



**FAIRHAVEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
December 3, 2025

FAIRHAVEN TOWN CLERK  
RCUD 2025 JAN 16 PM1:19

MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Monroe, Nicole Pacheco, Erik Andersen, Stephanie Pickup, Kelly Ochoa, Donna McKenna

STAFF PRESENT: Superintendent Tara Kohler, Assistant Superintendent Mark Balestracci, School Business Manager Nicole Potter

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Monroe at 6:30 pm

***Report of the Student Advisory Committee:***

New Student Advisory Committee member Vishva Patel introduced herself to the Committee and noted she will contribute at the next meeting.

***Reports & Recommendations of the Superintendent:***

*Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC) Capital Reserve Policy Review and Vote to Accept:*  
Executive Director, Catherine Cooper of SMEC presented the Committee the 2025 Proposed Amendment to the Capital Reserve Account (Attachment A) explaining any changes.

Mrs. Pacheco made a motion to approve the Proposed Amendment 2025 for the SMEC Capital Reserve Account, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (6-0).

***Fairhaven High School Building & Facility Update:***

Business Manager Nicole Potter presented the Committee a facility update (Attachment B). The project is complete, with scaffolding removed and the back parking lot reopened for staff use. Approved at Town Meeting in 2023 for \$2.275 million, the project was completed under budget at just over \$2 million. The project team, including the waterproofing contractor as GC, RTA Architects as OPM, and Spencer Preservation Group, were commended for strong communication, collaboration, and high-quality execution. Work focused primarily on the front gables and included installation of a cathodic protection system, along with sealing adjacent archways and the connector to address longstanding water infiltration issues dating back to the 1999 construction. The repairs were effective, with no issues observed following recent heavy rain. The cathodic protection system is divided into four zones and is monitored by the consultant, as well as the staff being trained. A student monitoring portal was also developed and integrated into Fairhaven High School's chemical engineering curriculum, providing an educational opportunity. Appreciation was expressed to Fairhaven taxpayers for funding the project and supporting the preservation of the high school facility. The next phase may be proposed as early as at the next Town Meeting, but more realistically in another year.

***Fairhaven High School Programming & Updates:***

Assistant Superintendent Balestracci provided an overview (Attachment C) of recent and ongoing grants and how they support current and future programming in Fairhaven. He highlighted the recent districtwide accreditation, strong student outcomes, and commitment to the five Cs: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, and civic participation through rigorous coursework, expanded AP access, dual enrollment, Innovation Career Pathways, and extensive extracurricular offerings. Updates included continued success in the Business and Finance Innovation Pathway, pursuit of new pathways in Health and Human Services and Environmental Science, and expansion of advanced coursework with open access for all students. Recent grant awards include a Skills Capital Grant for a new personal finance lab, a Mass Life Sciences equipment grant to enhance hands-on science learning and support a future pharmacology pathway, and integration of cathodic protection system monitoring into student learning. Assistant Superintendent Balestracci also reported progress toward "After Dark" partnership with Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School, potentially providing electrical training opportunities for students not admitted through the vocational lottery. He emphasized strong student achievement, innovative partnerships, and gratitude for continued support in expanding opportunities for Fairhaven students.

***Acushnet Tuition Agreement:***

The Committee received and placed on file from Superintendent Kohler the Acushnet Communication Timeline (Attachment D) regarding the tuition agreement discussions, including recent Acushnet tuition agreements, an article from the Massachusetts Municipal Association highlighting statewide fiscal pressures tied to local aid, and a town communication timeline. It was noted that both districts are facing similar financial challenges due to reduced local funding and uncertainty around potential changes to Chapter 70, which the state is currently reviewing through a listening tour.

Superintendent Kohler stated this meeting was moved up at the request of the Acushnet School Committee, which is scheduled to meet next week and wanted clarity on Fairhaven's position before making a decision. The Superintendent emphasized transparency, stating that her role was to clearly communicate the process, the information shared by Acushnet, and Fairhaven's understanding of the facts so the Committee can provide direction.

Superintendent Kohler presented information to the Committee (Attachment E) regarding the Acushnet Counter Proposal. She explains that because it does not operate its own high school, it must maintain at least one tuition agreement. Acushnet's assertion is that it pays more in high school tuition per student than it receives in Chapter 70 aid, creating budget pressure and complicating long term planning. At their November 20, 2025 meeting, Acushnet framed its position on the guiding principles of students first, transparency, quality, and sustainable, fair tuition agreements.

Superintendent Kohler went through the FAQs on the Acushnet School Committee website. First, placing students first, Fairhaven highlighted a partnership with Acushnet that spans more than 100 years. Over the last decade, Acushnet students have comprised roughly one quarter to one third of Fairhaven High School's enrollment, with approximately 150 students currently attending. The relationship extends well beyond high school, beginning in youth athletics and community activities, where students from both towns grow up together, compete together, and form lasting friendships. This integration culminates in a shared high school experience that, despite Acushnet not having a physical high school, provides its students with a true sense of belonging.

