

Hooksett School District

2026 Deliberative Sessions

David R. Cawley Middle School

Session 1	Session 2 (Town Election)
Friday, February 6, 2026 Starting at 6:00 pm	Tuesday, March 10, 2026 6:00 am to 7:00 pm

Introduction

The information included in this 2026 School Meeting Guide is that data required to inform the voters and to conduct the affairs of the 2026 School Meeting. You are notified to meet at the David R. Cawley Middle School on Friday, the 6th day of February 2026 at 6:00 p.m. for the first session of the School Meeting to discuss and amend as required, the 2026-2027 School District Budget and Warrant Articles.

The final ballot vote for School District Warrant Articles will take place at the David R. Cawley Middle School on Tuesday, the 10th of March 2026. The polls will be open from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

HOOKSETT SCHOOL DISTRICT WARRANT

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

**TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, IN THE TOWN
OF HOOKSETT, NEW HAMPSHIRE, QUALIFIED TO VOTE IN
DISTRICT AFFAIRS:**

First Session of Annual Meeting – Deliberative

You are hereby notified to meet at the David R. Cawley Middle School, 89 Whitehall Road, in said District, on the 6th day of February 2026, 6:00 p.m. This session shall consist of explanation, discussion, and debate of warrant articles

number 2 through 8. Warrant articles may be amended subject to the following limitations: (a) warrant articles whose wording is prescribed by law shall not be amended, (b) warrant articles that are amended shall be placed on the official ballot for a final vote on the main motion, as amended and (c) no warrant article shall be amended to eliminate the subject matter of the article.

Second Session of Annual Meeting – Voting

Voting on warrant articles number 1 through 8 shall be conducted by official ballot to be held on the 10th day of March 2026. Polls will be open from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the David R. Cawley Middle School.

Article 1: Elected Officials

To choose the following school district officers:

- a) Three School Board Members 3-year term
- b) School District Moderator 2-year term
- c) School District Treasurer 2-year term
- d) School District Clerk 2-year term

Article 2: Facilities Upgrade Bond Project

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of **\$7,250,000** for the purposes of replacing the roof and HVAC systems, installing boilers, and repairing the fire suppression system and plumbing at Memorial School; replacing HVAC units and repairing the fire suppression system and plumbing at Cawley Middle School; replacing HVAC units and repairing to the fire suppression system and plumbing at Underhill School; and to authorize the issuance of not more than \$7,250,000 of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act, RSA 33:1, et. seq., as amended; to authorize the Hooksett School Board to apply for, obtain, accept and expend federal, state or other aid, if any, which may be available for said project; to comply with all laws applicable to said project; to authorize the Hooksett School Board to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; and to authorize the Hooksett School Board to take any other action or to pass any other vote relative thereto; and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$181,250 for the first year's payment for the bond?

Estimated tax rate impact is \$.06/per thousand. (Three-fifths vote required)
The average cost-per-pupil for the preceding year (2024-2025) as calculated in accordance with RSA 189:75, I(a) is elementary: \$17,396.79, middle \$18,744.59. Hooksett School District achievement proficiency scores for the preceding year (2024-2025):

Recommended by the School Board 6-0
Recommended by the Budget Committee 9-0

Voters' Guide Explanation:

A detailed bond repayment schedule and a full description of the proposed project scope are included in the reference section at the back of this voter guide.

The Hooksett School District engaged Harvey Construction, with support from The Turner Group, to assist with facilities planning for all three district school buildings. In late summer, The Turner Group conducted a comprehensive facilities assessment of Memorial School, David R. Cawley Middle School, and Fred C. Underhill School. That assessment identified **more than \$20 million in total facility needs** across the district. This figure reflects all identified needs and does not represent the amount of the proposed bond.

Following the assessment, a Facilities Committee composed of School Board Members, district administration, and community representatives reviewed the findings and **organized the identified needs into three priority levels**. Priority levels were based on health and safety concerns, system reliability, and operational impact. The prioritization framework was reviewed and approved by the School Board.

This bond proposal focuses on addressing **Priority 1** facility needs at all three schools. **Priority 1** needs represent the most critical issues related to building safety, system failure risk, and basic operations. In addition, the proposal includes selected **Priority 2 and Priority 3** upgrades at Hooksett Memorial School, which was assessed as being in the most urgent overall condition due to the age and condition of its core building systems.

