PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release: Tuesday, November 27, 2012

District Unveils Plan to Transform All School Buildings;
Better Align Size with Enrollment

$2.413 billion, 10-year construction plan represents
largest public investment ever in Baltimore City’s children

(Baltimore, MD)—Baltimore City Public Schools today released a $2.413 billion plan to bring the district’s decrepit school buildings up to 21st-century standards of excellence over 10 years. The plan—21st-Century Buildings for Our Kids: Baltimore City Public Schools’ Proposed 10-Year Plan Recommendations—represents both a critical next stage in the transformation of City Schools and the single largest public investment ever in Baltimore City’s children.

For decades, City Schools students have attended school in some of the worst buildings in the state, buildings that, by national standards, are failing children. Nearly three-quarters of the buildings were constructed between 1946 and 1985, and one-quarter pre-date World War II. Many lack such basics as drinkable water, sufficient classroom wiring to support use of computers and air conditioning. And all told, the district uses less than two-thirds of the space that spans its 183 school buildings across 163 campuses.

Joined by Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and numerous city and state officials and community partners who collaborated over many months to help develop City Schools’ 10-year buildings strategy, district leaders laid out for the first time a clear and feasible plan for reversing this longstanding—and unacceptable—reality. Through a massive construction program that will affect all district buildings, City Schools will align the size of its portfolio with enrollment and place students in markedly better learning environments than they are in today. And the district is seeking the support of the state legislature to pay for the program with a financing model commonly used for large capital investments that leverages current construction funds to raise additional revenue through the sale of bonds. City Schools is asking the Maryland General Assembly to approve legislation during the coming 2013 session that would allow it to receive future state school construction dollars in the form of a block grant, and that would allow creation of a new school construction authority to oversee the construction program.

“This plan has been a long time in coming, and it is with a sense of great urgency that we release it to the public today. Our kids have waited too long to have high-quality buildings that support their academic achievement,” said Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners Chair Neil Duke. “To get to this point, where we have a detailed blueprint for implementing a massive construction program, has required the hard work and input of so many people, all of whom care deeply about our students and about supporting the academic progress they have made in the last five years. On behalf of the Board, I extend deep gratitude to all of them.”

“To get Baltimore growing again, we need to work together and make the tough decisions needed to improve our schools,” said Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, who has championed the plan from the start and fought for additional revenue to support it. “We need to stand together for our kids as we move forward on this tough but important journey to modernize and revamp our aging school buildings.”

In 2012 the Board set a vision for City Schools: In 10 years, all City Schools students will learn in buildings that embody 21st-century standards of excellence. The plan the district released today realizes that vision by:

- Renovating or replacing 136 school buildings
- Vacating 26 school buildings over 10 years
- Reducing the size of the district’s school buildings portfolio from 163 to 137 school campuses
• Increasing City Schools’ building utilization rate from 65 percent to 77 percent

To implement the plan will cost $2.413 billion, which City Schools proposes funding by leveraging currently existing and earmarked state and city construction funds to raise additional revenue through the sale of bonds. In order for City Schools to move forward with this proposal, the General Assembly must approve legislation this coming session that would grant City Schools future capital dollars in the form of a block grant.

“The scale and scope of what we are proposing today is awesome. Yet so is the responsibility we as a school district bear each and every day: to prepare 85,000 kids with incredible potential for a successful future,” said City Schools CEO Andrés A. Alonso. “Our 10-year buildings plan is about living up to that responsibility. It’s about replacing our old, deteriorated and outdated buildings with the high-quality learning environments our kids deserve, the kind of learning environments so many kids around the state of Maryland and our nation experience every day. It’s about doing what is right and fair for our kids.”

“This is a historic moment in Baltimore—one around which we should all rally. Never before have we planned to make such a significant investment in the lives of Baltimore’s children,” said Bishop Douglas Miles, co-chair, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD). “Two generations—40 years—is a long time to wait. This is long overdue, and I am glad that all segments of the community agree that this represents an opportunity to provide the new and/or improved buildings needed to transform the education atmosphere for children. It also represents the opportunity to rebuild neighborhoods with new school buildings as the hub and to create jobs for city residents. Let's do it now for the sake of our children and for the future of Baltimore.”

