



## **Frequently Asked Questions about Imagine OPRF Project 2**

### **What led to Project 2?**

Project 2 is an outcome of the Imagine OPRF long-term capital projects planning process that began in 2017. The Imagine OPRF Work Group, which included 30 community members and 10 employees, led a comprehensive, 18-month process that was needs-driven, student-centered, and equity focused.

Much of the building is more than 100 years old, and the work group found that learning spaces do not support the needs of this century's students. Problems with capacity, configuration, and condition are significant. In November 2018, the Imagine OPRF Work Group made its recommendations to the Board for addressing these problems with a long-term, five-phase plan.

Project 1 broke ground in summer 2020 and is nearly complete, with just 20 classrooms left to renovate in summer 2023. Included in the project were a new, centralized Student Resource Center, with a library, tutoring center, and makerspace; 15 new classrooms; 65 classroom renovations; eight all-gender washrooms; and an ADA-compliant elevator.

### **What does Project 2 include?**

Project 2 focuses on building a new physical education wing to replace the southeast (Scoville and Lake) corner of the building, and includes:

- **A 25-yard x 40-yard pool and spectator balcony** to replace the two current pools, which were built in 1928
- Larger, flexible, multi-use gyms that can serve as a competition space and replace small, limited use gyms

- **All-gender locker rooms** for gender non-conforming students
- **Performing arts dressing rooms** (boys, girls, and all gender)
- **An elevator that complies with accessibility requirements**
- **A multi-purpose/dance gym**
- **A weight room**
- **Boys locker rooms** to replace the current ones, which have a host of issues (poor ventilation, plumbing problems, inadequate toilet space, etc.)
- **Girls locker rooms**
- **PE classrooms, PE and athletics offices, PE equipment storage and a conference room** to replace the ones removed during demolition
- **Improvements to the performing arts green room**, which does not meet student needs
- **Costume shop/storage, prop shop/storage**
- **An expanded treatment room for athletic trainers** that addresses inadequate space and inaccessibility issues
- **Student commons and pre-function space**
- **Green roof** to manage stormwater runoff

### **Why is Physical Education so important?**

Because OPRFHS is about educating the whole person. Healthy students exercise their minds *and* their bodies. Our Physical Education curriculum focuses on exposing students to as many different physical activities as possible for four years, so that they have a wide range of options for lifetime fitness, health, and wellness.

Virtually every one of our 3,400 students learns in PE spaces year-round for four years. Our PE spaces are *classrooms* where 300-400 students receive instruction every single period of the school day.

PE spaces also are used by many of our 29 different athletics teams—which has academic benefits. OPRFHS data shows that students who participate in extracurriculars, including sports, have a grade point average that is, on average, half a point higher than students who don't.

### **UPDATED What is the cost of this project?**

Approximately \$102 million.

### **I thought it was much less. What happened?**

The original Project 2 cost estimate of \$64.5 million came from the 2018 Imagine plan and was based on a high-level conceptual design, or “bubble drawings.” In order to provide an accurate cost estimate, in April 2022 the Board of Education approved creating a schematic design, which is the detailed one used for construction.

As part of this process, project architect FGM held three rounds of programming meetings with students, PE teachers, and coaches. FGM found that in most instances, the current needs of these groups aligned with what was provided for in the Imagine plan. In addition, the space allocations and mid-range finishes that were included in the original conceptual design have not changed significantly.

What *has* changed is that we've experienced a global pandemic, supply chain issues, and steep inflation. In addition to these factors, the schematic design cost reflects the significant structural needs of building gyms on top of a pool.

**What makes PE an equity issue, and how was equity addressed in the Imagine process?**

Virtually every one of our 3,400 students learns in PE spaces year-round for four years. More than any other classrooms, our Physical Education facilities are where *all* students learn together every day, regardless of academic ability, race/ethnicity, gender, income status, etc. Swim instruction in particular is an equity issue: Black children and children of low-income status are far more likely than white children to report low or no swimming ability, and Black people drown at a rate 50 percent higher than that of white people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Equity was at the heart of the Imagine team's work. The application process, the diversity of membership, and the three guiding principles of being equity focused, needs driven, and student centered all were aimed at ensuring that any developed plans had the needs of all of our students front and center.

The Imagine team was deliberate in gathering data that it could disaggregate by race. For instance, in our student survey, 669 students responded to the question about what spaces do not work well for them. For the 245 respondents of color, the top three spaces were, in order, bathrooms, locker rooms, and pool. For the 92 Black student respondents, the top four spaces, in order, were bathrooms, locker rooms, cafeteria, and pool + music spaces (tied).

The team also conducted 28 listening sessions with student groups/classes, a third of which were, by design, clubs whose members tend to experience marginalization, such as ASPIRA, Black Leaders Union, and Students Advocating for Equity.

**NEW How will Project 2 be funded?**

The funding plan that the Board approved on April 27, 2023, involves borrowing \$45.3 million in debt certificates, which do not require a referendum nor create an additional tax levy. Instead, the debt certificates will be repaid from the district's annual operating budget in annual increments of \$3.5 million over a period of 20 years. The funding plan also includes \$44.2 million from cash reserves and \$12.5 million in donations raised by the Imagine Foundation.

**The district has a cash reserve of roughly \$90 million. Why not just use that?**

School districts need to maintain a certain level of cash reserves, also called a fund balance, in order to cover emergencies or unforeseen circumstances. For instance, Cook County was months late in distributing property taxes during the second half of calendar year 2022; some school districts with low reserves had to borrow money just to pay their bills.