The proposed work includes roof replacement, heating and ventilation system replacement, boiler installation, and repairs to fire suppression systems and plumbing. These projects address deferred maintenance and are intended to reduce the risk of system failures. In the calendar year 2025, the district spent approximately \$180,000 on emergency repairs across the three schools.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How is this plan different from last year's proposal?

Answer: This proposal addresses facility needs at all three schools rather than a single building. The district is working with different construction and facilities planning firms than in the prior proposal. The current plan is based on a district wide facilities assessment and considers both immediate needs and longer term system reliability.

2. What does this plan cover?

Answer: The proposal includes full heating and ventilation system replacement at Hooksett Memorial School, including units, controls, and programming. It also includes a new roof and new boilers at Hooksett Memorial School, as well as selected rooftop unit and heating or cooling component replacements at Cawley Middle School and Underhill School. Full details can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3NgfwsY> or the back of the voter's guide

3. Who comprised the Facilities Committee?

Answer: The Facilities Committee includes community members with professional experience in building systems and facilities management, along with district administration and School Board members. The committee serves in an advisory role and provides recommendations to the School Board.

4. Will this affect the summer program at Memorial?

Answer: The district has begun coordination with the YMCA regarding the summer program. Planning is ongoing to allow the program to continue while construction work proceeds, subject to final scheduling and contractor timelines.

5. What happens if voters do not approve Warrant Article 2?

Answer: If the warrant article is not approved, the projects included in this proposal will not move forward at this time. The district would continue to address facility issues through routine maintenance and emergency repairs as systems fail. Some projects may become more costly over time as building conditions continue to age.

6. What is the tax impact of Warrant Article 2?

Answer: The estimated tax rate impact for the first partial year of the 15-year level-principal municipal bond is \$0.06 per thousand dollars of assessed property value. In subsequent years, the estimated impact will decrease from \$0.22 to \$0.15 per thousand dollars of assessed property value, with decreasing interest payments as principal is paid down at about \$485k/year. These figures are estimates and may vary based on property valuations and other factors. The bond's full estimated payment schedule, based on a recent sale rate of 3.07%, is provided in the reference materials at the back of the voter's guide.

Hooksett Memorial School: ELA Proficiency: 57%; Math Proficiency: 66%;
Science Proficiency: 34%

David R. Cawley Middle School: ELA Proficiency: 65%; Math Proficiency: 59%;
Science Proficiency: 41%

Article 3: Operating Budget

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling **\$45,851,643**? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$45,360,166, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Hooksett School District or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. Estimated tax rate impact: \$10.57/per thousand (increase of \$.59/per thousand over prior year).

Recommended by the School Board 5-2

Recommended by the Budget Committee 5-4

Voters' Guide Explanation:

This warrant article establishes the Hooksett School District operating budget for the 2026/2027 school year.

- The Hooksett School Board proposes an operating budget of \$45,851,643.

- If the proposed budget is not approved, a default budget of \$45,360,166 will be adopted.

These figures represent total gross appropriations and include grants and food service operations.

The **default budget** is determined in accordance with New Hampshire state law. It is based on the current 2025-2026 operating budget and adjusted for contractual obligations and other legally required costs for the upcoming school year. For comparison, the current school operating budget selected by voters in March 2025 - the default budget option from that ballot - was \$43,959,116.

Notable changes included in the **default budget** for 2026-2027 are summarized below.

1. Staffing and Contracts: Scheduled increases to salaries and benefits as specified in the HESPA (support staff) contract approved by voters in March 2024. There are no cost increases for teaching staff in this next year's default budget, as the proposed 2026-29 HEA contract specifying those proposed costs is a separate warrant article. However, several departing teachers were replaced with staff at higher salary steps.

2. Special Education Costs: These legal obligations have increased due to a small rise in the number of qualifying students, up to 438 from 433 last year, as well as an increase in the overall cost of providing services. Special education sees an increase in the # of paraprofessionals and a \$5 higher hourly rate for contract staff, and is up overall by \$179k.

3. High School Tuition: Regular education tuition for grades 9-12 has risen by 3.97%, and will cost \$17,910 per student next year vs. \$17,226 this year, based on the rate established by Pinkerton Academy. However, high school sees a decrease in students due to more 12th grade students graduating (152) than coming up from eighth grade (136), so we budgeted a \$133k regular education high school increase or 1.51%.

