



May 13, 2021

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

Biden's school infrastructure plan

PRO POINTS

- **President Joe Biden's two-part infrastructure proposal** focuses on promoting equity by physically upgrading crumbling schools, and expanding access to pre-K and higher education.
- **Biden is requesting \$109 billion to make community college free** for all Americans and DACA students. The plan aims to cover the number of credits required for a two-year degree or certificate and students can use the benefit for up to three years.
- **The Biden administration has pitched a \$200 billion proposal to make pre-K free** for the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds. The plan also sets a wage of at least \$15 per hour for pre-K program and Head Start employees.
- **The president is asking to boost Pell Grant awards**, which are reserved for low-income college students, by \$1,400. Four-year colleges are largely uninterested in making community college free and say the administration should focus on doubling Pell.

HOW WE GOT HERE

Free community college was a big hit on the campaign trail as candidates vying for the Democratic presidential nomination battled over how best to tackle student debt. Biden's \$4 trillion proposal aims to cultivate the "best-educated generation in U.S. history" by adding at least four more years of free education through two years of free community college and two years of universal pre-K.

The first part of the proposal, the American Jobs Plan, looks to update technology and fix the crumbling infrastructure of the nation's community colleges and K-12 schools. Long-festering challenges around physical infrastructure got pushed to the forefront last year as schools struggled to assess whether their buildings had sufficient air circulation to safely bring kids back to their classrooms amid a pandemic. A Government Accountability Office analysis conducted before the pandemic and released last year found that heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems were the most common items in need of repair or replacement. Biden wants cash from his plan to be used to build new schools, help schools reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, and improve their ventilation and kitchens.

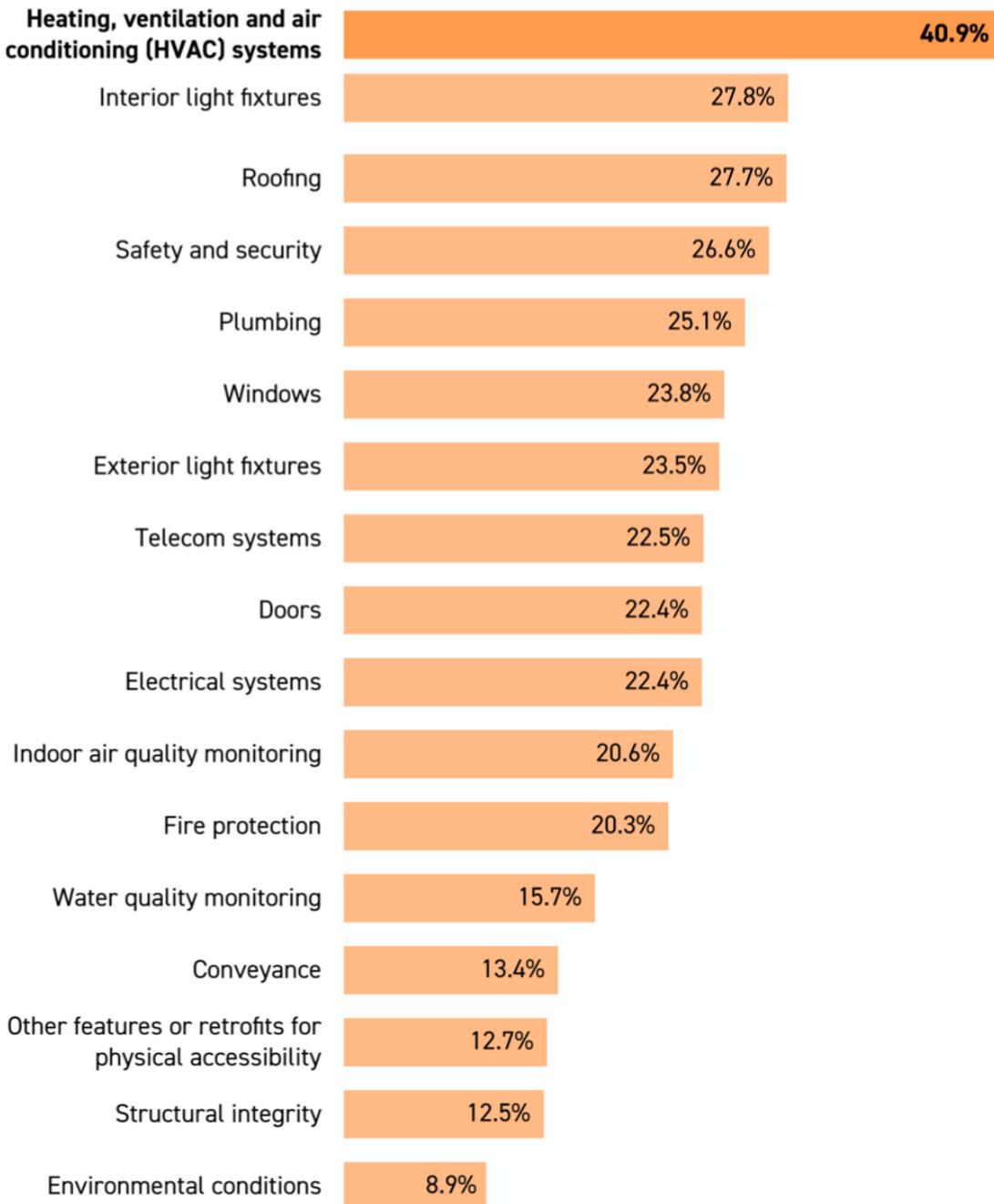
The president's plan also seeks to bring more diversity into research and development and STEM fields by funding programs and labs at historically Black colleges and universities, and other minority-serving institutions. He wants to increase the maximum Pell Grant award, which is given to low-income students, from its \$6,495 amount for 2021-22 by \$1,400. Biden also asked Congress for \$62 billion to improve completion and retention rates at community colleges and institutions that serve students from under-represented communities. And, he's calling for \$9 billion to train and equip more diverse instructors.



