



Finance & Operations Committee

September 3, 2026

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

Board Members Present: Kehoe, Christenson, Tollefson, Westra, Sidhu, Vos

Meeting called to order: Kehoe 5:06 p.m. **District staff Present:** Merritt, Minnick, Malbon, Lents, Jory

Citizen Representatives: Roderique and DeMers **Others Present:** Rachel Hayes, Steve Gentilia

Public Comments - Rachel Hayes of CAPES spoke regarding the processing error that resulted in the Sinking Fund proposal not appearing on the November ballot. She requested a clear explanation of where the process broke down and what steps will be put in place to prevent a similar issue in the future.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes - The June 18, 2026 meeting minutes were approved.

Sinking Fund Discussion - The committee reviewed the next possible election dates for a Sinking Fund proposal: May, August, or November. Members also discussed the timing of a future bond proposal. The debt levy for the 2020 bond is expected to fall below 4.0 mills in July 2029, which may create an opportunity to consider a new bond election in November 2028. Holding the bond election at that time would also leave the following May available if a second attempt were needed.

The estimated cost of placing an initiative on the ballot is approximately \$100,000 to \$150,000. The district would also have costs for a factual public-information campaign, including printed and electronic materials. It was noted that capital funds may be available to cover certain election costs if an initiative is unsuccessful.

Member Kehoe said the two most practical Sinking Fund options appear to be May 2027 or November 2028. Board members discussed community concerns, current facility needs, and the importance of clearly explaining how funds would be used. Mr. Roderique agreed to update the economic presentation he previously shared with the committee and bring it back for review. The Board will continue the discussion during a workshop following the September 8 Board meeting. Materials requested for that discussion include the three election-date options, filing and Board-action deadlines, estimated election and communication costs, the timing of tax collections, funding options, current building needs, and the prior community survey questions and results.

The Board may also discuss whether another community survey is needed. A new survey would take approximately 30 days. Members Sidhu and Kehoe said they would not want a survey conducted before the November midterm election because it could create confusion. Superintendent Merritt noted that ballot language can be filed promptly once the Board selects a date and approves the necessary action.

Added Topic: HVAC Issues at Buildings - Mr. Lents provided an update on the heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning problems experienced during the first week of school. He explained that several unrelated equipment failures occurred at approximately the same time during extreme heat and humidity, followed by storm-related power issues.

Building	Update
Plymouth High School	An aging HVAC unit serving the office and nearby classrooms experienced problems during the extreme heat. Repairs were made and the unit was operating again. The system is scheduled for replacement as part of upcoming bond work.
Canton High School	
Salem High School	Several HVAC issues occurred at the same time during the extreme heat. Repairs were made and cooling was restored, with staff continuing to monitor the system and address remaining repairs.
West Middle School	Fuses and power problems affected an HVAC unit. The building was also affected by storm-related power issues.
Farrand	The building was affected by storm-related power outages.
Bird	The building was affected by storm-related power outages.
Field	Two units experienced motor failures.
Eriksson	Units needed to be reset following a power surge.
Workman	The chiller was cooling but was not performing at the expected level.
Hulsing	A new unit shut down following a brownout. Because the unit remains under warranty, Carrier must complete the service work.

Mr. Lents said district staff and outside vendors had been working through the issues based on urgency. He also explained that systems are typically started before staff return, but this summer's construction schedule was unusually compressed. Many of the district's systems are more than 20 years old, and the district has tried to extend their useful life while prioritizing available capital dollars. The recent failures show the need for continued investment in major building systems.

Board members emphasized the need for timely, plain-language communication when building problems occur. Member Sidhu suggested a districtwide public update. Mr. Gentilia agreed that information should come directly from central administration rather than leaving building principals and staff to answer questions without the full details. Members also asked that future communications explain what happened, what temporary steps were taken, what the permanent solution will be, and when the work is expected to be completed.

Board members also discussed the importance of providing context around the district's facility needs. It was noted that the district has tried to be fiscally responsible by extending the useful life of equipment when practical, rather than automatically replacing systems based on age alone. Members felt it is important for the community to understand that the district has continued to maintain its facilities, prioritize needs, and make the best use of available resources.

The committee also supported clearer, more proactive communication from the Superintendent or central administration. Members suggested easy-to-understand updates that explain what has happened, what is being done, what work has been completed, and what facility needs remain, so families receive consistent and accurate information.

Additional Facility Updates - The committee received an update on two concerns raised previously. The Starkweather sign was observed while it was still under construction; the incomplete lettering has since been removed and the new sign is in place.

The large "S" on the Salem gym floor was installed in the wrong orientation. The contractor is responsible for correcting the work and covering the cost. Because the gym is now heavily scheduled, the district is working with the APAA and project team to identify a time for the repair. Community member requested that the affected school community be told what occurred, why the gym was opened before the correction, and when the repair is expected to take place.

Adjournment: 6:55 p.m.