

# Holyoke Middle Schools Building Project

## frequently asked questions

The City of Holyoke has proposed building two new middle schools, a new 550 student middle school to replace Peck and a second 550 student school to be built at the corner of Chestnut and Cabot Streets.

### Why is Holyoke considering building two new middle schools?

For many years, families, teachers and students have expressed a desire to establish new schools specifically designed for this age group. Mid-sized middle schools (550 students) allow for sufficient resources to provide a robust middle school experience (e.g. a variety of enrichment offerings, content-based teacher collaboration, etc.), without compromising personalization, strong relationships and student safety.

Additionally, consolidating middle school students into two buildings will reduce congestion in the elementary schools, lower overall operating costs and enable the closure of worn out buildings. New state-of-the-art schools may also attract new and retain existing families.



Proposed Chestnut Street Middle School



Proposed Peck Middle School

### I am a renter. Am I allowed to vote?

Yes. All Holyoke residents registered to vote will be eligible to vote on this measure.

### How big will the new schools be?

Each new middle school will be roughly 106,000 square feet in size (or two-thirds the size of the current Peck School). The first floor will contain cafeteria, gym, administration, music, library and other large spaces. The three upper floors will each support a single grade level divided into two clusters of 90 students each.

### Why not a single school for 1,100 students?

This option was studied by the Building Committee and District staff but discarded in favor of the option of two mid-size middle schools. Mid-size middle schools help create strong adult-student relationships, provide a customized learning environment and offer a variety of classes.

### How much will this cost to build?

The combined project cost is \$132 million, of which the City will pay \$56 million. The State will pay \$76 million through the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The current proposal is to borrow for the City's share over a 30 year period.

The voters of the City have to approve this plan by a majority vote because it will increase the tax rate for commercial and residential property owners for the period of the debt payment. The City may be able to pay down that debt faster as other revenue becomes available.

### What will this cost me as a home owner or business owner (per \$1,000)?

Current residential property tax rate:	\$19.13
Increase:	\$1.31
New residential rate:	\$20.44
Current commercial rate:	\$39.69
Increase:	\$2.72
New commercial rate:	\$42.41

# frequently asked questions continued

## Will new middle schools improve the educational outcomes of the District?

There are many reasons to believe that new schools will improve the District's overall success. The project will replace two worn out buildings with buildings that suit 21st century teaching needs. It also aims to improve the social and emotional environment in which children learn. The plan creates grade level classroom clusters to enable team teaching. It supports inclusion and differentiated instruction. It offers collaboration spaces, de-escalation spaces and offices for academic coaches near classrooms.

Modernized educational facilities are shown to improve results on cognitive performance tests and standardized tests, and reduce staff turnover rates. Much of that improvement is attributed to better attendance and lower rates of respiratory illness. It has also been established that better daylighting, air quality and acoustic performance in schools improves learning and reduces the stress levels of students and teachers.

The design of the new middle schools also focuses on building healthier relationships to nature by including green walls, views of the outdoors, ample daylighting, operable windows, outdoor classrooms and natural wood finishes.

Finally, the schools will include updated teaching technology including a device per student, a new STEM lab and science labs, new sinks in every classroom, an expanded medical suite, and a dedicated resource area to welcome and support our families.

## Will the community be able to use the schools after hours?

Yes, the schools will be air conditioned and designed to support secure community use in the evenings and year round.

## When will the new schools open?

If the project is approved by the voters by June 2019, students will be moved out of Peck in Fall 2020 and relocated to swing space in the District. The construction of the new schools will take approximately 22 months. Both schools will open in Fall 2022. If the project is approved in Fall 2019 the construction may not begin until Dec. 2021 (with completion in January 2023). An increase to the construction cost as a result of the project delay.

## When will the City vote?

It is up to the City Council to set the date for a special election. The Council has not made that determination.



New Peck Middle School Site Plan



Chestnut Street Middle School Site Plan

## Will there be middle school enrichment programs?

Yes, the new schools will include arts and music programs. There will be also be a new STEM lab, a learning commons, a new gym, better outdoor spaces, and an exercise/dance classroom.

## What if the City votes against the project?

If the voters reject the proposal to build two new middle schools, Holyoke will forgo access to the \$76M offered to the project by the MSBA. If the District decides to submit another project for consideration to the MSBA, it will have to start the entire process over, submitting a new project request to the MSBA, creating a new building committee and new schematic design.

In the meantime, schools that are already identified as in need of critical repairs or replacement will continue to be maintained and used as teaching facilities by the District. Middle school students will continue to be taught across many schools.

## How can I learn more or get involved?

Reach out to the Design Team at Jones Whitsett Architects by emailing [db@joneswhitsett.com](mailto:db@joneswhitsett.com) or visit [www.hps.holyoke.ma.us/turnaround/msredesign/](http://www.hps.holyoke.ma.us/turnaround/msredesign/).