National Center on School Infrastructure

COMMUNICATION & VISUALIZATION DECK TEMPLATE FOR STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (SEAS)

The State of Our School Facilities: User Guide and Storyline Playbook

A technical assistance product for state education agencies communicating school facilities data to legislatures and state boards of education.

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Prepared by the National Council on School Facilities (NCSF) for the National Center on School Infrastructure (NCSI)

Companion file: NCSI_SEA_Facilities_Deck_Template.pptx

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant 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.

Note on Intended Use

This template and guide support state leaders in communicating verified facilities data. They are not a substitute for a comprehensive Facility Condition Assessment (FCA) conducted by qualified, credentialed professionals, nor for legal, financial, or bond counsel advice.

Every pre-loaded national statistic in the deck traces to a published source listed in Appendix B. Placeholder and sample elements are clearly tagged and must be replaced with your own verified data before any audience sees them. This guide notes where published figures conflict and how to handle each case.

Contents

Contents 2

About this product 3

Glossary 5

Section 1. The four storylines 6

Section 2. Deck architecture and data map 10

Section 3. Working with the charts 12

Section 4. Talking points for your two audiences 14

Section 5. File customization 16

Appendix A. Data inventory checklist 17

Appendix B. Works cited 19

About this product

Public school facilities are among the largest public infrastructure commitments in the United States (close to 100,000 schools serving nearly 50 million students) yet the leaders responsible for them often struggle to translate engineering reports and budget tables into a case that moves a decision-making audience. Recent national analysis finds the country underfunds its school facilities by roughly $85 billion every year, and the American Society of Civil Engineers grades U.S. school infrastructure a D+. The data for a compelling case exists. What most agencies lack is a repeatable way to present it.

This guide closes that gap for state education agencies. It provides a presentation template built around four storylines that recur in effective facilities cases, pre-loaded with verified national anchor statistics, native editable charts, a plug-and-play graphics library, and talking points written separately for your two main audiences in the speaker notes of every slide.

This SEA edition is for state education agencies communicating school facilities data to legislatures and state boards of education. A companion LEA edition exists with its own guide; the two share the same evidence base, palette, and storyline architecture, so materials produced from either are visually and factually consistent.

The two audiences this edition serves

- **LEGISLATURE:** appropriations and policy framing (funding shares, formula design, peer-state comparisons, the cost of state inaction).
- **STATE BOARD:** strategy and oversight framing (facilities as infrastructure for adopted academic goals, sequencing criteria, data-system policy).

All content slides' speaker notes contain both versions, clearly labeled. The slides themselves work for either audience.

What is in the package

- **NCSI_SEA_Facilities_Deck_Template.pptx —** the 26-slide SEA template: four storyline sections, native editable charts with step-by-step editing instructions embedded in the notes, tagged placeholders, dual-audience talking points, and a two-page plug-and-play graphics appendix.
- **This guide —** the storyline playbook, slide-by-slide data map, chart instructions, audience-tailored talking points, file customization steps (PowerPoint), a data inventory checklist, and the complete works cited.

How to use it, in brief

1. Complete the data inventory checklist in Appendix A before opening the deck.
2. Replace every element tagged PLUG IN YOUR DATA or SAMPLE DATA. National-anchor slides need no changes.
3. Pick the speaker-note variant that matches your audience: LEGISLATURE or STATE BOARD.
4. Customize the speaker notes and storylines.
5. Customize the look of the deck to match your branding, as desired.

Glossary

These terms are used throughout the deck and this guide. It is a good practice to define any of them aloud the first time you use them when speaking to your audience.

Term	Definition
FCA	Facility Condition Assessment: a systematic inventory of a building's major systems (roofing, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, envelope, interiors, site), evaluating condition and estimating the cost to correct deficiencies.
FCI	Facility Condition Index: the cost of needed repairs and deficiencies divided by the building's current replacement value. Lower is better. Conventions vary; see Section 1, Storyline 2.
CRV	Current Replacement Value: the estimated cost to replace a building (or portfolio) at today's construction prices.
M&O	Maintenance and Operations: the recurring annual spending that keeps buildings functioning (maintenance staff, repairs, custodial, utilities).
Capital outlay	Spending on construction, major renovation, and system replacement: typically funded through bonds or dedicated capital appropriations rather than operating budgets.
GSF	Gross square feet: the total enclosed floor area of a building or portfolio.
SEA / LEA	State education agency / local education agency (school district).
Deferred maintenance	Maintenance and renewal work postponed past its due date; the accumulated backlog is the numerator of the FCI.

