



# Lexington Public Schools

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## **“Our Schools”**

### **Building a Plan for Learning: Our Schools’ 2008 Capital Plan**

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As the School Committee and I move forward in our budget discussions, we are focused intently on applying our limited resources to protect and preserve the programs that prepare our students for the complex world they inhabit. As we concentrate on programs, however, we must also recognize that the success of our students, teachers, and programs is critically dependent on the physical environment of our schools. We simply cannot lose sight of the fact that it is equally important to have buildings and facilities that are conducive to the best possible learning that we can provide. The School Department's Fiscal Year 2008 Capital Plan not only contributes to this, but will begin to address important issues of energy usage and conservation. The plan also applies innovative financing to further our goals.

Deferred maintenance and unfortunate reductions in the scope of capital renovations have left many of our buildings, both older and relatively new, requiring significant attention. When I first brought Bill Hartigan on board as Director of Facilities, he performed an assessment and created a 5-year capital plan to address our aging buildings and systems. The current 2008 proposal is based on that plan. In both the 5-year and near-term plans, Bill has applied a philosophy that assures emphasis on each of the following critical areas: public safety and alarm systems; building design that supports programming; energy conservation; adequate mechanical and operating systems; and maintaining the building itself, that is, the bricks and mortar. Although we work to maximize every dollar, functionality, rather than financial payback, is the overarching driver because our primary mission is to educate students within our walls.

Many of the projects in the plan address problems that, without immediate attention, will dramatically impede our ability to serve our students. For example, paving at Estabrook is a top priority because it is sorely needed to improve safety during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up. The project will create a median to separate bus traffic from car traffic and provide a safe, monitored cross-walk for students. Similarly, locker installation at Hastings is necessary to meet fire safety codes and allow the hallways to be safely traversed in the event of an emergency evacuation. Also a priority, Lexington High School's mechanical systems frequently fail, and as a result, some classrooms are not heated to adequate levels. Providing a safe and adequate environment for learning should be, and is, our number one concern.

Energy usage and conservation cannot be ignored. With rising energy prices and growing environmental concerns, we have made an effort to include projects that will yield immediate gains in energy conservation. An added bonus is that these projects will pay for themselves in cost savings in the short term. The payback on these projects ranges from only 1.5 years for re-insulation of the ceilings at Bridge, Bowman, and Hastings to 3.6 years for phase one mechanical work at Lexington High School to improve environmental controls.

The School Committee plans to implement bond financing on these projects that, based on our best estimates of payback, will make these projects self-financing. With a 5-year bond to finance the re-insulation project as an example, we will begin to realize cost savings in energy consumption each year that exceed the principal and interest costs of the bond. This innovative financing strategy has allowed us to fund an additional \$910,000 worth of projects for 2008.

What has been most striking for Bill Hartigan and me in the development of this plan is the level of partnership we've experienced with the citizens, principals, staff, School Committee, and the town's Department of Public Works. From citizen input, to walkthroughs at each school guided by the principal, to collaboration with Bill Hadley and his staff, this plan is the product of a cooperative effort. To make that kind of collaboration the norm and increase future efficiency, the School Committee and I are actively investigating the possibility of joint management of our school and municipal facilities.

I invite you to visit the LPS website and review the capital plan in detail at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org/FY08CapitalFeb7.pdf>. Our children can only learn if the classrooms and buildings they are in are conducive to learning. What's more, the investment we make today will support many generations of Lexington students by not only improving our children's learning environment, but by saving money through needed energy conservation, leaving an even larger legacy for our children and our town.