Many of America's schools have big repair needs

More than half of the nation's public school districts need to update or replace at least two building systems, according to a 2020 report from the Government Accountability Office. Among the most critical repairs is upgrading outdated heating and air conditioning systems that can imperil indoor air quality for students and staff. HVACs were also a big issue during the tensions over reopening schools during the pandemic.

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN WHICH AT LEAST HALF OF THE SCHOOLS NEED UPDATES OR REPLACEMENTS OF KEY BUILDING SYSTEMS OR FEATURES



Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office analysis of school district survey data



WHAT'S NEXT

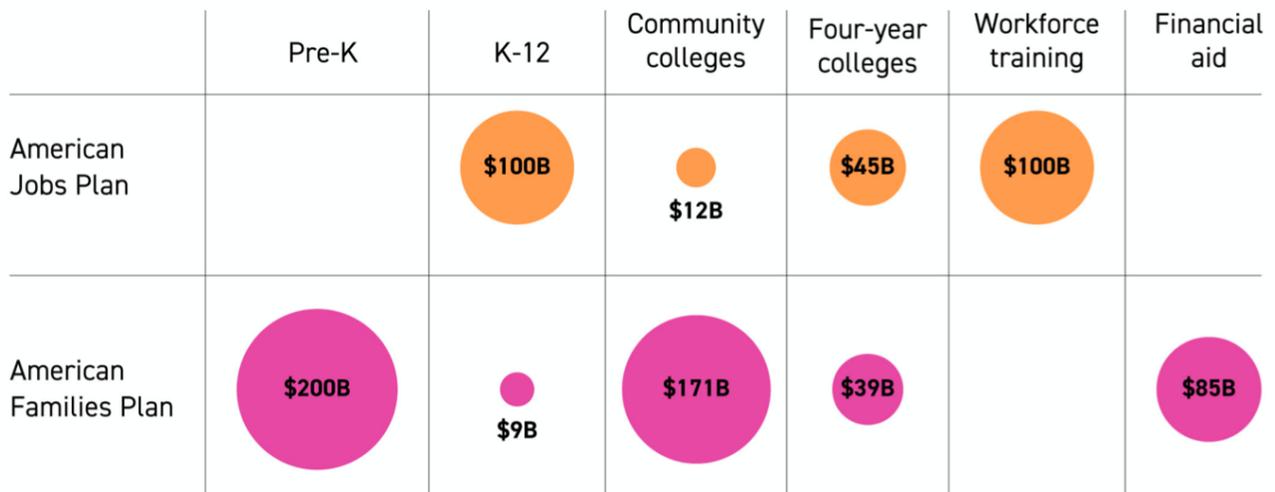
Biden hopes to pour billions of taxpayer dollars into child care and universal pre-K through his “human infrastructure” proposal, while putting a big emphasis on college affordability as he looks to make good on promises he made on the campaign trail.

Education committee chairs Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.) have introduced two pieces of legislation that may ultimately form a large part of the president’s plan. But Murray’s HELP Committee is evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, potentially making it more difficult to advance legislation out of her panel. One measure, the America’s College Promise Act, which would make community college free, dovetails with the president’s pitch to Congress in April. This is an area ripe for conflict since a contingent of progressive lawmakers want to go a step further and make public four-year colleges and some private minority-serving institutions free.

Murray and Scott have also introduced H.R. 1364 (116), the Child Care for Working Families Act, which is similar to Biden’s plan to establish free universal pre-K. And, Scott led a group of lawmakers earlier this year in introducing three education bills to reopen and rebuild schools, save educators jobs and help students recover lost classroom time.

How much Biden wants to spend on education infrastructure

President Joe Biden’s sweeping \$4 billion infrastructure package was introduced as two proposals, one centered on physical infrastructure and the other on what the administration calls “human infrastructure.” The latter focuses on making college affordable and expanding access to child care and pre-K.



Source: The White House



POWER PLAYERS

- **First lady Jill Biden:** President Joe Biden has said the first lady, a Northern Virginia Community College professor, will be “deeply involved” in the push to make community college free. She has served as a key administration surrogate on education issues from the outset of Biden’s term.
- **Martha Kanter:** President Barack Obama’s undersecretary of education has been pushing for free community college across the nation from her perch as CEO of College Promise, a nonpartisan group that champions the issue. There are more than 330 College Promise programs in more than 30 states.
- **Rep. Bobby Scott:** The Virginia Democrat chairs the House Education and Labor Committee, and has introduced a slew of school infrastructure bills that would spend close to half a trillion dollars in K-12 schools for building upgrades and to mitigate job losses and student learning loss. He also has backed two plans to make community college and pre-K free.
- **Sen. Patty Murray:** The HELP Committee chair, who has been the top Democrat on the panel since 2015, has introduced two plans, along with Scott, that aim to make pre-K free and community college free. Prior to her service in Congress, Murray was an instructor at Shoreline Community College in Washington state, and a preschool teacher.