

Portsmouth Middle School Project

Frequently Asks Questions

This document is created by the Portsmouth School Board to address common questions about the Portsmouth Middle School project.

1) What are the goals of the Portsmouth School Board with regard to the renovation/construction of Portsmouth Middle School?

In 2003, the Portsmouth Middle School Needs Assessment Study Committee was charged with examining the philosophy of a middle school, the Portsmouth Schools mission statement, community input, and beliefs about educating middle school students in order to make recommendations regarding new or improved construction and/or renovation plans for PMS. As the process has continued and evolved over the past 5 years, the needs of the middle school students and the input of the Portsmouth community have remained central to the process.

Most recently, the school board agreed upon the following guidelines for the plan that will be presented to the city.

The plan will:

- Support Portsmouth Middle School’s educational program now and in the future
- Minimize the educational impact of students during construction so that instructional time, the curriculum, and the supportive environment for all students is maintained
- Result in a “High Performance” school that is environmentally sensitive and efficient to operate and maintain
- Provide a healthy physical environment that is conducive to learning
- Maximize the safety of students and staff with regard to traffic, parking, and security
- Be the result of an open process with frequent communication with educational professionals, students, and the community
- Ensure optimal educational investment for taxpayer money

2) What is the history of this project?

See Timeline for Portsmouth Middle School Project online at the Portsmouth Middle School Dialogue Database.

<http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/school/middleschool.htm>

3) Where can I learn more about the Portsmouth Middle School program?

You can learn more about the Portsmouth Middle School program in several places. The PMS Parent Handbook gives a general overview of the program and

expectations and can be found at:

<http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/school/pms/PMS-ParentHandbook.pdf>.

Another way to learn more is to watch a webcast of the September 23, 2008 School Board meeting. PMS Principal John Stokel explained the program in detail, compared the proposed space to the current space, and explained how spaces are utilized. Webcasts can be found at:

<http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/webcast/index.htm>

A Power Point document summarizing the 9/23 presentation is also available. The School Board Work Session on August 5, 2008 also features in-depth discussion of the PMS program. Lastly, the Educational Specifications document will also help to describe the program and the need and rationale for the project.

The Power Point presentation, a webcast of the 8/5 work session, and a preliminary draft of the Educational Specifications can be found online at the PMS Dialogue Database at:

<http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/school/middleschool.htm>.

4) **What is the “Educational Specifications” document?**

The Educational Specifications document is written by the school department and describes the educational activities and spaces that need to be incorporated in a proposed new or renovated facility. The educational specifications are concerned with the program and the people to be housed, not the architectural solutions. Educational specifications should address the individual spaces required in the building and the desired characteristics of each space in general terms. The desired adjacencies between spaces should be identified and prioritized. This will assist the designers in understanding the intent of the project. This document is part of the application for state building aid.

The purpose of the Educational Specifications document is:

1. To describe the need and rationale for the project in sufficient detail that the voting public can understand and support it.

2. To serve as the guiding document for the entire project by describing the educational program (goals, activities and space needs) in sufficient detail that design professionals can translate the program into a building which meets those needs.

3. To provide sufficient information so that the Department of Education can evaluate the necessity for the project and the appropriateness of the design to the proposed curriculum and activities and ensure that N.H. State Minimum Standards for School Approval.

For more information, please see

<http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/programsupport/Building%20Aid/2006Manual.pdf>, Chapter 3.

5) **What was the “Educational Narrative”?**

The Educational Narrative was a document developed by Team Design Architectural Firm, the School Facilities Committee and the faculty and staff of the Portsmouth Middle School between October 2003 and June of 2004. It was compiled by interviewing the faculty and staff at the Middle School and evaluating the needs of the school based on the use of the Middle School Model. The document was then used by Team Design to inform its design process for the Middle School in 2004. Later, in early 2008, the Educational Narrative was used by JCJ Architects, the architectural firm that the School Board is currently working with, as a part of their research when they began the process of designing both the renovation and new construction of the Middle School on Parrott Avenue. For more information, please visit the city web site:

<http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/school/middleschooldesign/1.pdf>

6) **What will be done to minimize the educational impact of students during construction?**

One of the requirements in the request for proposals to the architects was phasing of the project, so double sessions and portable classrooms would not be required. Double sessions reduce instructional time drastically. Portable classrooms would be difficult to locate in Portsmouth and would make it impossible to maintain the level of program for the middle school students. The cost of portables is comparable to the cost of phasing.

The project will be phased with new construction to the left of the present building first. Once this is completed the students will move into the new construction and the remainder of the present building will be renovated in two phases. For the safety and well being of students, major demolition will take place during the summer months when school is not in session.

7) **What is a “High Performance” school?**

A “High Performance” school is one in which all of its systems function in an efficient and synergistic fashion. A high performance school provides a healthy, comfortable environment that facilitates learning, saves money, and helps to protect the environment.

High performance schools offer superior indoor environmental conditions for health and academic performance, are cost-effective and efficient to operate and maintain, and are resource efficient in the areas of energy use, water use, and building material content and durability.

NH House Bill 129, which took effect on September 9, 2005, gives the Department of Education the ability to award up to 3% more state funding to districts that design, build, and operate school facilities that meet new high performance standards.

The designation of “High Performance” is very similar to LEED certification. In New Hampshire, the Department of Education’s School Building Aid Office uses the designation of “High Performance” instead of LEED certification to indicate that sustainable and green practices were used in the design and building of the school.

Much of the information for this answer was gathered on the NH Department of Education’s web site. For more information please follow this link: <http://www.nhphps.org/faqs.asp>

8) How are the academic or “team” areas designed and how will the space be used?

The team areas are designed in such a way that the students’ academic classrooms are clustered in a common area. This clustering keeps the team of students in their own area which cuts down on the time needed for moving from one class to another which in turn saves on instructional time. This concept also gives the students and teachers a feeling of ownership in their area of the building that supports and enriches the team concept. Each grade level will have one break out area to share. This break out area will be used for team meetings, interdisciplinary projects, small group meetings, classroom projects, guest speakers, and other programs as deemed necessary by the teams of teachers. The breakout area also provides future flexibility as instructional space in case of enrollment spikes.

9) How much parking is needed?

The state requires outside vehicle parking space shall be provided for at least 100 percent of the staff and additional parking areas shall be provided for visitors, parents, and school buses as required. The Middle School currently has 100 staff.

10) How is the Portsmouth School Board working to ensure an open process with frequent communication?

Since the beginning of the project in 2003, the Portsmouth School Board has sought to be open and collaborative about the process. The committees formed (PMS Building Needs Assessment Study Committee 2003 and Joint School Advisory Committee 2006) have included representation from the school department, school board, city council and the community.

In 2007, Portsmouth Listens conducted Study Circles to examine the question “What criteria should be incorporated into our city’s plans to improve the educational facilities for our 6th, 7th and 8th graders?” Please see the following link from the Portsmouth Middle School Dialogue Database: <http://portsmouthlistens.org/groups.htm>.

Upon hiring JCJ and Destefano architects in January of 2008, the School Board has sponsored two Community Workshop Series to discuss and gather input on design options. Meetings pertaining specifically to the Portsmouth Middle School have been recorded and are available to the public. Information, links to meetings, and research related to this project are available online at the Portsmouth Middle School Dialogue Database at <http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/school/middleschool.htm>.

As always, the public's participation is welcomed and encouraged. All meetings are public and are posted on the meetings calendar at <http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/calendar/2008/index.htm>. Please feel free to come to any meeting to learn more and/or share your concerns or contact a school board member.