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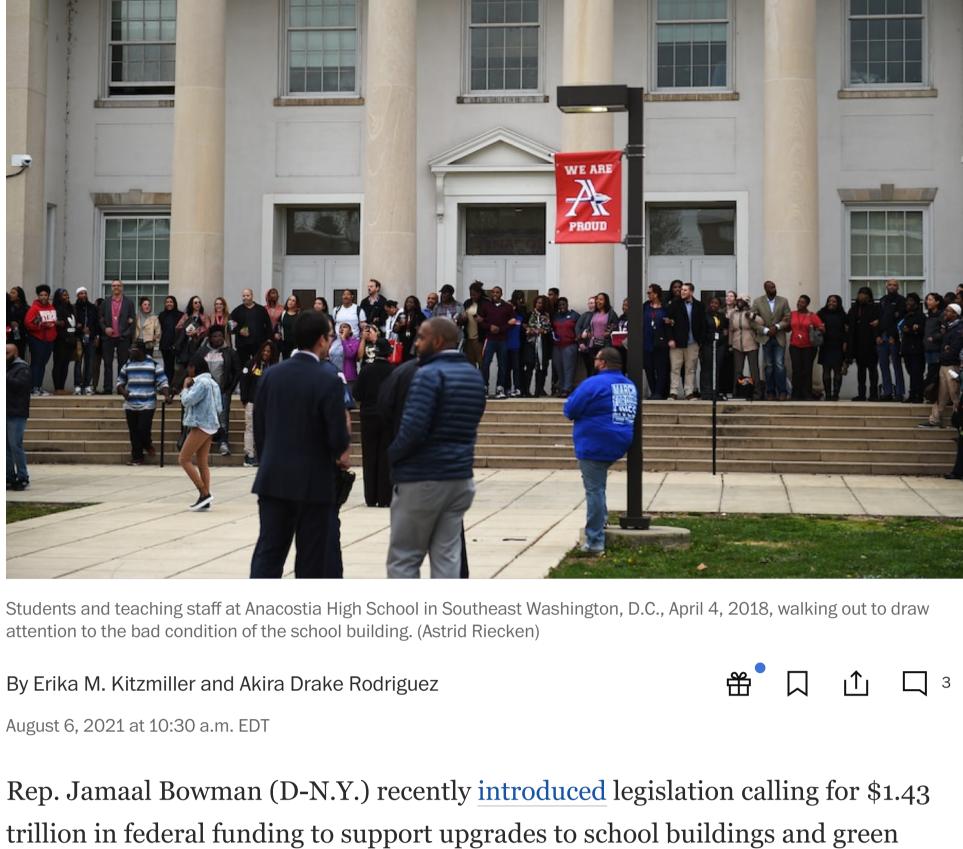
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The link between educational inequality and

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infrastructure For over a century, we have spent much more on schools for White students than for Black ones Ads by Google

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infrastructure while making major investments in teaching and learning. As a former public school principal, counselor and teacher, Bowman understands firsthand the hardships that educators, families and youths have endured this year

— and especially the underappreciated but powerful link between sustainable infrastructure and education.

Indeed, educational inequality has long been fueled by the inefficient physical structures of the school building, something the response to covid-19 exposed. While affluent parents donated resources and funding to guarantee that their schools could implement covid-19 mitigation practices — notably mandatory masking and physical distancing — public schools that serve less-affluent, non-White children faced antiquated HVAC systems and windowless classrooms, making it difficult, if not impossible, to implement the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's covid-19 mitigation policies and practices.

Yet, while covid-19 certainly shed new light on health risks associated with

substandard school conditions, the roots of the problem are much deeper. The racially biased policies and practices that elected leaders and public school officials that were implemented more than 100 years ago set the stage for underinvestment in public education and the wide variance in school facilities that serve White and non-White youths today. **ADVERTISING**

Beginning in the late 19th century, the reliance on local funding, coupled with desires to maintain racially separate and unequal schools, drove inequitable school funding patterns. In 1875, for example, Black families demanded that St. Louis officials provide a high school for Black youths. School leaders reluctantly complied and opened the

first Black high school in a building previously condemned and closed because

officials felt it was unsuitable for White youths. Black families raised concerns

about the substandard conditions inside the building as well as the school's

proximity to a local lead factory that generated smoky, polluted air near the

school.

school, exposing them to these toxins. In 1880, school officials allocated \$39,330 per White school and \$14,600 per Black school. These funding differentials exacerbated educational inequality and generated substandard facilities for non-White schools.

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This local funding structure, tinged with racism, created problems across the

reporters that "by far the worst aspect of this school is its lack of proper light.

country. In 1907, an assistant teacher in one Philadelphia public school told local

ACCOUNTABILITY

School officials refused to listen. Half of the city's Black children attended this

Even today when you see it under the most ideal weather conditions the light in those remote corners of the room is so poor that children cannot properly see the blackboard, and yesterday, with the term scarcely begun, many of the children were complaining of the strain on their eyes." One winter she taught with no heat. School administrators closed the school building for weeks because the classrooms were too cold for instruction. At times, less-affluent, immigrant students had no access to clean drinking water and many had to sit on "aisle seats," which were rough wooden boards that teachers put across two existing desks to accommodate their students. These poor conditions in non-White schools remained constant even as school districts continued to build new schools in the 1920s and '30s — thanks again to

In one example in the 1940s, the all-Black Macarty Elementary School in New

Orleans, built in 1861, had mold on the ceilings and rats in the classrooms.

local control of funding and policy.

