

2020 Bond Election Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What findings led to the decision to combine Columbia and West Central into a new elementary school at a new location?

A long-term facility committee was convened in the winter of 2019 after a demographic and population growth study was concluded for the district. The long-term facility committee was made up of community members, an architect, engineers, a city planner, students, Board of Education (BOE) members, administrators, parents, and faculty members.

The committee desired to create a clear picture of what facility improvement projects are needed to ensure that all Joplin Schools students have access to safe, quality, and equitable learning environments district-wide. The committee's goal was to provide feedback with recommendations to the Joplin Schools Board of Education and administration regarding high priority projects which the committee believed the community would support.

In order to meet this objective, the Long-Term Facility Committee worked within the Joplin Schools 5-Year Strategic Plan, specifically within Goal # 3 of the plan as articulated below:

3.2 Joplin Schools will ensure a safe and nurturing environment.

3.4 Joplin Schools will demonstrate fiscal responsibility.

The long-term facility committee reviewed a myriad of documents including: Joplin Schools Strategic Plan, a demographic study of population and growth trends, a review of each campus' square footage, operational costs, enrollment and capacity, and the school facilities conditions report. The long-term facility committee also toured several of the district's facilities including Columbia, West Central, and Kelsey Norman. Another document that informed the committee's decision was the result of a survey that gauged the district's climate and culture.

The conclusion of the committee that was reported at the June 25, 2019 Board of Education meeting stated:

- The district utilizes Capital Outlay funds for maintenance.
- There is a process in place for allocation of maintenance capital expenditures.
- Annual Capital Outlay funds are insufficient for major new construction.
- The District is currently a good steward of facilities (clean and well maintained).
- Enrollment is declining in some attendance zones in the district.
- Significant structural issues exist at Columbia.
- Modular units are still in use (Kelsey Norman and Columbia).
- Bonding capacity exists for a no-tax increase bond issue.
- Cost per student varies widely at different schools in the district due to building age, school building size, and student enrollment.

Concerns highlighted at Kelsey Norman:

- Modular Classrooms (Trailers) - concerns with weather, temperature control, energy efficiency, safety, accessibility, etc.
- Sharing classrooms - special use spaces, such as art and music, are currently sharing classrooms.

- Pull-Out Tutoring and Practice Rooms for students - teachers who need to work with students on an individual basis or in a small group within the areas of the school that can be used for these purposes are very minimal or in converted closets.
- Lack of adequate space for school counseling programs.

Summary Recommendation for Kelsey Norman:

- Construct new addition to include classroom space, offices, and flexible learning space to eliminate modular units (trailers) and provide equitable programming space.
- Preliminary cost estimate \$2.875 million (est.)

Concerns highlighted West Central:

- Safety concerns due to site size and proximity to a high traffic area.
- Inadequate classroom sizes (sq. ft. per classroom)
- Inequitable for 21st century learning options for students (Ex. Flexible learning spaces, collaboration, and project based learning, etc.)
- Accessibility (ADA) challenges
- Inequitable programming spaces (special education, art, music, library, computer labs, cafeteria, etc.)
- 90 year old infrastructure
- Inadequate site size to redevelop a new facility with current standards
- Railroad easement, road closure, property acquisition, etc.
- Lack of storage space for educational support items.

Concerns highlighted at Columbia:

- Safety concerns
- 90 year old infrastructure
- Geotechnical concerns for the entire property
- Unsuitable soils, Mining features, settling on the east end of existing building, settling at the southeast corner of storm shelter
- Inadequate classroom sizes (sq. ft. per classroom)
- Inequitable for 21st century learning options for students (Ex. Flexible learning spaces, collaboration, and project based learning, etc.)
- Accessibility (ADA) challenges
- Lack of storage space for educational support items.

Summary recommendation for Columbia and West Central:

- Combine both schools at a new site to house 450 students at \$19.6 million (est.)

When combining the two schools, what are the advantages to student safety?

Combining both schools is an effective and efficient use of our resources. When combined, the new school will serve approximately 400 students, thus remaining a relatively small and nurturing environment while also allowing for an adequate student population to enhance programming and resources.

Currently, both schools have safety challenges. Both are very close to roadways. They lack the desired secure entrance system. Neither school has sufficient space for drop-off and pick-up of students by either cars or buses. The schools are currently making the logistics work at both locations the best they can. However, a well-planned footprint that takes into consideration many facets of modern life will improve the safety of the students and staff at a new location.

