

# BEVERLY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## A Letter from the Superintendent of Schools October 23, 2008

Following World War II, an American genius named W. Edwards Deming played a major role in the revitalization of Japanese industry. His approach involved data-driven decision-making, an essential element in education today. What I remember most about Deming is his statement “In God we trust – all others bring data.” With that in mind, this letter seeks to address the question “why should Beverly support the current proposal for a new High School?”

Two reports, Feasibility Study for the Beverly High School (July 2002) and Beverly High School Draft Report (November 2003), and communications with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) are central to that recommendation.

### Feasibility Study, July 2002

In September 2000, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) placed the High School on “warning” because of “large scale deterioration of the building, its infrastructure, and its instructional equipment.” Their report called for a “long range facility plan intended to address the deteriorating condition of the facility”. Shortly thereafter, the City of Beverly, acting through its Building Commission, engaged the architectural firm Symmes Maini & McKee Associates (SMMA) to conduct a feasibility study of Beverly High School. The purpose of the analysis was to provide a comprehensive examination of the current High School and to develop options and costs for future facilities needs.

With analysis by expert engineering teams, SMMA examined all aspects of the facility as well as sub-soils and submitted a full report in July 2002 to the Joint Secondary Facilities Committee (composed of members of the Building Commission, City Council, and School Committee).

In this comprehensive report, the physical evaluation determined that building systems for HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), plumbing, and electrical “have generally outlived their useful life. Systems are in poor condition; do not meet building code requirements or recommended practices... Any substantial building renovation if undertaken will include a complete replacement [of these systems].”

The report presented four options to the district:

- Option 1: Full Renovation with Minor Additions – Renovating one wing at a time, this project would require an additional 20 portable classrooms and related facilities and would take six years to complete. Estimated cost = \$50,750,000
- Option 2: Full Renovation with Minor Additions – Renovating more than one wing at a time, this project would require an additional 40 portable classrooms and related facilities and would take four years to complete. Estimated cost = \$52,750,000
- Option 3: New Construction – The gross square footage of this new facility would be less than the current facility and would take two years to complete. Estimated cost = \$49,700,000
- Option 4: Combination of New Construction and Renovation – A blend of new construction (academic wing) and renovation (field house, café, and auditorium) would result in a building larger than that in Option 3 and would take two years to complete. Estimated Cost = \$49,400,000

SMMA recommended Option 4, which was subsequently supported by the Joint Secondary Facilities Committee. For those in the community who continue to recommend a complete renovation of the facility, it should not be missed that it would cost just as much as the project currently being considered and would substantially interrupt the education of students for four or six years while sections of the building are renovated. A full copy of the Feasibility Study is available on our website [www.beverlyschools.org](http://www.beverlyschools.org).

### Draft Report, November 2003

Frustrated with Beverly’s lack of progress in addressing facility issues, NEASC placed the High School on “probation” in April 2003. At that time City officials could not envision a way to proceed with planning for a project expected at \$50 million or more. They asked SMMA to determine what could be done to renovate the High School to “satisfy the physical building shortcomings as identified... from the NEASC and keep

the school operational and functional for an estimated 8 to 10 years... the anticipated timeframe to complete the goals of the Feasibility Study". In November 2003, SMMA developed a "draft report" which was never put into any final form (and thus never publicly presented).

To say it differently, it was anticipated that a new facility would be necessary after 8 to 10 years. SMMA stated, "These two goals [address NEASC issues and operate for 8-10 years] often conflict when comparing the cost versus life expectancy. Some aspects of the NEASC change carry a comprehensive renovation cost along with a 30 to 50 year life expectancy. For many of these issues or systems, there is no 8 to 10 year fix. Some systems that are failing must be replaced with new systems. Some requirements such as full handicapped accessibility will need major renovations to accomplish. These are long term fixes, not 8-10 year."

SMMA developed a scope of work to meet these two goals, estimating a cost of \$13.7 million. And as a draft report, SMMA cautioned, "because of the general nature of some of NEASC's comments, subjective interpretations have been made. These need to be confirmed with both the City and NEASC." The Draft Report never moved forward to a final version. Although there was some consideration to reduce the scope of work to about half the estimated cost, even that path was not seen as viable. Expending \$13.7 million for an 8-10 year improvement, knowing we would still have to construct a new high school within the decade, and knowing that much of the 8-10 year improvements would have no carryover value to the new project, it should be easy to see why there was no further interest in this line of thinking.