The Time Is Now

In the last five years, City Schools has made major progress: gains in graduation and overall student achievement; steady enrollment growth despite projected declines; and growth in its institutional capacity to sustain lasting reforms. And the areas the district has prioritized moving forward include improving the space in which students learn. Research shows that the quality and safety of physical learning space has a significant impact on student achievement; key factors include temperature and indoor air quality, lighting, noise control, access to science labs and sufficient space to eliminate overcrowding. Yet, City Schools students attend school every day in buildings that, due to decades of wear and insufficient resources, are in deplorable condition and are either overcrowded or far too large—and their condition is getting worse with every year. Absent a major overhaul, City Schools students will be relegated to unhealthy, unsafe buildings for decades to come.

Numerous factors have created the fiscal environment and public and political will in Baltimore to reverse this decline now, particularly the district’s current progress and ongoing urgency around reform; historically low interest rates and construction costs; the hard work and collaboration of district, city and state officials, experts and key partners; and City Schools’ creation of a detailed 10-year buildings plan and financing strategy to support it. Once approved by the Board, the plan will go—with the financing proposal—to Maryland’s General Assembly, where lawmakers will be asked to vote during the 2013 session to allow City Schools to receive future capital funds as a block grant and to create a new school construction authority to oversee the finances and implementation of the Board-approved 10-year buildings plan. Legislative approval will set in motion the 10-year plan.

“I will work extremely hard to ensure that we are successful in securing the money to build and renovate and bring into the 21st century the facilities of Baltimore City Public Schools,” said state Sen. Nathaniel McFadden, senior member of the Baltimore City legislative delegation. “It’s of paramount importance to our young people and to the efforts to continue the progress of moving the system forward. It’s the number one priority for me, as well as the delegation, heading into the 2013 session of the General Assembly.”

Developing the 10-Year Plan

In early 2011, City Schools commissioned Jacobs Project Management to assess the condition of its buildings, how they are being used and the cost to renovate and maintain them (in their current state) over 10 years. In spring 2012 City Schools released the Jacobs report. With this information, and in partnership with school communities, City Schools identified physical improvement needs and priorities; then it worked with a range of city and state officials, industry experts and partner organizations to develop recommendations for renovating and replacing buildings to bring them up to 21st-century standards.
For the district and its schools, Jacobs provided a Facility Condition Index (FCI), which compares the cost of current and predicted building repairs over 10 years with the cost of constructing a new building of the same size. The FCI is presented as a percentage, where a higher percentage reflects a poorer condition, and an index value of 75 percent or more makes a building a candidate for replacement. Jacobs also provided an educational adequacy score, reflecting the degree to which a school building’s current physical structure, technology and instructional space support its academic mission. Lastly, Jacobs provided a measure of how many students a school’s physical space can effectively serve.

The Jacobs findings, published in the “Jacobs report” and released by City Schools last spring, are stark. The district FCI is 60 percent, which according to the Jacobs report reflects a portfolio of “facilities in very poor condition,” and the average educational adequacy score for the district is 55 percent—a “failing grade” the Jacobs report asserts. The Jacobs report also shows that City Schools uses just 65 percent of its available space. District buildings have the capacity to serve 121,302 students but serve just 78,511 (not including students in non-district buildings, such as those used by some of City Schools’ charter schools). This excess capacity is particularly prominent in middle and high schools, for which the average utilization rates are 40 percent and 51 percent, respectively. Though City Schools’ enrollment has increased for five straight years, this growth comes after four decades of declines, so there is still a large amount of excess space. Lastly, Jacobs calculated it would cost $2.452 billion to bring all district buildings in their current configuration up to minimally acceptable standards and address anticipated problems over 10 years. The Jacobs report does not address the district’s capacity challenge.

