

Frequently Asked Questions About the Ocean Avenue School Project May 2008

1. Why does Portland need a new elementary school when enrollment is dropping?

Education has changed significantly over the last 50 years. Today we are committed to *assuring that ALL students are learning for their futures*. As students' learning needs have become more complex, the educational facilities needs have changed (especially technology needs.) Recent laws also dictate that schools provide services (including Special Education, English Language Learners, elementary school libraries, etc.) that were not part of public education 50 years ago, further expanding space needs.

In the most recent round of appropriations for school construction, the Maine Department of Education placed the Nathan Clifford Elementary School first on the list for state-funded replacement. Accepting these funds enables Portland to build an energy-efficient school with lower maintenance costs that will serve Portland children well into the future.

2. How much will the school cost? Who is footing the bill?

The Ocean Avenue School Bond Referendum question asks Portland voters to approve a ballot question authorizing the city to float \$19.6 million in bonds to fund the new school **that will be reimbursed by the state.**

It is expected that \$60,000 of local funds will be spent to extend air conditioning to the Functional Life Skills (FLS) classrooms. FLS students are the most severely handicapped students and often are medically fragile. FLS students attend summer school in July and August and cannot tolerate the heat without risking life-threatening medical consequences.

State funding does include air conditioning in the new school's library, computer lab, and administrative offices

3. I live in another part of Portland. How will this school benefit my family?

Over the long term, as Portland residents, we all benefit from strong and vibrant public schools. Quality public education drives economic development and attracts young families to our city – a key to our future.

Shorter term, closing Nathan Clifford and opening the new school will reduce maintenance and operating costs. Those dollars can then be reallocated to improve other aging schools or support educational programming. Two additional district programs that serve all Portland students will also be housed in the new school.

4. Will the community have access to the new school?

The new school will not have a community center wing, however it is anticipated that Portland Parks and Recreation will run before and after school programming for the students there as they do at our other elementary schools.

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Portland Public Schools also has a building use policy that permits individuals and community groups to use public school facilities outside of regular school hours after meeting certain criteria (related to expenses and insurance.) This policy will permit similar community use at the new school.

And, the improved grounds surrounding the new school will provide new recreational opportunities for the community. The school will have a playground that can be used by the community after hours and the adjacent wood will have recreational trails that will be improved by the City of Portland through a grant from the Maine Forest Service.

5. What is being done to ensure that the new school is as energy efficient as possible?

The intent is to attain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. We have not yet determined the LEED certification level, however, the initial reviews are showing that a silver level certification should be attainable. Efforts will be made for higher levels of certification within budget constraints. The project will include credits for: Sustainable Site features, Water Efficiency, Energy and Atmosphere, Materials and Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality, and Innovation and Design Process.

A local citizen donated the \$20,000 fee for the LEED Certification application. The same donor has agreed to buy solar panels to provide pre-heated water for the school's mechanical systems if this proves to be a worthwhile investment. Find out more about LEED certification criteria at usgbc.org - the United States Green Building Council.

6. I have no children in the Portland Public Schools. Why should I support my tax dollars paying for a new school?

Over the long term, as Portland residents, we all benefit from strong and vibrant public schools. Quality public education drives economic development and attracts young families to our city – an important investment in our future. A quality public education system can also positively impact property values.

More importantly, most of us (and our families) have taken advantage of public educational opportunities that were supported by taxpayers without children. And even though we (or our parents) paid taxes – those taxes did not cover the cost of our educations. Now it's our opportunity to give back to the next generation of children.

It's also important to understand that the \$19.6 million state funding for the new school will be spent. If for some reason, Portland voters chose to refuse the funding, the Maine State Department of Education will offer funding to the next district on the school construction funding list. Therefore, the decision is to either spend the tax dollars to build a new school in Portland or in another Maine school district.

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7. How long will the school take to build and when will it open?

We expect to begin site preparation in the spring of 2009 and open the new school in the fall of 2011.

8. What will happen to the programs that are currently housed in the old Baxter Elementary School on that site?

No decision has yet been made about new locations for the Adult Education and Multilingual Center programs currently housed at the old Baxter Elementary School site.

At its May 7, 2008 business meeting, Portland School Committee voted unanimously to approve a resolution establishing a Comprehensive Facility Use and Maintenance Task Force led by Jamey Caron. The task force will present a recommendation to the full School Committee by October 2008 on where to house the two existing programs.

9. What will happen to Nathan Clifford School after it closes?

The Portland School Committee will decide whether or not there are any Portland Public School programs or services that need space at Nathan Clifford. If they decide that the district does not need the building, it will be returned to the City of Portland.