

Testimony January 21, 2025

David Trumble (Weare) HB 366 – School Building Aid

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I support this bill for several reasons.

First, the state has a duty to assist in the funding for building and maintaining local public schools.

(a) State Mandate.

For over 100 years, NH Statute has mandated “suitable and sanitary” public school buildings for the education of children under RSA 189:24 the “standard school” statute.

189:24 Standard School. – A standard school is one approved by the state board of education, and maintained for at least 180 days in each year, or the equivalent number of hours as required in the rules of the department of education, in a suitable and sanitary building, equipped with approved furniture, books, maps and other necessary appliances, taught by teachers, directed and supervised by a principal and a superintendent, each of whom shall hold valid educational credentials issued by the state board of education, with suitable provision for the care of the health and physical welfare of all pupils. A standard school shall provide instruction in all subjects prescribed by statute or by the state board of education for the grade level of pupils in attendance. (originally passed in 1919)

(b) 10-year plan for ‘adequate learning environments.’

RSA 198:15 establishes a 10-year plan, which is to be updated every 2 years, keeping track of all of the upcoming school projects in the state, in order to provide “adequate learning environments for New Hampshire’s students.”

198:15-a (V). The department of education shall develop and maintain a 10-year school facilities plan of potential school building grant projects. Potential projects shall include, but not be limited to, criteria pursuant to RSA 198:15-c, II(b). The 10-year plan is intended to create a method to identify and enhance school facilities in a safe, healthy, and efficient manner while providing adequate learning environments for New Hampshire's students. The 10-year plan shall be updated every biennium to provide the department a summary of projects and school facility capital expenditures that are anticipated for the next 10 years. The plan shall identify new construction, renovation, and emergency projects, and describe the overall condition of projects contained in the plan.

(c) The state provides funds for these projects pursuant to RSA 198:15-a

198:15-a Grant for School Construction. –

I. To aid local school districts and chartered public schools under RSA 194-B in meeting the costs of school buildings, the department of education shall, from funds appropriated by the general court to carry out the provisions of this subdivision, pay to the school districts and chartered public schools of the state, sums in accordance with the provisions of this subdivision, RSA 198:15-b, I(b) or the alternative school building aid provisions under RSA 198:15-u through RSA 198:15-w.

Second, the 10-year moratorium threatens the ability of NH schools to provide “adequate learning environments”.

(a) NH schools are old and unsafe.

Key findings of the NH School Funding Fairness Project report on 7-31-2023 entitled State Building Aid and the Condition of New Hampshire’s Public Schools

- 33,160 (20%) NH students are in buildings that have not been updated in 35 years.
- Asbestos and Lead are found in 24% of New Hampshire’s public schools.
 - 37 school districts have Asbestos in their schools - Table 3
 - 9 schools districts have Lead in the water - Table 3
 - 5 school districts have Lead Paint - Table 3
- The largest group of students (about 30%) in NH go to buildings with their most recent construction or renovation in the 1990s and 10% in the 1980s

(b) How old is too old for schools?

National Center for Education Statistics – Issue Brief 1999

“How Old are America’s Schools?” <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999048.pdf>

Many of America’s schools may be at an age where frequent repairs are necessary. According to Ornstein (1994), **when a school is 20 to 30 years old, frequent replacement of equipment is needed. Between 30 and 40 years old, the original equipment should have been replaced, including the roof and electrical equipment. After 40 years, a school building begins rapid deterioration, and after 60 years most schools are abandoned.** (Allan Ornstein, Professor of Education at St. John’s University in NY)

[c] What does this mean for NH?

- 20% of our schools are past the state of rapid deterioration heading to abandonment
- Another 30% are leaving the state of needing frequent replacement of equipment, and now heading for equipment should have been replaced, including roofs and electrical.
- That means, **if we don’t fund them now, by the end of this decade, 50% of the schools in the state will need either major replacements and projects or a complete rebuild.**

Third, having standard school buildings can significantly increase educational outcomes compared to substandard school buildings: 5-17 percentile difference, with a 14 to 17 percentile difference in urban areas.

Professor Glen Earthman, Virginia Polytech Institute
School Facility Conditions and Student Academic Achievement
October 2002 <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sw56439>

The North Dakota study produced a difference of 5 percentile rank points on the composite or total achievement scores for students in substandard buildings versus students in above standard buildings and differences of 7 and 9 percentile rank points on the reading vocabulary and spelling sub-tests. Hines found higher differences in his study of urban high schools. These differences between students in substandard buildings and students in above standard buildings were 14 percentile rank points on the composite achievement scores and as high as 15 and 17 percentile rank points on reading and mathematics sub-tests respectively. Subsequent research studies (Andersen, 1999; Ayres, 1999, O'Neill, 2000) have provided some support for the results of previously cited researchers who found the **average difference between students in old or substandard buildings and those students in modern or above standard buildings to be from 5-17 percentile points.** Taken together, the research studies cited above, along with the studies dealing with age of buildings, presents a formidable body of research findings that demonstrate that **the condition of the school building has a sizeable and measurable influence upon the achievement of students** (Earthman, 1998).
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sw56439>

Fourth, the amount of money needed. Towns and Cities are asking for about 40% of the cost of their school projects.

www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/sonh/fy24-25-ranked-list-approved-by-sboe.pdf

NH DOE Rankings as of November 2022

17 projects___ submitted will cost \$564 million

17 projects building aid sought \$228 million (just a little over 40%)

Examples of the top five:

Rochester (requested building aid of \$20.2 million),

Colebrook (requested building aid of \$9.9 million),

Monadnock (requested building aid of \$19.4 million),

Concord (requested building aid of \$70.5 million) and

Litchfield (requested building aid of \$9.6 million).