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## Tech school urges repairs

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By Ann DeMatteo, Assistant Metro Editor

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HAMDEN — The breakfast was grand, and the plea grander still.

Students and staff of Eli Whitney Technical High School want to know what's happened to the state bond money that was promised to renovate their Jones Road school.

So they held a breakfast for local legislators last week, hoping to get them on their side.

The school's culinary department presented yogurt and fruit, eggs Benedict on a bacon biscuit, potato pancake and blueberry crepe as part of the fare. Students then took legislators on a tour of the school.

Gonzalo Gatica, head of the culinary department, explained that students had a role in food preparation, getting the dining room ready and serving the customers.

"Six years ago, we started with a very small program, 30 students. Now we have 90 students and three instructors," Gatica said.

Principal Steve Anderson said that despite the fact students learn in a 1956 building, their Connecticut Academic Performance Test scores are higher than their New Haven public school counterparts. He says he makes the comparison because 90 percent of Eli Whitney students live in New Haven. They performed better even though they have academics only 90 days of the school year; the other 90 days they are learning in hands-on laboratory settings.

"One of the reasons they're succeeding is our teachers here are dedicated. We're asking for support to bring our building up to where it needs to be," Anderson said.

"They've done a remarkable job to keep the building clean and safe, but we're at the breakpoint. We need your help," said Rick Tanasi, president of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers. "I hope when the session starts you can look at the future."

Among the problems are outdated equipment shop areas, broken showers in the locker rooms, roaches, broken toilets, water leaks and cold or stifling air in classrooms. State Sen. Joseph J. Crisco, D-Woodbridge, said that contract documents were delivered in April 2008, but the bid process was delayed pending resolution of the state budget. "I don't know which budget," Crisco said.

Besides Crisco, state Reps. Elizabeth Esty, D-Cheshire, J. Brendan Sharkey, D-Hamden, and Peter F. Villano, D-Hamden, attended, as well as Toni Walker, D-New Haven, and Gary Holder-Winfield, D-New Haven. Legislators brainstormed over whether federal stimulus money earmarked for energy efficiencies could supplant energy improvements that were part of the

original bond request.

Legislators agreed that they would form a working group to push the renovations to the forefront at the Capitol. According to Crisco, the legislature's Education Committee is having an informational forum on vo-tech schools at 3:30 p.m. Monday at the Legislative Office Building.

Rob Simmons, who is seeking the Republican nomination to run for Congress, said that he is a firm believer in vocational education. He said he is "appalled" at the postponement of the Eli Whitney renovations. "I am impressed with the faculty and students and they deserve better."

The union has been asking how Eli Whitney, in the pipeline for repair since 2002, has been left behind while other technical high schools have been fixed up. It is supposed to be at the top of the list this year. Eli Whitney's renovation was approved by the General Assembly in 2002, and legislators authorized \$74.3 million for the work in 2006.

The cost has since jumped to \$98 million.

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