

Elementary Facility Questions and Answers

Q: A school bond would be paid for by an increase in property taxes. What are the types of property being assessed along with the percentage of each to the total valuation?

A: According to the most recent valuation report (2015 Certified School Adjusted Value Report) the school district has just over one (1) billion in assessed valuation (\$1,124,778,850). The chart below shows the breakdown of the different types of property and the percentage of each to the total valuation.

2015 Certified School Adjusted Value Report (October 9, 2015)		
Property Classification	Valuation Amount	% of total valuation
Personal Property	43,098,853	3.8%
<u>Centrally Assessed</u>		
Personal Property	26,689,173	2.4%
Real	10,287,947	0.9%
Residential Real Property	522,562,270	46.4%
Comm. and Indust. Real Property	154,982,997	13.8%
Ag Improvmnts. and Farm sites	13,064,020	1.2%
Agricultural Land	354,093,590	31.5%
Total Valuation	1,124,778,850	100%

Q: What is the Homestead Exemption and how does it work?

A: The Homestead Exemption is for residents 65 years of age and older (Veterans and disabled individuals of any age received special consideration) who own and reside in a home within the Beatrice Public School District. If the individual has an annual income range between \$27,400 - \$40,301 he/she may be eligible for an exemption up to a maximum applicable property value of \$95,000. Property of greater value can receive partial exemption. Please contact the Nebraska Department of Property Assessment and Taxation or the Gage County Assessor for specific guideline and details regarding eligibility.

Q: If the bond issue passes, what will happen to the existing buildings?

A: The existing buildings would either be: 1) sold for an appropriate reuse, compatible with the neighborhoods or 2) demolished, and the property sold for redevelopment compatible with the neighborhoods.

Q: How will safety and security be addressed in the new building option?

A: The new school will be constructed to provide a storm shelter in each of the four classroom neighborhoods. The proximity of the storm shelter areas to the students and staff are important for quick and easy access. The building will also be designed to have a secure main entrance (visitors allowed to enter the building only with school office staff permission).

Q: Does the facility have capacity for growth?

A: Yes, there will be room for some modest growth based upon our current student numbers.

Q: What was the intended lifespan of the existing buildings?

A: The lifespan of the existing buildings is relative to program requirements and the degree of maintenance and repair performed over the life of the building. The existing elementary schools received good care and maintenance, but building systems like heating, ventilation, and air conditioning need updating every 25 – 30 years. Also, the educational programs being offered today require more space and different types of space than that of 60 years ago. A 60-year lifespan is a reasonable expectation; then major improvements are necessary for any building.

Q: How is the District going to keep that small school feel in a big building?

A: Making a large building feel smaller was a focal point, both of the Board of Education and the committee who worked with the architect. It is important that a new building retain the community atmosphere of our current buildings. While touring other facilities, the committee discussed this with the architectural firm, DLR, and a plan emerged. The concept design represents a way, through grade level neighborhoods and larger common spaces, to make this happen. The facility is designed for students to spend most of the day in their neighborhood, similar in size to an existing elementary building, with others of similar age. The larger common spaces are to be used during scheduled times, still in smaller age range groups, under supervision. Outside, separate playgrounds based upon age ranges are planned. Additionally, the building allows for access by neighborhoods (before and after school), keeping children in smaller groups.

Q: How will a new single site elementary affect busing?

A: We are expecting to bus more students with a single elementary building. Norris and York have single site elementary buildings, and they transport approximately 75% of their elementary students. Our current student transportation provider estimated that it would take an additional three buses to transport 75% of our elementary students. Depending on size, each additional bus would cost around \$4,000 per month (3 buses x \$4,000 per month x 10 months = \$120,000 per year). The District is reimbursed by the state using a formula where we get the lesser amount of our actual costs or the number of miles. A majority of the costs should be reimbursed, and the District would pay the remainder.

Q: What will parents have to pay to bus their child(ren) to a new single site elementary buildings?

A: Board policy states that transportation will be furnished to in-town elementary students whose residence is nine (9) blocks or further from their designated attendance center. The location of the single site elementary would put most students outside the nine (9) block radius, so most in-town elementary students would qualify for free busing.

Q: Has the increased traffic flow associated with a new elementary school been considered?

A: A traffic study, completed by Olsson Associates, looked at traffic patterns and traffic flow. Road improvement will be needed on 33rd Street to the building entrance and possibly on Lincoln Street by the building entrance. Additionally, there is a service road to be constructed running from the East parking area connecting to Highway 136 at the light on Orange Boulevard. The proposed bond includes the funding for all these changes.

Q: Has the increased parking associated with a new elementary school been considered?

A: Staff parking and bus drop-off / pick-up will enter off Lincoln Street. Parent parking and drop-off / pick-up will be off 33rd Street, utilizing a double loop system. The committee observed this system during one of the facility tours. The double loop system helped with traffic flow and congestion during those busy times before and after school.

