

Board of Education Meeting – December 8, 2025

GES/PES Building Project Update Questions & Answers

Why are we looking at rebuilding on the current PES site instead of choosing a new property?

The PES site, while challenging, remains **more feasible** than undeveloped alternatives. Building on a school property reduces unknowns, avoids land acquisition, and qualifies for **more reliable state reimbursement**.

Undeveloped sites bring significant added costs for infrastructure, utilities, access roads, and permitting.

2. What about the remaining unruled-out sites like Roxbury Road or the IBM property?

These locations were studied, but each presented major drawbacks:

Roxbury Road

- Plenty of space but using it would leave PES behind—requiring additional costs for demolition, remediation, and future site planning.
- Higher environmental and long-term maintenance impacts.

IBM Property

- Access roads were built for corporate use and are not well suited for school traffic.
 - Utilities in the area are older and would need substantial upgrades.
 - High up-front infrastructure costs before construction could even begin.
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3. Was the Southbury Training School (STS) property considered? Why was it eliminated?

Yes. STS posed several constraints:

- Limited buildable acreage due to wetlands and waterways.
 - Needed removal of existing buildings and large-scale grading.
 - Steep slopes would require extensive retaining walls—undesirable for an elementary campus.
 - Overall timeline and cost significantly exceeded other options.
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4. If PES has site challenges, why not choose the easiest land to build on?

“Easy land” usually comes with **hidden costs**:

- Land acquisition
- Major utility installation
- Roadway reconstruction
- Longer permitting timelines
- Transportation route redesign for the district
- Roxbury Road is the easiest land to build on but may be difficult to acquire

Building on existing school land keeps the project **faster, more predictable, and more reimbursable**.

5. How does transportation factor into site selection?

Relocating a school affects:

- Bus routes
- Parent traffic patterns
- Timing of district-wide transportation
- Road improvements required by the town and state
- Student redistricting

Choosing a site that disrupts the fewest transportation patterns helps control costs and project complexity.

6. Why isn't renovation (“Renovate to New”) the preferred option?

Past studies—conducted with Newfield Construction—found that **renovation cost more per square foot** than building new.

Reasons include:

- Work must occur around students → nights, weekends, summers
 - Phasing stretches the project timeline to nearly double
 - Higher remediation and abatement costs in older buildings
 - More unpredictable site conditions once walls and foundations are opened
 - Significant educational disruption over multiple years
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7. With increased state reimbursement, should renovation be reconsidered?

Because reimbursement rules and construction costs have changed, it may be valuable to **update the renovation vs. new construction comparison**.

However, the earlier studies consistently showed that new construction offered:

- Lower cost
- Shorter duration
- Less disruption
- Better long-term value

Updated numbers would give the community a current, clear comparison.

8. Why does the design team prefer using existing school sites?

Building on current sites provides:

- More predictable conditions
- Clearer cost estimates
- Higher reimbursement potential
- Less district-wide disruption
- Flexibility in scheduling and construction sequencing
- The district controls more variables
- Project can begin sooner on existing land and reduces site preparation

These factors consistently made the GES and PES sites rise to the top.

9. What are the next steps?

- Continue refining site designs and access solutions, especially at PES.
- Provide updated cost comparisons as needed.
- Engage the community with clear visuals, timelines, and impacts.
- Prepare for future state submission deadlines.

10. What does “Renovate to New” mean? Does it keep the same building layout?

Yes. Renovate-to-new keeps the **same general footprint and layout** of the existing school.

Although the interior is updated to meet current codes, the building’s **core structure, hallways, ceiling heights, and circulation patterns** remain mostly the same.

This is why concerns such as:

- long walking distances (e.g., a kindergartener walking 10 minutes from one end of PES to the other),
- outdated circulation patterns, and
- inefficient layouts

would still remain under a renovate-to-new approach.

11. Why is renovate-to-new so complex at PES?

Because PES's structure limits how much modernization you can do without major structural reconstruction.

Key challenges:

- **Very low ceiling heights** — difficult to fit modern HVAC ductwork.
- **Concrete, cast-in-place roof structure** — harder and more expensive to modify.
- Likely need to **raise the roof or build mechanical systems on top**, increasing cost.
- Layout inefficiencies (long corridors, spread-out wings) that can't truly be fixed in renovation.

