

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Answers**

### **Fuller School Future**

A decision about the future of the Fuller School site has raised important financial and education issues for Gloucester. The School Committee has reviewed these issues as it relates to our educational goals and public input and has reaffirmed the district's commitment to the Plan for an Effective Learning Communities (PELC) in a vote on June 27, 2012.

As part of this review, the Committee conducted a survey that sought public input on the relative educational merits of smaller and larger elementary schools (cf. [survey results](#)).

To the 507 parent/guardians, staff members, and Gloucester residents who completed the survey, thank you for taking the time to provide your feedback.

Results from the survey provided evidence of overwhelming support for our current, smaller elementary school structure (PELC).

The following items are committee responses to common questions about the Fuller School.

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Information in this FAQ may be updated as new material is available.

## FAQs

### **What is the history of the Fuller School?**

The Fuller School was built as a Catholic High School in 1965, by the Archdiocese of Boston. It was acquired by the City in 1969, and although designed as a high school, it was used as a K-5 elementary school. The site is comprised of 13.3 acres of land and the 176,000 square foot school building, associated parking areas where the school buses are parked, access roads, and a playing field.

It was vacated as an elementary school in 2008, following recommendations of the Plan for Effective Learning Communities (PELC). The decision to close Fuller was twofold. First, to support the educational merits of smaller schools in community settings, when possible. Second, to reduce operating expenses of approximately \$1 million per year. (In 2007, the operating expense of Fuller was \$2.16 million.)

Since 2008, the school has been partially used to house the preschool, transportation and administration offices. Supplemental revenue is generated by non-profit utilization of the auditorium, gymnasium and classrooms, including the Cape Ann Symphony, community sport teams, and the YMCA after school program. The Cape Ann Emergency Operations Center is also located in the facility.

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### **What is the Plan for Effective Learning Communities (PELC)?**

The PELC sought to define the most effective configuration of our elementary schools based on educational goals. The plan concluded with a recommendation to organize grades into smaller, community based schools as the optimal learning environment for our youngest students. The district's goal was to create two or three classes per grade level per school to encourage team teaching and to provide educators with a more intimate knowledge of the student population. One of the challenges of this redistricting was to attempt to balance the socioeconomic demographics of the school population, while minimizing, whenever possible, the travel distance to each school. The class target was set as K-2, 20 students, and 3-5, 23 students on average.

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### **Where did the 400 plus students go when Fuller closed in 2007?**

For year one, while the elementary schools went through facilities reconstruction at a cost of \$3.5 million to the city, the Fuller School K-4 students were relocated to our current five elementary schools based on catchment areas. Fuller was used to house the district's 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms for one year for the 2007/2008 school year only ("the Fuller Fifth"). During the following year, these 5<sup>th</sup> grade students graduated to the middle school and the elementary schools became K-5 schools. Ten modular classrooms were added to Beeman, Plum Cove and Veteran's Memorial Schools to provide adequate space for the students redistricted from Fuller. The 21<sup>st</sup> century modular classrooms were constructed with new wider hallways, lavatories and larger kindergarten classrooms that conformed to the current square footage requirements, 900 square feet. Plum Cove, traditionally a K-1 school servicing both Beeman and Plum Cove, became a fully independent K-5 school shortly after the restructuring.

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### **Has the Plan for Effective Learning Communities succeeded in fulfilling its educational mission?**

From an academic standpoint, Superintendent Safier reports that systemic, modest, and consistent academic progress has been made under the PELC smaller elementary school structure. With the newly funded curriculum introduction of the K-5 Pearson Learning Literacy Series, we are on track and well positioned to make further progress in academic results, including [MCAS results](#).

This smaller school configuration is similar to the existing house structure of the O'Maley Middle School which is consistent with a smaller school feel, within a larger school. Each grade level is divided into three houses with a core team of teachers who work collaboratively. Each grade level is on a separate floor and has its own guidance counselor who loops, or remains, with that grade for all three middle school years.

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### **What challenges has the district faced with the Plan for Effective Learning Communities (PELC)?**

When the PELC was rolled out, the initial plan called for an average of 30% for free and reduced lunch students distributed among all five schools. Achieving this goal became challenging based on existing neighborhood school locations and struggling local economy, even when the district increased geographic catchment areas to balance the populations at each school.

Currently, Beeman Memorial and Veteran's Memorial Schools exceed the 30% threshold. However, our district personnel, through Title One grants, have provided additional reading and math coaches in order to focus on diverse education needs. In addition, the Bay State Reading Institute (BSRI) literacy partnership was deployed at both schools. We hope to expand this BSRI partnership for our remaining elementary schools, provided we are able to fund this important initiative in [our FY2013 budget](#).

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### **What is the current status and condition of the Fuller School?**

Since the fall of 2008, the site houses the preschool, the school administration, and transportation offices for our bus fleet. The site no longer operates as an elementary school. It hosts a YMCA sponsored after school program, the Gloucester emergency center, and is home to the Cape Ann Symphony as well as other community uses.

