

# Why Districts Can't Afford Deferred Maintenance

*Deferring maintenance can put districts—and staff—at risk.*

By April Dalton-Noblitt



**A**lthough school officials are committed to the safety of students, budget constraints oftentimes put general maintenance, system upgrades, or building repairs—all key to protecting students, especially during a lockdown—on the back burner. The longer maintenance is deferred, the more problems increase, transforming simple, low-cost repairs into full-on replacements.

Just how big is the cost of deferred maintenance?

Experts at Allegion, a provider of security products and solutions, stress that every dollar of deferred planned maintenance equates to \$4 of failed equipment/

replacement. Research estimates the cost of deferred maintenance could potentially be 30 times that of the early intervention cost, and future expenses, on average, can be expected to be 15 times the total repair cost (Buildings.com 2006).

School district leaders can't ignore the numbers. Although putting off upgrades and repairs is certainly a short-term way to save money, ultimately, deferred maintenance creates a far greater burden.

Safety and security should be at the top of school administrators' priority list, and they don't have to be costly. Consider a classroom door that needs adjustment. When the door is closed, it fails to properly latch and can't be locked. In the event of a school lockdown, the teacher won't be able to lock the door, thus putting the students and teacher in potential danger. Is deferring maintenance worth the risk—especially when the repair isn't difficult or costly to make in the first place?

When security solutions need replacing—whether because of maintenance that was deferred for too long or because of an upgrade to a more secure solution—schools should consider a range of factors, including long-term durability and flexibility to make ongoing upgrades. Schools should invest in solutions that have the following attributes:

- A design that will withstand regular wear and tear.
- Scale-up ability to accommodate future growth and maintenance.
- Repair or replacement parts.
- Training on ongoing management and maintenance.
- Requirements for all necessary safety codes.

For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in North Carolina—one of the largest school districts in the nation with more than 160 schools and over 140,000 students—wanted to create a safer environment for its students and staff. With no real access control system in place, the district schools lacked true security. When the district's facilities director and locksmith began to evaluate options for creating a safer learning environment, they wanted to find a system that was

affordable, that would protect students and staff, and that would allow district personnel to respond quickly in the event of a crisis.

The CMS facilities director and locksmith determined key security needs and solutions that met the district's requirements and purchased electronic locks that can be configured according to need, intelligent controllers that communicate with a central database, and proximity cards that allow only authorized staff to enter the buildings. The security solutions that CMS installed meet all of the criteria listed above. And as the budget allows, the district can add even more advanced security features in the future.

### The Bottom Line

Each time a district defers maintenance, it puts students at risk in the face of crisis—whether during an act of violence or a natural disaster—and continuously incurs greater costs. Deferred maintenance is simply too great of a financial and safety risk to take on.

Districts should periodically assess facilities to identify, evaluate, and report on the condition of their buildings. Such an assessment will help them uncover any existing problems, guide budget development for future maintenance and capital projects, and track deferred maintenance backlogs. The assessment should

be comprehensive, evaluating all building components and infrastructures, including mechanical and electrical equipment, building shell, interior structures and finishes, transportation systems, and building site.

### Districts should periodically assess facilities to identify, evaluate, and report on the condition of their buildings.

District officials should also define clear building standards to help them make decisions about building upgrades as the need for repairs and maintenance arises. That way, districts are aware of the costs of upgrades, how to service the upgrades, and how to acquire the tools and materials needed to keep buildings up-to-date and, most important, safe.

### Reference

Buildings.com. 2006. Paying for deferred maintenance. Retrieved from <http://www.buildings.com/article-details/articleid/3161/title/paying-for-deferred-maintenance.aspx>

---

**April Dalton-Noblitt** is director of vertical marketing for Allegion, a provider of security products and solutions for homes and businesses. Email: [April.Dalton-Noblitt@allegion.com](mailto:April.Dalton-Noblitt@allegion.com)

Strong.  
Stable.  
Safe.

And helping school districts  
make the most of their budgets.

**BMO** Financial Group

[bmoharris.com/governments](http://bmoharris.com/governments)

At BMO® Financial Group, our team of specialists understands the unique financial service needs of educational institutions. Our education clients count us among their most tested, trusted and effective partners. Whether they rely on us for the advantages of p-Card or cash management services, checking, credit, investments or public finance, they know we're focused on one thing—their financial success.

BMO and BMO Financial Group are trade names used by Bank of Montreal. BMO Harris® and BMO Harris Bank® are trade names used by BMO Harris Bank N.A. Member FDIC.