

# ESSEX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FEASIBILITY STUDY



In January 2023, the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) recommended and approved the Essex Elementary School for admission into the Eligibility Phase of the MSBA grant process. Being accepted means the MERSD Essex Elementary School has been identified as being one of the neediest schools in the state (close to being out of options to address the structural issues of the building) and a good candidate for the grant program. The MSBA grant program provides technical assistance and financial support (a minimum of 30% reimbursement) for the planning and construction of a new/renovated school.

Acceptance into the program comes at a critical time. In the fall of 2022, MERSD commissioned Habeeb & Associates to conduct a needs assessment of both facilities to provide a data-based resource to guide in the development of a timeline to address the renovation replacement of Essex Elementary School. The results were reported to the community in November 2022 and clearly showed that Essex Elementary has passed its useful life. The study identified approximately \$9 million in capital investments needed to maintain the aging facility. (Habeeb Report '23)

Participation in the MSBA program will allow MERSD to work with the MSBA team of experts to conduct a feasibility study to determine the most cost-effective solution for providing a renovated/rebuilt facility.



## A Feasibility Study is Necessary Because

- This is a requirement of the MSBA to qualify for state-funded reimbursement for any future building project, including renovation
- Creates a transparent process that investigates potential options and provides multiple solutions for the town to consider, including cost estimates and schematic designs for repair, renovation, or new construction
- Provides the school, town officials, and voters the facts needed to make educated decisions about the future of the school and, more importantly, the students it serves



# FEASIBILITY Q&A

## WHY IS THE TOWN THINKING OF TAKING ON A SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECT RIGHT NOW?

The Essex Elementary School building is in critical need of attention. In December 2023, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) identified the Elementary school as one of the neediest schools in the state (close to being out of options to address the structural issues of the building) and a good candidate for the grant program. Each day we wait to take action, we risk not only forgoing state money to offset any project costs, but we risk incurring expenditures of more than nine million dollars in "band-aid" costs such as replacing the roof and major mechanicals only to spend the dollars twice when we are forced to address the needed structural repairs.



## COULD WE JUST REPAIR ESSEX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

Repairing the school will certainly be considered as part of the feasibility study.



## WHAT IS A FEASIBILITY STUDY?

The Essex Elementary School feasibility study is the MSBA's first step. A feasibility study helps our communities determine the best long-term solution to address the failing building. It is a requirement of the MSBA in order to qualify for state-funded reimbursement for any future building project.

## HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

The feasibility study is estimated to cost up to \$1,500,000. The feasibility study will be funded through reserves with contributions from MERSD, Essex, and Manchester. The cost to the towns is determined in accordance with the capital allocation formula outlined in the MERSD Regional Agreement. Additionally, the feasibility study is eligible for MSBA reimbursement.



## WHO CONDUCTS A FEASIBILITY STUDY?

The feasibility study is completed by a designer architect under the management of an Owner's Project Manager (OPM) hired by and in collaboration with the School Building Committee (SBC).

## HOW LONG WILL THE FEASIBILITY STUDY TAKE?

The in-depth analysis of the current condition of the school will take approximately 6-9 months. Upon completion of the first phase, the SBC, OPM and Designer Architect will work with the MSBA on determining the long-term solution for the school. The second phase of the study will include the conceptual and schematic designs and drawings for the solution selected and will take an additional 6-12 months. The total length of time is 12-24 months.



## HOW DOES THE TOWN APPROVE FUNDING THE FEASIBILITY STUDY?

This is a three-step process. The first step is an affirmative vote for the Essex Elementary School Feasibility Study warrant article by the MERSD School Committee. The second and third steps require affirmative votes to fund the towns' portions of the study at each of the town meetings.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE BUILDING WHEN THE STAFF IS PROVIDING A GREAT EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN ALREADY ATTENDING?

The teachers and staff at the Essex Elementary School have done an amazing job educating our students despite the conditions of the building. While we recognize that the most important elements in carrying out our educational mission are the people inside the building, the physical environment cannot be overlooked.



## WHO MAKES UP THE SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE (SBC)?

The SBC is required by the MSBA to be made up of town representatives with backgrounds in construction, architecture, landscape and education, as well as the district superintendent of schools, a school committee member, the school principal, district schools' facility management director, at least one teacher from the school, a member of the finance committee or local budget official, and a representative from an office authorized by law to construct school buildings.



## WHO MAKES THE FINAL DECISION REGARDING A SOLUTION FOR ESSEX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

Ultimately, Town Meetings and the voters in Essex and Manchester make a final decision about the scope of a project, including costs and which option to pursue. Throughout the Feasibility Study period, the School Committee and the School Building Committee will keep the communities apprised of the plan, as well as provide opportunities for public participation and input. We recognize that it is critical to gain public participation and input and secure voter support for any school building project to be successful.



For more information on the MSBA and Feasibility Study process, please visit [www.mersd.org](http://www.mersd.org)