12. Isn't renovation supposed to be cheaper? Why were earlier estimates showing it close in cost to new construction?

Earlier estimates (from May) showed:

- **~\$80M** for renovate-to-new
- **~\$86M** for new construction

But that does **not** tell the full story.

Renovation includes large "throwaway" costs:

- **~\$12M** in temporary swing space and phased construction
- **Extended construction timeline (4+ years)** → more escalation
- Costs for temporary utilities, staging, and operating a school in a construction zone
- Disruption across multiple school years

These costs **disappear** once the project is complete—no long-term value.

13. Would reimbursement make renovation more attractive now?

Not necessarily.

Reasons:

- Increased reimbursement **applies more favorably to new construction**, especially for PreK space.
 - Temporary facilities in renovation are **not reimbursable**.
 - With updated reimbursement rules, the financial gap may actually **widen**, even if both options gain some funding.
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14. Why is the access road at PES such a big cost factor? Was it always included?

The new-access-road requirement adds cost to **new construction**, but the earlier comparison slide **did not include** this additional site work.

However:

- When renovation adds \$12M+ in temporary and phasing costs,
- and new construction adds costs for improved access and traffic flow,

the difference ends up being roughly a **\$10M+ swing**, not a small margin.

The board is asking for **updated numbers** to reflect the full picture.

15. Does building two new schools at once create risk by having two major construction projects?

Yes, it is a concern raised by board members.

However, renovation would create **four years of disruption** and require relocating students and staff—also risky and expensive.

New construction on existing sites allows:

- Clean separation between construction zones and learning environments
 - Shorter construction durations
 - More predictable schedules
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16. Does renovating add additional community costs?

Yes. Renovation includes:

- Busing students to other locations during construction
- Temporary modular classrooms

- Extended use of staff time for operational logistics
- Significant escalation due to longer project timelines

These costs **add up** and are mostly **non-reimbursable**.

17. Are PES site challenges newly discovered? Why wasn't this anticipated?

The general challenges were known, but the **scope of required roadway improvements**, site access modifications, and stormwater/septic considerations have become clearer as the design team advanced their analysis.

This is a normal part of early-stage planning—details evolve as information becomes more precise.

18. What is the current status of alternative sites (IBM, STS, Roxbury Road, Middlebury properties)?

IBM Property

- Recently rezoned **industrial**
- Would place a school adjacent to potential industrial uses
- Utilities antiquated → costly upgrades (Jeff will give information on utilities)
- Steep, challenging topography
- Roadway access controlled by private owners
- We **do not own** the land → would require referendum to buy (R15 would need to buy two new pieces of property) one for building school and one for road access

Bottom line: Multiple major barriers; functionally not viable.

Southbury Training School (STS) Property

- Major environmental and grading limitations
- Would require demolition of existing structures
- Cost-prohibitive

Bottom line: Eliminated earlier; constraints decisive.

Roxbury Road Property

- Phase I environmental study completed
- The town of Southbury would have to agree to sell it

Middlebury Properties

- Might require **district-wide redistricting**
 - Would shift east-west instead of north-south → very disruptive
 - Transportation implications significant
 - Land availability unclear
- Bottom line:** Could be closed once redistricting impacts are confirmed.
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19. Why not continue exploring many sites at once?

Two reasons:

1. Timing

The district is aiming for a **May referendum**.

Expanding the list of sites now risks delaying the entire project.

2. Reimbursement

State reimbursement rules may change again.

Current PreK and construction incentives are unusually favorable.

Delay could reduce funding dramatically.

Repairs are needed to the two buildings we currently have

Board members voiced concerns that **too many open variables make it hard to move forward** confidently.

20. What do board members want before “closing doors” on other locations?

They want:

- Clear, documented reasons each site is or isn't viable
- A transparent list of remaining options
- Updated cost numbers for renovate vs. new
- Answers to previously submitted FAQs
- Pre-read materials before meetings when possible
- A clear explanation they can defend publicly

This ensures decisions are:

- Transparent
- Community-informed

- Based on real constraints, not speculation
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21. What are the next steps?

1. **Update renovation vs. new construction cost models** with all current site impacts included.
2. **Provide formal explanations** closing remaining site options (IBM, STS, Roxbury Road, Middlebury).
3. **Publish an expanded public FAQ** addressing submitted board questions.
4. **Confirm transportation impacts** and clarify septic/utility assumptions.
5. **Align board direction** so the design team can proceed to the next phase.