In 2011, the Fuller School was deemed one of 23 schools in the state that was in poor condition, scoring the lowest in the four tier assessment system by the MSBA. The school's operational costs are approximately \$300,000 a year.

The closed areas of the building have led to concerns about mold, mildew and air quality that would need to be remedied before the building could be used again as a school.

According to DPW Director Mike Hale, the costs to refurbish Fuller will be approximately \$5 million to put the building back in operation as a minimally functional school excluding major renovations. Further, this large consolidated elementary school option is not consistent with the district's desire to stay the course with the smaller school educational benefits identified in the Plan for Effective Learning Communities.

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### Does the School Committee own the Fuller School?

The Certificate of Title provides that the City of Gloucester is the owner of the property. Mass. General Laws Chapter 40, Section 15A sets out the procedure through which city property, which is delegated to a particular department and held for a particular purpose, may be reused for another purpose. The School Committee, as the current custodian of the property, may vote to declare that the Fuller School building and grounds are no longer in actual use as a school building and no longer required for school purposes. The Committee thereafter gives notice of such determination to the City Council. Refer to Section 2-3 of the City Code of Ordinances for further steps.

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### What is the cost to renovate the Fuller School as a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment?

The specific costs have not been determined. Cost estimates are available on the MSBA website, <http://www.massschoolbuildings.org/> for recent school renovation projects, but some projects smaller than Fuller have exceeded \$20 million and ranged up to \$34 million.

<b>School</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Square Footage</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>Type Project</b>
Douglas ES	Douglas	83,227	\$18,517,565	Repair
Russell Street ES	Littleton	70,887	\$13,400,000	Repair
Village ES	Marblehead	123,000	\$20,623,788	Repair
Newman ES	Needham	119,264	\$27,412,421	Repair
E.Somerville K-8	Somerville	121,071	\$34,782,578	Renovation
Belmonte Middle	Saugus	160,000	\$20,277,465	Repair
Foxborough HS	Foxborough	218,500	\$19,993,200	Repair
**Fuller ES	Gloucester	176,000	<i>not determined</i>	Renovation

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*\*\* It should be noted that the Fuller School is not in line for MSBA reimbursement, so the full cost would be borne by the city. ([Superintendent Safier's article in Cape Ann Beacon](#))*

Additionally, the City of Gloucester would be required to repay the state for the 48.27% roof reimbursement, or approximately \$1.4 million. The school district recently replaced roofs on four of the five existing elementary schools. West Parish was the only elementary school that did not receive a new roof. (see [Mass Building Authority projects in Gloucester](#))

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### What is the School Committee's next step in the Fuller School decision?

Following the Superintendent's recommendation on the educational merits of smaller v. larger elementary schools, and in light of the strong support for smaller elementary schools on the part of stakeholders in the

recently completed Fuller survey, the committee has reaffirmed its commitment to smaller v. larger elementary schools on voting on June 27 5 in favor zero opposed “to endorse and reaffirm the commitment to smaller community elementary schools which are consistent with the Plan for Effective Learning Communities based on educational merit.”

The Committee is currently evaluating alternative locations to move the preschool, administration, and transportation offices. After this due diligence process, the Committee will be well prepared to determine the future use of Fuller as a school facility.

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### **What is the School Committee’s assessment of the MassDevelopment Fuller School Site Reuse Study?**

The School Committee has no formal role in evaluating the MassDevelopment Study. Should the School Committee vote to declare Fuller surplus, the future of the Fuller site will be decided by the City Council and Mayor.

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### **What specific steps is the School Committee taking in this due diligence process regarding the Mayor’s request to deem the Fuller School surplus?**

Pertinent topics have been referred to several School Committee subcommittees.

At full capacity, the Fuller School can only hold up to 750 students. The District has approximately 1,400 elementary students. The superintendent has provided the Committee with reports and studies that show evidence that smaller/community schools are advantageous academically, especially with high needs learners, low income, and English Language Learners. He stated that the district has shown consistent and modest improvements in academic results and that he wishes to “stay the course” with the current district configuration of five elementary schools, which was a result of the Plan for Effective learning Communities.

The building and finance subcommittee has already looked at the cost savings potential of consolidating three elementary schools into Fuller. The preliminary conclusion of that analysis was that the potential cost savings was not significant enough to offset the additional costs to bring Fuller back into use as an elementary school. The estimate of \$5 million by Mike Hale, DPW Director, to reopen Fuller was to get the systems repaired and minor work done. What was not factored into this analysis was the full cost to bring the Fuller School up to a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment.

The B&F subcommittee continues to discuss the space needs that will be required for the school administration, preschool, bus parking, and playing fields. The Committee, along with the superintendent and administration, continues to proactively seek alternative funding sources and locations for the preschool.

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*These Frequently Asked Questions and Answers were approved unanimously by the School Committee at the April 4, 2012 meeting, and updated at Programs subcommittee of Sept 17, 2012*

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