She then emphasized that this partnership is visible throughout the community and school culture, including athletics, theater, and student activities. Acushnet students are fully embedded in Fairhaven High School life, and Superintendent Kohler argued that this level of continuity and community cannot be easily replicated elsewhere.

Regarding transparency, she stated Fairhaven acknowledged a timeline of communications and expressed concern about mixed messages over the years regarding the stability of the partnership.

On the issue of quality, Superintendent Kohler cited the strength of its academic and extracurricular programs, accreditation, and the overall educational experience offered to students. She emphasized that Fairhaven has built something special over many years and that students from both communities benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from being together in one school environment.

Superintendent Kohler then focused on sustainable and fair tuition. Fairhaven stated that the first concrete financial proposal from Acushnet was presented at a meeting in October 2025 and proposed a tuition rate of approximately \$8,500 per student, significantly lower than the current rate of about \$12,500. Acushnet also suggested changes related to transportation costs and the removal of a school adjustment counselor. Fairhaven calculated that accepting this proposal would result in an immediate revenue loss of approximately \$600,000, which it viewed as unreasonable.

She stated Acushnet is offering 70% of the Acushnet Chapter 70 high school, column 6, funding rate from DESE foundation page of the annual Chapter 70 final budget report. She strongly disputed Acushnet's reliance on the Chapter 70 "Column 6" foundation rate as the basis for tuition negotiations, explaining that this figure is a component of a broader funding formula and not the actual per student funding received. She believes the proposal is unfair and unfounded. She presented historical data, prior agreements, and per pupil spending figures to argue that Acushnet currently saves money under the existing tuition arrangement when compared to both required and actual per pupil expenditures. Superintendent Kohler stated that, based on her analysis and consultations with multiple State school finance experts, Fairhaven is not overcharging Acushnet and may, in

fact, be charging less than the true cost of educating those students, and it sounds like Fairhaven is subsidizing Acushnet's educational responsibility.

Superintendent Kohler highlighted the chart the Acushnet School Committee presented at a meeting, showing the number of \$11,714 as being the number they are stating is column 6, and a negative dollar amount stating they are losing money. She again stated she believes this is fundamentally flawed and presented Fairhaven and Acushnet charts showing the estimated amount required for per pupil net school spending for FY26, not counting transportation. Acushnet's per pupil amount is \$14,810, Fairhaven's per pupil amount is \$16,287. She went on to explain some math regarding the numbers: 152 kids at \$12,500 equals \$1,911,856. Taking the Acushnet required per pupil expenditure, the number would be \$2,225,196 for a savings of \$339,000. Acushnet's most recent actual per pupil amount was from 2024 at \$16,083, and paid \$11,629 in tuition to Fairhaven per child, which amounted to a savings of \$866,000.

Superintendent Kohler mentioned additional concern was expressed about public statements suggesting that Fairhaven benefits financially from higher need students. Fairhaven argued that additional state funding for special education, English learners, and low-income students exists to meet those students' needs and should not be portrayed as a financial windfall. Committee members also strongly objected to proposals that would eliminate mental health support services, emphasizing the critical importance of student wellness, especially in the post COVID environment.

Committee members reiterated that there is no price on a child's education and emphasized both the educational value and community enrichment Acushnet students bring to Fairhaven. While acknowledging that all districts face financial pressure, members agreed that reducing tuition to the proposed level would unfairly shift costs to Fairhaven taxpayers.

A motion was made by Mrs. Pickup to allow Superintendent Kohler to inform Dr. Bailey that the Fairhaven School Committee and Fairhaven Public Schools would like to continue our relations with Acushnet, and be considered as a partner, but at no less than the current rate, seconded by Mrs. Pacheco, passed (6-0).

A motion was made by Mrs. Pacheco to direct Superintendent Kohler to inform Dr. Bailey that we would like to continue being a partner, but prefer the relationship stay the way it is today with Fairhaven and New Bedford being the options for the Acushnet students, seconded by Ms. McKenna, passed with one abstention of Ms. Ochoa (5-0).

Superintendent Kohler then read each article on the agreement and the Committee discussed the proposed one-year extension agreement (in Attachment E). She stated she is checking with legal, but believes the current 8<sup>th</sup> grade class can still enroll under the current agreement. Due to the short timing of receiving the proposal, the Committee agrees to table the topic until Superintendent Kohler can get clarification from legal counsel.

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to table the vote on a possible one-year extension with Acushnet Public Schools for High School Tuition for legal clarification, seconded by Mrs. Pacheco, passed unanimously (6-0).

***Upcoming Events:***

The next School Committee Meeting will be held December 10, 2025 if needed. The January School Committee meeting was noted as January 7, 2026, but it is actually January 14, 2026.

***Unfinished Business:***

The discussion and vote regarding the Town and School Municipal Expenditure Agreement MOU proposed by the Town of Fairhaven remained tabled. Superintendent Kohler and Mrs. Potter will be meeting with the new Town Administrator and the Town Accountant for more information.

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to adjourn and go into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigation position of the public body and the chair so declares, seconded by Ms. McKenna, roll call vote, approved (6-0).

