

THE SCHOOLS HVAC CHANGE LAB

The Change Lab is a catalytic initiative that invites collaboration to address the urgent infrastructure crisis facing U.S. schools. Forty-one percent of schools require HVAC installations or replacements, with 14,000 schools lacking air conditioning entirely. This crisis jeopardizes learning and health for 50.8 million students, leading to more than 14 million missed school days annually due to conditions like asthma and poor indoor air quality. The root causes are not a lack of technical solutions, but deep, persistent barriers:



Insufficient staff to manage complex infrastructure projects



Fragmented access to trusted information and funding



\$85 billion annual gap in school infrastructure investment

Theory of Change

The HVAC Change Lab serves as a proof-of-concept for a powerful theory of change, testing whether a coordinated action network can overcome fragmentation and deliver value that individual nonprofits and initiatives acting alone cannot. Rather than launching with theoretical assumptions or diluting our capacity by working on multiple issues, **the Change Lab will focus on a specific problem: HVAC upgrades—a solvable, measurable, and high-need problem.**



Center for Green Schools

nbi new buildings
institute



National Center on
School Infrastructure

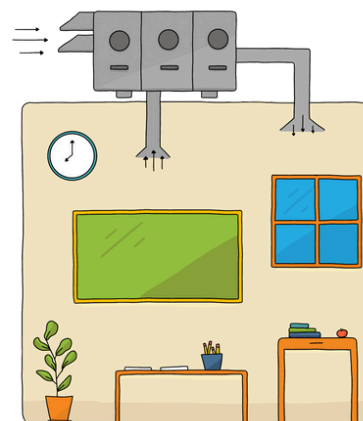
The Change Lab will test whether a centralized support network can bridge gaps in staff capacity, knowledge, and funding, reducing project risk and accelerating impactful outcomes. Success in this pilot will demonstrate the value of **five core functions**:

1. **Connecting communities of practice:** Convene district leaders, designers, health and climate experts, and funders to collaborate on root-cause analysis and creative problem-solving.
2. **Curating and delivering technical assistance:** Map, adapt, and develop best-in-class resources, toolkits, and playbooks to help districts design, fund, and implement HVAC projects.
3. **Coordinating impact networks:** Align nonprofit, public, and private sector efforts to ensure districts have seamless access to support, reducing fragmentation and competition.
4. **Developing innovative, field-driven solutions:** Prototype and pilot support programs, technical techniques, and policy interventions, tailored to resource-constrained environments.
5. **Inspiring the sector through real-world results:** Communicate case studies, data, and success stories to build public and stakeholder will for transforming school infrastructure.

What the Change Lab Will Do

The Change Lab's first step is to address HVAC needs in under-resourced districts. Its direct actions include:

- Establishing interdisciplinary communities of practice to map system barriers and root causes.
- Aggregating and customizing technical resources while mapping out gaps in the existing support landscape.
- Prototyping free technical assistance and support programs to address district-specific challenges.
- Piloting solutions in select districts and evaluating results for improvement and eventual scale.



Expected Outcomes

- **Districts implement HVAC upgrades more quickly and effectively**, catalyzing projects that improve energy efficiency and may otherwise have stalled or failed, or improving the outcomes of existing projects.
- **Greater access for underserved districts** to alternative financing including tax credits, performance contracting, green banks, as well as federal, state, and philanthropic funding streams.
- **Development of a robust, field-tested library of resources** and best practices for district leaders.
- **Tangible improvements** in indoor air quality, student and staff health, and student attendance in 8-15 schools
- **A stronger, more aligned national network** of nonprofits, technical experts, and policymakers driving school infrastructure change.
- **A scalable, evidence-based model for collective action** on future facility and infrastructure problems.

Key Strategic Objectives that Benefit the Healthy and Efficient Schools Movement:

- **Defined Need:** Solve an urgent, quantifiable problem with proven technical solutions, directly addressing student health and learning outcomes.
- **Theory Validation:** Test whether centralized action networks can break through barriers where fragmented efforts fall short.
- **Real-world Results:** Support districts in achieving the best possible HVAC outcomes, leveraging all available resources and integrating improvements in acoustics, air quality, and climate safety.
- **Pathway to Scale:** Create a replicable model for tackling other facility challenges, demonstrating that coordinated, inclusive support enables schools to implement solutions faster, cheaper, and with lower risk.

The Change Lab's success will create not just better schools, but a powerful, network-centered engine for lasting transformation across the entire system of K-12 education.