

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need to build new schools?

Five of our schools were built 80 or more years ago. They were built when our city looked very different, our population was different and educational programs were very different. Over the years we have modified these older schools and added to them to make them fit our changing needs. However, there comes a time when you can't retrofit any longer without experiencing an unreasonable expense. We have reached that point. It simply is not fiscally prudent to invest the kind of money that it would take in these old schools. It is time to use them for something else and build new schools.

Why K-8 schools?

As long as we are going to build new schools, K-8 schools are a very efficient and effective grade configuration. They can be constructed to keep the older students separated from younger students except for planned activities. At the same time they offer the advantage of continuity, of having students remain on the same campus for nine years.

Why build a school for 900 students?

There are very practical reasons for building a school of 900 students. If a school is to replace O'Connell and Bingham schools, it must have the capacity to house 600 students in grades K through 5 (the current combined enrollment of these two schools). When you add grades 6, 7, and 8 to the school you need to have a capacity of 100 students at each grade level so that all students can remain in the school. This totals 900 students. With modern construction techniques and good planning this school can be made to function like much smaller schools. As discussed above, there will be a primary wing housing

grades K-3, and upper elementary wing housing grades 4-5 and an intermediate wing housing grades 6-8. Each of these areas would be smaller than any other school in Bristol. Students would spend most of their day in their wing and only interact when planned. In fact, a 900 pupil properly planned and constructed school would actually feel like a much smaller school to the students than those they are currently attending.

It is true that many, many years ago all of Bristol's schools were K-8. Then in the 60's, 70's and 80's we had a combination of K-6 schools and K-8 schools. Bristol's K-8 schools ranged in size from 750 to 1085 in the 70's. In the 1980's, the concept of middle schools literally swept the nation. The theory is that the needs of students of that age group, (11-13), are so unique that they would be better served in a separate facility that could be specifically designed for them. This had great appeal and the K-5, 6-8, 9-12 grade configuration is now, by far the most common in the nation and state. Bristol followed this national trend.

Education, like many fields is constantly changing, with trends coming and going based upon what well meaning people really believe is best for students at the time. The fact is how you arrange grades in a school or system is far from the most important factor in determining how students are going to perform. We all know that the quality of the teacher standing in front of the class is the most important variable. Since we have to build new schools, K-8 makes sense because it is more efficient and the Board of Education truly believes that it is better to have students of that age (11-13) in smaller groups at K-8 buildings than in groups of up to 1,000 together in large middle schools.

If we don't do anything, what will happen?

The longer we wait to address the issue of aging schools the more it is going to cost. This cost will occur in two ways. First, we will have to invest more and more in keeping these schools functioning as places where you can house hundreds of children. This means new roofs, electrical service, plumbing, etc. The second expense will come from inflation driving up the cost of new construction. Our consultants estimate that each year the City waits to build new schools adds approximately 7% to the cost of construction. [\$7-\$8 million each year of delay].

Will transportation costs increase?

Transportation costs will increase. As we eventually close four older schools and replace them with two larger schools, the busing areas will increase. If walking distances remain the same for grades K-5 and 6-8, the increase in transportation will not be significant.

Why don't we renovate the old schools rather than build new ones?

The four schools that will be replaced were all built prior to 1930. They have certainly served Bristol well, but lack the amenities necessary for today's instructional models. The cost to renovate these older buildings would be more than building new ones. The renovated buildings would still have site problems and inefficiencies that exist in their present locations. Some of these deficiencies include inadequate parking, inadequate or non-existent playground areas, space constraints which do not allow for computer labs or media center, lack of accessibility for special needs students and visitors, and heating.

How much is this going to cost?

The cost for two new K-8 schools will probably end up in the \$110 to \$115 million cost range depending on when construction starts. At this time, Bristol is reimbursed for approximately 70% of the cost by the state leaving the city with a cost of \$33 to \$35 million dollars.

Why are we moving so quickly on this?

Actually the need to close some of our older school has been in discussion for more than 10 years. The Board of Education has twice convened committees to look at the future facility needs of our students. A similar plan was sent to the City Council four years ago, but was not acted upon as some members of the City Council did not think it was a viable plan.

Won't it be a problem having Kindergarten and eighth grade students in the same building?

The design of the new school would include separate entrances and wings for primary and intermediate students. Further, there will be separate cafeteria, physical education and laboratory facilities designed appropriately for the age group they serve.

Won't it be a problem having Kindergarten and eighth grade students on the same bus?

At this time, we expect to run buses at staggered times, busing grades K-5 separately from grades 6-8.

When the new schools are built, will we have to redistrict students?

Yes. Redistricting will have to take place throughout the city. It would not be appropriate to plan this redistricting until one year prior to the schools opening.

Is there a plan to change all of our school to K-8?

The Board of Education would like to do that, but it may not be feasible. However, after this first phase, three other existing facilities may be converted to K-8's. Since this would be 10 to 15 years in the future the Board of Education does not feel it would be appropriate to develop more specific plans at this time.

How does the process work?

Both state law and local ordinances govern the process of building a new school. Simply put, the process is:

1. The City Council votes to form a Building Committee.
2. One member of the Building Committee is appointed from the City Council, Board of Finance and Board of Education.
3. These three members select six additional members.
4. The City Council votes to approve the six additional members.
5. The Board of Education approves education specifications for the project.
6. The School Building Committee approves the educational specifications and estimated cost of the project.
7. The City Council and Board of Finance vote to approve the city's share of the estimated cost.
8. The Superintendent files the application with the state.

How long will it take to get the new schools built?

From the time the application is submitted to the state it will take at least 5 years before construction is completed.

How can I stay informed on what is happening with the facilities issue?

The Board of Education will post all agendas and minutes from the School Building Committees on its website and publicize the meetings in the newspapers and on the City website. The Board of Education will also have a standing agenda item on its monthly agenda. The Board of Education meetings are televised on Channel 19.

It is also our hope that the City Council will deliver regular updates at their monthly meetings.



Mission Statement

To maintain a safe and secure learning environment that provides all students with the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully complete college, other post high school education or training.



Building The Future

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INTRODUCTION

The Bristol Board of Education is recommending that Bristol construct two new K-8 schools and close four of the city's oldest schools – O'Connell (1913), Bingham (1916), Greene-Hills (1922) and Memorial Boulevard (1927).

The quality of a school system is one of the most important measures of a community's quality of life. The quality of a school system is created by many factors - teachers, curriculum, supportive parents, facilities, etc.

One important factor is the quality of the school buildings in the system. The four buildings listed above were built to very high standards, have been well maintained and have served generations of students in the city. The time has come to discontinue their use as schools and replace them with facilities, current with today's education programs; just as the town had to close buildings 80+ years ago when these buildings were erected. There is no better public demonstration of a community's support of a high quality education system for its children than to house that system in state-of-the-art facilities.

What follows are the most common questions that have arisen about the our facility plan and our best answers.

We would like to thank the Parent Advisory Council for their assistance in the production of this document.

Barbara Y. Doyle

Barbara Y. Doyle, Chairman
Bristol Board of Education