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## Building Educational Success Together (BEST)

For Immediate Release  
Contact: Jason Franklin 202-745-3745

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### Building Better Schools from the Community Up

#### National Collaboration Targets Urban School Districts for Facility Improvements

Washington, DC – On July 31, the 21st Century School Fund will launch the Building Educational Success Together (BEST) initiative with a \$1 million grant from the Ford Foundation. This constituency building, research and communications collaboration will focus on improving urban public school facilities.

Across the nation, deteriorating public school buildings are a major obstacle to achieving academic success and neighborhood vitality. Despite higher standards and efforts to improve teacher quality, “a poorly designed, overcrowded, and poorly maintained school limits the effectiveness of education reforms,” says Barbara Diamond, a [KnowledgeWorks Foundation](#) program officer.

These same buildings also challenge multi-million dollar efforts to revitalize urban communities. “Schools that are in disrepair and inaccessible to the larger community send a stark message to surrounding neighborhoods: ‘Your kids — your community — doesn’t matter,’” states [Neighborhood Capital Budget Group](#) executive director Jacqueline Leavy.

The BEST initiative was launched to make school buildings assets for, instead of barriers to, educational success and community development and preservation. Members of this initiative will work to: involve local communities in facility planning; make schools useable by their surrounding neighborhoods; ensure honest and effective management of facility construction, renovation and maintenance; and secure stable and sufficient funding for new construction and modernization.

This initiative will also work to preserve and modernize historic schools which are often important civic landmarks and neighborhood anchors. “The system should make it easier for communities to preserve these institutions when they can be renovated to meet 21st century educational standards,” says Constance Beaumont of the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#).

“Children in poor urban communities have a right to attend excellent schools that are safe and educationally adequate,” says David Sciarra, executive director of the [Education Law Center](#). In its first year, BEST will focus its efforts in eight cities: Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, OH; and Newark, Paterson, and Trenton, NJ.

“We have brought together a committed team of leaders from the education, historic preservation, neighborhood development, philanthropic, legal, and research communities to build better schools for our children and our neighborhoods,” says 21st Century School Fund executive director Mary Filardo.

The BEST initiative is a collaboration of the 21st Century School Fund (Washington, DC), [Education Law Center](#) (Newark, NJ); [KnowledgeWorks Foundation](#) (Cincinnati, OH); [National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities](#) (Washington, DC); [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) (Washington, DC); [Neighborhood Capital Budget Group](#) (Chicago, IL); and Mark Schneider at the [State University of New York at Stony Brook](#).

The formal launch of the BEST initiative will take place at the Sumner School and Archives (1201 17th Street in Washington, DC) at 11:30 AM on July 31st. Please join us for lunch and a Q&A session following the announcement. RSVP at 202-745-3745.

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