Section 1. The four storylines

Making an effective case for school facilities hinges on a few recurring storylines. This template is organized into four storylines that, when connected, make the case: ***why facilities matter***; ***our buildings today***; ***the funding gap and the cost of waiting***; and ***the path forward***.

Storyline 1: Why facilities matter

The case begins with students, not buildings. Decision-makers fund what they believe affects children, and the peer-reviewed evidence connecting facility conditions to student outcomes is strong. A typical student spends more than 15,600 hours inside school buildings by graduation. Indoor environmental quality, or IEQ, encompasses a wide range of interrelated factors that affect students: the air students and staff breathe, the water they drink, the temperature and humidity of their classrooms, the amount and quality of light, the acoustic conditions that determine whether instruction can be heard and understood, and the presence or absence of harmful contaminants such as lead, asbestos, mold, and volatile organic compounds. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health's Schools for Health review, synthesizing more than 200 studies, associates each additional liter per second per person of classroom ventilation with roughly 2.9 percent higher math scores and 2.7 percent higher reading scores. A national study of ten million PSAT-takers found that a 1°F hotter school year reduces that year's learning by about one percent in schools without air conditioning, and that air conditioning largely offsets the loss. Childhood asthma, aggravated by poor indoor air quality, costs American students an estimated 13.8 million missed school days each year. Poor conditions hinder a school's ability to deliver basic educational services or to improve programs and practices. Two framing anchors close the storyline: the average main instructional building is 49 years old (NCES, December 2023 data), and ASCE's 2025 Report Card grades U.S. school infrastructure D+. Delivered in two to three minutes, this storyline converts a maintenance conversation into a student-outcomes conversation.

Going deeper. The evidence slide points audiences to two NCSI resources for the fuller evidence base: the overview essay *The School Facilities Challenge & Possibility* (school-

infrastructure.org/the-school-facilities-challenge-possibility/) and the *Student Impacts* topic area (school-infrastructure.org/topic-areas/student-impacts/), which collects the research on how facility conditions affect students. Either or both can be used for leave-behinds and/or follow-up emails.

Storyline 2: Our buildings today

The second storyline establishes what you own and what condition it is in; the factual foundation every later claim rests on. It moves through portfolio scale, building age (nationally, 38 percent of main instructional buildings predate 1970, and 31 percent of schools rely on portable buildings), and assessed condition. Condition is often where credibility is won or lost, which is why the deck teaches the Facility Condition Assessment and the Facility Condition Index before showing results. The FCI (repair cost divided by replacement value) originates in the 1991 NACUBO publication Managing the Facilities Portfolio, whose classic thresholds band buildings as good below 5 percent, fair from 5 to 10 percent, and poor above 10 percent. Conventions genuinely vary: NCSI's own FCA Workbook bands good, fair, and poor at 0–25, 26–50, and 51–100 percent, and some states define the index differently altogether. The deck therefore instructs presenters to state their convention on the slide itself. The national system-level anchors (an estimated 41 percent of districts needing HVAC replacement in at least half their schools (about 36,000 schools), 54 percent needing multiple systems replaced, and 13,700 schools still lacking air conditioning) let even an unassessed portfolio place itself in a national pattern. If no FCA or condition data exists, present the national data and make the assessment part of your ask: GAO found roughly one-third of districts had no FCA within the prior decade.

New regional evidence. A 2026 peer-reviewed analysis of federal Commercial Buildings Energy Consumption Survey data ("Built to last? An examination of deteriorating US school buildings and regional disparities," *Cogent Education* (2026)) finds that the odds of a school building having had a major renovation since 2000 differ sharply by U.S. region even after controlling for building age and size, with the South lowest (as presented by the authors, roughly: Midwest 5.2× and Northeast 2.4× the South's odds; West 1.3×). This is useful for

positioning your state within its region when making the case to a legislature. The study is cited in the aging-portfolio slide's speaker notes and on the sources slide.

Storyline 3: The funding gap and the cost of waiting

This storyline is one continuous money arc: *here is the need, here is what we actually spend, here is who pays, and here is what it costs to let the gap keep growing*. It opens with the national arithmetic: the 2025 State of Our Schools report compares actual spending (FY2014–2023, in 2024 dollars) against industry stewardship benchmarks of 4 percent of replacement value annually for capital renewal and 3 percent for maintenance. The nation spends $82.4 billion a year on capital against a $138.4 billion benchmark, and $74.4 billion on M&O against $103.6 billion; annual shortfalls of $56.0 billion and $29.4 billion, a combined $85.5 billion gap the report characterizes as "nearly $90 billion."