Adjourned at 8:37 pm.

Sheri Souza  
Secretary to the Fairhaven School Committee

Approved  
January 14, 2026

Proposed Amendment 2025

SMEC Capital Reserve Account

Established 2015

Amended 2019

- 1) Any deposits into the SMEC Capital Reserve Account must be approved by the SMEC Board of Directors through the SMEC budget process. Funds that are identified as surplus revenue as a result of higher than anticipated enrollment and/or cost efficiencies created in other expense areas, **and/or funds received through donations, grants, or other targeted government funding** ~~would~~ **may be approved** ~~proposed~~ for deposit into the account Capital Reserve Account; deposits would not be funded through any tuition increases, or surcharges. ~~We will only utilize a portion of surplus revenue, if any, that may be identified at the end of any fiscal year for deposits to the Capital Reserve Account, with SMEC Board approval.~~ **The SMEC Board will approve any proposed deposit into the Capital Reserve Account and/or use of the funds therein.**
- 2) The maximum cumulative balance of the Capital Reserve Account will be **Two Million Dollars** ~~\$500,000~~ **(\$2,000,000)**. Withdrawals from the fund for capital purchases or projects will be in compliance with current SMEC Board policies for budget amendments and capital spending.
- 3) The stated purpose of the funds will be to maintain and complete improvements to any Collaborative owned property or properties for which the Collaborative has a valid long term (5+ year) lease, **to acquire new facilities** and/or to acquire additional or replacement vehicles for the Collaborative van pool.
- 4) Any modification to the purpose of the Capital Reserve Account will require the approval of the SMEC Board and at least two-thirds (2/3) of the SMEC member school committees in accordance with current regulation.

# Facilities Update - December 12, 2025



# FHS Gable Project Summary



Project Duration: 2023-2025

Project Completion: 100%

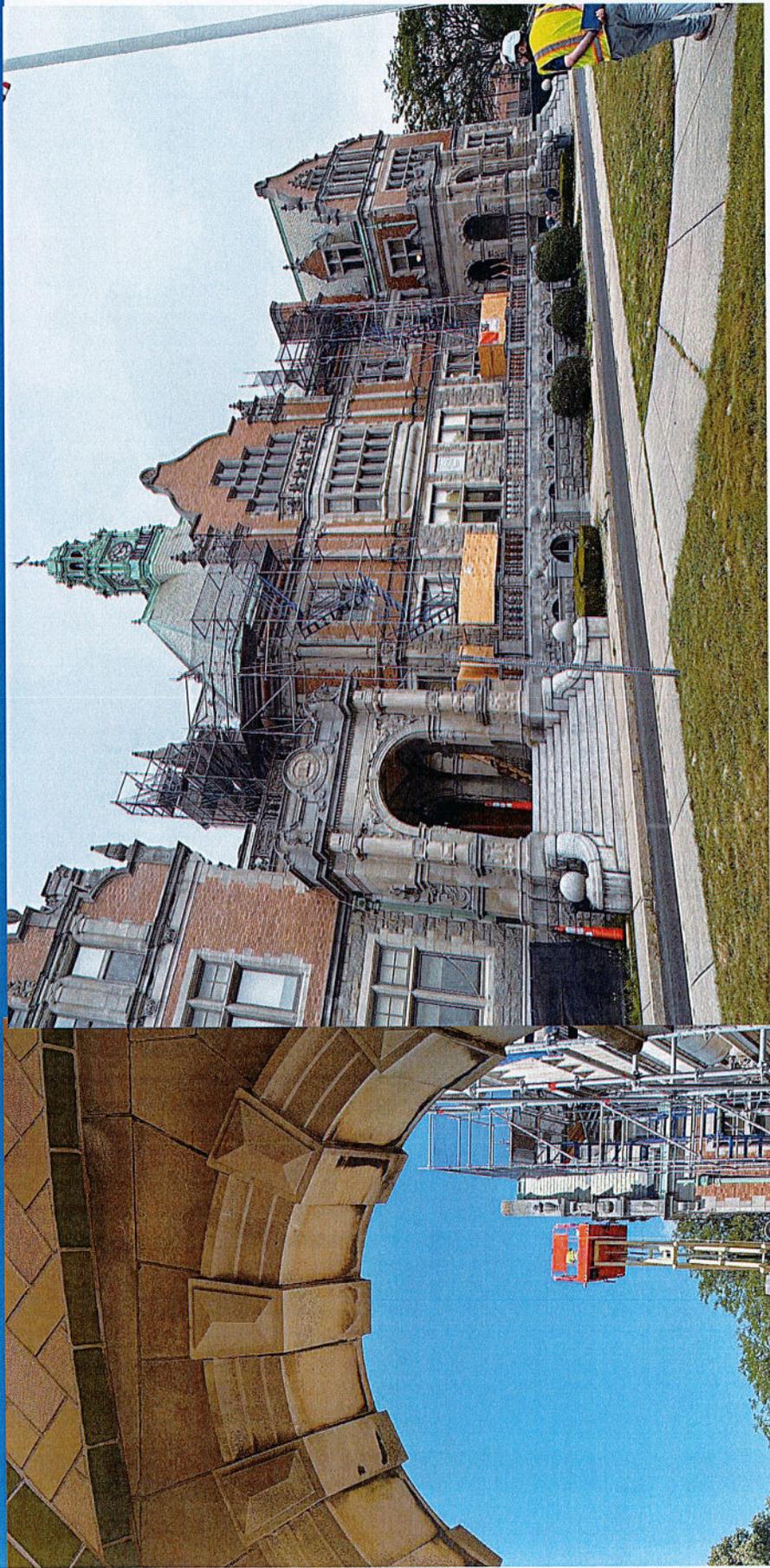
Project Allocation Approved by Town Meeting:  
\$2,275,000

