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## Group to press state to fund Eli Whitney rehab

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By Ann DeMatteo, Assistant Metro Editor

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HAMDEN — A grass-roots effort has begun to get state officials to approve funding to renovate Eli Whitney Technical High School.

About 50 students, teachers, parents and alumni attended a meeting at the school on Jones Road Wednesday night, and decided they would start a letter and phone campaign to draw attention to the need for renovations.

Among the alumni who attended was Ed Jolley, who learned the machine trade at Eli Whitney in the 1960s. Through his former company, Sargent's, donations of equipment have been made to the school. The condition of the school bothers him, and the 1963 graduate said he's willing to do what's necessary.

"I feel badly. I had no idea it was so bad," said Ellen Anderson, whose grandson is a freshman who loves the school.

But while students like the school, they complain about outdated equipment in their shops, not enough money for sports uniforms and equipment, broken showers in the locker rooms, tile breaking off the walls in a girl's bathroom, roaches, broken toilets, water leaks and cold air in classrooms. Other parts of the building are stifling.

"It's a drag coming to school here every day," said Kasey Brumell, 17, a senior cosmetology major from New Haven. "It makes me mad. I feel like I got cheated out of my four years of high school."

Shalease Lewis, 17, a senior carpentry major from New Haven, said her class wrote to Gov. M. Jodi Rell two years ago, and the governor at the time said she would try to get the school renovated.

The General Assembly authorized renovations for Eli Whitney in 2002 at a cost of \$54.4 million. Since then, the estimated cost increased to \$98 million in 2008, the last time the project was authorized.

But people like Rick Tanasi, president of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers, is wondering where the \$98 million went.

"I'm fully aware of the budget problems, but the timing of this isn't right," said Tanasi, who ran Wednesday night's meeting.

Leo Canty, second vice president of the Connecticut branch of the American Federation for Teachers, said that contact from parents and students is what's going to make state officials take notice.

Pat Ciccone, interim superintendent of Connecticut's technical high schools, has said that Eli Whitney has been on a priority list, and that in 2010, Eli Whitney will be first on the list, along with H.H. Ellis Technical High School in Danielson. Eli Whitney hasn't been substantially updated since 1980.

Under the plan, new academic and trade wings would be built. The school would get a new media center, fitness center and auditorium. The roof and exterior doors and windows would be replaced.

Thomas Murphy, a spokesman for the state Department of Education, has said the governor's budget as a result of the state's economic crisis required the technical high school system to delay construction on five projects, including Eli Whitney.

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