Q: What are the advantages of a single site elementary school?

A: The advantages of a single site elementary are many. Here are a few to consider.

- A single site elementary allows for consistent class sizes. Currently, classroom size varies by building. It is not uncommon to have a classroom at one building with 17 students while the same classroom in another building has more than 20. A single site elementary would allow these numbers to be in balance, giving all students the advantage of smaller class sizes.
- A single site elementary would allow grade level teachers to collaborate and plan together to ensure consistency of instruction for all children.
- A single site elementary would give students similar experiences at each grade level.
- A single site elementary would allow all students to experience an inclusive environment similar to Middle and High School. Currently, specialized programs are localized in a few buildings.
- A single site elementary would eliminate the need to transport students to a different school because of programming needs or overcrowding at a certain grade level.
- A single site elementary would allow for efficiencies in building use and staffing:
 - Eliminate loss of time for staff that currently travel between buildings.
 - Administration assigned to a building full-time rather than split between two buildings.
 - Defined gym space would allow better scheduling of facilities for optimum use.
 - Because students would not be moved to other buildings for program needs, staffing adjustments and changes would be easier to accomplish.
- A single site elementary would be more efficient:
 - Mechanical systems have improved/are more efficient than when the existing buildings were constructed.
 - A new facility would be designed for 21st Century learning and technology.
 - Eliminate student transportation to other buildings because a program need wasn't available in their home attendance center.

Q: What impact do new schools have on economic development?

A: In a review of research by Jonathan D. Weiss, he concludes the following:

“While the research is emerging and difficult to measure, many studies have shown that public schools and school spending also impact state and local economies and can play a role in attracting business. By educating the future workforce, public schools help make states and localities more economically competitive. Also, as a basic industry, schools are major employers that have a short-term stimulus impact on state and local economies. Evidence suggests that the quality of public schools can also influence business site selection and labor location decisions.”

Q: What education is not taking place in the current elementary schools? What cannot be taught or learned in the current school buildings, and why?

A: The teachers at Beatrice Public Schools do a great job educating our students; however, the programming deficiencies in our current facilities include: lack of preschool classroom space, inefficient special education space, outdated media and technology centers, and poorly designed physical education space. All preschool programs cannot be taught in our current buildings. We struggle with the other items because of facility deficiencies. Take special education for an example. Special education services have increased over time. Over the years the district has had to either divide up classroom spaces or re-purpose small areas in buildings for special education classrooms. We still get the job done, but the spaces are far from ideal. With four separate buildings the issue is not what is NOT being taught as much as it is that there is not a consistency of efficiency of what is being taught. Class size which has a direct effect on the student/teacher time cannot be balanced when students are split between four buildings. Separate buildings limit teacher collaboration time to share teaching techniques and to take advantage of specific talents of teachers as part of a grade level teaching team. Traveling staff reduces efficiency of instruction time. Shared administrators means at any given time there are two buildings with a principal in the building.

Q: The talk for a new elementary building is based on a strategic plan that a group compiled a number of years ago. What are the specific needs that were highlighted in this plan?

A: The school district went through a strategic planning process six years ago. The strategic planning committee was composed of community members, parents, students, board members, and staff. This group generated five (5) overarching areas the district needed to focus upon as it moved forward. One of these areas or strategies was to develop and implement plans to provide and maintain the facilities necessary to achieve our mission. Using these strategies as a foundation another group was formed involving more community and staff to develop specific results and action steps. One of the specific results of this group was, to develop and implement a solution to long range physical plan needs for Beatrice Public Schools elementary/preschool/SPED facilities. Additional people were brought in to look at elementary facilities. Areas of focus were: building and staff efficiency, curriculum and instruction, class size and transportation, safety and technology, energy and cost efficiency, and school size and physical plant design. Below are some of their findings that address the specific needs for a single site elementary:

- Building & Staff Efficiency
 - Maintaining four older facilities is not cost efficient (not energy efficient)
 - No full time administrator in the four buildings
 - Loss of instructional time for staff that have to travel between buildings (i.e. music, PE, counselor, librarian, nurse, and SPED staff)
 - Inefficient use of classified staff in four buildings
 - Staffing would be efficient and flexible in one building
 - Classrooms would be equitable in student number in one building
- Curriculum & Instruction

- Class size vary based upon attendance area
- Special education student numbers based upon attendance area and where special programs are located
- Some special education services are centralized which increases percentages and needs in specific buildings
- Class Size & Transportation
 - Keep class size as uniform as possible
 - Eliminate movement of students to other buildings
 - Provide more uniform opportunities for students
 - Eliminate need to transport students to other buildings
- Safety & Technology
 - Lack of controlled access into the building (i.e. office location in buildings offer no line of site to front door)
 - No off street drop-off/pick-up for students
 - Building construction does not lend itself to technology (i.e. cement floor and ceiling)
 - Lack of space for hardware needed for technology
- Energy & Cost Efficiency
 - Maintenance updates on four facilities is expensive and will continue to grow as the buildings age
 - Buildings mechanical systems are not efficient
- School Size & Physical Plan Design
 - Studies indicate that there is no optimum size for schools and that school size showed no difference in achievement

Q: How will the new elementary building affect my property taxes?

