

FRANKFORT COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT #168

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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

Friday, September 18, 2026

West Frankfort Electrical Fire Incident Brings Other Needs into Focus

Thursday morning's electrical fire in the elevator equipment room at Frankfort Community High School highlighted a growing issue with school facilities across the state. While the ages of the buildings are obvious, it is the age of renovated systems in these buildings that is a growing issue. School leaders have to decide when the cost of repair and upgrades in older facilities becomes a losing investment in the long term.

While FCHS opened in 1921 with an addition in 1938, the elevator was one of the "newer" systems and is already 40 years old. Just in the last few years, the district has spent \$327,131 on a partial roof replacement, \$72,893 for tuckpointing, and is currently replacing a boiler installed around 1998 for \$133,900. While these systems don't have to last another 100 years, there are concerns that the funds could be better spent on overall facility upgrades and renovations.

The School District had some hope in 2019 when the General Assembly passed a School Construction Task Force as part of the other Capital Bill process that has funded much needed improvements in roads and other infrastructure. District 168 worked to have things in place to be "shovel ready" and move forward. They had already been on the 2004 School Construction List, but the state stopped funding that in 2013 with the 2003 list. While the pandemic caused a bit of disruption, it did allow some improvements at other buildings in the district, just not enough for a renovation project for its flagship building. Like many school district across the state, the District has relied on state or federal help with school construction going all of the way back to WPA programs during the Great Depression.

While the results of Thursday's incident were positive with all students and staff evacuating safely, the bigger questions about school and public facility maintenance and improvements remain. Frankfort CUSD 168 leaders will continue to work to find solutions to those problems.

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