Here in District 200, Board policy requires maintaining a fund balance between 25% and 50% of expenditures. The current fund balance is at 86%. By the end of this fiscal year, on June 30, 2023, it's expected to be at 69%. While some portion of the reserves could be allocated to Project 2, they cannot be drained to cover the entire cost.

**This is a huge investment. Wouldn't the money be better spent on academics?**

To be clear, Physical Education is one of our academic divisions, and PE spaces are *curricular* spaces, where teaching and learning happen for virtually all of our 3,400 students every school day for four years. The PE curriculum focuses on building foundational skills for comprehensive life-long wellness, and that goes beyond

physical fitness to include topics such as mental health, self defense, CPR, healthy relationships, and nutrition. Students need and deserve modern facilities in which to learn these skills.

Think of it this way: Overall, the district spends roughly \$85 million per year on student instruction. In comparison, spending \$100 million in facilities that can be expected to last at least 40 years breaks down to an annual cost of roughly \$2.5 million, which is a worthwhile investment for current and future generations of students.

### **Instead of wholly replacing the PE wing, could you renovate in place?**

Renovating in place would improve some conditions, but the capacity and configuration problems wouldn't be solved. For example, the gymnasiums, which were built when boys and girls weren't allowed to take PE together, are in some cases so small and cramped that we have students learning in hallways. There is no elevator in this wing of the building, and many of the spaces are inaccessible to anyone with mobility issues. Our locker rooms lack private changing spaces; students of all genders identify this as a problem, and it's a particular concern for our gender-nonconforming students. Such problems can't be addressed without remaking the space.

### **How much of the cost is due to the pool in Project 2?**

Of the \$102 million total for Project 2, roughly \$21.5 million is for the pool and its associated spaces, such as pool decks, locker rooms, observation gallery, etc.

### **Why not cover the outdoor pool at Ridgeland Common?**

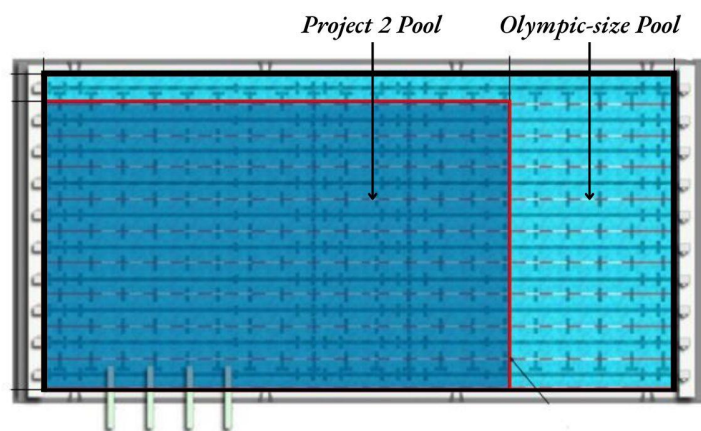
While covering the Ridgeland pool may seem like a simple solution, it's a construction project that would require engineering and building a whole new structure around the pool. For instance, the current locker rooms are not big enough for the high school's classes and teams, and there's no observation gallery or elevator, which would be required. A rough estimate shows that even with minimal work to the existing Ridgeland pool itself, the cost would be around \$18 million.

Furthermore, the school's pools are heavily used by hundreds of students all day, for Physical Education instruction from 8:00 a.m. to 3:11 p.m., then for athletics practices, meets, or performances before school, in the evenings, and on the weekends. The use of an indoor pool at Ridgeland Common could support some of the high school activities. However, it would not meet a majority of our needs due the park district's programming uses to serve the community.

### **But what if you made the pool smaller, say, 25 yards x 25 yards?**

Aside from a smaller pool not being sufficient to meet all of our curricular and extracurricular needs, shrinking the pool by 15 yards would reduce the cost from \$21.5 million to roughly \$18.5 million. It would not reduce the overall footprint of the Project 2 PE wing, however; a schematic design would be required to determine how those 15 yards would be repurposed and what it would cost.

### **I keep hearing Project 2 includes an oversized Olympic pool—is that true?**



Absolutely not. The pool in the Imagine plan is 25 yards x 40 yards, which replaces the current two swimming pools in-kind and accommodates physical education instruction for more than 2,000 students each year. It also addresses all of the other aquatic uses at the school, including providing sufficient pool area to move diving back on-campus.

The to-scale drawing here shows the size of the pool in the Imagine plan (darker blue) relative to an Olympic-size pool (lighter blue), which measures 25 meters x 50 meters. The Imagine pool aligns with the size of competition pools built at roughly 20 other Chicago-area high schools over the past 25 years. For example, Hinsdale and Leyden have recently built the same or similar size pools.

### **Didn't the community already vote down a new pool?**

What was voted down in 2016, by a margin of 0.08%, was a bond issue of \$25 million. The money would have been combined with \$20 million from cash reserves to build new performing arts classrooms; update classrooms with technology and flexible furnishings to meet the needs of this century's learners; replace the two 1928 pools with a single 25-yard x 40-meter pool and a new garage on the site of the existing garage; and renovate locker rooms to eliminate health and safety issues.

There were 35,676 votes cast on the ballot question, which failed by 28 votes. With the community almost evenly split on the issue, the district created the community-based Imagine OPRF process to address the most common questions that came up during the referendum: How does a pool fit into the overall facilities needs, and what would addressing all the needs cost?

### **Where can I get more information?**

Scan this QR code or go to [bit.ly/OPRFfacilitiesmasterplan](https://bit.ly/OPRFfacilitiesmasterplan)

