



SOUTH Elementary School | FAQ's

January 31, 2023

Elementary School Building Project

What is the South Elementary School Building Project?

The South Elementary School Building Project is currently in the Feasibility/Study phase to determine the best solution to solve the problem of aging and outdated buildings at our South Elementary and, possibly, Wilkins Elementary schools. The Study will result in a recommendation to Town Meeting and a ballot debt exclusion override in the Spring of 2024.

What is the School Committee's role in the building project?

The Stoughton School Committee, as the governing board responsible for the educational goals and policies of our PreK-12 public schools, is responsible for approving the Educational Plan for a new or renovated school as well as the final decision on the design enrollment scenario (225 students or 515 students) and whether Stoughton will transition from five (5) K-5 neighborhood schools to four (4) K-5 neighborhood schools. The Educational Plan will be presented to the School Committee in February for approval in March 2023. The design enrollment will be decided as part of the Preferred Schematic Report which will be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) at the end of June 2023.

What is the South Elementary School Building Committee's role in the building project?

The South Elementary School Building Committee will manage the study, design and construction of a new K-5 building project once the School Committee decides on the design enrollment. Based on building deficiencies identified in the Town's Facilities Master Plan, the Town has been invited by the MSBA and charged by Town Meeting, to conduct a "feasibility study" and "recommend the most cost effective and educationally appropriate preferred solution" Over the next 12-14 months, the Building Committee will study all options, including a no-build option, and then recommend the final building solution to the Select Board, School Committee, Town Meeting and the MSBA, which will provide substantial reimbursement of the cost of a new school.

What will be the traffic, pedestrian safety, and circulation impacts of a new school?

As no site has yet been selected for a new school in either enrollment scenario, it is pre-mature to stipulate exact measures that will be taken to assure student, pedestrian, and abutter safety. Every major town project (including the new High School) undergoes a rigorous process to assure safe traffic and pedestrian access to it. That process will include:

- Detailed traffic analysis and mitigation if needed,
- Complete safety audit of pedestrian routes to and from the school with mitigation if needed,
- Full and transparent site plan approval process involving all related town boards including the Planning Board and Police/Fire

What is the cost of the new school; what will be the tax impact?

The new school is just in the beginning steps of planning including determining the size of the school and site it will be located on. As these two parameters are the driver of any cost estimates, it is too early to state the cost and, therefore, the potential tax impact. The Town is fortunate to have been invited by the Mass School Building Authority to participate in its school construction reimbursement program (like the new high school). On the high school program, ***the state reimbursed the Town for 42% of the total cost.***

Why would we consider re-districting and, if it were to happen, when would it occur?

By having the larger school scenario accepted by the MSBA for study, we have an exclusive opportunity to leverage more state aid so that Stoughton doesn't need to fund a new school on its own dollar. Additionally, there are educational and fiscal opportunities with a larger elementary school program which may make it attractive. Should the School Committee decide to pursue a four (4) elementary school configuration for the Town, redistricting for that scenario would not occur until Fall 2027 at the earliest.

Will this project (and possible closure of Wilkins) affect Title One funding?

There will be no impact on the district's title one funding because of a redistricting plan. *Title One* funding is based on our low income population districtwide. The funding, except for one math coach at the Wilkins, is used for all students to support preschool, vacation camps, and summer programming. It remains to be seen which school is designated as the Title One school once the redistricting happens. The budget allows for one math coach in each elementary school so there will be no loss of service.

Will any teachers or specialists lose their jobs due to possible re-districting?

Staffing needs are dependent on the school population, not the size of a school. As a result, we do not anticipate teacher or specialist staffing reductions due to the larger school or the reduction from 5 to 4 schools.

How many students would be impacted by redistricting?

It is far too early to know the exact answer to this question until we are closer to implementing the process 4-5 years from now. However, we should have an approximate answer to this question once we have seen possible district configurations from our GIS consultant in the Spring.

How can the Town afford the debt for a new school building?

The Town Accountant has calculated that Stoughton's borrowing capacity exceeds the expected debt that a new school will incur under either scenario. While the final costs are not yet known, it is expected that an MSBA reimbursement will cover between 40 and 45% of the cost of the project. Under the MSBA program, the Town will be reimbursed on an ongoing basis and will not need to borrow any more than the Town's share of the cost. This saves a significant amount in interest costs for the Town.

How will the new school be sustainable and respond to new building codes?

There have been many advances in new energy efficient construction systems and techniques, even since the high school (a LEED Gold building) which the new project will be able to take advantage of. These advances have decreased the Energy Use Intensity of new schools by 70% compared to 1960 era schools like the South and Wilkins. Additionally, the infrastructure act and other federal and state programs have helped subsidize significantly the cost of green energy technology. Preparing for a Net-Zero school or 'Net-Zero' ready project will be discussed in future meetings and will discuss methods such as renewable energy strategies, as well as stormwater reuse, amongst other approaches.

How can a citizen stay informed? What efforts are being made to make sure there is sufficient communication?

The Building Committee, as well as the Stoughton Public Schools, is committed to a fully transparent process which will provide several opportunities for residents to understand the project and provide feedback. That program will include:

- Publicly advertised and open monthly meetings of both the School Building Committee and the School Committee
- Several open Community Forums to be held at various venues
Meeting notices are on the building project website and will be included in the Town Crier
- Monthly newsletter and other updates on the progress of the study phase
- A current website [South School Building Updates | Stoughton Public Schools \(stoughtonschools.org\)](#) with ability to contact
- Regular Facebook postings at www.facebook.com/SouthSchoolBuildingProject.

Is a 515-person school too big?

Of the 30 elementary schools that have been approved by the MSBA in the past four years, 21 have design enrollments over 515 students. The average of those 30 schools is 630 students and 43% have been consolidations of two smaller schools. The trend in educational design has been for moderately sized schools designed to be welcoming neighborhoods with light and airy common spaces as opposed to long, dark corridors that are the hallmark of 50+ year old schools. This allows the town to offer more opportunities to more children. Importantly, class sizes will not be impacted by the overall enrollment of one school.