How will the new elementary enhance student learning?

Columbia and West Central were both built in the 1920's. They have classroom square footages that are almost 50% smaller than district academic standards.

In addition to traditional independent work, 21st century learning standards require students to work collaboratively and use modern technology within a project-based learning atmosphere. Small classrooms, lack of storage, and 90-year-old infrastructure severely limit what can take place within their current setting. New designs help incorporate different ideas for classroom demonstrations and activities.

Mandated programs such as Special Education were unheard of in the 1920's. Neither Columbia nor West Central were designed with handicapped accessibility in mind. Ancillary spaces for such things as physical therapy, speech therapy, special education classes or small group remediation have been placed within divided up classrooms or closed-in hallways, further limiting the existing space. High needs special education students are therefore currently unable to attend their neighborhood schools.

A new combined campus will allow adequate programming space for special education as well as school guidance services, health/physical education, art, music and child nutrition.

What is the economic advantage of combining the two schools?

More balanced deployment of resources due to reasonable economies of scale, energy efficiency, more efficient staffing of ancillary spaces such as, library, cafeterias, etc.

What will the school district do with the current properties at Columbia and West Central when the bond issues passes?

The District plans to demolish Columbia within twelve months of occupancy of the new school at Dover Hill. The District will remove all debris from the property at the time of demolition. Currently, the District plans to maintain the property in accordance with the Joplin City Code for the interim, unless an entity or suitable buyer emerges with a use for the property.

Regarding West Central, the District believes there will be interest in the property and buildings for future use because of its location on 7th street. If a suitable buyer is found, the property will be sold. Until then, the District will adequately maintain the building and property. If a suitable buyer is not found in a reasonable time, the building will be demolished.

Were there any other properties researched? And why did the district settle on the Dover Hill property?

There were at least six other properties in the area that were researched by a team of school officials, contractors and design professionals. Several ideas for property acquisition were presented to the District by patrons, property owners and interested parties. The District conducted an extensive review of geo-technical maps, roadways surrounding the properties, conducted discussions with property owners, and reviewed cost analysis projections. The selections were narrowed further to two properties. They were reviewed extensively by the District architect and construction management firm before being presented to the Board of Education for final consideration.

Finally, with all things considered, Dover Hill's proximity to Columbia and West Central, along with having the needed acreage, favorable initial geotechnical testing results, and the ability to work with the City (and heirs) to transfer the property; the Dover Hill site was selected for the new elementary school.

What have been the uses of the Dover Hill property in the past?

The Dover Hill property was donated to the City of Joplin in 1928 for use as public park land. Mapping indicates some mining test holes along the eastern perimeter of the property but no significant activity on the property.

How will the school district ensure that additional traffic in the area will be effectively addressed?

The school district has commissioned a traffic study. The traffic study will be based on the traffic anticipated to be generated by parents transporting students, staff vehicles, and buses for a school with an enrollment of 450 students. An initial concept that has been considered is to have two entrances onto the property to help with traffic flow for drop-off and pick-up of students. The District will work closely with the City of Joplin and MODOT to make arrangements for any necessary enhancements to the 17.83 acre site and associated access.

Are there any geological concerns on the Dover Hill property?

Recently a geotechnical firm drilled 5 holes on the property. Rock was consistently hit at 20 feet depth across all levels of the hillside. It appears there is a favorable distance between the surface and rock. It also appears at this time there are no actual mines in the area where the school might be located, and the mining test holes that exist are on the periphery of the property. The property where the school is being considered is on top of Dover Hill and well outside of the flood plain. The soccer fields (located to the west) are within the flood plain. The soccer fields are not being considered as part of the planned development.

How will the new bond affect the total debt service tax levy?

The District has maintained a \$0.91 debt service levy since 2013. The passage of the bond issue will not require an increase in the tax rate.

How many years will the levy be in place?

The repayment period on the bonds will be 20 years.

Will the school boundaries change with this bond?

By combining the two schools as well as providing a building addition at Kelsey Norman, a boundary change is not anticipated. It is our intent to keep each elementary school boundary as close to existing zone lines as possible. However, if the bond issue fails and we are unable to address the existing structural, safety, and efficiency issues prevalent at West Central and Columbia nor address the growth within Kelsey Norman, there is the potential for multiple boundary changes as students are absorbed into other attendance areas.