4. Health Insurance: Premiums on the Schoolcare Yellow Choice plan have increased by 7.7%, but by moving to Yellow Choice 2.0 our plan rate increase is 3.75%. District wide health insurance costs increased \$206k, both from the rate hike but also increased utilization. The district also received an unbudgeted “surcharge” or “assessment” from Schoolcare this

fall of \$553k, \$367k of which is included in the 2026-27 default budget as a contractual allocation (under “School Board”) with the rest as an unbudgeted expense against our current operating budget.

5. Transportation: Busing for regular education (the big buses) and special education (typically van transportation) has increased \$141k overall.

6. Retirement Stipend: We have one retirement eligible for the \$28k retirement bonus, vs. three this year, so our default budget regular education category is reduced by \$56k.

The School Board’s **proposed budget** is based on the default budget. In response to community feedback from the past two elections, the School Board proposes a budget 1.1% above the default budget, which includes four additional requests of taxpayers beyond the default budget.

- Two positions at Cawley Middle School, which were cut from the 2023-24 budget, are proposed to be reinstated. One is a 6th-grade Social Studies teaching position, the second a Reading Specialist.
- A new 3rd-grade teaching position at Hooksett Memorial School, to accommodate a large bubble class coming in from 2nd-grade.
- \$120k for additional maintenance, adjusting for increased repair needs - often emergency repairs - due to aging infrastructure.

Our administrative team had submitted to the School Board several important budget requests with a total of just over \$1 million dollars beyond the default budget; however, the Hooksett School Board reduced this by more than half.

The school-year teaching positions are budgeted at roughly \$118k each. This is for the salary corresponding to Masters degree step 10, 19.23% New Hampshire Retirement System (pension) employer contribution on this salary, employer costs for family insurance (\$34,644), and taxes (FICA).

Combined with a \$20k projected food services increase (outside the general fund), this brings a total proposed operating budget of \$45,851,643.

The Budget Committee reviewed the operating budget and did not make any changes.

For detailed information about the budget, including the complete itemized budget spreadsheet, please refer to the Hooksett School Board website under “Documents and Reports”: <https://hooksetschoolboard.sau15.net/>

Hooksett School District - Budget Summary FY 2026-27							PROPOSED BUDGET 2026-27				
PROGRAM	ACTUAL 2024-2025	BUDGET 2025-26			DEFAULT BUDGET 2026-27			Requests	Proposed Total		
		Salaries & Benefits	Operational	Total	Salaries & Benefits	Operational	Default Total				
REGULAR EDUCATION	\$ 17,235,471	\$ 9,551,593	\$ 8,980,884	18,532,477	\$ 9,572,170	\$ 9,226,315	\$ 18,798,485	\$ 351,476	\$ 19,149,961		
SPECIAL EDUCATION	10,152,327	3,132,554	8,745,154	11,877,708	3,508,585	8,547,947	12,056,532	-	12,056,532		
ATHLETICS/XCURR	172,657	142,759	32,893	175,652	195,479	35,123	230,602	-	230,602		
GUIDANCE/NURSE	1,059,293	830,543	441,956	1,272,499	853,718	390,925	1,244,643	-	1,244,643		
PSYCH/SPEECH /OT/PT	1,668,563	399,413	1,049,485	1,448,898	527,449	1,151,123	1,678,572	-	1,678,572		
PROF SVCS/MEDIA	523,889	488,521	34,791	523,312	512,272	31,241	543,513	-	543,513		
SCHOOL BOARD	121,022	18,775	80,695	99,470	18,775	451,717	470,492	-	470,492		
SAU #15	792,349	-	865,491	865,491	-	852,732	852,732	-	852,732		
SCHOOL ADMIN.	1,430,069	1,449,257	99,148	1,548,405	1,525,612	104,139	1,629,751	-	1,629,751		
PLANT OPERATIONS	2,235,688	1,232,813	1,013,896	2,246,709	1,230,710	1,046,940	2,277,650	120,000	2,397,650		
TRANSPORTATION	2,933,163	-	3,432,744	3,432,744	-	3,574,049	3,574,049	-	3,574,049		
SUPPORT SERVICES	461,871	374,261	90,790	465,051	385,676	104,950	490,626	-	490,626		
FACILITIES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
DEBT SERVICE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
TRANSFER TO FUNDS	256,607	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
TO CHARTER SCHOOLS	142,450	-	60,700	60,700	-	102,520	102,520	-	102,520		
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	\$ 39,185,418	17,620,489	24,928,627	\$ 42,549,116	18,330,446	25,619,720	43,950,166	471,476	\$ 44,421,643		
FEDERAL/STATE GRANTS	796,535	-	-	550,000	-	-	550,000	-	550,000		
FOOD SERVICES	868,609	-	-	860,000	-	-	860,000	20,000	880,000		
OPERATING BUDGET	\$ 40,850,562	\$ 17,620,489	\$ 24,928,627	\$ 43,959,116	\$ 18,330,446	\$ 25,619,720	\$ 45,360,166	\$ 491,476	\$ 45,851,643		

