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Jefferson Modernization - Frequently Asked Questions

The Jefferson community has played a pivotal role in the planning and design process as we work toward a modernized Jefferson High School. We are so grateful for your continued engagement with this important project. Over the course of several information sessions, we have received crucial input and feedback from families, students, and community members. We have also fielded a number of important questions. We hope the following answers provide helpful context and clarity as we move forward together.

Jefferson Modernization FAQ

How many teaching stations will Jefferson have?

The number of teaching stations in the updated design remains consistent with the previous plan – 73 teaching stations, 40 of which are general classrooms and the remaining being specialized instructional spaces. There has been no decline or reduction in the number of teaching stations included in the modernization.

What's the difference between a teaching station and a classroom?

Classrooms typically refer to general education spaces, such as English, Math or World Language. Teaching stations include both general classrooms and specialized instructional spaces like science labs, music rooms, dance studios, gymnasiums, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) labs.

What specific programs or spaces are being reduced or removed to meet the new square footage and budget targets?

To reach the goal of reducing 15,000 square feet, the district took a balanced approach—some large spaces were adjusted, and several smaller reductions were made. These changes are still proposals and have not yet been finalized. Key proposed changes include:

- Reducing the theater size from 1,000 to 500 seats, which aligns with the standard in other recent high school modernizations and follows the Educational Specifications (Ed Specs).
- Reducing the number of Team Rooms from 5 to 3, bringing it in line with McDaniel High School and current Ed Spec guidelines.
- Reducing or removing square footage in areas like office space, conference rooms, building lobby space, general storage, and the archive room.

- Reducing or removing community partner and district program space square footage that was over Ed Spec or not in Ed Spec.
- Decreasing the square footage of the dance studios, while still maintaining 2 dedicated studios and working with PPS staff to ensure safe movement space remains.
- Reducing the choir room by 200 square feet. Note: the choir is not listed as a required space in the Ed Specs and was larger than the previous choir builds, but the room remains in the plan.

Throughout the process, the team has aimed to honor prior design work while making necessary adjustments to stay within the evolving budget and square footage limits.

Why are theater, dance, and choir spaces being reduced or reallocated, and how does that affect the budget?



While dance and choir are valued parts of Jefferson's programming, they are not designated as required spaces in the district's Ed Specs. However, because they are important electives for students, the district has proposed reallocating square footage from general education electives to support performing arts.


In the previous design, these spaces were added on top of the existing square footage, which contributed to increased costs. In the current proposal, space for dance and choir is still included, but within the existing footprint by shifting space from general education, which helps control both square footage and overall budget growth.

Is the library still included in the new Jefferson High School design?



Yes. The library remains a dedicated space in the Ed Specs and will be included in the final school design.

Why is there a Teen Parent Center in the new Jefferson design, and can it be combined with other programs like the health center or workforce (entrepreneurial) development to better serve students? Can the Teen Parent Center be reconsidered or redesigned to better align with student needs and evolving program goals?



The district shared that decisions around the Teen Parent Center (TPC) are still part of the design-specific planning process. Community suggestions – such as combining the TPC with the school-based health center or aligning it with career and workforce development programming – are welcome and will be explored further during upcoming design engagement meetings. While any adjustments must remain within budget and space constraints, the district expressed openness to ideas that better reflect the evolving needs of students.

Where will the main and auxiliary gyms be located in the new design?



In the updated design, the main gym will be located on the first floor, while the auxiliary gym will be on the second floor. In the previous design iteration, both gyms were located on the second floor, but this layout was adjusted in the current plan.

Does the ground floor of the building use the full square footage of the school?

No, the ground floor does not encompass the full square footage of the building. The image shown may make it appear more limited due to site constraints, but the total planned square footage for the new building is 295,000 square feet.

How much over budget are we still and how much more do we need to adjust?

The district is currently in the process of finalizing the project budget. The working estimate was previously set at \$490 million, but after all three major school projects came in over budget, a Cost Reduction Study was launched to identify \$20–33 million in potential savings. Once finalized, the new reduced total will be presented to the Board as a revised comprehensive plan, and that amount will become the new official budget.

The original baseline allocation for Jefferson (approved by voters in the 2020 bond) was \$366 million. To fully fund the updated design, the district estimates that it will need approximately \$98 million from the 2025 bond. For reference, Lincoln High School, the most recently modernized high school, cost approximately \$291 million.

If the 2025 bond doesn't pass, can the district use the existing \$366 million to build a smaller version of the school now?

The district acknowledges this is a critical question. While it's possible to explore alternate options if the bond doesn't pass, any effort to reconfigure the site or scale down the project would add both time and cost. One of the most significant cost drivers so far has been the decision to keep students on-site during construction, which has extended the timeline and increased expenses.

