

TESTIMONY
OF
MARIETTA ENGLISH

PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS-MARYLAND

PRESIDENT
BALTIMORE TEACHERS UNION

BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 5, 2013

**HB 0860 – BLOCK GRANT FUNDING FOR BALTIMORE SCHOOLS
SUPPORT**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I speak on behalf of Marietta English, the president of the American Federation of Teachers—Maryland and president of the Baltimore Teachers Union. We represent more than 20,000 state and municipal workers in Maryland, including 9,000 educational workers in the City of Baltimore.

I am here today, on behalf of those educational workers, to express our support for House Bill 0860, Baltimore City Public Schools Construction Authority, legislation that, if passed, will allow the construction of new schools in the City of Baltimore.

The truth is that the infrastructure of the schools in the City of Baltimore is an embarrassment to our state.

News reports tell us that students and teachers in 70 percent of Baltimore City schools are working in buildings that are dilapidated and—quite frankly—hazardous.

Not long ago, 45 of our Baltimore schools had to be closed for a total of 34 days—more than a month—because of problems ranging from malfunctioning electrical systems, poor air quality and carbon monoxide leaks, and even a lack of functioning lavatories.

Such conditions deprive our students and teachers of the basic requirements of a proper educational environment.

A recent study on Maryland schools by Dr. Glen Earthman, a leading expert and professor emeritus at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University highlights five facility factors that have the most significant impact on student achievement: Temperature Control, Indoor Air Quality, Lighting, Acoustical Control, and Secondary Science Laboratories.¹

Other studies have shown that in classrooms with temperatures that are outside of the human comfort zone (~67-74F), student productivity, efficiency, and test scores have been found to be significantly less.²

¹ Prioritization of 31 Criteria for School Building Adequacy, ACLU of Maryland, Glen I. Earthman, Professor Emeritus Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, January 2004

² Ibid.

When ventilation rates are at or below minimum standards (roughly 15 cfm per student), an associated decrease of 5%–10% occurs in certain aspects of student performance on tests.³

Adequate Lighting and Noise Control are also critical environmental factors that affect student achievement. Students have scored between 7-18% higher on tests and progress significantly faster in math and reading in classrooms that receive ample lighting, especially from natural daylight.⁴

Absentee rates have also been positively correlated with poor lighting.⁵ More recently, a study has shown that when deprived of natural light, children's melatonin cycles are disrupted, thus likely having an impact on their alertness during school.⁶

For Baltimore, the construction of new, state of the art, schools is essential to our educational efforts and to the health of our communities.

As noted, quality school facilities have a positive influence on student attendance, achievement, and graduation rates.

The existence of new and modernized schools sends a signal to students, educators, and to the community at large that education is valued and that the communities in which that education takes place are important.

Further, a commitment to building new schools will create jobs in construction and related industries and will stimulate our local economy.

In the past, Governor Martin O'Malley has stated—and I quote—"There is nothing that speaks to the expectation that we have of our children quite so much as the condition of the buildings in which learning and teaching take place."

The governor is right.

The very fact that such poor conditions exist in our educational institutions is shameful. The fact, however, that our legislators recognize this fact and are moving deliberately and with swiftness to correct these conditions is to be commended.

I, and the educational workers that I represent, applaud the introduction of this legislation, and we encourage you to support its passage.

House Bill 860 is essential to the health and safety of our children and to the future of the City of Baltimore.

Thank you.

³ Impacts of Building Ventilation on Health and Performance, Ventilation rates and school performance, Indoor Air Quality, Scientific Findings Resource Bank, Lawrence Berkely National Laboratory (<http://www.laqscience.lbl.gov/vent-summary.html>)

⁴ Heschong Mahone Group. Daylighting in Schools. San Francisco, Calif., 1999.

⁵ Working in urban schools. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership. Corcoran, Thomas B.; Walker, Lisa J.; White, J. Lynne, 1988.

⁶ Lack of short-wavelength light during the school day delays dim light melatonin onset (DLMO) in middle school students, NeuroEndocrinology Letters, Figueiro M.G., Rea M.S., 2010