Article 4: HEA Union Wage Agreement

Shall the Hooksett School District approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Hooksett School Board and the Hooksett Education Association, which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level over those paid in the prior fiscal year:

Year	Estimated Increase
2026-2027	\$325,105
2027-2028	\$326,773
2028-2029	\$318,174

and further to raise and appropriate \$325,105 for the 2026 – 2027 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels? Estimated tax rate impact 2026-2027 is \$0.10/per

thousand. Estimated tax rate impact 2027-2028 is \$0.10/per thousand. Estimated tax rate impact 2028-2029 is \$0.10/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 5-1
Recommended by the Budget Committee 5-4

Voters' Guide Explanation:

The Hooksett School Board approached this year's contract negotiations with a focus on increasing staff retention while mitigating costs for the community. The cumulative increase over the 3-year contract comes to approximately \$970,000, representing less than 1% of an operating budget increase per year.

A total of 111 employees are covered by the agreement.

Notably, the contract:

1. Increases the salary step schedule while compressing the overall range to reduce the pay gap between the lowest paid and highest paid employees from 93.2% to 85.5%. The adjustment is achieved by increasing the lower end of the salary schedule by \$1,000 per year to more closely align with state averages. The purpose of this change is to improve the Hooksett School District's ability to recruit and retain employees, particularly in lower and mid-range positions.
2. Makes available a health insurance option with a higher deductible paired with a health savings account. The option would allow eligible employees to enroll in a plan designed to lower premium costs while providing access to a tax advantaged savings account for qualified medical expenses.
3. Adjusts the maximum number of \$28,000 retirement bonuses that may be granted in a single year from six to five.
4. Provides continued bonuses for top-step staff whose steps were consolidated in 2023.
5. Provides an increase in certain hourly reimbursements from \$25 to \$40/hour.
6. Reallocates one teaching day to a second parent teacher conference day in March.
7. Improves language for staff course and workshop reimbursements.
8. Provides for more granular use of sick and personal leave.

Article 5: Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$150,000 to be added to the Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March 2020? There is \$121,606 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. This sum to come from June 30, 2026 fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from additional taxation. Estimated tax rate impact is \$0.00/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 4-3

Recommended by the Budget Committee 9-0

Voters' Guide Explanation:

This fund supports the maintenance and upkeep of the district's school buildings and facilities. Over time, major maintenance projects such as heating and ventilation system replacements, roof repairs, and parking lot resurfacing become necessary to maintain safe and functional school environments. These projects often involve significant costs that can place pressure on a single year operating budget.

By making planned contributions to this trust fund, the district can set aside resources over time to address large maintenance needs as they arise. This approach allows for better long term planning and helps reduce the need for sudden increases in the annual operating budget when major repairs are required.

For example, in 2025 our schools incurred approximately \$180,000 in emergency repairs. Memorial School experienced multiple system failures, including boiler malfunctions, ventilation outages, leaking pipes, and heating disruptions that resulted in the loss of heat and hot water on three separate occasions.

Cawley Middle School also saw extensive maintenance needs, with broken heating and cooling systems, leaking pipes, fire system issues. A water main failure at Cawley School required canceling school one day, as two days of repairs were required to bring water service back online.

