

Consolidation Q & A

1. Why are you deciding now to consolidate to one building?

This is not a new decision. Over the last 10 years, the different members of the LBI Board of Education have agreed on one thing, that consolidating the students into one building would be beneficial for not only the students and staff, but also for the taxpayers; however, they differed in which building.

- In 2010 a feasibility study on consolidation was ordered by the Mayors of Surf City, Ship Bottom, Harvey Cedars, Barnegat Light and Long Beach Township, and the study concluded that it was feasible to combine the 2 schools into a single site, and it was determined that the best option was to sell the LBI Grade School property.
- In 2017, the 2-question, \$18.4M referendum to renovate the EJ Building and add an addition was voted down by the taxpayers as being too costly.
- In 2019, the \$7.6M referendum to make necessary structural repairs and minor renovations to the LBI Building failed due to the uncertainty of the structural repairs under the building, the concern that the building was not large enough to accommodate all the students, and the past damage from Superstorm Sandy.

2. What recent steps did you take to determine which building to keep?

The Board of Education engaged Spiezle Architectural Group to evaluate each building and provide a report including:

- The cost to renovate the LBI Building
- The cost to renovate the LBI Building and add an addition to consolidate all the students
- The cost to renovate the EJ Building
- The cost to renovate the EJ Building and add an addition to consolidate all the students
- The cost to demolish and construct a new building

The Board of Education also engaged a Real Estate Appraisal company to appraise both properties.

Based on the aforementioned reports, it was determined that consolidating to the EJ Building was the solution.

3. Why am I only hearing about this now? See question 1.

The decision to choose the EJ School came after the BOE engaged with an architectural firm to provide cost estimates for consolidation at each building. The architectural firm presented their findings to the public in July 2020. The uncertainty of necessary structural repairs under the LBI Grade School was a key determining factor to choose the EJ School. The representative from the engineering firm, (who has been monitoring the structural condition of the LBI Grade School for several years and conducted numerous inspections) was present at the public meeting and indicated he would not invest any more funds into the renovation of the LBI Grade School Building.

4. How much will this cost?

The estimated cost of the addition is \$19 million. However, if we do not have all the funds available certain pieces of the plan will be put on hold until funds are available.

5. How much is this going to cost the taxpayers?

There will be no cost to the taxpayers. The Board of Education is funding the construction project through Capital Reserve funds.

6. What exactly is being added in the addition and how big will it be?

- Phase 1 of the construction project will add 5 new classrooms at almost \$8,000 sq. feet.
- Phase 2 will include a 6,345 sq. ft. gymnasium.

7. Will there be 2 gymnasiums?

The existing gymnasium is not full size, and after discussions, it was determined that the space would be better utilized as a cafeteria and interior office spaces.

8. Are any staff being let go?

Any staff reductions will be through attrition.

9. Will the class sizes increase?

As we closely monitor class sizes for the 2025-2026 school year, the majority of classes will not increase. The district will maintain class size at an optimal instructional level. Class sizes will remain at or below our current Class Size policy.

10. Why the EJ school and not the LBI Grade School?

The uncertainty of necessary structural repairs under the LBI Grade School was a key determining factor to choose the EJ School. The representative from the

engineering firm, (who has been monitoring the structural condition of the LBI Grade School for several years and conducted numerous inspections) was present at the public meeting and indicated he would not invest any more funds into the renovation of the LBI Grade School Building.

11. Why can't we go out to referendum and keep both schools? See question 1.

The taxpayers have twice voted down a referendum. The first time to consolidate to the EJ School and the 2nd time to keep both schools and make necessary repairs to the LBI School.

12. Is the district suing Ship Bottom?

The Board of Education reached out to the Borough of Ship Bottom twice to inquire whether the Borough was interested in acquiring the LBI Grade School Property. No response was ever received from the Borough causing the Board of Education to then advertise the sale of the property via public bid. With knowledge of the Board's efforts to sell the LBI Grade School Property, the Borough of Ship Bottom and the Ship Bottom Land Use Board moved forward requesting and approving a Reexamination to the Borough's Master Plan and an amendment to the Borough's Zoning Ordinance specifically as it relates to the zone governing the LBI Grade School property.

The main purpose for the adoption of the zoning ordinance was to make it more difficult for the Board of Education or any subsequent purchaser/owner to obtain a use variance and develop the LBI Grade School Property. The Board of Education engaged an attorney specializing in Land Use to represent its interests. A suit was commenced against the Borough and the Land Use Board challenging their actions.

On December 18, 2023, the Court decided the suit in favor of the Board of Education and struck down the zoning ordinance. A link to the Court's 18 page decision and the initial complaint filed against the Borough and Land Use Board can be found on the district's web page under the Consolidation Information tab.

Litigation between the Board of Education and the Borough of Ship Bottom is now concluded.

13. How big is the property?

The Ship Bottom property is just shy of 5 acres.

14. Is it true the school district doesn't own the EJ School Property?

The Board of Education owns the EJ School and property located in both Surf City and Ship Bottom. However, the borough of Surf City has a right of first refusal to purchase that portion if we were ever to sell it.

15. Are there currently any buyers for the property?

Yes, after careful consideration, the Board of Education and Michael Pagnotta entered into a Purchase Agreement for the sale of the Grade School Property. Per the Agreement, Pagnotta's intentions are to seed to develop single family residential homes on the school property. His efforts were delayed due to the litigation between the Board and Borough.

On July 23, 2024, the Board of Education approved the second amendment to the purchase agreement with Michael Pagnotta Architect, P.A. d/b/a Fortuna Park LLC for the purchase of the Long Beach Island Grade School property. On the same evening, the Ship Bottom Council named Michael Pagnotta Architect d/b/a Fortuna Park LLC as the designated redeveloper for the LBI Grade School property. Additionally, as a result of the resolutions adopted by Ship Bottom, litigation between the Board of Education and the Borough of Ship Bottom is now concluded.