The arc then localizes (your spending against the same benchmarks), names who pays (local districts carried 80 percent of facilities funding over the decade, states 17 percent, the federal government about 3 percent; ten states contributed nothing to capital at all; districts carried nearly half a trillion dollars in long-term debt as of FY2019), and turns to time: deferred needs compound. Systems run past useful life fail as replacements rather than repairs; construction inflation reprices every deferred project upward each year (Washington's state cost allocation alone rose from $375 to $399 per square foot between 2024 and 2026); and the last full federal condition survey found 53 percent of schools needed repairs just to reach good condition; a $197 billion bill in 2013 that has only grown.

The equity evidence nationally that you can point to and relate to your state: nationally, high-poverty districts invested $15,065 per student in capital over FY2014–2023 versus $19,413 in low-poverty districts despite higher construction costs; hot school days account for roughly 5 percent of the racial achievement gap and air conditioning largely offsets the harm; and GAO found high-poverty districts depend most on state capital funding. The compounding risk and the uneven burden are key aspects of the same story: waiting costs the most exactly where capacity is weakest.

How this template presents it: SEAs open with the national gap, place their state against the 4 and 3 percent benchmarks statewide, use the who-pays and 50-state slides to frame the policy choice, then close the money story with escalation and equity; the case that state inaction compounds and lands hardest where local capacity is thinnest.

Storyline 4: The path forward

A strong facilities case should point to next steps. The deck structures the close in three moves. First, sequenced priorities (Now / Next / Later) with the sequencing logic stated: life safety, then building integrity, then systems at end of life, then educational modernization. Second, the ask: one headline number or decision, tied visibly to the sequenced plan, with the cost of "no" stated plainly as the escalation repricing from your own projection. Third, process: three dated next steps with named owners, and the underlying data offered openly. Transparency helps convert skeptics.

Section 2. Deck architecture and data map

The table below maps every slide in the SEA deck: its job, its tag status, and exactly what data you need (and where to get it) before presenting. Tags appear on the slides themselves: NATIONAL ANCHOR (verified, pre-loaded, keep or delete but do not alter), PLUG IN YOUR DATA (replace before presenting), and SAMPLE DATA (fictional, shown only for format; always replace).

#	Slide	Tag	Data you need / source
1	Cover	Plug in	Agency name, audience, presenter, date, your logo.
2	How to use (delete before presenting)	—	None.
3	The story we need to tell (four-storyline arc)	—	None.
4–5	Storyline 1: evidence	National anchor	None. Pre-loaded (Harvard Schools for Health; Heat and Learning; NCES; ASCE).
6–7	Storyline 2: statewide portfolio at a glance	Plug in	Districts, schools, GSF, enrollment, average age, statewide CRV, average condition score, inventory status from your state facilities inventory.
8	Building age profile	National anchor + plug in	National NCES distribution pre-loaded; replace or pair with statewide construction-date data.
9–10	FCA and FCI explainers	National anchor	None. State which FCI convention your data uses (see slide 10).
11	Condition results by district/region	Sample — replace	Statewide condition data aggregated by district or region; statewide average; total deficiency cost.
12	Systems driving the need	National anchor + plug in	GAO/ASCE anchors pre-loaded; right panel takes your statewide top systems by deficiency cost.

#	Slide	Tag	Data you need / source
13–14	Storyline 3 opens: national gap	National anchor	None. Pre-loaded (2025 State of Our Schools, Table 1 / Chart 5).
15	Statewide spending vs. benchmark	Sample — replace	Aggregate district capital and M&O spending; statewide CRV estimate. NCSI's Interactive Data Dashboard has district-level history to build from.
16	Who pays	National anchor	None. Pre-loaded (SOOS 2025 Chart 13, Map 2; SOOS 2021 debt figure).
17	How states fund school facilities (50-state view)	National anchor + plug in	ECS 2023 pre-loaded; add your state's share, mechanism, equity adjustment, peer states.
18	The cost of waiting: escalation	Sample — replace	Your backlog projection under current funding vs. proposed plan (supports actual data; see Section 3).
19	Equity (closes storyline 3)	National anchor	None. Pre-loaded (SOOS 2025 Table 4; Heat and Learning; GAO-20-494).
20–21	Storyline 4: priorities	Sample — replace	Your prioritized statewide/district needs grouped Now / Next / Later with costs.
22	The ask	Plug in	The programmatic ask with its one memorable number (per-sq-ft spread, per-student gap, percent of need funded).
23	What happens next	Plug in	Three dated steps with owners; contact; URL for condition data and budget analysis
24	Sources and data notes	—	Keep in every presentation.
25–26	Plug-and-play graphics library	—	Copy-paste components; delete before presenting if unused.