Article 6: Special Education Expendable Trust Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$100,000 to be added to the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March of 2001? There is \$336,215 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. Estimated tax rate impact is \$0.03/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 4-3

Recommended by the Budget Committee 5-4

Voters' Guide Explanation:

This fund is intended to help manage unexpected special education costs without requiring reductions to other areas of the annual operating budget. Under New Hampshire law and applicable federal law, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, school districts are required to provide special education services to eligible students residing in the district from ages of 3 through 22.

Special education currently represents just over one quarter of the district's total operating budget and is a significant driver of year to year budget increases. Beginning in the 2025/2026 school year, state special education aid is expected to decline, increasing the district's share of these required costs.

The fund may be used to address substantial and unanticipated expenses such as out of district placements or specialized services for students who enroll in the district during the school year. By contributing to this fund, the district can better plan for these obligations and reduce sudden budget impacts from year to year while continuing to meet all legal requirements.

Article 7: Technology Expendable Trust Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$150,000 to be added to the Technology Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March 2008? There is \$51,866 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. This sum to come from June 30, 2026 fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from additional taxation. Estimated tax rate impact is \$0.00/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 5-2

Recommended by the Budget Committee 6-3

Voters' Guide Explanation:

This fund supports the school district's ongoing technology needs. Through prior planning and the use of federal pandemic related grants, each student and staff member currently has access to an individual computing device. These devices and systems require continuing investment for software licensing, network infrastructure, cybersecurity, technical support, and eventual replacement due to normal equipment life cycles.

By making regular contributions to this trust fund, the district can plan for major technology purchases and replacements over time rather than absorbing large costs in a single operating budget year. For example, in the spring of 2025, the School Board approved the use of funds from this trust to help purchase 50 new laptops for teachers at David R Cawley Middle School and also 150 new Chromebooks for students in 3rd-grade.

Article 8: To Establish Curriculum Capital Reserve Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$150,000 to be added to the Curriculum Capital Reserve Fund previously established in March 2025? There is \$103,144 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. This sum to come from June 30, 2026 fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from additional taxation. Estimated tax rate impact of \$0.00/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 7-0

Recommended by the Budget Committee 9-0

Voters' Guide Explanation:

The Curriculum Trust Fund was established to support the purchase and replacement of instructional programs in reading, mathematics, and science. These subject areas are assessed annually by the State of New Hampshire through the statewide assessment system, making it important that curriculum materials remain current and aligned with state expectations.

The district's current mathematics program is approximately ten years old. In addition, beginning in 2027, the State of New Hampshire will require school

districts to use a state approved language arts curriculum. While the approved curriculum list has not yet been released, discussions with state education officials indicate that the district's current language arts program is unlikely to meet the forthcoming requirements.

The purpose of this warrant article is to increase the Curriculum Trust Fund in preparation for the anticipated costs of replacing the outdated mathematics program and implementing the required state approved language arts curriculum when it becomes available.

Under New Hampshire law, the state sets curriculum standards and assessment requirements through the Department of Education, but the cost of selecting, purchasing, and implementing curriculum materials is the responsibility of local school districts. When the state adopts new standards or requires the use of state approved curriculum lists, it does not typically appropriate funds to pay for local curriculum replacements.

As a result, districts are expected to plan for these costs locally through the operating budget or capital and curriculum trust funds. Increasing the Curriculum Trust Fund is the fiscally prudent way to prepare for a known state mandate without forcing a large one year operating budget increase.

References and Supplemental Information

1. Student enrollment distribution
2. Facilities
 - a. Report: The State of Hooksett School Facilities
 - b. Harvey Construction SCR
 - c. Harvey Construction ESA
 - d. Harvey Construction Assessment & Prioritization
 - e. NHMBB estimated bond payment schedule
3. Trust fund report
 - a. 4 School capital reserve funds
 - b. School contingency fund of \$264,124.06 documented separately
4. Replacement cycles for technology
5. Technology current infrastructure report
6. Projected building maintenance plan
7. Proposed school operating budget - categorization pie chart
8. NH Dept. of Revenue MS-27 report for Hooksett school proposed budget
9. School District Moderator's rules

Student Enrollment Distribution

**School Administrative Unit #15
Hooksett Pupil Accounting
Monthly Enrollment**

January 5, 2026

School	Grade	TOTAL	Section	Average Class Size	Paraprof. Per Building
Underhill	Preschool	29	2	15	7 E
	K	119	7	17	15 C
	1	133	7	19	
	2	149	7	21	
TOTAL		430	23	19	

