

school is a modern, state-of-the-art facility that befits the educational ambitions and excellence of this school district. Indeed, it is the kind of school facility that every child in America deserves. The district also received fire safety grants totaling \$107,000 to make improvements throughout the district.

Excellent schools do not just pop up like mushrooms after a rain. They are the product of vision, leadership, persistence, and a tremendous amount of collaboration among local officials and concerned citizens. I salute the entire staff, administration, and governance in the Armstrong-Ringsted Community School District. In particular, I'd like to recognize the leadership of the board of education—Rod Foster, Paul Stevens, Howard Taylor, Betsey Ulrich, Don Looft and former members Marti Kindrick, Dale Anderson, Jan Hampton, Tom Mart, Greg Buum, Lisa McConnell, Greg Anderson, Anita Larsen, and Rick Steinberger. I would also like to recognize superintendent Randy Collins, former superintendent Robert Raymer, board secretary Deb Obbink and building director Tom Mart.

As we mark the 10th anniversary of the Harkin school grant program in Iowa, I am obliged to point out that many thousands of school buildings and facilities across the United States are in dire need of renovation or replacement. In my State of Iowa alone, according to a recent study, some 79 percent of public schools need to be upgraded or repaired. The harsh reality is that the average age of school buildings in the United States is nearly 50 years.

Too often, our children visit ultra-modern shopping malls and gleaming sports arenas on weekends, but during the week go to school in rundown or antiquated facilities. This sends exactly the wrong message to our young people about our priorities. We have to do better.

That is why I am deeply grateful to the professionals and parents in the Armstrong-Ringsted Community School District. There is no question that a quality public education for every child is a top priority in those communities. I salute them, and wish them a very successful new school year.●

#### BAXTER COMMUNITY EDUCATION

● Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, in Iowa and across the United States, a new school year has begun. As you know, Iowa public schools have an excellent reputation nationwide, and Iowa students' test scores are among the highest in the Nation.

I would like to take just a few minutes, today, to salute the dedicated teachers, administrators, and school board members in the Baxter Community School District, and to report on their participation in a unique Federal partnership to repair and modernize school facilities.

This fall marks the 10th year of the Iowa Demonstration Construction Grant Program. That is its formal name, but it is better known among educators in Iowa as the program of Harkin grants for Iowa public schools. Since 1998, I have been fortunate to secure a total of \$121 million for the State government in Iowa, which selects worthy school districts to receive these grants for a range of renovation and repair efforts—everything from updating fire safety systems to building new schools or renovating existing facilities. In many cases, this Federal funding is used to leverage public and/or private local funding, so it often has a tremendous multiplier effect in a local school district.

The Baxter Community School District received a 2003 Harkin grant totaling \$508,893 which it used towards building new elementary school classrooms. The additions also allowed the district to add a preschool classroom and partner with a local childcare center. This school is a modern, state-of-the-art facility that befits the educational ambitions and excellence of this school district. Indeed, it is the kind of school facility that every child in America deserves. The district also received a fire safety grant in 1999 for \$8,893, which was applied to a new detection system, wiring and exit signs at the high school.

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Mr. President, as we mark the 10th anniversary of the Harkin School Grant program in Iowa, I am obliged to point out that many thousands of school buildings and facilities across the United States are in dire need of renovation or replacement. In my State of Iowa alone, according to a recent study, some 79 percent of public schools need to be upgraded or repaired. The harsh reality is that the average age of school buildings in the United States is nearly 50 years.

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#### BENTON COMMUNITY EDUCATION

● Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, in Iowa and across the United States, a new school year has begun. As you know, Iowa public schools have an excellent reputation nationwide, and Iowa students' test scores are among the highest in the Nation.

I would like to take just a few minutes, today, to salute the dedicated teachers, administrators, and school board members in the Benton Community School District, and to report on their participation in a unique Federal partnership to repair and modernize school facilities.

This fall marks the 10th year of the Iowa Demonstration Construction Grant Program. That is its formal name, but it is better known among educators in Iowa as the program of Harkin grants for Iowa public schools. Since 1998, I have been fortunate to secure a total of \$121 million for the State government in Iowa, which selects worthy school districts to receive these grants for a range of renovation and repair efforts—everything from updating fire safety systems to building new schools or renovating existing facilities. In many cases, this Federal funding is used to leverage public and/or private local funding, so it often has a tremendous multiplier effect in a local school district.

The Benton Community School District received a 2001 Harkin grant totaling \$100,000 which it used to build a fire wall and renovate the stage area of the Keystone Center building. The area was transformed into two classrooms for art and music. The Federal grant made it possible for the district to provide quality and safe schools for their students.

Excellent schools do not just pop up like mushrooms after a rain. They are the product of vision, leadership, persistence, and a tremendous amount of collaboration among local officials and concerned citizens. I salute the entire staff, administration, and governance in the Benton Community School District. In particular, I'd like to recognize the leadership of the board of education—Brenda Schanbacher, Terry Harrington, Brian Strellner, Dan Voss, Tricia Schutterle, Bryce Brecht and Bill Boies and former board members Robyn Allen, George Martin, Connie Jacobsen, Elaine Harrington, Jeff Semelroth, Gary Kaiser and Chris Christensen. I would also like to recognize superintendent Gary Zittergruen and elementary school principal Tim Sanderson.

As we mark the 10th anniversary of the Harkin school grant program in Iowa, I am obliged to point out that many thousands of school buildings and facilities across the United States are in dire need of renovation or replacement. In my State of Iowa alone, according to a recent study, some 79 percent of public schools need to be upgraded or repaired. The harsh reality is that the average age of school buildings in the United States is nearly 50 years.