A: According to current Nebraska law, the only way to pay for a new building is via property taxes. The current law doesn't allow you to set aside money to accumulate over a number of years to pay for a new school. Using conservative estimates from our bond underwriter, Ameritas, the net bond levy increase on a 30-year bond issue of 34.8 million is 16.26 cents per \$100 of valuation. This means that on a \$100,000 home, taxes would increase by \$162.60 a year. The table below provides more detail.

Property Valuation	Yearly Increase	Monthly Increase	Daily Increase
\$50,000	\$81.30	\$6.78	22 cents
\$100,000	\$162.6	\$13.56	45 cents
\$250,000	\$406.50	\$33.87	\$1.13
\$500,000	\$813.00	\$67.74	\$2.26

Q: What is different about the elementary bond proposal this time?

A: Really nothing other than the cost, which has increased from \$33.7M to \$34.8M due to the cost of inflation. Construction cost will only continue to rise as time moves on.

Q: Why is the School Board presenting the same building option that was previously defeated?

A: Through several public forums and meetings, the community has indicated that the new central PK-5 building was still the best long term solution to the needs of the school district.

Q: Why is this project needed and/or why can't we use existing buildings?

A: Some of the factors associated with this need include:

- Aging and outdated facilities that do not provide needed program space for the best

- educational environment for students and staff
- Inadequate program space (cafeteria, PE, music, SPED, portable classrooms)
- Growing program space needs (preschool)
- BPS was to find ways to operate more efficiently and this can be most effectively accomplished by consolidating the existing four elementary schools in to one central facility, both from a staffing standpoint as well as an operational standpoint
- At capacity, can't balance class sizes, teachers can't collaborate, taking advantage of the skills sets of all teachers collectively
- Neighborhood school fallacy- most students get a ride to school

Q: Why does the school district find it necessary to provide preschool program services? Isn't it just free daycare?

A: Preschool is NOT a daycare program. It has very specific and targeted educational curriculum instructional content that is delivered to the students. Preschool programs have proven to help prep young students for success when they enter kindergarten. In the competitive educational environment that we live in, a strong preschool program allows BPS to attract and retain young students and their families in the BPS system. Neighboring school districts that have offered preschool programs have been able to attract BPS students to open enroll out of the BPS district. This program is just one more way for BPS to retain students and the associated funding that follows those students.

Q: Our district already has a high levy. Can't the district become more efficient first?

A: The BPS tax levy is higher than surrounding school districts with less students. The BPS tax levy is lower than similar sized school districts (Crete, Nebraska City, Waverly, Norris & Ralston). BPS is a very efficient district with a cost per pupil (using Average Daily Membership) that is the 25th lowest in the state. The BPS cost per pupil is \$10,872 and the state average is \$11,619 or about \$750 less. Surrounding districts with fewer students have a higher cost per pupil: Lewiston \$19,073, Tri County \$17,689, Diller-Odell \$15,347, Fairbury \$13,423, and Freeman \$12,994.

Q: What will happen if the referendum is defeated again?

A: The physical plant and programmatic needs that are facing BPS will not go away. If the referendum were to fail again, the school district will be forced to invest \$12.5M in the next ten years, to deal with the pending issues that have been identified in the facility audit. This will require the expenditure of tax dollars in the form of building fund levy or a future bond referendum to fund this renovation work that will cost over \$12.5M.

Q: Why was the land purchased without a vote of the people?

A: It is common practice for school boards to purchase land and it is one of the accepted uses of monies in the building fund. The Board talked about this in open session over the course of months. The Board negotiated in closed session. The problem with bringing the land purchase to a vote of the people is that if the bond failed is that the preferred site is then known and the price could change.

Q: What about the Beatrice 6 cost?

A: Not sure when that will be resolved or how. Our school needs haven't gone away and the Board didn't feel it could wait. It is something the voters will decide.

Q: What about the Southeast Community College bond?

A: SCC has its own needs for the 15 county area it serves. The board has to focus on the overall needs of the school district and our community.

Q: How is the air/water quality in the buildings?

A: An air quality study was completed last year. The average temperature and relative humidity levels in all buildings were within recommended guidelines. The average carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in buildings indicated that additional outside air was needed. Adjustments were made and another test is scheduled for early next year. Water quality- BPS has replaced all galvanized piping with copper from the main into the buildings.