Project Cost: \$2,134,296

The Waterproofing Company, RTA Architect  
Spencer Preservation Group



# FHS Gable Project



# FHS Gable Project - Connector/Water Infiltration Issues

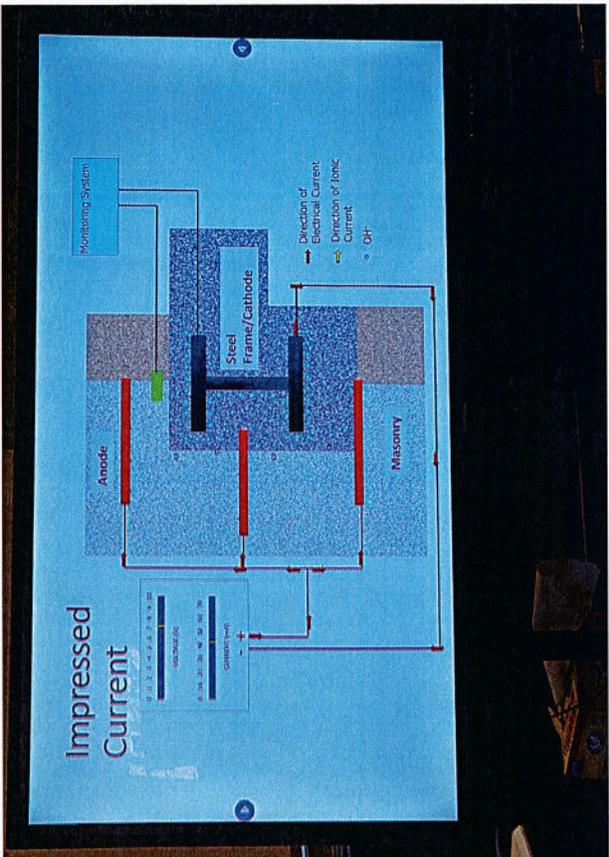


# FHS Gable Project - Cathodic Protection



November 19, 2025 - Cathodic Protection Training provided by Paul Noyce, Echem Consultants

Student Portal Active by January 2026



# Anode Zoning @ Fairhaven School (Total 4 Zones)

- Total Zones : 4 Zones [Each Zone independently wired]
- Anode Mesh
- Installation completed from the exterior of the building
- Two (2) Monitoring Cells per zone
- Three cathodes and Three positive at Zone 1&4
- Two cathodes and Two positive at Zone 2&3

