

[FAQ on School Consolidation](#)

On November 5, 2024, Portland voters will vote on a proposed \$68 million school consolidation project. If approved, the project will involve renovating and expanding Valley View Elementary School to create a PreK-5 school, moving sixth grade to Portland Middle School, and decommissioning Gildersleeve Elementary School and Brownstone Intermediate School.

The following provides relevant information and links to certain documents.

Q: What is the current status of Portland public schools?

A: In February 2020, Portland Public Schools commissioned Sightlines LLC to conduct a facilities analysis. The Sightlines Report identified \$28.2 million in capital projects across all five district schools over the next ten years. In 2022, a second facility analysis was conducted by Friar Architecture, assessing architectural, structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing needs, along with a code survey. Friar updated the cost estimate for capital projects across all five district schools to \$45.8 million.

[Click [here](#) to read the Sightlines Report and cost estimate. Click [here](#) to read the Friar Facility Analysis and cost estimate.]

Q: What happened after the Town received the Sightlines Report?

A: In June 2021, the Portland Board of Selectmen established a Facility Study Committee to evaluate the current and future facilities needs of Portland schools. The committee presented its report in June 2022.

[Click [here](#) to read the Facility Study Committee's report.]

Q: What happened after the Facility Study Committee's report?

A: The Facility Study Committee considered several options: maintaining five schools, consolidating to four schools, or consolidating to three schools. The Portland Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education decided to move forward with the three-school consolidation after conducting a community survey.

[Click [here](#) to view the community survey results. Click [here](#) to view a video presentation of the community-wide survey results.]

Q: What is the plan for the consolidated school?

A: The Portland Board of Education developed an educational specification plan and asked Friar Architecture to develop a plan for the new elementary school. Friar Architecture created 3D models and a blocking diagram based on the educational specifications plan.

[Click [here](#) to view the educational specifications plan. Click [here](#) to view a Google Slide Presentation with the 3D models and blocking diagram.]

Q: What will happen to the Gildersleeve and Brownstone school buildings if they are decommissioned?

A: The Portland Board of Selectmen formed a Land and Building Usage Assessment Committee to explore options for repurposing or reusing the Gildersleeve and Brownstone buildings. The committee's findings are outlined in a report.

[Click [here](#) to view the committee's report.]

Q: What happens if the referendum does not pass?

A: If the referendum does not pass, the Town will consider two alternatives:

1. **Consolidate to Four Schools:** This would involve decommissioning one of the district's elementary schools and consolidating from three elementary schools to two elementary schools. There are various options involving which of the three elementary schools (e.g., Valley View, Gildersleeve, and/or Brownstone) is subject to decommissioning, costs associated with renovations and alterations, and what the new grade level configurations at the remaining two elementary schools will become.
 2. **Maintain All Five Schools:** This option would require developing a capital improvement plan to address the infrastructure needs identified in the Sightlines Report and Friar Facility Analysis.
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Q: How much will the consolidation cost taxpayers, and how will it affect the mill rate?

A: The estimated total cost of the project, including financing, is \$68 million. The plan includes an estimated 56% reimbursement from the State of Connecticut for eligible expenses, leaving Portland responsible for 44% of the costs.

[Click [here](#) to read the explanatory text on the referendum question. Click [here](#) to review the projected debt service impact and its effect on the mill rate.]

Q: Are there any assumptions built into the cost estimates?

A: Yes, several assumptions are considered in the cost estimates:

1. The financing assumes the State will classify the project as a "renovate-to-new," which qualifies for 51% reimbursement from the State. It is expected that the State will classify the project as "renovate-to-new" because renovating and extending Valley View is less expensive than building an entirely new school, which is the standard the State uses to determine "renovate to new" status.
 2. The financing assumes Portland will receive a 5% bonus for participation in the Open Choice Program, which thereby increases the overall reimbursement rate from 51% to 56%. To qualify for the enhanced reimbursement rate, Portland commits to maintaining 5% of our enrollment for Open Choice students.
 3. The financing projection assumes no growth in the Town's net grand list. If the grand list grows, a larger tax base could lessen the mill rate impact.
 4. The plan is based on a 30-year bond with a 4.5% interest rate, without accounting for possible future refinancing.
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Q: How much will property taxes increase?

