

# Only Two Baltimore City School Buildings Visited By State Inspectors This Year



*Westport Academy in June 2019. The school was one of just two public school buildings in the city of Baltimore that were inspected by the state this year. Google Street View.*

Out of 155 public school facilities in Baltimore City, only two school buildings were inspected this year to assess their quality and condition. One was rated as "not adequate."

Although state law requires the Interagency Commission on School Construction to assess at least one school facility in each school district annually, it has a goal to visit a quarter of

each local school systems' buildings each year. That would equal about 39 schools in Baltimore City. Only Montebello Elementary/Middle School and Westport Academy, which received the "not adequate" rating, were visited this year.

The limited access to school buildings due to the pandemic and lack of staff were reasons for this reduced number.

"Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the IAC assessors were not permitted access to school facilities in order to complete maintenance assessments starting March 13, 2020, through the end of the fiscal year, resulting in 112 planned assessments being postponed until fiscal year 2021," Scott Snyder, the lead facility assessor, said during an IAC meeting Thursday morning.

The commission was able to complete 260 inspections throughout the state this year, but IAC will have to hire additional assessors to be able to reach their goal of a quarter of all pre-k through 12 buildings each year, he said. Currently, there are three full-time maintenance assessors.

In the last few years, IAC has focused on some local districts based on recurring maintenance inspection issues so that they would not have to inspect 25% of school buildings in every county, Robert Gorrell, executive director of Interagency Commission said. This would mean targeting higher percentages of schools in Prince George's and

Baltimore City — which have scored poorly in the past — than in other counties that were getting better scores.

Baltimore City has some of the oldest school buildings in the state, with an average age of 42 years old, or 12 years older than the average age of school buildings in Maryland — 30 years. More than 95 buildings in Baltimore City Public Schools are more than 50 years old, according to a [2020 report by John Hopkins University](#).

Hopkins researchers found that problems with temperature control, such as no heat on cold days and no air conditioning on hot days, caused a loss of 1.2 million hours of instruction in the city over the last 5 years. At least 97 schools in Baltimore City have HVAC systems that need replacement, but a history of underfunding makes this difficult. From September 2018 through September 2019, 100 schools filed a total of 736 complaints related to HVAC to Baltimore City Public Schools' facilities team, according to the Hopkins report.

The state has provided \$5.1 billion in capital funding between fiscal years 2006 and 2020 for public school construction, according to its 2020 annual report.

Last year, IAC inspected 47 buildings in Baltimore City and only 21% were found to be in "good" or "superior" condition, while more than half the schools in three-quarters of

Maryland counties met this high standard.

This year, the IAC found that roof drains, gutters and electrical equipment were well maintained in the two Baltimore City school buildings that were visited, but there were damaged windows which had not been improved since previous assessments, stained ceiling tiles and little to no maintenance on chairlifts or elevators.

IAC had planned to visit a large number of schools in Baltimore City this spring, but those plans were cancelled when the pandemic hit, Gorrell said.

In Prince George's County, the IAC had a goal to visit 50 school buildings for regular inspections, but only 11 were reached this year; an additional 14 schools received follow-up inspections after prior visits. Six schools in the county were reviewed as "not adequate" and none were in the "good" or "superior" condition. Roof drains, electrical service equipment and interior doors and walls were well maintained, but there were deficiencies in windows, roofs, plumbing and restroom fixtures.

Overall, most of the 260 school buildings reviewed statewide were adequately maintained with regards to their interior lighting, interior walls, interior doors, skylights and monitors, utilities, electrical equipment and air conditioning, Snyder said.

School sites, roofs, ceilings, restrooms and plumbing fixtures require more attention, he said.

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