**Zone 1** [Southwest Gable]

**Zone 2** [Auditorium Roof Gable West]

**Zone 3** [Auditorium Roof Gable East]

**Zone 4** [Southeast Gable]

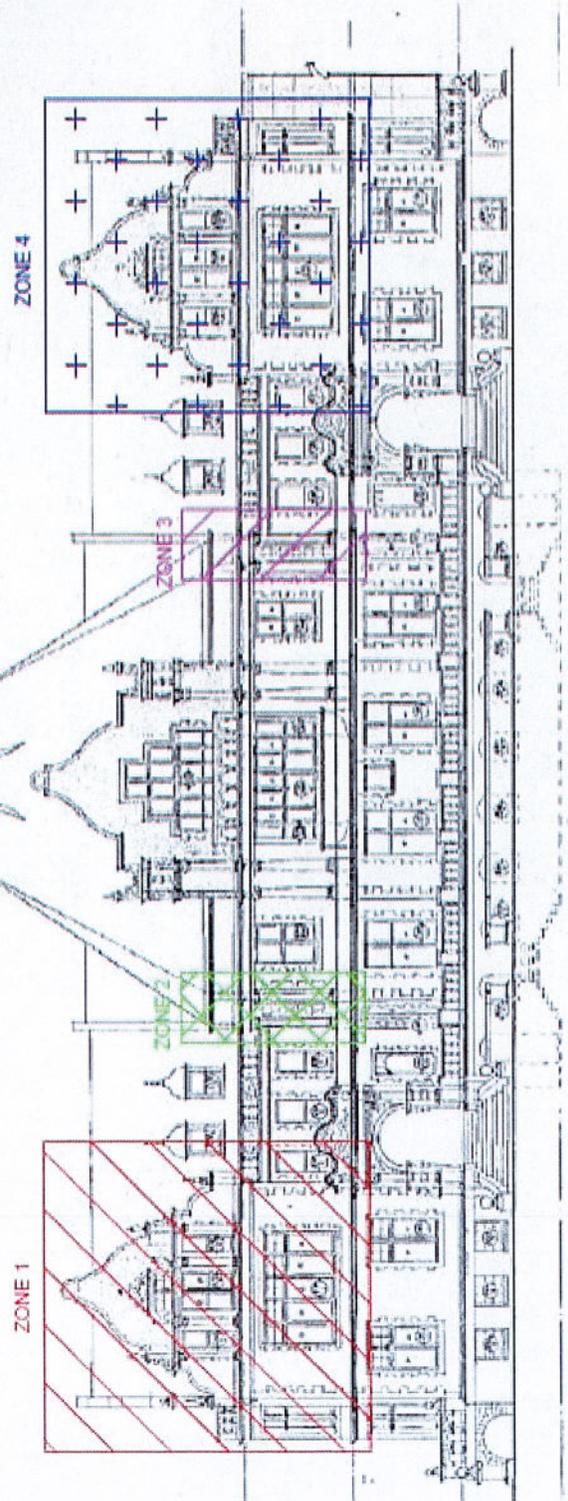


# Anode Zoning @ Fairhaven School (Total 4 Zones)

KEY:

<b>ZONE 1</b>		SOUTH WEST GABLE
<b>ZONE 2</b>		AUDITORIUM ROOF GABLE WEST - ADD ALTERNATE
<b>ZONE 3</b>		AUDITORIUM ROOF GABLE EAST - ADD ALTERNATE
<b>ZONE 4</b>		SOUTH EAST GABLE

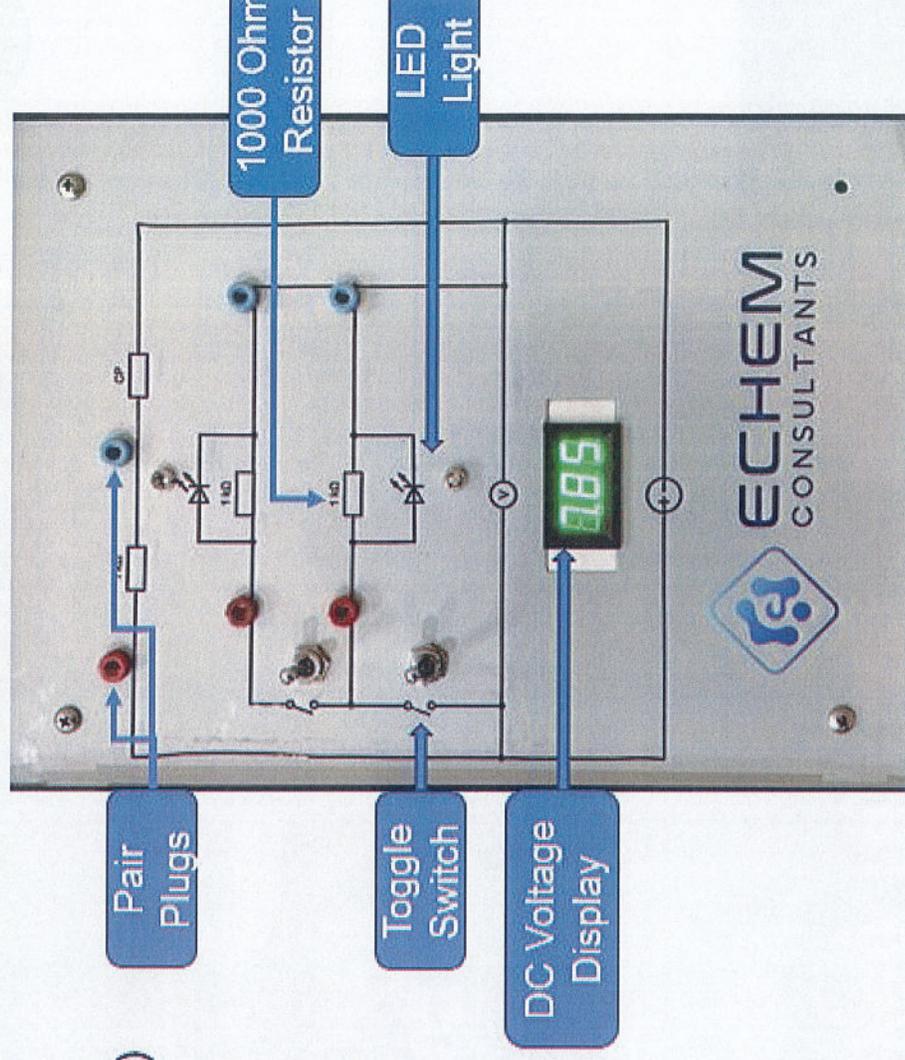
- Zone 1** [Southwest Gable]
- Zone 2** [Auditorium Roof Gable West]
- Zone 3** [Auditorium Roof Gable East]
- Zone 4** [Southeast Gable]