A: The Town assesses properties in Portland. Assessed values are generally calculated at 70% of the market value. For a home with an assessed value of \$200,000.00, the bond repayment would raise the mill rate by 2.41 mills during the 2052 fiscal year, which is the peak of the repayment calendar. This would increase annual property taxes by \$481.45.

Q: Are there any expected savings from the consolidation?

A: Yes, consolidation is expected to reduce costs in transportation, utilities (e.g., heating, electrical, water/sewer, etc.), general maintenance, supplies, equipment, and staffing. By moving to a single elementary school, staffing needs for nurses, administrative assistants, custodians, teachers, and administrators will decrease. Compared to the 2023-24 school year, if the consolidation is approved, the district estimates a possible reduction of up to \$1.1 million from the operating budget. Initial reductions would be reflected in the 2025-26 operating budget, with further savings in the 2027-28 operating budget. These savings are one-time reductions.

Q: Will class sizes increase with staff reductions?

A: No. The reductions will involve support staff and overlapping positions required to operate three schools. Class sizes will not be affected by the consolidation.

Q: If the referendum passes, what is the expected timeline?

A: If approved, the Board of Selectmen will form a building committee this year. The building committee will select an architectural firm by the end of the 2024-25 school year. During the 2025-26 school year, PreK-2 students will move to Gildersleeve Elementary; grades 3-5 will move to Brownstone Intermediate; and grade six will move to Portland Middle School. Renovations at Valley View Elementary will occur during the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years. By the start of the 2027-28 school year, PreK-5 students will move into the renovated and expanded Valley View Elementary.

Q: What academic and extracurricular programs will the new school support?

A: The new school will accommodate all current academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs. Any changes will be reviewed by district staff, with input from parents and students, and must be approved by the Board of Education.

Q: Will the schedule look different at the PreK-5 Valley View and 6-8 Portland Middle School?

A: District leaders have developed proposed schedules, including lunch waves, specials, and core academic courses.

[Click [here](#) to view sample schedules for students in a consolidated PreK-5 school. Click [here](#) to view sample schedules for students in a grades 6-8 Portland Middle School]

Q: Will the community be able to use the new facility when school is not in session?

A: Yes, the new facility will be available for community use in the same way current facilities are used.

Q: Will ball fields or gym space used by Portland Parks and Recreation and other community groups in the Town be reduced?

A: The ball field space will not be reduced. The consolidation plan does not affect the fields at Valley View. However, the fields behind Gildersleeve could be modified depending on future

decisions regarding the decommissioning of Gildersleeve. The Gildersleeve fields are rarely used by Parks and Recreation or other community groups. The fields at Agoglioti Fields will remain unaffected.

Gym space could be impacted depending on what the Town decides for the decommissioned Gildersleeve and Brownstone buildings. Currently, the gyms at Gildersleeve, Brownstone, Portland Middle School, and Portland High School are used by Parks and Rec and other community groups. The gym at Valley View is not utilized due to its size and condition. The renovated and expanded Valley View would include a new, full-size gym available for community use. If Gildersleeve and Brownstone are no longer available, gym space for the community will be provided at the new Valley View, Portland Middle School, and Portland High School. This represents a net reduction of one gym.

Q: What if I have more questions?

A: You can contact Superintendent Charles Britton at cbritton@portlandct.us or First Selectman Ryan Curley at rcurley@portlandct.org.

Q: How can I share feedback or comments?

A: You can address the Portland Board of Education or the Portland Board of Selectmen during the public comment portion of their regular meetings.

Q: When is the referendum?

A: The referendum will be held on Tuesday, November 5, 2024, during election day. Absentee ballots are available beginning Friday, October 4th.
