitor for bacteriological and chemical contaminants and comply with water treatment, reporting, and system maintenance standards. Plumbing infrastructure in all schools must comply with the Rhode Island

Plumbing Code, including cross-connection controls to prevent contamination. School kitchens are reviewed separately by RIDOH's Office of Food Protection during routine inspections to ensure compliance with drinking water and food safety standards.

Environmental and Energy Standards

Rhode Island establishes environmental and energy requirements for public school facilities through building regulations, environmental remediation laws, and operational support programs. School construction and renovation projects receiving state funding must comply with the Northeast Collaborative for High Performance Schools (NE-CHPS) Protocol Version 3.0, as required under 200-RICR-20-05-4.5.1. NE-CHPS outlines design criteria related to energy efficiency, ventilation, indoor environmental quality, and daylighting. These requirements are consistent with the Green Buildings Act, R.I. Gen. Laws § 37-24, which mandates that public buildings exceeding 10,000 square feet meet a high-performance green building standard. Approved compliance protocols include NE-CHPS, LEED, or alternatives authorized by the Department of Administration.

Site assessment and remediation are governed by the Industrial Property Remediation and Reuse Act, R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 23-19.14-1. If a school project is proposed on a contaminated or formerly industrial site, an environmental assessment and public review process must be conducted, and remediation plans must be approved by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). The School Construction Regulations prohibit siting schools in designated flood hazard areas, wetlands, and other locations with known environmental risks.

School construction projects disturbing one acre or more of land must obtain a stormwater construction permit from RIDEM and comply with the Rhode Island Stormwater Design and Installation Standards Manual. Plans must include measures for managing construction and post-construction runoff. Project documentation must also address compliance with relevant environmental health statutes, including procedures for the assessment and mitigation of radon, asbestos, lead, and other contaminants.

Operational energy improvements are supported through the Public School Energy Equity Program, administered by the Office of Energy Resources (OER). The program provides funding and technical assistance for projects that improve school energy performance through measures such as LED lighting retrofits, HVAC upgrades, and automation systems. Participation is optional and does not affect School Housing Aid eligibility.

Projects approved under the School Housing Aid Program may qualify for temporary incentive points if they exceed baseline energy efficiency requirements set by the Rhode Island Energy Code. Incentives are calculated based on the modeled percentage improvement and require post-occupancy energy performance documentation.