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Massachusetts' new climate law, "An Act Driving Clean Energy and Offshore Wind," recognizes the important role that healthy, green schools play in our communities and in our efforts to address the climate emergency.

[Section 82 of H.5060](#) calls on a group of key state agencies to collaborate to assess the current state of our school buildings with an eye to eliminating fossil fuels and to recommend standards and strategies for advancing healthy, green schools.

Here's a quick take from us on some of the important passages in the law.

1. "shall develop, and report on, methods, best practices, and standards for achieving green and healthy schools strategies for the students of the commonwealth"

This law importantly marries two vital concepts that work best when they are hand in hand: green and health. For too long, we have allowed ourselves to work in silos without a holistic appreciation for how buildings best serve their inhabitants. We know that we can't make buildings more energy-efficient without also safeguarding the quality of indoor air. We also know that efforts to reduce building emissions like switching to heat pumps or induction cooking equipment will also improve outdoor *and* indoor air. This law makes clear that these two concepts can and must be in perpetual partnership.

2. "The assessment shall include cataloging the age and condition of any building systems relying on the on-site combustion of fossil fuels."

The law requires the Massachusetts School Building Authority to enhance the regular assessments they already do to provide decision-makers and advocates with information specifically related to the machines in schools that burn fossil fuels. Since end-of-life replacements are the most cost-effective time to switch from fossil-fuel burning equipment to cleaner options, and since some of those switches require additional planning, training, building upgrades, etc., it is imperative that we have our eyes on those

end-of-life replacement opportunities well in advance. Making this data publicly available will allow advocates to encourage local decision-makers to engage in this important preparatory work so we aren't stuck making short-term, suboptimal decisions at the expense of our kids' futures.

3. "Methods, best practices, and standards may involve, but shall not be limited to:
(i) increasing energy efficiency, increasing electrification, and shifting to fossil-free fuels..."

The law text goes beyond energy efficiency and makes explicit mention of electrification and getting fossil fuels out of schools. This is a much-needed evolution in thinking, language, and hopefully action. Schools have been doing "energy efficiency" for years. Energy efficiency is a great starting point to achieve our climate goals. It is not enough. Reducing building-related emissions through electrification, and, in particular, clean heat, is a pillar of Massachusetts' plans as reflected in the work of the [Clean Heat Commission](#) and the recently released [2025/2030 Clean Energy and Climate Plan](#). Schools can and should be important building types in which to model cost-effective strategies for moving commercial buildings in cold-weather climates to clean heat.

4. "recommendations to prioritize schools with the greatest needs, consider the unique environmental differences of schools located in urban, industrial, rural and other areas facing site challenges, and consider the need to address historic patterns of inequity in education and schools including, but not limited to, patterns of inequity involving students in special education programs"

In this law, legislators explicitly call out existing inequities as a core consideration around which the department of public health should mold its recommendations for how to move forward. This is critical. After all, we know that school infrastructure mirrors other inequities in education and beyond with [schools serving Black and Brown children more likely to be in poor condition](#). And, we know that [climate change has a disproportionate impact on these same communities](#) (e.g. more likely to attend school on a heat island) as they also contend with existing [environmental inequities](#) (e.g. poor air quality from exposure to highway pollution).

5. "The Massachusetts School Building Authority shall conduct assessment of elementary and secondary school buildings.." and "the department of public health, in consultation with the Massachusetts School Building Authority, the department of elementary and secondary education, and the department of energy resources, shall develop, and report on.."

This law smartly combines accountability and partnership. The two deliverables called for in this law – an assessment and a report – are each the responsibility of a lead agency, the MSBA and the department of public health, respectively. And yet, throughout the text these two agencies along with the department of elementary and secondary education and the department of energy resources are called on to work together to bring the necessary breadth of expertise and perspective that these complex issues require.

6. “Any findings or recommendations may be used to guide the department of elementary and secondary education in its implementation of item 1599-2055 of section 2A of chapter 102 1853 of the acts of 2021.”

This law text connects the dots between HVAC systems, health, and climate for work that is already underway. In December of 2021, legislators provided the department of elementary and secondary education (DESE) with \$100M of ARPA funds to improve school HVAC systems. The language in the climate law notes that this work by the MSBA and the department of public health (DPH) may be used to inform DESE’s efforts to invest in school HVAC systems. Given that the report from DPH is not due until December 2024, and DESE is expected to move ahead with disbursement of ARPA funds without delay, it is unclear that the report itself will be available to support DESE’s investment of those ARPA funds. And yet, by connecting the dots today, legislators are highlighting the need for agency staff at DESE implementing the ARPA-funded program to look at what’s to come and consider concepts like electrification as they invest in improving the largest user of energy in schools – HVAC systems.

As you can see, this is just the beginning of the work to systematically improve our schools so that they are healthy, climate-resilient, decarbonized, and equitable. We have much work to do together.

But today, we’re celebrating, and hoping more states will follow Massachusetts’ lead in recognizing a state role in delivering green and healthy schools.

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