

The Bellows Falls Union High School PCB Crisis: Unacknowledged Costs and Educational Impact - Testimony to House Education Committee, January 16, 2026 - Andrew Haas, Superintendent for Windham Northeast Supervisory Union

Bellows Falls Union High School received notification that PCBs were present in our air at unacceptable levels in **August 2023**, just ten days before the start of the school year. This situation necessitated limiting the time students and staff could spend in specific areas throughout the day. The result was an immense operational scramble, leading to the rapid erection of temporary classrooms across campus. The logistical complexity was significant, encompassing the immediate provision of essential infrastructure such as **lighting, network connectivity, security protocols, and protection from adverse weather**.

Throughout this whole ordeal, we have had professional support from the Department of Environmental Conservation and our consultants at VHB.

The Visible Financial Cost (District Expenses vs. State Reimbursement)

Below is a breakdown of the expenses incurred by the district to manage this crisis and the corresponding reimbursements received. To date, we have been reimbursed for all submitted expenses, but it is our critical understanding that **there may be no additional state funds**, and not all necessary remediation will be completed by the end of this school year.

Category	Amount
District Expenses to Date	
FY24 Expenses	\$301,501.78
FY25 Expenses	\$607,928.70
FY26 Expenses (as of Jan 2026)	\$71,041.39
Approved State Reimbursements this year	
Nov 2025: Fire Retardant Material Remediation	\$2,000,895.68
Dec 2025: Additional PCB Remediation Work	\$57,392.60

The Invisible Financial Cost (Unreimbursed Labor)

It is imperative to note the extensive volume of staff time and district resources required to manage the meetings, communications, schedule changes, and operational support for this effort since August 2023.

This dedication of district staff time represents a **significant, unacknowledged financial contribution** that is not formally included in funding reimbursement discussions. This constitutes a severe operational burden, diverting resources and focus from our primary educational mandates.

What is impossible to formally calculate and report is the lost administrative and staff time. This "invisible" cost has been entirely shouldered by the district and the school. We conservatively estimate that this **unreimbursed administrative and staff cost has easily surpassed \$200,000** over the last two and a half years.

The Incalculable Loss

Finally, the greatest loss is to our students. When administrators, teachers, and staff have to devote hundreds of hours to PCB-related activities, that is time they are not focused on the education of our students. This represents a fundamental, **incalculable cost** to our students' education and our community's future.

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrew Haas
Superintendent