

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE VOTES DOWN SCHOOL FACILITIES LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PUT LOUISIANA IN LINE WITH 41 OTHER STATES

For the second year in a row, school children were denied improved buildings due to the position of Governor Jindal, despite strong leadership efforts in the State Legislature to create an authority to improve facilities.

The House Appropriations Committee voted down legislation that would have created an authority designed to improve school facilities for the entire state of Louisiana. This legislation—SB 90—authored by Senator Cheryl Gray Evans received significant support from legislators across the state. It passed the entire Senate this legislative session and both the House and the Senate in the 2008 legislative session.

“Employees from the Administration sent by Governor Jindal spoke at every Committee Meeting against the legislation,” said Senator Gray Evans. “The Administration believes that local schools districts should pay for facilities needs while at the same time he expects them to pay more for the operations of their schools than other districts in the southwest region.”

Numerous organizations were in support of SB 90: Agenda for Children, Algiers Charter School Association, Avoyelles Parish School Board, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), Children’s Defense Fund, Citizens for One Greater New Orleans, Eastbank Collaborative of Charter Schools, League of Women Voters of Greater Lafayette, the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, Louisiana Retired Teachers Association, Louisiana School Board Association, School Leadership Center, and many others.

“Not only was School Facility Authority legislation supported unanimously by legislators in 2008, the bills were also thoroughly researched by a Task Force created by HCR 230 (a school facilities resolution passed in the 2007 session) consisting of facilities experts from around the country who produced a report that was presented and approved by BESE in January of 2008,” said Senator Gray Evans. “Why would the Administration work against good policy?”

Louisiana ranks the fourth lowest among all states in terms of funding for public school facilities, Senator Gray Evans said. Forty-one other states provide some form of funding for their school facilities—Louisiana is not one of them.

“The fact is that Louisiana spends less on our schools than our regional counterparts. In 2004-2005, the last year for which good data is available, Louisiana schools spent less per student on their facilities than schools in Mississippi, Alabama, or Arkansas. In fact, Louisiana spent only 57 percent of the amount the Arkansas spent per pupil,” she said.

“At the same time, our local school districts already contribute a larger amount of funding per student than schools districts in Mississippi, Alabama, or Arkansas. While these four states spend similar amounts of money per student on operations, the state of Louisiana contributes the least per student of all of these states and local districts in Louisiana contribute the most per student. Our local school districts are already taxing themselves at a rate higher than other districts in our region just to run their schools,” she added.

Research conducted by the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives showed that school facilities are in disrepair and the local tax based is not enough to provide repairs, maintenance, renovation or new construction.

“The Governor says that he is not supportive of SB 90 in part because of unmet need across the state in areas such as roads and state buildings. It is difficult to imagine a more pressing unmet need than the school buildings where the next generation of Louisianans is educated. Studies have demonstrated that improved school building quality is linked with improved student performance, teacher performance, and teacher retention,” said Senator Gray Evans.

“Louisiana should step up, as 41 other states have done, and offer funding for our school facilities. The issue of repair, renovation and construction of facilities will continue to come up and it is time for Louisiana to take the first steps to help achieve higher quality buildings for all of our children,” she said.