A note on length. 26 slides is the template, not the presentation. A typical 20-30 minute briefing runs 14–18 slides after removing the how-to slide and unused appendix components. Move detail to an appendix if needed.

Section 3. Working with the charts

All charts are native PowerPoint charts and **every chart slide contains its own step-by-step editing instructions in the speaker notes**, so the person doing the customization has the how-to at the point of need. The same instructions are consolidated here.

The basic edit (any chart)

1. Right-click the chart and choose Edit Data (or Edit Data in Excel).
2. A worksheet opens showing the values behind the chart. Type your numbers over the sample values.
3. Close the sheet. The chart and its data labels update automatically; formatting and colors are preserved.

Adding rows (e.g., adding a district/region to the FCI chart)

A new row typed below the existing data does *not* automatically appear in the chart, because the chart reads a fixed data range.

1. In the Edit Data sheet, drag the small corner handle of the colored range outline down so the outline covers your new rows; or
2. Right-click the chart → Select Data → edit the Chart data range so it spans all rows.

Band coloring on the FCI chart: the chart colors bars by condition band using three overlapping series (Good, Fair, Poor). Enter each district/region's value in exactly one band column and leave the other two columns blank for that row. Option to sort worst-first before presenting.

The spending-vs-benchmark chart

Compute your two values first: capital percent equals average annual capital outlay divided by portfolio CRV; M&O percent equals annual maintenance and operations spending divided by CRV. Estimate CRV as gross square feet times current regional cost per square foot if you lack

an engineer's figure, and label it an estimate. Only the two blue "our spending" values change; the 4 and 3 percent benchmark bars stay fixed because they are the stewardship standards.

The escalation chart

The backlog-trajectory chart supports real numbers, not just the illustrative index. Once your assessment provides projections, replace both rows with your projected backlog in dollars under (a) current funding and (b) your proposed plan; update the two series names; and change the axis title to "Projected backlog ($M)". If your FCA tool does not project, a defensible simple model is: next year's backlog equals this year's backlog, minus planned renewal spending, plus systems newly reaching end of life, escalated by regional construction inflation. Keep the SAMPLE tag on the slide until actual data is available.

Chart accessibility

The palette (blue 1A4199, red E24E47, green 2E7D32, gold F7B500 and amber C69100, with a darker red, C8372F, for small white labels; dark text 221D18 and gray 54595F) was checked for text contrast and for color separation under common forms of color-vision deficiency. Condition bands use blue for Good, amber for Fair and red for Poor. Red and green are never the only difference between two values, because many viewers with color-vision deficiency can't tell them apart. Two recommendations for easy audience understanding: avoid relying on color alone (keep the direct labels) and reuse the palette colors rather than inventing new ones. Use gold and amber as fills behind dark text, not as text colors.

Section 4. Talking points for your two audiences

Every content slide's speaker notes contain two labeled versions of the talking points: one for legislature audiences and one for state board audiences. This section consolidates the talking points in one place so you can rehearse the full arc and explains how the two variants differ. Of course, tailor your message to your specific audience; these prompts are meant as a guide.

How the two variants differ

Audience	Emphasis
LEGISLATURE	Appropriations and policy framing (funding shares, formula design, peer-state comparisons, the cost of state inaction). Effect sizes, benchmarks, and sources can be spoken aloud.
STATE BOARD	Strategy and oversight framing (facilities as infrastructure for academic goals, sequencing criteria, data-system policy).

The through-line, in four sentences

1. Buildings shape learning: ventilation, temperature, and air quality show up measurably in attendance and test scores. (Storyline 1)
2. Here is what we own and its condition. (Storyline 2)
3. The money story is one arc: the need, what we actually spend, and who pays. (Storyline 3)
4. Here is the sequenced plan, the one number or decision it requires, and the dated steps that follow. (Storyline 4)

Handling predictable questions

Question	Grounded response
"Didn't COVID relief money fix this?"	Federal relief was one-time and largely directed to non-facilities needs; the structural gap persisted at roughly $85 billion per year through the post-COVID decade (2025 State of Our Schools, FY2014–2023 data).

