



Montgomery Area School District

Building Project FAQ

April, 2023

As questions arise regarding the proposed building project they will be added to this document with explanation/answer for public information, therefore this document will be expanded as we move through the process and updated regularly on the district website.

Background: The District conducted a Building Condition Survey in September, 2015 in response to Safe & Secure Schools requirements, plumbing issues, and gym wall repair. This study revealed more deficiencies than the District was able to repair due to financial constraints at that time. The board, together with advice from the architect at that time (Hunt Engineers, Architects & Land Surveyors, P.C.) and our Financial advisors, decided that a larger scale construction project would take place in ten years based on our reduction in debt and borrowing capacity. In order to provide a safe learning environment for our students, priority areas were identified and a \$3.3-million renovation was completed during the summer of 2015. Approaching our 10 year mark, the district issued an RFP for a District wide Facility Study in October of 2021.

- 11/2021: MASD Interviewed the responding Firms for the Facility Study
- 12/2021: MASD hired CRABTREE, ROHRBAUGH & ASSOCIATES to conduct the Facility Study
- 12/2021: A steering committee was formed consisting of staff, board members and community members.
- 12/2022-5/2023: 6 steering committee meetings were held and multiple public board presentations to define our process and establish the needs of the district and to develop the options.

The steering committee developed the following guiding principles for a potential project:

1. *The design and location of educational facilities will be the result of a comprehensive planning process, with expenditures aligned with our financial resources.*
2. *The educational facilities will provide a comfortable, stimulating learning environment that is conducive to*
3. *collaboration, meets the diverse learning styles of individual students, and supports an equal educational opportunity for all.*
4. *The educational facilities will respond to current, and future information, communication and technology needs that will empower staff to deliver a high quality rigorous instructional program blended for the needs of all students.*
5. *The educational facilities will support community use and educational partnerships with local business and industry. 5. The educational facilities will be inspirational in design features that cultivate the critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity of our students.*
6. *The educational facilities will allow space to encourage academic, athletic and social/emotional growth of our students.*
7. *The District facilities will be adaptable to future demographic, educational, and community needs.*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why do we need a new school?

(The following summary is taken from the final Facility Study published on the District Website and presented to the board on 8/30/22 in an advertised school board meeting and public presentation. That meeting was also available through zoom for those not able to attend in person. A video walkthrough of the existing facility was presented at that time, and a public survey was conducted with the results were posted to the District website.)

Link to the full Facility study: <https://www.montasd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/3545-Montgomery-ASD-Final-Study-Website.pdf>

The Montgomery Area School District is a small school district with a small tax base. As with any district of this size, it is difficult to balance all needs throughout the district with limiting funds. The district has done a good job over the years maintaining their facilities with the funds available. However, our current PreK-12 facility can no longer meet the needs of the district and be maintained as-is. The educational programmatic needs of the elementary and secondary grade levels cannot be met with the existing space available. In addition, the existing facility is in need of comprehensive renovations to existing components and systems to bring them up to current construction standards. Construction options were developed to meet these needs. The district is currently at a crossroads and must make a decision to maintain the existing facility as a PreK-12 facility or relocate the secondary grade levels to the MAACC site. With each option there are pros and cons. Those options were studied and revised in order to maximize our priorities and gain the best learning environment that will last our community for 30 years while staying within our borrowing capacity. At our August 30th public presentation multiple options with projected costs were presented by Crabtree, Rohrbaugh & Associates. Option 1 presented was for a comprehensive renovation to our existing site only, to bring the building up to current construction standards. This option did not address our educational or functional deficiencies and had a projected cost of \$27,254,844. This option was only used as a comparison as the committee quickly discovered that maximizing our borrowing capacity and not addressing our educational needs was not an option that we wanted to explore. Option 2 was split with Option 2a providing comprehensive renovations and additions to the Elementary & Jr/Sr High School. This option maintained the current grade configuration and constructed renovations and additions to meet all the needs established in the study. A new addition was proposed for the Elementary School in order to house all of the elementary students within the Elementary school allowing the Jr/Sr High to regain the classrooms that have been currently taken over by elementary classrooms. It included new classroom and support spaces, a new multipurpose gym/cafeteria with satellite kitchen and new main entrance. The current multi-purpose room would be converted to a library and art and music classrooms would be relocated back to the Elementary school. The locker rooms would be renovated and kitchen expanded and fully upgraded in this option as well as reconfiguring the Tech Ed. Spaces, wrestling room and adding a fitness/weight room. This option included a new parent drop-off/pick-up, new bus loop, new elementary playground and much needed expanded parking. The softball field would need relocated to an area that was not determined at the time. This option was our ideal option with maintaining the school as a PK-12 environment on one site and keeping the MAACC as it is currently; however, it came with a projected price tag of \$53,118,729. This is a dollar figure that is unattainable for our District. We went back to the drawing board with option 2b. This option was a modification of option 2a to develop an option that is financially feasible to the district. The new addition was modified to include classroom and support space for the Elementary, new cafeteria with satellite kitchen and new main entrance. The multipurpose room would be converted to a gymnasium and Art and Music would be relocated to the Elementary school area. Library space would continue to be shared with the Jr/Sr High. This option still included construction of a new parent drop-off/pick-up, new bus loop, new elementary playground, and expanded parking. Option 2b still required the relocation of the softball field to an unknown piece of property that would need to be purchased by the District. This option only addressed select renovations in the Jr/Sr High leaving continued programming deficiencies for grades 7-12. Option 2b brought our cost to \$34,486,893. This option was still over our targeted borrowing capacity and did not address all of our identified educational deficiencies. Finally, Option 3 was developed which included two phases. Option 3a included moving the Jr/Sr High School to the MAACC with the constructed

