



**PPS response to Jefferson High PTSA questions about the status of the JHS Modernization project
May 7 2025**

1) Blank Check Concerns: *In the absence of communication, critics raise concerns that the bond lacks sufficient oversight, offering broad funding without mechanisms for transparency or accountability.*

The 2025 bond package includes funding to complete the modernizations of three remaining high schools, and it also includes funding for deferred maintenance and priority scope. The amount of need for capital improvements in the deferred maintenance and priority scope category far exceeds the amount of funds that will be available in the 2025 bond. Project scope will be prioritized across replacing failed building systems, providing seismic upgrades, replacing roofs, replacing mechanical systems, abating hazardous materials, improving accessibility, and other types of needed capital improvements.

It would take many billions of dollars to complete all of that work. For example, a roofing consultant recently recommended completing \$150 million in roof replacements before 2029 to fix roofs that are in poor, very poor, and failing condition. It would cost an estimated \$900 million to replace the HVAC systems and provide cooling in all school buildings that don't currently have it. Fully seismically retrofitting all of our remaining schools would cost well over \$1 billion. These are only a few examples of the magnitude of improvements that our elementary and middle schools need.

We take the responsibility to prioritize these needs and provide as much value as we can with this funding seriously. Because the 2025 bond is planned as a long term bond program for 8 years, the Board has included the flexibility to prioritize the spending during the life of the bond program. When so many building systems are past their useful life, it is not possible to precisely plan which projects will need to be completed in what order. The prioritization will need to be studied and adjusted according to reasonable criteria on an ongoing basis.

2025 Bond oversight will include:

- [The Board of Education](#) sets the priorities for the Bond program. For example, on May 6, 2025, the Board passed resolutions 7109 and 7110, setting a priority for 2025 bond funds for seismic improvements and requiring transparency and regular updates about the progress of the seismic improvements program. All Board of Education meetings are public meetings that are [streamed and recorded](#).
 - School Board - [School Facilities Improvement Oversight Committee](#) (SFIOC)
 - OSM reports on the progress of the bond programs and brings Staff Recommendations regularly to the Committee. All SFIOC meetings are public meetings that are streamed and recorded and available on the [PPS Board of Education YouTube page](#).
 - School Board - [Audit Committee](#)

- The bond program undergoes an annual 3rd party performance audit. The performance audit is published publicly. OSM reports progress on audit recommendations to the Audit Committee. All Audit Committee meetings are public meetings that are streamed and recorded.
- The [Bond Accountability Committee](#) is a group of citizens who report to the Board of Education. They report their observations and make recommendations about whether PPS is meeting its obligations to the bond's taxpayers. All Bond Accountability Committee meetings are public meetings that are [streamed and recorded](#) and have opportunities for public comment.

2) Budget Growth Timeline: *The 2020 bond promised \$311 million for Jefferson's Modernization. Five years later, construction has yet to begin, and the estimated cost has grown to \$491 million. The public deserves clarity on how and why these changes occurred.*

Below is a timeline for the Jefferson project showing changes to the design and budget increases and the reason for them:

- **In late 2019**, after a series of public meetings over a four-month period, a [Jefferson High School Conceptual Comprehensive Plan](#) was completed as part of the planning effort for the 2020 Bond. This conceptual plan was used as the starting point for the new Jefferson Modernization Comprehensive Plan.
- **In November of 2020**, the passage of the 2020 School Improvement Bond provided funding for both design and construction for the modernization of the historic school at a **total of \$311 million. That figure was later increased by the school board to \$366 Million when the Comprehensive Plan was approved in Nov 2022.**
- In Spring of 2022**, Planning for the Jefferson Modernization began and has been the most extensive public engagement process of any PPS project so far.
- **In December of 2022** the School Board approved Jefferson comprehensive plan that would extensively renovate the original 1909 building while adding new facilities around it. They also increased the budget. **The now \$366 Million plan had students & staff staying on site during construction.**
- **In Summer 2023** new construction **cost analysis of the plan revealed that seismically upgrading the original 4 story unreinforced masonry building while keeping students on site would greatly exceed the project budget.** PPS briefly looked at moving the students & staff to the Marshall campus during construction but many in the Jefferson community opposed this plan.

In December 2023, the School Board called for a full reassessment of the Jefferson modernization plans with the following criteria:

- Keep students & staff largely on the Jefferson campus during construction.
- Include a targeted student enrollment of 1,700.
- Demolish the 1909 building and build a new building.

On April 2nd 2024 the Project Team presented the Board a new plan with an all new Jefferson High building to be constructed at the North end of the campus. **This new plan would have cost \$491 Million.**

In December, 2024 Superintendent Kimberlee Armstrong asked the Office of School Modernization (OSM) to find a smarter, more cost-efficient approach to deliver high-quality learning environments for students for the high school modernizations at Cleveland, Jefferson, and Ida B Wells. The projects went on hold as project teams looked toward design changes that would fulfill that direction.

On February 11 2025, the PPS Board of Education [unanimously approved](#) a plan to restart the design process on the Cleveland, Jefferson, and Ida B Wells high school modernizations focusing on right-sizing each school to maximize resources while maintaining strong programming.

On April 22 2025, the project team provided an update of the Jefferson Comprehensive Plan to the Board as the final update on cost reduction efforts. With the reductions mandated by the Board directives and efficiency adjustments made to the floor plan by the design team, the project is projected to save approximately \$22M-\$27MM.

3) Enrollment vs. Capacity: *With Fall '24 enrollment at 456, Portlanders question the need to build 1,700-student capacity. What justifies this scale?*

The PPS Board has directed the district to build high schools for the next 100 years, not just for population forecasts for the next five. We also believe that having state-of-the-art, modernized high schools will support Portland's efforts to recruit new businesses and new families to our city. In addition, district staff are preparing an enrollment campaign which will highlight the positive things occurring at our schools and provide principals with a tool kit that will help them encourage neighborhood families to choose to send their children to PPS schools. Superintendent Dr. Kimberlee Armstrong addressed this question in the Willamette Week recently: She replied that in a scenario where the District has extra capacity in modernized high schools, the district could use the buildings to serve students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. "I will tell you, there is no situation where a newly modernized, community-invested high school will go empty or even be half full."

In addition the district plans to launch an enrollment and boundary review process likely beginning in June 2025, after the bond election and once new Board members are seated. This process will include a review of high school boundaries, impacting schools like Grant, McDaniel, and Roosevelt, as well as program placement and boundaries across K–12 sites. The goal is to right-size and optimize enrollment, ensuring that Jefferson can grow as a neighborhood-centered school while aligning district resources more effectively across all campuses. There will be an open call for community members to join the committee leading this work.

4) Summary of Bond Budgets: *The project presents as though it is being funded twice—first in 2020 and again in 2025—without visible progress to date. Stakeholders need a clear, detailed explanation of the bond funding history and what remains unfunded.*

The answer to Question #2 details how the price changed over time due to design and schedule changes. As you will notice in the above timeline the April 2024 revised plan for an all new Jefferson High School came in higher than the \$336 million 2020 Bond budgeted amount. Therefore additional construction funds will need to come from the 2025 Bond.

The design process has evolved as the District has responded to community and stakeholder feedback and rising construction costs. The extra iterations have resulted in a design that better reflects the values of the community and the District. They've also meant delays to the ground breaking and construction schedule, so there isn't visible construction progress on the site yet despite the significant progress in terms of planning, design, and engagement.

Additional Questions? Please refer to [the new Jefferson FAQ](#) for more information.