After years of study and deliberation, therefore, the consensus of city officials for a "long range facility plan intended to address the deteriorating condition" of the High School was a project that combined a new academic wing with renovation of the larger common spaces (field house, kitchen/cafeteria, and auditorium).

#### Communications with NEASC

The New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc., is the nation's oldest regional accrediting association whose mission is the establishment and maintenance of high standards for all levels of education, from pre-K to the doctoral level. NEASC's Commission on Public Secondary Schools monitors its schools in relation to its Standards for Accreditation which are developed and approved by the membership.

As previously stated, NEASC placed the High School on "warning" in September 2000 because of "large scale deterioration of the building, its infrastructure, and its instructional equipment." In April 2003, after months of debate and public hearings, a \$734,000 bond order for schematic designs for an Option 4 project was presented to the City Council. With six votes needed for passage, the bond order was defeated on a 5 to 4 vote. In May 2003 NEASC placed Beverly High School on "probation", a more serious status level than "warning", because "school officials and the community of Beverly failed to develop and fund a facility plan to address the deteriorating condition of Beverly High School".

With no progress in developing a long range plan, the Commission notified Beverly High School in July 2005 that it had voted to recommend to NEASC's Board of Trustees that the school be terminated from membership "because of its continued failure to adhere to the Standards for Accreditation on Curriculum, Instruction, and Community Resources for Learning", i.e., a safe, healthy facility which supports teaching and learning.

Over the next several months, the school administration and City officials followed every route possible to avoid loss of the school's accreditation. Through one avenue of appeal in August 2005, the Superintendent and High School Principal addressed forty specific issues identified in 2003 by NEASC as affecting health, safety, teaching, and learning. It was stated that 83% of the issues had been addressed. At the same time, City officials reviewed the data developed by experts and recommended a major construction/renovation project. In September 2005 the City Council approved \$3.6 million for funding of design and preconstruction measures.

After all appeals had been exhausted, NEASC still concluded in January 2006 that "there is no formal plan of action, no process, and no funding for a resolution to the facility problems", acknowledging that appropriation of the \$3.6 million was "a step toward a more comprehensive solution." It concluded that

“Beverly High School has failed to demonstrate reasonable progress resolving facilities deficiencies originally identified in the 2000 report”. They continued to proceed with terminating the school’s accreditation. In February 2006, the City Council appropriated \$65 million for the construction and renovation project for the High School. NEASC immediately responded that it considered this step significant and postponed any action on termination of our accreditation.

#### What Else Should Concern Citizens?

Whether citizens of Beverly have children in the schools or not, they should want the High School to be the “flagship of the school system”. The quality of a community’s high school is the major factor in how the school system is perceived. And that perception directly affects property values. Ask any realtor. For most of us, our home is our biggest investment. Whichever path is taken to address the High School facility, it will impact property values.

The action by NEASC’s Commission on Public Secondary Schools, recommending that the High School’s accreditation be terminated, is an issue that must be addressed. We should want to be measured against high standards for quality education, always looking for ways to improve. Having accreditation in doubt or losing accreditation at the “flagship” reflects poorly on the community and its school system.

Lastly and most importantly, a new facility is necessary to support the educational program. This new facility will allow us to continue offering a high quality education in classrooms that are state-of the art and that will prepare our young citizens for successful post-secondary education and for jobs like those that are already available at “the Shoe.” The integration of technology throughout the curriculum is an essential part of instruction today. Special instructional spaces, such as rooms for science, mathematics, the arts, and library media, will be quite different in a new facility.

#### Conclusion

NEASC never told Beverly it had to build a new High School. However, it did require a long range solution to the issues in the current facility. The proposal before the City Council represents the best analysis and thinking toward that goal. It is fair to say that if this project were to not be supported by City Council, the High School would lose its accreditation in a matter of months.

The design of the new facility is efficient and forward-thinking and will support good teaching and learning for decades to come. It is our best solution to the problems we face. The best investment of tax dollars is for a building that will support education in Beverly for the next 40-50 years, not for band-aids to a building whose time has passed.