additions. The existing school would convert to Elementary PK-6 configuration with comprehensive renovations including demolition of the oldest section of the building and relocation of the District Office to the former multipurpose room allowing for a new bus loop and elementary playground. This first attempt at option 3 included a new full-size auditorium at the Jr/Sr High, but again was determined to not be financially feasible for our school district with the cost coming in at \$43,511,161 for phase I and phase II projected at \$19,035,238. We again went back to the drawing board to create option 3b with two phases. This option is similar to 3a in that it moves the Jr/Sr High to the MAACC with constructed additions, but eliminates the full-size auditorium, stage and associated support spaces and instead includes a smaller black box theater. The performance auditorium would remain at the existing facility. The existing Montgomery Elementary & Jr/Sr High school would be converted to a Pre-K to 6 Elementary school and would undergo selective renovations including upgrades of existing conditions. The District Office and Board room would remain in its current location and the former Tech Ed area will be available for maintenance and needed general storage. Site upgrades would include construction of a new parent drop-off/pick-up and new elementary playground. The existing softball field would remain and serve the Jr/Sr High School athletics program. This option was the closest option to address all of our facility conditions and educational & functional deficiencies. It allows for future expansion if needed and allows all additions constructed to remain on non-occupied school owned current sites. This option 3b would need to be constructed in phases but allows for construction during school times as students can be educated in areas not under construction at the time. Option 3b phase I was projected at a cost of \$32,314,026 with 3b Phase II projected at a cost of \$10,617,461. This option, after much study, became the most feasible option for the District at this time allowing us to address most of the identified issues over time, leaving the District in the best financial and facility condition for the future. Moving the secondary grade levels to the MAACC will align the secondary students with the athletic facilities and will also free up space at the existing building to allow the elementary educational program to be met. In the end, the district is limited in its maximum borrowing capacity. The tax increases over the next four years will cover the cost of future loan obligations.

The District received approximately \$3 Million Dollars in ESSER funding through COVID 19. The Board of Education decided to focus this funding on improvements to the Jr./Sr. High School HVAC system, renovation of the shared library learning commons, renovation of office space for specialized services for students, and improved safety areas throughout the school complex. These areas are projected to remain for the Pre-K-6 elementary school in the future.

Why don't we purchase a piece of property and build a new building instead of attaching it to a 20+ year old existing structure?

This is a great question as our current building situation is a large building with many additions and renovations over time. Those timelines are:

Original Construction 1930

Additions & Renovations, 1956, 1984, 2000

Renovations 2006, 2015

During the steering committee meetings various properties were discussed including an area for a softball field should the option to add to the existing school buildings be selected. The option of purchasing property large enough for a Jr. Sr. High school, and constructing a new building was not within our financial ability. In addition, this option does not allow for our students to have access to their athletic facilities during the regular school day. The existing structure at the MAACC was constructed in 2000 and is a pre-engineered metal building. The proposed new construction will surround the gym and will fit within property we currently own without disturbing athletic fields.

How much will the proposed option cost the District?

\$32,900,000.00 with additional costs for renovation/demolition of areas in the existing building.

How long will it take the District to pay it off?

30-years (last payment projected for 2057)

How much is it going to cost the taxpayer?

.84 Mills increase each year over the next 4 years.

What is millage and how does it work?

Millage is a multiplier of assessed value of your property. We have used a \$100,000 property assessment as an example, $\$100,000 \times .00084 = \84

Why doesn't it have to be voted on by the taxpayers?

Act 1 is a property tax relief bill passed by the Pennsylvania legislature in 2006 and amended in 2011. It greatly expanded rebates and exemptions for senior citizens and provided rebates for other homeowners. It also set a cap on the amount a school district can raise property taxes without first getting voter approval. The cap is calculated with an eye toward allowing school districts to cover normal inflationary cost increases. If a school district wishes to raise taxes above that cap, the increase must be voted on in a district-wide referendum.