January 2025
27
126
140
127
420

Memorial	3	128	6	21	3 E
	4	140	6	23	7 C
	5	166	7	24	
TOTAL		434	19	23	

137
161
134
432

Cawley	6	138	6	23	6 E
	7	145	8	18	7 C
	8	138	8	17	
TOTAL		421	22	19	

E = Employee
C = Contracted

142
141
136
419

GRAND TOTAL		1,285	64	20	
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1,271

**School Administrative Unit #15
Hooksett Pupil Accounting
High School Monthly Enrollment**

DATE: January 5, 2026

School	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	TOTAL
Pinkerton Academy	124	126	128	113	491
Manchester Central	0	1	1	1	3
Manchester West	0	0	2	1	3
Manchester Memorial	0	0	1	1	2
MST	1	0	0	0	1
Bow High	2	5	0	1	8
Goffstown High	1	0	1	1	3
Londonderry High	14	11	31	22	78
Pembroke Academy	7	4	2	5	18
Other Private/SPED	3	3	8	7	21
TOTAL	152	150	174	152	628

Report: The State of Hooksett School Facilities

Addressing Deferred Maintenance and Emergency Repairs Under Ongoing Budget Constraints

Executive Summary

The Hooksett School District is facing increasing facilities management challenges due to prolonged operating budget constraints and aging building systems. To maintain safe and operational schools, the School Board has relied on federal grant funding, year end fund balances, and operational reductions. These measures have helped address immediate needs but have limited the district's ability to invest in planned and preventative maintenance.

As a result, the district has been forced to shift towards a more reactive approach to facilities maintenance. Aging systems, particularly heating, ventilation, and plumbing, are experiencing more frequent failures that require emergency repairs. These unplanned costs reduce resources available for routine maintenance and have contributed to a growing backlog of deferred projects, affecting overall building reliability and, in some cases, the learning environment.

1. The Financial Landscape: The Default Budget Cycle

The primary driver of the district's current facilities challenges is the mismatch between building needs and voter-approved operating budgets.

Over the past eight years, voters have rejected the proposed operating budget four times (FY20/21, FY21/22, FY24/25, and FY25/26), forcing the district to operate under default budgets. Default budgets typically lock spending at prior-year levels, adjusted only for contractual obligations, and do not account for inflation, aging infrastructure, or rising repair costs.

In FY25/26 alone, the default budget resulted in significant reductions to proposed maintenance funding:

- **Fred C. Underhill School:** reduced by \$66,666.62
- **David R. Cawley Middle School:** reduced by \$55,867.71
- **Hooksett Memorial School:** reduced by \$22,410.51

To align with these reductions, planned maintenance items—including classroom painting, carpet replacement, and preventative parking lot maintenance—were removed from the budget.

Capital Investment Proposals and Voter Outcomes

In parallel with constrained operating budgets, the School Board has attempted to address aging building systems through voter-approved capital investment. In 2023, the district proposed a comprehensive facilities project totaling approximately \$13 million to replace aging HVAC systems in all three schools and address roof replacements at two schools. The proposal was structured as a lease-purchase agreement to spread costs over time. This warrant article was eliminated during the deliberative session and did not advance to the ballot.

In 2024, the Board brought forward a more limited proposal focused solely on essential repairs and system upgrades at Hooksett Memorial School. This reduced project totaled \$6 million and was proposed to be funded through a 15-year bond. The warrant article advanced to the 2025 ballot; however, it did not achieve the required three-fifths majority needed for bond approval.

While these efforts demonstrate long-term planning and attempts to move from reactive repairs to proactive system replacement, the failure of these capital proposals has contributed to the continued reliance on operating budgets and emergency maintenance to address aging infrastructure.

2. Strategic Use of Alternative Funding Sources

To offset the limitations of default budgets, the School Board has actively pursued non-taxpayer funding sources to address critical facility needs.

Federal ESSER Funds (2020–2023)

Federal COVID-19 ESSER II and III funds were used to address urgent health, safety, and infrastructure issues, particularly related to air quality.

- **HVAC Improvements:** Installation of energy recovery ventilation (ERV) units at Underhill School to meet ASHRAE standards and provide mechanical ventilation where none previously existed.
- **Safety and Continuity Measures:** Enhanced cleaning services, sanitation supplies, and technology infrastructure to support learning during building deficiencies.