If the bond fails, the district will aim to be proactive in exploring alternatives that do not compromise the integrity or long-term viability of the project. However, delays in rebuilding Jefferson come at a cost to enrollment and community confidence. A modern, fully rebuilt facility is essential to attracting and retaining students, and the district remains committed to moving forward with urgency, respect, and transparency.

What happens if the 2025 bond doesn't pass? Will we have to wait months to figure out next steps?

The district will know the results of the bond election within a month and a half, so the community will not have to wait long to understand what comes next. While some questions (such as how to proceed without additional bond funding) may require input from district leadership, the emphasis from board members and district leaders was clear: we have the power to pass this bond.

Community members were recently reminded that this is a generational investment—just like other high schools that were rebuilt for 1,700 students. The bond is polling well, and there's strong momentum to move Jefferson forward. If the bond doesn't pass, the district will need to

explore alternatives, but for now, the focus remains on rallying the community and securing the resources needed to build a school that will serve generations to come.

If the bond doesn't pass, what options will the district consider to move the Jefferson project forward?



If the 2025 bond does not pass, the district and School Board will have several options to consider. One possibility is to redesign the project, which would take additional time. Another option could be to seek alternative funding sources beyond bonds to complete the project as originally envisioned. The district confirmed that it does have some options outside of traditional bond funding.

These decisions can be made relatively quickly once the bond results are known, which will be in approximately six weeks from the election date.

What does the "2025" reference in the budget estimates mean?



The reference to 2025 indicates the anticipated timing of the construction study and project timeline. The cost estimates are projected to the midpoint of construction, which is a standard industry practice to account for inflation and market escalation that may occur over the course of the project. These figures help ensure the budget reflects future construction costs, not just current prices.

Is there a contingency built into the project budget to handle unexpected costs?



Yes. For all major construction projects—especially new builds—district policy includes a 10% project contingency. This reserve is intended to cover unexpected issues, such as market volatility, inflation, or unforeseen site conditions. Typically, the contingency funds are not accessed until construction begins, allowing the district to manage risks responsibly as the project progresses.

Are there reserve funds the district can use to help cover the funding gap if the bond doesn't pass?



The district acknowledged the community's recollection of past conversations about potential reserve funds to help close the funding gap. While no confirmation was provided during the meeting, leadership committed to researching the availability and use of any such funds as part of exploring alternatives should the bond not pass. Further clarification will be provided once more information is gathered.

There was an article recently, published on February 27th, that Grant will be moving forward with their master plan to add lights and a softball field to the Grant Bowl. Is that still happening?



That's depending on the bond. That's on the 2025 bond.

The 2020 bond approved by voters was for \$1.2 billion—not \$366 million. Who decided to allocate only \$366 million specifically to Jefferson High School?



While voters approved a \$1.2 billion bond in November 2020, the \$366 million allocated to Jefferson High School was determined during the district's internal bond development process. This process typically takes over a year and includes broad input from staff, community members, and technical experts. It begins with a wide range of possible projects and then narrows down based on priorities, needs, and available funding.

Ultimately, it is the School Board that determines the final list of projects and funding levels to include on the ballot. The \$366 million for Jefferson was included as a specific line item in the 2020 bond proposal that the Board referred to voters and which the voters approved as part of the full bond package.

Jefferson was included in the 2020 bond but ended up being the last school addressed. What protections were in place to manage cost escalation for a project scheduled so late, and how will this be handled differently in future bond planning?



Like all large capital projects, the Jefferson modernization carried risks related to cost escalation – especially given its placement at the end of the 2020 bond timeline. The district used the best available data and third-party cost estimates at the time the bond was developed and included contingency funds to address potential unforeseen increases.

However, as the project advanced and subject matter experts were brought in during the detailed design phase, it became clear that the initial estimates were too low. While the district applied available contingency funds, they were not sufficient to cover the gap, which led to the current cost reduction and reassessment process. This experience has highlighted the need for even greater caution and flexibility in planning future bond-funded projects.

Will students be involved in every phase of the Jefferson modernization project?



On the student side, the district and design team are committed to deep student involvement throughout the project. All construction contracts include career-related learning requirements, which the district strives to enhance through classroom visits, co-teaching, and internship opportunities.

The design firm BORA has partnered closely with Jefferson and SEI, and currently employs two Jefferson alumni who are now leading student engagement efforts, including the Demo Design Club. These alumni are mentoring current students and helping to connect them to the design and architecture professions. The goal is to ensure that Jefferson students are not just observers but active participants in shaping the future of their school—both during and beyond the modernization.

Is there any possibility of expanding or reconfiguring the baseball field in the new design?