City Schools is committed to going beyond “minimally acceptable” building standards and to addressing its excessive capacity. Working with the Jacobs data and the expertise of many, the district developed a plan to bring all of its buildings up to 21st-century standards and to reduce the size of the district to align it with enrollment—which is expected to continue to grow, but not at the same rate as in the 1950s, when so many of Baltimore City’s school buildings were constructed. Implementation of the City Schools 10-year buildings plan will cost $2.413 billion—$39 million less than the Jacobs estimate—and provide higher quality buildings.

**The 10-Year Plan Recommendations**

The City Schools 10-year buildings plan includes 177 individual building recommendations to renovate or replace 136 school buildings; vacate 26 school buildings; reduce district capacity from being able to serve 121,302 students to being able to serve 105,620; increase the district’s building utilization rate from 65 percent to 77 percent which, according to experts, falls within the ideal range of 75 percent to 90 percent; and reduce the size of its school buildings portfolio from 163 to 137. Also as part of the 10-year plan, 12 school programs will move to different buildings and 17 programs will close.

All 177 recommendations are the result of deep and broad analysis; many required difficult decisions. But all recommendations will result in placing students in better buildings than they are in today, and all were developed according to guiding principles articulated by the Board and informed by community input. Each recommendation for a school building includes a recommended action and a proposed year for that action, and recommendations were prioritize, in keeping with the Board’s guiding principles.

The 26 recommendations that result in vacated buildings were made to address a range of different situations, including merging two nearby schools with low utilization rates to create a single program that draws on the strengths of both; moving stand alone special education programs to be part of school campuses with other, non-special education schools; moving other general education and specialized programs so that they are more accessible to and better meet students’ needs; vacating buildings where there is large-scale underutilization; and creating better options for students who currently attend under-enrolled and academically struggling programs in buildings that are under utilized.

The 10-year plan envisions 2013-14 as a planning year, with Year 1 of construction taking place in 2014-15, once construction funding is secured and construction feasibility studies on the first new or renovated school buildings are complete. The recommendations include four school program closures at the end of the current 2012-13 school year; these buildings are severely under utilized and the school programs are struggling academically, and closing them will allow the district to immediately begin to reduce its excess capacity. These four schools programs recommended for closure are Baltimore Rising Star Academy, Garrison Middle School, Patapsco Elementary/Middle School and William C. March Middle School. For the complete list and details of the school

Implementation of each building renovation or replacement recommendation will be preceded by a feasibility study and design process that will include community input, in order to create the best possible buildings for school communities. For all buildings that are vacated as school buildings under the 10-year plan, an alternate academic or community use will be identified, in partnership with the city and through a process that includes community input.

“In 2010, the Baltimore Education Coalition (BEC) took up the campaign to fully renovate school facilities because we believe that all children in Baltimore deserve great school buildings—buildings that are safe, modern and can provide for a 21st-century education,” said Jimmy Stuart, BEC co-chair. “This is the single greatest investment in children in Baltimore’s history, and the 10-year plan is a key step toward making this vision a reality.”

“This building program can provide a path to real careers in the building and construction trades for graduates of City Schools and thousands of jobs for city residents. It’s time for action,” said Rod Easter, president of the Baltimore Building & Construction Trades Council.

Creating 21st-century buildings requires a massive capital investment. City Schools needs predictable revenue streams it can leverage to raise additional funds by selling bonds. State and city construction funding in the form of a block grant will provide this predictable revenue stream. City Schools is also proposing creation of a new school construction authority—similar to the Maryland Stadium Authority that was established by the General Assembly in 1986 to build, manage and maintain quality facilities to retain major league baseball and return NFL football to Maryland—to implement its Board-approved 10-year plan. Key charges of the authority would include ensuring accountability for effective expenditure of funds and meeting state school construction standards and requirements. Legislation will be introduced in the coming General Assembly session to put these cornerstones of the district’s construction financing and oversight plans into place.

“City Schools’ students need better buildings, and everything is in place to give those buildings to them now, in a way that is streamlined and cost effective,” said Dr. Alonso. “We as a school district, city and state must do right by our kids. We must make possible the implementation of City Schools’ 10-year buildings plan.”