The proposed .84 Mill tax increase does not exceed our cap or "index" under Act 1 for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Is it true we are installing a turf football field?

We do not have a turf football field or an all-weather track included in the price of the project at this time. We maximized the square footage of the educational spaces based on our budget, therefore, a stadium project as well as a greenhouse for our agriculture and culinary programs will be bid as alternates. When bids come in, we will be able to make decisions at that time based on our budget whether the district can afford to include the alternate bids. This is why the current soccer field is remaining, until we know where we are financially after the project is bid.

Why do we not have a full-size auditorium designed in the new building?

We had a new full-size auditorium designed, however the cost did not allow for it to remain. Instead, we would like to maintain our current auditorium and the new, more intimate theatre in the new school, will be used for smaller performances with seating projected at 158. Our current auditorium seats over 500.

What is going to happen to the old school complex?

The elementary grades pre-K to 6 will move into the current Jr./Sr. High school areas gaining the much needed space for their programs. They will finally have the use of a gym, library, cafeteria, auditorium, art, and music rooms on their own schedule, greatly increasing their flexibility in programming. The current elementary classrooms are considered in the most need of repair. This is the portion of the building that would be projected for demolition in order to gain a play area and proper drop-off and pick-up for our elementary students. This section of the building would be maintained at its current condition, including the wrestling rooms until demolition. It would be fiscally responsible of the district to seek school-based programs that would generate funding to offset the costs of maintaining the building until such time that the board and community would make the final decision on demolition.

The .84 mills tax increase covers the cost of construction; how much more of an increase will be needed to cover the additional maintenance costs, wage increases, and overall price increases?

It is the intent of the district at this time to hold the tax increases over the next 4 years to .84 mills per year.

New questions added 4/17/23

If we need a new elementary school, why are we building a new high school?

The offerings needed to fulfill a well-rounded secondary educational program are lacking in both size and quality at our current Jr/Sr High school. Our current career programs of study (Agriculture, Bio/Ag STEM, Culinary, Construction, Manufacturing, Engineering, Broadcasting) are overcrowded. We have outgrown the current space as all of our students participate in career exploratory programs for jobs of the future. Art, Music and Science facilities are undersized and outdated for current and future secondary school standards.

Wouldn't it be cheaper to build an elementary school?

It would not be cheaper to build an elementary school, and the renovations that would be needed to maintain Jr/Sr High students in the existing building would exceed our budget. Our current elementary enrollment PK-6 is 526 students. Jr/Sr High grades 7-12 is 413.

We also took into consideration placing our Jr/Sr High students close to their athletic facilities and weight room will allow them access during the regular school day as well as after school.

Can we sell or rent the existing elementary school to offset some of the cost of construction?

We would be able to look for programs that would benefit our community to rent unoccupied space until the district has the ability to complete phase II of the project.

Have we looked into solar panels for the roof and other areas of the facility to reduce operating costs?

Energy efficiency is built into this project. Solar panels have been discussed and a conversation has taken place with McClure, however they are not included in the new construction at this time.

How much staff will we add to support the second facility? Administrators, maintenance personnel, food service personnel, and security personnel were mentioned.

Projected staff needed to support the new facility include a librarian, a nurse and a custodian. (2 professional staff and 1 support staff)

Are we receiving any state or federal money to offset the cost?

The Commonwealth is not funding Plan Con at this time; however, our feasibility study was completed in accordance with Plan Con requirements so that we would be eligible for reimbursement if the program would be funded once again by our legislators.

Is there going to be any renovation necessary to make the existing high school suitable for use as an elementary school?

Yes, this renovation is projected as phase II of the project at a cost of \$10,617,461.

Has there been any discussion with other school districts about the consolidation of resources as a way to reduce costs? The examples given were administrative staff, specialized educators, IT personnel, etc.

We currently share resources where possible with our local Intermediate Unit, however, we have found that outside of consortium pricing for technology and our IU WAN, we have saved considerable monies developing our own programs to meet the unique needs of our students.

In 2007, the General Assembly released a study on the cost for individual school districts to educate students to meet the Pennsylvania Performance Standards. Please see the following summary of that study.

Name of the Study "Costing Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Public Education Goals" **Date Released** November 14, 2007

Who performed the study? The study was commissioned and funded by the General Assembly in June 2006. It was supervised and released by the State Board of Education. It was performed by a national consulting firm - Augenblick, Palaich and Associates of Denver, Colorado. What is the purpose of the study? The study was designed to understand what it costs for all students in Pennsylvania public schools – no matter where they live – to receive a quality education allowing them to meet state standards for academic achievement. By understanding these costs, the state can adjust its funding system to close the gap between high-spending and low-spending school districts. These gaps cause local tax pressures in many communities, especially on property taxes.

