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School Infrastructure Is a Children's Human Rights Issue — It's Time the US Acknowledges That

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Across the country, school districts are furiously debating whether to keep schools open in the face of the recent omicron surge. Perhaps no place has received more attention than Chicago, where the teachers union **has been locked** in a stalemate with the Chicago Public Schools over Mayor **Lori Lightfoot**'s insistence upon in-person learning. Likewise, U.S. Education Secretary **Miguel Cardona** has continued insisting schools remain open, recently **saying** "We know what works, to keep our schools and our staff safe ... We should be using those mitigation strategies. That along with vaccination for our students to keep them safe and testing protocols will keep our schools open full time in person."

These calls for in-person learning during the omicron surge rest upon an assumption that schools can keep students, teachers, and staff safe. But how can we seriously expect effective mitigation of infectious diseases such as COVID in schools — something that **requires** investment in appropriate ventilation, testing, and infrastructure for distancing — when many of our school buildings are **decades behind** on repairs and upgrades? In fact, the American Society of Civil Engineers **finds** that "53% of public school districts report the need to update or replace multiple building systems, including HVAC systems".