Question	Grounded response
“Why should the state pay for local buildings?”	In general, school building quality tracks local property wealth, not student need. The GAO found high-poverty districts depend most on state capital programs. Operating budgets are state-supported; capital is typically the outlier.
“What are other states doing?”	Nearly every state provides some assistance; 28 build in a local wealth adjustment component and 19 have dedicated revenue (ECS, 2023). A handful of states provide nothing. Name the two or three peer states your legislature actually watches, with their mechanism. (These state stats are as of early 2026)
“How do we know these numbers are right?”	Name the source (the state inventory, the federal survey, the national report) and offer the underlying document. The sources slide should stay in every version of the deck.
“Isn’t this a district problem?”	Run-to-fail is the most expensive strategy, and its costs concentrate in the districts least able to pay. The GAO found those districts lean hardest on state programs. The state’s choice is not whether to be involved but whether to be involved early or expensively.

If available, you should add more specific information relative to your state for these and other questions.

Delivery guidance

- The transitions between storylines help strengthen the argument. Each section divider’s notes contain its transition sentence. Adapt as needed.
- Be transparent about the caveats (FCI convention, illustrative charts until actual data is in). Volunteered caveats often help build credibility.
- Name the peer states your legislature actually benchmarks against and refer to numbers drawn from the state’s own published documents, where available.
- Close with process: offer clear, time-bound steps, naming those responsible for action. Suggestion: follow up within 48 hours with a one-page summary and a link to the underlying data.

Section 5. File customization

Adding your branding

Add your logo to the cover slide directly. You have the option to adopt your own brand colors, if desired (Design → Variants → Colors → Customize Colors). The chart series colors provided in the template are color-vision accessibility compliant.

Typography

The deck uses Arial throughout to maximize compatibility across machines and operating systems. Feel free to replace with your own fonts to match your branding.

Appendix A. Data inventory checklist

Complete this before opening the deck by checking the box for data elements you have. Anything you cannot check becomes either a slide you hide or part of your ask (for example, funding an FCA or a statewide inventory).

✓	Data element	Typical source
☐	Number of schools, buildings, and sites; gross square feet	State facilities inventory; district reporting
☐	Enrollment served	State report card / enrollment system
☐	Construction date of each main building	State inventory; district capital asset records
☐	Current replacement value (or GSF × regional cost per square foot, labeled as estimate)	FCA; engineer's estimate; regional cost index
☐	FCI (or condition score) by building, with the convention named	Statewide condition data system; district FCAs
☐	Total identified deficiency cost, and top systems by cost	Statewide condition data; district FCAs
☐	Annual capital outlay and M&O spending (3–5 year average)	Audited financials; NCSI Interactive Data Dashboard
☐	Backlog projection under current funding vs. proposed plan	FCA software; simple escalation model (Section 3)
☐	Prioritized project list grouped Now / Next / Later, with costs	Condition data + capital planning criteria
☐	Three dated next steps with named owners; publication URL for the underlying data	Leadership decision
☐	State share of capital funding, mechanism, and any equity adjustment	State statute/budget; ECS 50-state comparison
☐	Statewide condition data status (system in place? convention? coverage?)	State facilities inventory / data system

✓	Data element	Typical source
☐	Peer states your legislature benchmarks against	Legislative staff; ECS
☐	The programmatic ask and its one memorable number	Budget analysis; condition data

Appendix B. Works cited

Every statistic pre-loaded in the deck or cited in this guide appears below.

National reports and federal sources

21st Century School Fund, International WELL Building Institute, & National Council on School Facilities. (2025). 2025 State of Our Schools: America's PK-12 Public School Facilities. https://www.facilitiescouncil.org/research

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U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2020). K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement (GAO-20-494). https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-494

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Peer-reviewed and research literature

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Uline, C., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2008). The walls speak: the interplay of quality facilities, school climate, and student achievement. Journal of Educational Administration, 46(1). https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09578230810849817/full/html

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Standards and practice

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National Center on School Infrastructure. Interactive Data Dashboard on Public School Facilities Funding. https://school-infrastructure.org/resources/interactive-data-dashboard-on-public-school-facilities-funding-bck/

National Center on School Infrastructure. Facility Condition Assessment topic area and resource library. https://school-infrastructure.org/topic-areas/facility-condition-assessment/

NCSI evidence-base resources (pointed to on the evidence slide)

National Center on School Infrastructure. The School Facilities Challenge & Possibility. https://school-infrastructure.org/the-school-facilities-challenge-possibility/

National Center on School Infrastructure. Student Impacts topic area. https://school-infrastructure.org/topic-areas/student-impacts/

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