

The Boston Globe

Area school building projects advanced by state funding agency

By John Laidler

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 30, 2014

A state funding agency has advanced plans for new schools in Abington, Holbrook, and Plymouth while also agreeing to support building repairs in three other local districts.

At its March 26 meeting, the Massachusetts School Building Authority board moved the three new schools into schematic design, accepting the building options selected by the districts in recent studies.

The agency board also approved partial reimbursement for repair projects at five area schools, three of them in Stoughton and one each in Walpole and Wareham.

The Plymouth project calls for construction of a new, 247,631-square-foot Plymouth South High School on the existing school site.

“We are very pleased,” Plymouth School Superintendent Gary E. Maestas said, noting that the project would mark the final leg of a \$199 million building program authorized by voters about seven years ago. The plan also included the now-completed construction of a new Plymouth North High School and a new senior center.

The district has cited numerous deficiencies with the Plymouth South building, constructed in 1985. Among them are a deteriorating roof, extensive leaking, antiquated electrical and plumbing systems, inadequate access for people with disabilities, and undersized interior spaces, according to the MSBA.

“It’s just falling apart,” Maestas said. “We’ve had a lot of issues from day one.”

The school building authority is now projected to cover 50 percent of the eligible costs of the estimated \$107.5 million project, but Maestas said the district hopes to qualify for additional reimbursement.

The plan in Abington is to replace the existing Frolio Middle School and the high School with a new 234,560-square-foot school serving fifth- through 12th-grade students and pre-kindergarten on the site of the current high school playing field.

“I’m happy most of all about what this potentially means for the children in Abington, the families we serve, and the community at large,” said School Superintendent Peter G. Schafer. “The construction of the new school building and space will allow for us to use the existing infrastructure in a different way than we are currently using it. This will allow for all students to benefit from this building project.”

With the opening of the new school, the fifth and sixth grades would be added to the middle school level, freeing space in the elementary schools. Schafer said the project will also provide the town with more space to offer full-day kindergarten on a districtwide basis.

The district has identified many facility issues with the Frolio, which was built in 1937, and the high school, which was built in 1962, according to the school building authority. Both have undersized classrooms, multiple floor levels, and deficient handicap accessibility. The Frolio also suffers also from overcrowding, aged building systems, and insufficient parking.

Schafer said if the agency agrees to help fund the project, he would anticipate it providing 55 to 60 percent reimbursement of the eligible costs of the estimated \$95.9 million project.

The project in Holbrook calls for replacing the town's three existing schools — the Junior/Senior High, the South Elementary, and the John F. Kennedy — with a new school that would serve all of the town's pre-kindergarten to 12th-grade students. The 217,353-square-foot building would be constructed on the Junior/Senior High School's existing athletic fields.

"We couldn't be happier," School Superintendent Patricia Lally said, of the district being advanced to schematic design. "The whole community is just enthusiastic about the possibilities now for Holbrook students."

Lally said that the plan provides for two separate wings — one for the high school and a newly configured sixth- to eighth-grade middle school and the other for the elementary school level. But she said having a single facility would allow for sharing of resources, and for easier collaboration among staff and students at different grade levels.

The state agency said the district had cited many physical problems with the three buildings, two of which were built in the 1950s and the other in the 1960s.

The building upgrades in Stoughton, Walpole, and Wareham would be undertaken under the agency's Accelerated Repair program.

Stoughton was approved for reimbursement for the replacement of windows and doors at the Helen H. Hansen and Joseph R. Dawe Jr. elementary schools and roof replacement at the West Elementary School, according to the authority.

The grants would cover up to \$582,328 of the estimated \$1.2 million cost of the project at the Hansen; up to \$735,489 of the estimated \$1.4 million cost of the Dawe project; and up to \$686,165 of the estimated \$1.4 million cost of the West Elementary project.

Walpole would receive up to \$903,605 of the estimated \$1.9 million cost of a roof project at the Fisher Elementary School.

The award for Wareham would provide the town up to \$1.8 million of the estimated \$2.7 million cost of a roof project at the high school.

John Laidler can be reached at laidler@globe.com.