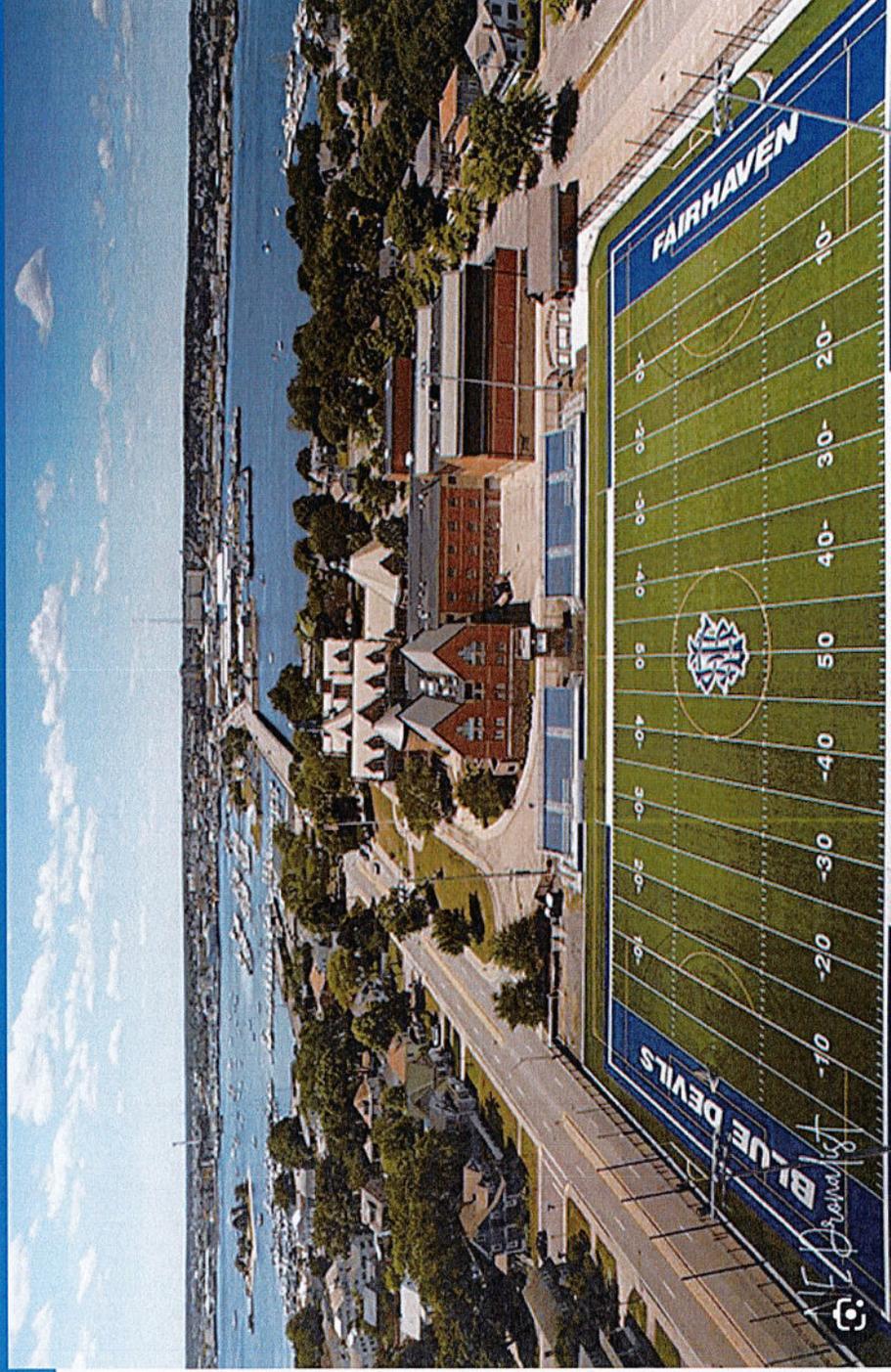
# Meet the Learning Panel

## Parts labeled:

- DC power source with LED voltage display (V)
- 1000 Ohm Resistor (For Calculating Current)
- Switches (to open/close current paths)
- Pair of plugs (for measuring Voltage across resistor)
- LED light (to visually show if there is current passing through)
- Outer loop connected to "CP" (real-world simulation)



# Thank you to the Fairhaven Taxpayers



**Thank you!**

**Fairhaven Taxpayers  
Greater New Bedford Voc-Tech**



# Acushnet's Rationale for exploring other schools



## TOWN OF ACUSHNET SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Mr. Ronald Houde, Chair  
Mrs. Melissa Cordeira, Vice Chair  
TEL. 508-998-0260 FAX 508-998-0262

FY26 Chapter 70 Aid:  
\$7,462,972

Both ORR and Apponequet have approached Acushnet about establishing new partnerships. Because Acushnet does not operate its own high school, the district is legally required to maintain at least one active agreement – but historically, the district has prioritized offering choice so families can select the school that best fits their student's needs.

