

W. Edward Balmer Elementary School Northbridge Public Schools

FAQs

1. Why did the Town perform a Feasibility Study?

The 50-year-old Balmer Elementary School has served the community well, but it:

- is undersized by about 25%
- no longer meets today's building codes
- lacks handicapped accessibility to the second level
- has inefficient and unreliable building systems
- does not support our educational curriculum

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) agrees. The School Building Committee (SBC) studied these conditions and developed a cost effective, sustainable, and educationally appropriate Preferred Solution. The team investigated renovation, renovation and addition, and new construction options, focused on these criteria:

- cost
- educational benefits
- size/scale of building
- minimizing disruption during construction
- community access
- transportation
- safety and security

2. Why was a grade PreK-5 elementary school for 1,030 student selected as the Preferred Solution?

Consolidating Northbridge Elementary and Balmer into one new facility and bringing the 5th grade back to the elementary setting, will:

- lower costs by consolidating two outdated buildings
- provide better curriculum alignment
- create fewer building transitions
- allow more uniform expectations of the students
- create opportunities for multi-age learning
- allow better teacher/administrator communication
- place 5th graders where they belong developmentally
- free up space in the middle school

3. What will happen to the Northbridge Elementary School?

The Northbridge Elementary School has served the community well for over 66 years. The school will be reverted back to the Town for sale or repurposing.

4. What will happen to the Middle School?

Creating a 6-8 middle school will allow teachers and staff to more intentionally focus curriculum, programs, and activities to meet the unique needs of early adolescent learners. The School Building Committee is reviewing options for the space vacated by the fifth grade students. Some of the options being reviewed are relocating Central Office to the Middle School, relocating students out of the 1905 wing and closing the 1905 wing.

5. What options were studied?

Ten design alternatives were discussed and evaluated over the course of twenty (20) School Building Committee meetings, several Northbridge Academic Leadership Team meetings, and six (6) community forums. The committee focused on the following criteria when developing the options: educational benefits, size of building, cost, minimal disruption during construction, community access, transportation, and student transitions. The ten design alternatives explored were comprised of two repair only options, two renovation and addition options and six all new construction options.

6. How long has the Feasibility Study been underway?

In 2009, the Selectmen and School Committee submitted a Statement of Interest (SOI) for the W. Edward Balmer Elementary School to the MSBA requesting to be admitted into the MSBA's grant program. In March 2016, the MSBA agreed that a Feasibility Study should be undertaken on the Balmer School. The Town and the MSBA executed an agreement for the Feasibility Study in November 2016 which has been overseen by the School Building Committee since that time.

7. What is the role of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)

The MSBA is the state authority that administers and funds a program of grants for Massachusetts school projects. The MSBA mandates a rigorous multi-step Feasibility Study and approval process be undertaken in order to receive a grant. The MSBA will provide Northbridge a grant of up to 63.78% of eligible Feasibility Study, Design and Construction costs.

8. Why not just repair the Balmer School?

The cost to Northbridge to only repair the aged Balmer and NES buildings is approximately \$53 million, similar to the cost to the Town for new construction or a complete renovation and addition. These repairs provide no educational improvements, do not meet the District's educational program, and the cost would be 100% borne by Northbridge. Additionally, only repairing the two aged schools will leave the Town with two schools that are undersized and do not support the educational curriculum.

9. Why should the 5th grade be returned to the elementary school?

Moving the fifth grade to a PreK-5 school eases student transition to middle school. Fifth grade students are more developmentally age-appropriate to an elementary setting and are more like their elementary peers than their middle school peers. Additionally, much of the

Town's curriculum matches the grade bands PreK-5 and 6-8, evident in the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks.

10. What is the total project cost?

The total project cost is \$100.97 million with an estimated cost to Northbridge of \$53.41 million after the MSBA grant.

11. What is included in the total project cost?

The total project cost estimate includes all construction costs - site work, playgrounds, and demolition of the existing school. It also includes building fees, construction-related testing costs, construction contingencies and new furniture and educational technology equipment.

12. Will the MSBA share in the cost of the project?

Yes, the MSBA will provide a grant of approximately \$47.56 million to the Town.

13. What is the tax impact?

The tax impact will be approximately \$1.85 per \$1,000 of assessed residential value. On an average home assessed at \$301,000, that equates to \$558 per year, which is equal to \$46.50 per month or \$1.52 per day.

14. Can the new school option be reduced in size?

In order to provide the educational spaces needed for our projected student enrollment and meet the MSBA requirements, the new school must be sized as it is in the proposed project.

15. Is now the right time to build?

Due to a slowly improving economy, borrowing costs are still at historic lows and, due to the very competitive building climate, construction costs remain low. These costs, however, are currently on the rise and a delay will increase project costs. While we do have a commitment from MSBA for 63.78% of eligible costs for this project, there is no guarantee of this level of State grant should the project not pass and be required to start over.

16. What if the project is not approved by the Town?

The Town would miss the opportunity to receive nearly \$50 million in State grant funding to resolve the deteriorating conditions of the 50-year-old W. Edward Balmer Elementary School and 66-year-old Northbridge Elementary School.

17. If the new building does not pass, can we use the State money to just repair the existing building?

No, the Town would need to submit a new application for a building or limited repair project (roof, windows and boilers only) for consideration and acceptance into MSBA's grant program. The limited repair would only address a small portion of the total amount of repairs needed, and does not include any educational improvements. The School Building Committee does not consider this to be a cost- effective long-term solution.

18. When will the Town be voting to approve the project?

The Town will vote to approve the project funding at the October 23, 2018 Fall Town Meeting. The debt exclusion ballot vote will be held on November 6, 2018 to approve the exclusion of the debt of the project costs from the so-called Proposition 2½.

19. If the project is approved, what is the schedule?

The project moves into the detailed design phases, where the Architect develops the design and construction bid documents. Construction would start in Fall 2019 with the new school opening in the summer of 2021.

20. Will ongoing use of Balmer Elementary be impacted during construction of the new school?

There will be separation between construction activity and the day-to-day functions of the existing school to ensure safety and to limit educational disruptions. A fenced-off construction zone, with dedicated construction vehicle access, will be constantly monitored for safety.

21. Will there be a Ballot Question Committee or PAC, in support of the project?

Yes, a Ballot Question Committee has been formed to support the ballot question. This group would operate separate from the School Building Committee.

For questions and comments, please email: sbc@nps.org

**For additional information, please visit the project website at:
<https://www.nps.org/sbc>**