

## Denver Post

URL: <http://www.denverpost.com/Stories/0,1413,36~53~2850479,00.html>

### Study: School repairs lagging

\$5.7 billion needed to meet construction needs in state, officials say

By Karen Rouse, Denver Post Staff Writer

May 4, 2005

Since Fort Logan Elementary School was built in 1923, it's had seven "rebuilt," said Jim Abrahamsen, executive director of operations maintenance for the Sheridan School District.

It is just one of the district's five buildings that could use some extra work - from new heating systems and alarm systems to replacing bathroom flooring and fixtures.

"We would appreciate any support we could get from any place," says Superintendent Michael Poore, who oversees the district of an estimated 1,860 students.

His schools aren't the only ones.

A recent Donnell-Kay Foundation survey found that school officials believe it would take \$5.7 billion statewide to cover capital construction needs.

The Denver nonprofit last month completed two surveys that attempt to gauge the extent of unmet capital construction needs in the state's 178 public school districts, said Mary Wickersham, director of special projects.

One survey was filled out by superintendents and facility managers from 72 districts. Data from a second survey, gathered through on-site visits at 16 schools across the state, found \$121.8 million in capital needs, said Wickersham.

The foundation estimates it would cost \$13,790 per student, compared to the \$268 currently provided, to meet all the needs around the state.

Donnell-Kay is also pushing to have the state legislature eventually create a system for assessing needs at each of the state's 1,700 schools.

The survey found that the average facility was built in 1967 of concrete masonry. Just under half have air conditioning, and facility managers rated 37 percent of their facilities as less than "good."

"We think the state needs to do a total statewide assessment," said Wickersham, who is also advocating for a change to the way Colorado funds school-building construction and maintenance.

The current system, which is based on property values, "is failing to meet the needs" of schools, she said.

Districts can raise property taxes to pay for construction projects. But because the levies are based on property values, poorer districts can't raise as much as their wealthier counterparts.

Blue-collar Sheridan, for example, could have raised a maximum of \$13,552 per student last year for construction. Steamboat Springs, on the other hand, could have raised \$55,884 per student through bonding, according to Wickersham. The figures are based on 2003-04 school-year data.

*Staff writer Karen Rouse can be reached at 303-820-1684 or at [krouse@denverpost.com](mailto:krouse@denverpost.com).*

**Copyright 2005, Denver Post. All Rights Reserved.**