



# Lexington Public Schools

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## Our Schools

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### Meeting the Capital Needs of Lexington Schools

Even in times of economic downturn like those we currently face, we cannot lose sight of the need to take care of our school buildings. Our students and staff depend on them every day. To determine how to maintain our aging buildings, the School Committee established the Ad Hoc Facilities Committee (AHFC) to assess the Facilities Master Plan recently developed by Design Partnership, consider the options in the report, and make recommendations.

The AHFC was comprised of exceptionally qualified individuals, which included School Committee representatives Phil Poinelli and Tom Griffiths; Selectmen representatives George Burnell and Peter Kelley; and Permanent Building Committee representatives Eric Brown, Jon Himmel, and Peter Johnson. I want to thank the members of the AHFC Committee for their dedication and their well-considered recommendations, which I will summarize in this article.

In its report to the School Committee, the AHFC supports the Master Plan and recommends that the town annually budget sufficient capital funds to keep our schools and municipal buildings properly maintained. The AHFC recommends:

**RENOVATING AND EXPANDING LHS:** Addressing current roofing, HVAC, and other capital needs at LHS; adding space to deal with overcrowding (total estimate \$37.7 million dollars); and filing a Statement of Interest (SOI) with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for a possible reimbursement of 31% to 40%.

LHS was renovated between 1999 and 2001, but various building components were cut from the original project when the 1997 debt exemption was defeated. Consequently, some of the HVAC systems and roofs at LHS are in need of immediate attention. In addition, LHS is significantly overcrowded because of a significant increase in enrollment and the expansion of legally required special education and English language learner programs. Overcrowded conditions will continue for at least another ten years based on local and MSBA projections.

LHS does not have enough educational spaces, which affects programs and class sizes. Space is also needed for computer laboratories, specialized instruction, special education, teacher preparation, student meetings, and extra help. Moreover, the size of the average LHS classroom (658 square feet) is well below the MSBA recommended size (950 square feet). Small classrooms make it difficult for teachers to use flexible teaching strategies and add modern technology to the classroom. Also, the school does not have sufficient cafeteria space, requiring many students to go off campus or eat in the hallways.

OTHER SCHOOL BUILDINGS: The AHFC agrees with the Master Plan approach to the Bowman and Bridge schools (\$13.1 million dollars) and recommends renovating both schools in the near future, filing a SOI with the MSBA for the Estabrook School after the disposition of the LHS SOI is known, and continuing to monitor enrollment numbers to determine Hastings' future use. The AHFC recommends that the Estabrook and Hastings Schools be maintained so they do not further deteriorate. The AHFC does not recommend that the School Administration Building (old Harrington) be renovated at this time. The AHFC recognizes that the remaining spaces in the Administration Building are needed for programs that cannot be housed in other buildings, such as pre-kindergarten and LABBB collaborative special education programs. The districtwide print shop has already been relocated from LHS to the Administration Building to free up one classroom for educational use.

Beyond commenting on the Master Plan, the AHFC also recommends preparing a technology plan for all nine schools and budgeting sufficient operating funds to keep all schools, as well as other town buildings, in proper repair commencing in FY2011.

The recommendations of the AHFC are detailed, comprehensive, and timely. The temptation in tough economic times is to allow maintenance and capital needs to fall to the bottom of the priority list. Even with continually shrinking State budgets and building program reductions, LPS must continue to pursue avenues that keep our facilities safe and able to serve our students. The good work of the AHFC has brought us closer to that goal.

On November 2, at 7:30 p.m., the School Committee will hold an information meeting and public hearing in Cary Hall Auditorium on the recommended PreK-12 long-range facilities plan. The Master Plan, AHFC Report, and Educational Technology Plan can be viewed at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org>

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