Year-End Fund Balances

Historically, unspent funds returned at the end of the fiscal year were used to complete facility projects not supported by the operating budget.

- **Completed Projects (2020–2023):** Security camera upgrades, impact-resistant glass installation, rooftop HVAC unit replacements at Cawley, and playground structures.
- **Declining Availability:** In FY24/25, the Superintendent recommended using year-end funds for Cawley parking lot maintenance, but funds were unavailable. Fund balance reports confirm that no facility upgrades were funded from this source in 2024 or 2025.

3. Deferred Maintenance and Aging Infrastructure

Repeated use of default budgets has required the district to delay both routine maintenance and major system replacements. At the same time, many core building systems, particularly heating and ventilation, are operating at or beyond their expected service life across all three schools.

Deferring maintenance does not eliminate costs. Instead, it shifts expenses from planned upkeep to unplanned breakdowns, where system failures require immediate and often more expensive repairs. Over time, this approach increases overall costs and reduces the reliability of building systems.

Key Contributing Factors

- Reduced funding for routine maintenance due to default budgets
- HVAC systems operating beyond their intended lifespan
- A compounding effect where failures become more frequent, disruptive, and costly

Examples of Deferred Items

- **Structural/Safety:** Exterior door replacements; security camera upgrades
- **HVAC:** heating unit and control system repairs
- **Cosmetic/Sanitary:** Floor tile repairs, bathroom partitions, carpet replacement
- **Preventative:** Parking lot crack filling and sealing at Cawley School

4. Rising Emergency Repair Costs and Impacts

As deferred maintenance has accumulated, emergency repairs have increased in both frequency and cost. These repairs are unplanned, time-sensitive, and significantly more expensive than preventative maintenance.

In FY24/25, the district spent approximately **\$237,585.98** on repairs, the majority of which were emergency in nature:

- **David R. Cawley Middle School:** \$150,049.20, including
 - \$41,170 main water line leak
 - \$51,330 pump house control panel replacement
- **HVAC Failures:** Heating wheels, motors, control systems, and glycol leaks across all three schools

While the School Board redirected available maintenance funds toward critical repair lines following default budgets, the scale and frequency of HVAC failures exceeded what those lines could sustain.

Operational and Educational Impact

In the past year, increased water leaks and HVAC outages have begun to affect classrooms through temperature control issues, temporary relocations, and instructional disruptions. As systems continue to age, these impacts are expected to intensify.

5. The Need to Get Ahead of Emergency Maintenance

The School Board's goal is to regain control of facility conditions by shifting from reactive emergency repairs to proactive system replacement and preventative maintenance. Continuing on the current path risks emergency repairs consuming an ever-greater share of limited operating funds, further accelerating infrastructure decline.

Over the past three years, long-term planning efforts have been initiated, but projects that failed at the ballot have contributed to a growing backlog. Each year without system replacement increases the likelihood of larger, more disruptive failures.

6. Ongoing Maintenance Commitment

Between 2023 and 2025, the district spent **\$559,533.06** on building maintenance across all three schools, demonstrating a sustained commitment to keeping facilities safe and operational.

These funds addressed both routine maintenance and unplanned system failures. However, as major systems age beyond their useful life, an increasing portion of maintenance spending is consumed by emergency repairs rather than long-term solutions. This explains why facility needs continue to grow despite significant ongoing investment.

Conclusion

The Hooksett School Board has relied on short term measures such as federal grant funding, year end fund balances, and operational adjustments to maintain safe and functional school facilities during a prolonged period of fiscal constraint. While these measures have helped address immediate needs, they are temporary by nature and cannot replace sustained investment in core infrastructure.

Over multiple years, the use of default budgets combined with aging building systems has contributed to increased deferred maintenance, particularly related to heating, ventilation, and other critical systems. As a result, the district has become more reliant on emergency repairs, which are often more costly and disruptive than planned maintenance.

The proposed capital improvement plan is intended to address these challenges by stabilizing district facilities, reducing reliance on emergency repairs, and supporting continuity of instruction. The goal is to protect both the educational environment for students and the long term investment of taxpayers through more predictable and proactive facilities planning.