Summary of Findings

The major findings of the study include the following:

- The average annual total funding needed per student in Pennsylvania is \$11,926. The average per-student amount actually spent in 2005-06 was \$9,512. Thus, the study found that an average increase of \$2,414 per student per year is needed for all students to reach Pennsylvania's academic proficiency and performance expectations.
- 471 of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts are currently spending below the levels recommended by the costing out study. 1.67 million students attend these under-funded schools. Some districts are currently spending more than \$6,000 per student below the level needed to provide a quality education under state standards.
- In total, Pennsylvania must increase education spending by \$4.38 billion per year over current levels – a 25.4 percent increase – in order to meet established performance standards. This number was calculated by adding up the per-student spending gaps in districts across the state.
- Pennsylvania's current state funding system is inequitable. Districts with higher wealth and lower student needs spend more per student than lower wealth districts with higher student needs. On average, the higher wealth districts can do this while still making a lower tax effort than other districts.

The entire study can be found here including the specific numbers for individual school districts:

<https://www.stateboard.education.pa.gov/Documents/Research%20Reports%20and%20Studies/PA%20Costin g%20Out%20Study%20rev%2012%2007.pdf>

I am retired, living on a fixed income, and already having trouble paying my bills. Is there any way I can avoid the tax increases?

Yes, there is a Property Tax / Rent Rebate Program for Pennsylvania Citizens age 65 and older. Please follow the link below to the application.

<https://www.revenue.pa.gov/IncentivesCreditsPrograms/PropertyTaxRentRebateProgram/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=The%20rebate%20program%20benefits%20eligible,Social%20Security%20income%20is%20excluded>

I'm 35 and live in a home valued at \$150,000. If I live here another 30 years, I'm really going to have over \$15,000 in just this construction project?

If you consider the .84 Mill tax increase as solely for a building project and calculate what you are paying in increased taxes after the next 30-years, you could say that it equates to \$15,000 after 30 years.

Will I still have access to the MACC when I want to exercise?

Yes, it was important to the committee that we still provide access to the MAACC for our community. There is a separate entrance that will allow access to our exercise facilities by community members.

Has the Board met with local borough and township officials to make sure their growth projections match those of the municipalities?

A student population study was conducted using the Pennsylvania Department of Education's criteria for the Plan Con process during the facilities study. Our growth is projected to maintain at our current numbers. This building project is not planned because of an increase in population, rather to address the needs of our declining and failing facilities.

What is the projected impact of this project on the education of our kids? Is it the buildings that make MASD great or the people within them? Do you expect an increase in test scores, college acceptance rates, average income of graduates, etc through the completion of this project? The individual used colleges as an example. Many of them offer the same degrees, but those degrees don't always equate to the same thing out in the working world.

It would be expected that providing modern teaching tools in a facility designed for teaching and learning of the future, that our student performance would increase. Positive student performance is so much more than test scores. It is about engagement, inquiry, positive relationships and real-world applications. It is definitely not a building, but the quality of instruction within that makes MASD great, however, we have reached a point where our facilities are beginning to negatively impact the quality that we can provide our students.

Communities are also impacted by the quality of their schools through growth in industry and new families finding the area desirable to relocate.

Has there been a determination of when/if the board meeting from 4/18 will be resumed? Also, does this hinder the timeline of the facility hearing considering there was not an official vote on the project fund approval on the agenda that evening?

There will not be a special meeting. The board will meet at its regular time on Tuesday May 16, 2023 at 7:00 pm. There will be no Act 34 hearing. The resolution was not voted on at the April meeting, therefore there was no advertisement for a hearing on the 16th. (An Act 34 hearing must be advertised for 20 days). The board will determine the date of the Act 34 hearing at the May board meeting.

The Act 34 meeting has been advertised for June 8, 2023, 6:00pm in the HS Auditorium

Why was the maximum project cost on the agenda around \$35 million when the board has settled on option 3b and the total estimated project cost of that option was roughly \$43 million. \$32.3 plus \$10.6. Phase 1 plus Phase 2. This is information I pulled from the faq sheet.

The numbers listed in the resolution were provided by our Financial firm (PFM) based on Option 3b Phase 1 only.

Is it possible that if the board is only voting on the amount for phase 1, that 3b phase 2 could not even happen?

It would be up to the sitting school board at the time to vote on exactly what would be done in Option 3b Phase II. There is no way to know how much money we will need until bids come back on the first phase. Everyone hopes that bidding is favorable, but moving forward with any options is based on reviewing real costs when the project bids come in. If bids are favorable it takes a vote of the school board to award bids and move forward with Phase I, and to begin budgeting and planning for Phase II.