Due to the limited space on the Jefferson campus, the current design is constrained by the need to accommodate multiple major features, including an enhanced track and field with additional lanes, the new building footprint, and site circulation, like the crossblock. Every element on site is competing for space, and after careful consideration in the previous design phase, the baseball field configuration was retained as-is.

The district determined that this layout reflects the best possible outcome within existing site limitations and students staying on site, and does not anticipate further changes to the baseball field in order to avoid additional delays or impacts to other essential components.

Is the Athletic Building accessible from the academic building? Or will the students need to exit the building to access the gym?



Yes. The Athletic Building will be accessible from the academic building.

No. Students will not need to exit the building to access the gym.

How is the district prioritizing Jefferson and ensuring it receives the attention and investment it deserves—especially given past delays?



The district has stated clearly that Jefferson is a top priority, particularly within the broader context of Albina community projects. Leaders have emphasized that this project is not a new initiative tied only to the 2025 bond, but rather a continuation of work promised in the 2020 bond, and therefore should be treated with the urgency of a 5-year delay.

There is a strong internal commitment to addressing enrollment challenges, with district leadership actively exploring ways to attract and retain students—including adjusting programming and strengthening the Jefferson pipeline. Recent cabinet-level discussions have focused solely on Jefferson, underscoring a belief in the value of its educational offerings and a commitment to proactive, community-centered solutions.

Why weren't the risks and trade-offs of earlier decisions (like keeping students on-site or expanding design elements) communicated more clearly to the community?



District leaders have acknowledged that, in hindsight, some earlier decisions may have been made without fully understanding or clearly communicating the long-term impacts on cost and timeline. Choices such as keeping students on-site during construction or expanding certain design elements contributed to cost escalation, and the community may not have been fully informed about the risks those decisions carried.

Going forward, the district is committed to greater transparency, clearer communication, and more direct engagement with the Jefferson community, ensuring that everyone understands what's at stake and can participate meaningfully in decisions.

Why is the Jefferson community (especially our Black and Indigenous students) being asked to sacrifice programs and spaces, while schools in wealthier, whiter



communities like Lincoln, Benson, and Grant appear to receive full funding, even when their projects go over budget?

In response to community concerns, a board member clarified that, according to current district records, Lincoln High School came in under budget, not over, despite community perceptions to the contrary. It was also stated that Roosevelt High School did not sue the district for incomplete projects. Instead, some of Roosevelt's planned features (such as Makerspace and athletic enhancements) were phased into future bond cycles, a common approach used across multiple school sites, including Franklin and Grant. The board acknowledged the equity concerns raised by the community and emphasized the need for ongoing transparency and dialogue around resource allocation.

Indian Education was listed as a community partner in Tuesday's board meeting. Why was Indian Education listed as a program to be adjusted or removed without prior notice or involvement, and how can Native community partners be meaningfully included in the process going forward?



The district clarified that the proposed changes to Indian Education space are not final and remain in the proposal phase. Final decisions will be made at a Board meeting, where there will be an opportunity for input and public feedback. Additionally, the district has a meeting scheduled with Indian Education and Native/Alaska Native partners to continue the conversation and ensure these voices are included in the process.

Is the district planning to make Jefferson a true neighborhood school again, and will enrollment boundaries be adjusted?



Yes, that is the plan. The district will launch an enrollment and boundary review process in late spring, likely beginning in June 2025, after the bond election and once new Board members are seated. There will be an open call for community members to join the committee leading this work.

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.

How do program cuts at feeder middle schools—like reducing dance at Ockley Green—impact Jefferson's enrollment, and is the district considering this when making budget decisions?



The district committed to following up on the situation at Ockley Green and recognized the importance of staff like Damon Keller, who plays a key role in sustaining programs that connect students to Jefferson. It was noted that reducing such positions could have a significant impact on student engagement and future enrollment at Jefferson.

How is the district accounting for construction cost escalation?



The current estimated project cost of \$490 million includes projected cost increases due to inflation, market volatility, and other construction-related impacts. These figures are escalated to the midpoint of construction, which is a standard practice to account for rising costs over time. The district continues to work with professional estimators and contractors to refine the budget, but it is important to note that the number is not yet final.

What is the status of the construction contract for Jefferson’s modernization project, and will a new contractor be selected?



The district is initiating a new competitive selection process for a Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC) because the scope of the Jefferson project has changed significantly—from a renovation to a full rebuild. Given the scale and complexity of the updated design, a new Request for Proposals (RFP) will be released in the coming weeks. The selection process is expected to take 6 to 10 weeks, ensuring the district chooses a contractor that is appropriately equipped to deliver on the revised project goals.

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