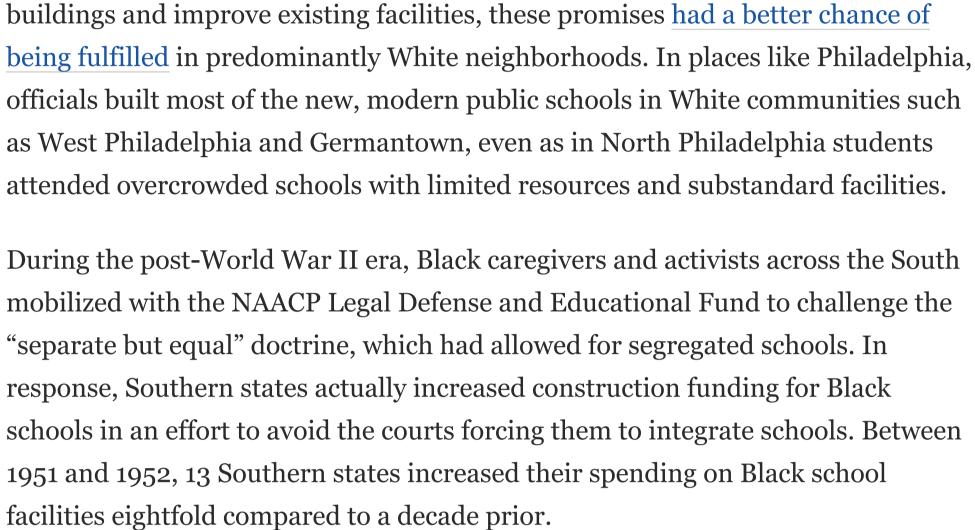
ACCOUNTABILITY

Though school superintendents often promised to raise funds to build new school

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Opportunity" found few differences between Black and White school facilities due to these efforts, and noted that school facility quality had a greater impact on educational opportunity for Black students than White students. But, given the motivation behind this funding, it is not surprising that this was the last significant effort to address these racialized facility disparities.

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Such investments did help. Indeed the 1966 report "Equality of Educational

and community activist, testified before the New York School Board's Commission on Integration about the deplorable conditions in her son's predominantly Black public school. Mallory said that P.S. 10 was "just as Jim Crow as the Hazel Street School [she'd] attended in Macon, Georgia," and demanded the city fund repairs and resources to remedy the school's shortcomings. In the 1950s and 1960s, school officials in Philadelphia continued to allocate more funding and resources to White schools than Black schools, which in turn

contributed to inequities in school facilities. In 1959, in West Philadelphia's

District 4, seven of the nine public schools that received more than \$250 in per-

pupil expenditures served White youths; by contrast, the 15 public schools that

received less than \$250 in per-pupil expenditures served Black youths. Add B.

The school district spent \$80 million on school construction. But this funding did

prioritized the needs of middle-class White families who officials feared might flee

little to improve conditions in predominantly Black schools. The school board

to the suburbs. While most White students attended new public schools, Black

students attended schools with peeling plaster, rotten floors, water-damaged

ceilings and antiquated HVAC units.

Anderson, whose racist views were well-known in the city, controlled school

budgets for decades, and thus drove these racially biased funding patterns.

And this wasn't just a Southern problem. In 1957, Mae Mallory, a Harlem parent

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And these conditions stemmed from policies that chronically underfunded schools

Between 1995 and 2004, school districts spent nearly \$600 billion in capital

expenditures. And yet, non-White, non-affluent districts were more likely to

spend on basic repairs such as to roofs and windows that failed from years of

educational enhancements such as science labs or performance arts spaces.

deferred maintenance, while affluent White districts were more likely to invest in

Pennsylvania has one of the most inequitable state funding formulas in the nation

serves primarily low-income youths of color, spends about \$13,000 per pupil each

primary affluent White youths, spends about \$23,000 per pupil per year. Officials

in Philadelphia lack the funds they need to facilitate long-term improvements in

emergencies in the city's school buildings. This funding discrepancy between the

the city's schools and thus are often only able to respond to the most pressing

city and suburb generates "larger class sizes, fewer academic options, older

buildings, less technology, and fewer, art, music, and gym classes."

- on average, high-poverty districts spend approximately 30 percent less than

more affluent districts. For example, the School District of Philadelphia, which

year while the adjacent, suburban Lower Merion School District, which serves

in Black neighborhoods and continue to do so today.

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For decades, journalists, educators, families and youths have documented the

well-being of educators and students. Common problems — including mold,

school facilities.

fund schools.

vermin, exposed asbestos and peeling paint and water feeder pipes containing

Covid-19 has only exacerbated these enduring problems. The present challenge

demands a creative, committed coalition of advocates, educators, families, youths

and, yes, elected and school officials to remedy our past misdeeds and equitably

detrimental effects of underinvestment in public school facilities on the health and

lead — pose significant health risks to anyone who spends time inside these public

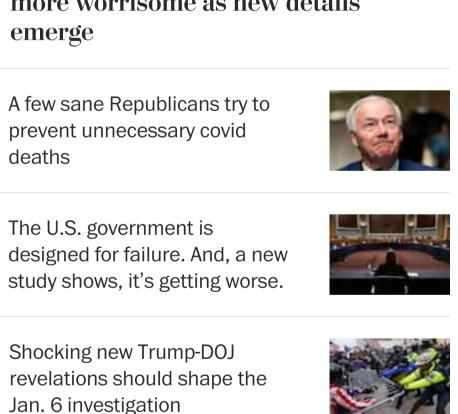
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