

**To:** Senate Education Committee  
**From:** Nicole Mace, Winooski School District Board Trustee  
**Re:** **H. 871 & Winooski Schools Capital Project**  
**Date:** April 11, 2024  
**Cc:** Wilmer Chavarria, WSD Superintendent

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Good afternoon, my name is Nicole Mace. I am currently serving as a school board member on the Winooski School District Board of Trustees. I was asked to represent the District in this testimony today as I was the Director of Finance and Operations for the District during the capital project, and served as a member of the Executive Committee overseeing the work.

In May of 2019 the Winooski community approved a \$57.8M bond to finance an addition and renovation project designed to recreate the PreK-12 campus into a more modern and functional learning environment and to upgrade its aging infrastructure to meet building codes.

In anticipation of a bond vote, the school board established a Capital Project Committee, which was charged to envision education now and over the next twenty years. That Committee led the design of an educational campus that could support that vision for education with the input of community members, students and staff, and the support of the architectural team at TruEx Cullins.

At the time of the bond vote, the facility needed substantial upgrades to the roof, HVAC, insulation and lighting systems. The old facility was built for 600 students and the district serves 800. Students were receiving services in hallways and closets. Buckets were regularly brought out to catch leaks in classrooms when a storm passed through.

Construction began in July of 2020 and was completed in April of 2023. Renovations improved about 145,000 square feet of existing space, with another 70,000 square feet of new program space added. The project thoroughly transformed the aging district facility into a modern 21st century school campus, which serves as a community hub and resource connector. You can see more information about the renovations and project design here:

<https://truexcullins.com/project/winooski-schools/>

In 2019, when the school board presented the capital project bond vote to Winooski voters, it estimated needing to borrow \$57.8m at an interest rate of 3.63%. In 2022, the WSD closed on a \$55m loan with the USDA at a historically low interest rate of 2.25%. As a result, the Winooski capital project cost taxpayers \$16.9 million less than projected in 2019. Borrowing less than the authorized amount was made possible thanks to efforts from our Congressional delegation to secure federal funds for our School Based Health Clinic, federal COVID funds that were used to cover the costs of HVAC materials, and careful management of the project by the Board's Capital Project Executive Committee.

The WSD Board of Trustees has not taken a position on H.871, but I would note that this project has not benefited from any state aid for construction. I would be happy to take any questions about our experience that would aid the Committee in its evaluation of the bill.

**Nicole Mace**

Winooski School District Board Trustee