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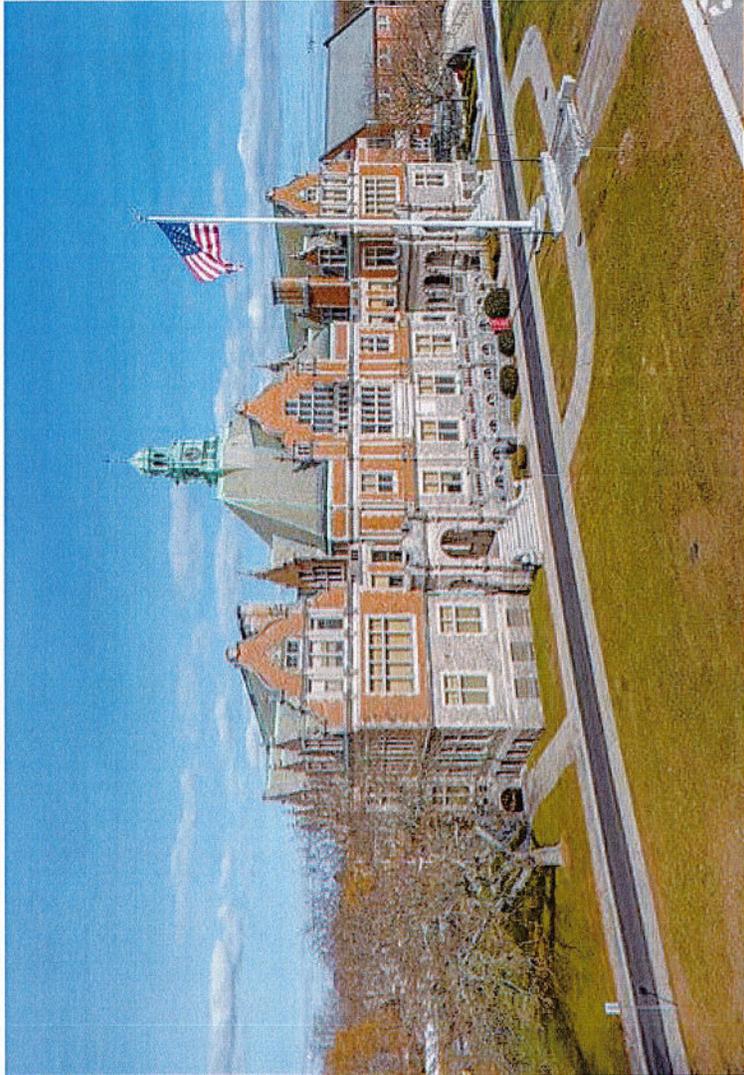
### 3. Why is this review necessary?

Acushnet currently pays more in high school tuition per student than the amount of Chapter 70 state aid the district receives for those same students. This imbalance puts pressure on the town's education budget and complicates long-term planning. The School Committee aims to secure future agreements that are both educationally strong and financially responsible.





	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26
<b>ACUSHNET</b>				
Chapter 70 Aid	6,469,222	7,170,330.00	7,292,322	7,461,972
Required Local	8,355,453.00	8,740,925.00	8,852,864.00	9,288,698.00
Required NSS	14,824,675.00	15,911,255.00	16,145,186.00	16,750,670.00
Foundation Budget Per Pupil	12,090.00	13,031.00	13,319.00	13,828.00
Amount Required NSS (Per Pupil)	12,436.81	13,031.33	13,764.01	14,810.50
Actual NSS	16,004,051.00	16,863,449.00		
Actual Per Pupil Exp	14,956.00	16,083.00	Pending	Pending
	<b>8% above NSS</b>	<b>6% above NSS</b>		
<b>FAIRHAVEN</b>				
Chapter 70 Aid	9,027,153.00	9,631,703.00	9,797,583.00	10,036,083.00
Required Local	13,273,418.00	14,136,790.00	14,889,430.00	15,860,855.00
Required NSS	22,300,571.00	23,768,493.00	24,687,013.00	25,896,938.00
Foundation Budget Per Pupil	13,282.00	14,327.00	14,795.00	15,425.00
Amount Required NSS (Per Pupil)	13,282.06	14,327.00	15,477.75	16,287.38
Actual NSS	23,409,914.00	24,346,238.00		
Actual Per Pupil Exp	16,788.00	18,260.00	Pending	Pending
	<b>5% Above NSS</b>	<b>2.4% above NSS</b>		



December 3, 2025

# Ambition-Perseverance-Integrity



## **PROFILE OF A LEARNER**

Students of FHS Will Develop the Skills They Need to be Successful

### **COLLABORATION**

Combining Ideas With One Another, Sharing a Goal

### **COMMUNICATION**

Making Your Thoughts Clear, Using Your Words, Drawings, or Writings, Listening to Others

### **CREATIVITY**

Using Your Imagination, Finding Original Solutions, Solving Problems or Developing an Idea, Being Flexible to Other Ideas

### **CRITICAL THINKING**

Looking at Things in Different Ways, Asking Questions to Find the Truth, Making Good Decisions That You Can Explain

### **CIVIC PARTICIPATION**

Developing Awareness, Contributing To Your Community In a Positive Way

# Current FHS Academic Opportunities

Fairhaven High School offers a comprehensive high school curriculum that is fully inclusive and accessible to all students and is complimented by its strong music, arts, and athletic programming.

