

All 19 public schools in Cherry Hill are getting upgrades. Here's how the bond-funded projects are going.

Cherry Hill is making changes to its schools after voters approved a bond referendum in 2022.



Cherry Hill School District director of facilities Steve Nicolella (from left); Joseph D. Sharp Elementary School principal Ric Miscloscia; and district assistant director of operations and facilities DaveRead more

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by Melanie Burney

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[Cherry Hill](#) voters made history in October 2022 when they overwhelmingly approved a \$363 million school bond referendum, one of the largest ever in New Jersey.

The referendum was touted as a game-changer to fund much needed facilities improvements in one of the largest districts in South Jersey. Voters had last approved a referendum in 1999 for \$52 million.

[It was the largest single school bond referendum in New Jersey in at least a decade.](#) It added about \$400 in new annual property taxes on a home assessed at the township average of \$226,400.

Then-Superintendent Joseph Meloche called the referendum “a once-in-a-generation opportunity” to change the landscape in [Cherry Hill](#) when it was approved. The district enrolls about 11,000 students in 19 schools — all of which are getting improvements.

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Slated to take several years to complete, the projects include building additions, repairing leaky roofs, upgrading plumbing and electrical equipment, building security vestibules, and replacing window, doors, and HVAC systems.



Construction is underway on a new all-purpose room at Joseph D. Sharp Elementary School in Cherry Hill. The work is funded by a \$363 million bond referendum approved by the district's voters in 2022.
Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

There are signs of construction around the sprawling [Camden County](#) community of 70,000 as the projects are being completed in phases.

“We’re spreading the projects around so every building is seeing some improvements,” said Lynn Shugars, the district’s business administrator. “There are a lot of moving parts.”

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Here’s a look at the bond referendum projects, what has been completed and what’s ahead.

What has happened since the bond referendum was approved?

Work began in the summer of 2023 with roofing projects at 10 schools, Shugars said. Cherry Hill High School East also got improvements, and a stadium and playgrounds were replaced at Harte and Paine Elementary schools, she said. Carpeting and locker room projects were completed at Rosa International Middle School, which is also getting a new security vestibule.

Shugars said the first round of HVAC projects were completed, with a second slated for this year. Getting the HVAC equipment has been difficult, and there is concern that [President Donald Trump’s tariff plan](#) may impact the availability and cost of equipment, she said.

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Last summer, a four-year project began at John A. Carusi Middle School, which will include asbestos removal this summer when the building is empty, Shugars

said.

This fall at Carusi, the district will work on installing an all-purpose room and temporary classrooms to relocate students during some of the work, Shugars said. Later phases call for renovating the music and cafeteria suites, the media center, and adjacent rooms. The work is expected to run through the spring of 2028.

What additions are elementary schools getting?

At Sharp Elementary, where crews were busy last week working on an all-purpose room addition, Principal Ric Miscioscia smiled broadly when he got his first look inside. It is twice the size of the current facility and will include a full-sized gym, and an elaborate theatrical stage with house lighting, an automated screen, and projector.

“It’s huge,” the principal said. He envisions hosting productions and sporting events in the all-purpose room. A separate entrance will allow for community use, too. It is slated for completion by late spring or early summer.

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Miscioscia said the construction has fascinated students watching the building progress. Crews had to install a road to access the site, digging up soil and bringing in heavy equipment.

“To them it looks like a big Lego project,” he said.

The Sharp all-purpose room is one of six under construction. The other elementary schools also getting the additions are: Barton, Mann, Johnson, Knight, and Kingston.

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To keep costs down, the district is building the all-purpose rooms using the same specifications and materials from ceiling tiles to door knobs, said Steve Nicolella, facilities director. That will make it easier to maintain the facilities and stock replacement parts, he said.

“Everything is the same,” Nicolella said. The gym floors will be color coded for each school with its logo in center court.



Principal Ric Miscioscia enters the construction site to get his first look in a few months at the progress of the new all-purpose room and gym at Joseph D. Sharp Elementary School in Cherry Hill last [Read more](#)
Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

What's next for the projects?

Permits have been submitted for additions and renovations at Rosa. Design work is underway for Beck Middle School, including renovations to the front entrance. At Cherry Hill High School West, work is set to begin on ADA accessibility and lighting work at the stadium.

Next on the list are a front parking lot and playground at Cooper Elementary, a parking lot at Beck Middle School, an auditorium at East high school in 2026, and in 2027 a wing at East and an auditorium at West. Beck is also getting a new security vestibule.



Cherry Hill School District director of facilities Steve Nicolella (hidden) demonstrates the lowering of the panel screen to divide the almost completed new all-purpose room and gym at Kingston Elem [Read more](#)

How long will the work take to complete?

Shugars said it will likely take seven years to finish the work. Supply chain delays have affected some projects, she said. And inclement weather has slowed down work at times, said Dave Nuzzie, assistant director of facilities and operations.

Nicolella said the construction team meets at least weekly to get updates. Crews are currently working on 12 projects simultaneously. Some work is done during a second shift when students and staff are not present, he said.

“We have 19 buildings and they all need a lot of work,” Shugars said.

What is the fiscal impact?

The bond will be paid off over 20 years, with the state contributing \$113 million, about 40% of the total authorized. That means that homeowners would pay the \$400 average annual tax increase to cover the bond through 2043, as well as any additional increases sought by the district.


Shugars said the district has sold \$300 million of the \$363 million authorized by the bond. A bond referendum allows districts to pay for projects that cannot readily be funded through their annual operating budgets.

“It is absolutely an investment,” Shugars said.



The new playground and all-purpose room attached to Kingston Elementary School in Cherry Hill.



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I write about education in New Jersey, focusing on issues and trends that shape learning for the state's K-12 students in public and charter schools.