Academic Offerings Include:

- College Preparatory and Honors Courses
- Advanced Placement Courses
  - Access to AP courses begins in grade 9.
- FHS was awarded an **Innovation Pathway Designation** from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the **Business and Finance Sector**.
- Innovation Pathways provide College and Career Learning Opportunities and immersive experiences via internships, capstone projects, **free dual enrollment opportunities, and industry-level credentials**.
- FHS is in the process of securing additional Innovation Pathway Designation in the **Health and Social Assistance and Environmental Sciences Sectors**.



# Academic Opportunities



**Fairhaven High School offers a total of 19 Advanced Placement Courses:**

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| AP Capstone Diploma Program              | AP Spanish             |
| AP Seminar                               | AP Drawing (2D and 3D) |
| AP Research                              | AP Photography         |
| AP Language and Composition              | AP Ceramics            |
| AP Literature and Composition            | AP Studio Art          |
| AP World History                         | AP Statistics          |
| AP United States History                 | AP Biology             |
| AP United States Government and Politics | AP Physics             |
| AP Economics                             | AP Chemistry           |
| AP Calculus AB and AP Calculus BC        |                        |

**\*FHS is currently in the process of expanding its AP Offerings beyond those currently offered.**



# Student Experience



# Clubs and Extracurricular Activities at FHS

FHS Offers 22 Clubs and Activities and more...

## Clubs:

Ambassadors Club  
Culture Club of America  
Media Club  
Yearbook Club  
Fishing Club  
Art Club  
Dungeons and Dragons Club  
Math Team

Interact Club  
Drama Club  
Gay Straight Alliance  
History Club  
Civil Rights Task Force  
Environmental Club

## Student Organizations:

Student Council  
Tri M Music Honor Society  
National Art Honor Society  
Band/Marching Band/Jazz Band  
Day of Service  
National Honor Society  
DECA  
Student Government

**\*Additional Enrichment Clubs and Organizations Offered Based on Student Interest**

**2025:** FPS is the first district in Massachusetts to receive a full District Accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

**2024:** FHS named a School of Recognition from the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for meeting or exceeding state accountability targets.

**2024:** FHS awarded an Innovation Pathway Designation by DESE in the Business & Finance Sector. (includes Dual Enrollment Courses through Bristol Community College

**2023:** FHS Football Team won the Division VI State Championship **2024:** Consecutive appearance in Title Game **2025:** Consecutive appearance in title game

**2023:** FHS received the Advanced Placement Access Award for expanding access for all students to AP courses starting in grade 9.

**2021:** FHS named a Nationally Recognized Unified Champion School and by the Massachusetts Special Olympics Unified Athletics and Inclusive Practices. **(4 consecutive years)**



# FHS Blue Devil Student Outcomes

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	Curry College	Rutgers University
Harvard University	East Carolina University	Sacred Heart University
Brown University	Endicott College	Salve Regina University
United States Naval Academy	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical Univ.	Seton Hall University
Rowdoin College	Fashion Institute of Technology	Simmons University
College of the Holy Cross	Florida State University	Stonehill College
Bentley University	Fordham University	Springfield College
Bowling Green University	Hofstra University	Suffolk University
Bridgewater State University	Ithaca College	Syracuse University
Bryant University	Loyola Marymount University	University of Alabama
Bryn Mawr College	Mass. College of Pharmacy	University of Connecticut
Bucknell University	Mass Art	UMASS Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth, Lowell
Clark University	Merrimack College	University of Miami
Coastal Carolina University	Northeastern University	University of New Hampshire
Colgate University	Penn State University	University of Mississippi
Providence College	Quinnipiac University	University of Rhode Island
University of South Carolina	University of Tampa	University of Texas (Austin)
Wesleyan University	West Virginia University	Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI)
Western New England University	Tufts University	Roger Williams University

# Facilities Update

# What the Future Holds for FHS

## *Grant Funded Opportunities and New Programming*

### 2025 Grant Funded Opportunities

**2025 Skills Capital Grant:** To design and implement the Finance Lab at FHS. Focus on Business, Economics, Personal Finance, etc.

**2025 Mass. Life Sciences Center:** \$74k to purchase state of the art equipment for all life sciences programs at FHS. Includes development of Pharmacology Program.

**2025: Innovation Career Pathway Implementation**

### New Innovation Pathways and Programs

**SY26: Innovation Career Pathway in Health and Human Services Sector**

**SY26: Innovation Career Pathway in the Environmental Science Sector (includes Dual Enrollment with UMASS Dartmouth)**

**SY26: CTE After Dark Partnership with New Bedford Voc-Tech in the Electrical Sector**

**SY26: Pharmacology Pathway (local) for FHS Students**



Project Duration: 2023-2025

Project Completion: 100%

Total Project Allocation: \$2,275,000

Total Project Cost: \$2,134,295.59

Under Allocation: \$140,704.41





