District: Manchester-Essex Regional School District
School Name: Essex Elementary School
Recommended Category: Preferred Schematic
Date: June 17, 2026

Recommendation

That the Executive Director be authorized to approve the Manchester-Essex Regional School District (the "District"), as part of its Invitation to Feasibility Study, to proceed into Schematic Design to replace the existing Essex Elementary School with a new facility serving Kindergarten through grade 5, plus Pre-Kindergarten, on the site of the existing school. MSBA staff has reviewed the Feasibility Study and accepts the District's Preferred Schematic.

It should be noted that the proposed site development associated with the District's Preferred Schematic requires a lease agreement extension. Should the District be approved by the Board to proceed into Schematic Design for this proposed project and is subsequently considered by the Board for approval of a Project Scope and Budget Agreement and a Project Funding Agreement, the District must comply with the MSBA's Site Standards requirements pursuant to 963 CMR 2.00 *et seq.*

District Information	
District Name	Manchester-Essex Regional School District
Elementary Schools	Manchester Memorial Elementary School (PK-5) Essex Elementary School (K-5)
Middle School	Manchester Essex Regional Middle School (6-8)
High School	Manchester Essex Regional Middle High School (9-12)
Priority School Name	Essex Elementary School
Type of School	Elementary School
Grades Served	K-5
Year Opened	1957
Existing Square Footage	53,036
Additions	Library and Gymnasium additions in 1975
Acreage of Site	9.9 acres
Building Issues	The District identified deficiencies in the following areas: – Structural integrity – Mechanical systems – Electrical systems – Envelope – Windows – Roof – Accessibility In addition to the physical plant issues, the District reported that the existing facility does not support the delivery of its educational program.
Original Design Capacity	Unknown
2025-2026 Enrollment	200 students
Agreed Upon Enrollment	Study Enrollment includes the following configurations:

District Information	
	• 165 students in grades K-3 at the Essex Elementary School plus Pre-Kindergarten; • 250 students in grades K-5, at the Essex Elementary School plus Pre-Kindergarten (Preferred Schematic); and • 515 students in grades K-5, District-wide plus Pre-Kindergarten.
Enrollment Specifics	Contingent upon the Board's approval of the Preferred Schematic, the District will sign a Design Enrollment Certification for 250 students in Kindergarten through grade 5, for a project that will serve Kindergarten through grade 5, plus Pre-Kindergarten.
Total Project Budget – Debt Exclusion Anticipated	Yes

MSBA Board Votes	
Invitation to Eligibility Period	December 13, 2023
Invitation to Feasibility Study	December 13, 2024
Preferred Schematic Authorization	On June 24, 2026 Board agenda
Project Scope & Budget Authorization	District is targeting Board authorization on December 9, 2026
Feasibility Study Reimbursement Rate (Incentive points are not applicable)	31.00%

Consultants	
Owner's Project Manager (the "OPM")	Dore & Whittier Management Partners, Inc.
Designer	JCJ Architecture, PC

Discussion

The existing Essex Elementary School is a 53,036 square foot facility located on a 9.9-acre site, currently serving students in Kindergarten through grade 5. The original building was constructed in 1957, with an addition of a library and a gymnasium in 1975.

The District's Statement of Interest ("SOI") identified numerous deficiencies in the existing facility related to outdated mechanical and electrical systems; structural integrity; building envelope, including roof and windows; and accessibility issues. The SOI also identified deficiencies in the existing spaces and notes that the spaces within the facility are not conducive to delivering the District's educational program.

As part of the Feasibility Study, the MSBA accepted the District's request to explore the following three (3) study enrollment options:

- 165 students in grades K-3 at the Essex Elementary School, plus Pre-Kindergarten;

- 250 students in grades K-5 at the Essex Elementary School, plus Pre-Kindergarten (Preferred Schematic); and
- 515 students in grades K-5, District-wide, plus Pre-Kindergarten.

In conjunction with its consultants, the District performed a comprehensive assessment of the existing conditions and the educational program and received input from educators, administrators, and facilities personnel. Based on the findings of this effort, the District and its consultants initially studied seven (7) preliminary options that included: two (2) code upgrade options, three (3) addition/renovation options, and two (2) new construction options. The following is a detailed list of the preliminary options considered.

Option	**Description of Preliminary Options**
Option A0.1	Code Upgrade/Base Repair for Kindergarten through grade 3 with an enrollment of 165 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing Essex Elementary School; with an estimated project cost of $45-50 million This option results in district-wide grades 4 through 5 enrollments attending the previously MSBA-funded Manchester Memorial Elementary School.
Option A0.2	Code upgrade/Base Repair for Kindergarten through grade 5 with an enrollment of 250 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing Essex Elementary School; with an estimated project cost of $45-50 million.
Option A1.1	Addition/Renovation for Kindergarten through grade 3 with an enrollment of 165 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing Essex Elementary School; with an estimated project cost of $75-80 million. This option results in district-wide grades 4 through 5 enrollments attending the MSBA-funded Manchester Memorial Elementary School.
Option A1.2	Addition/Renovation for Kindergarten through grade 5 with an enrollment of 250 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing Essex Elementary School; with an estimated project cost of $90-95 million.
Option B1.1	Addition/Renovation for Kindergarten through grade 5 with an enrollment of 515 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing MSBA-funded Manchester Memorial Elementary School; with an estimated project cost of $60-80 million.
Option A2.1	New Construction for Kindergarten through grade 3 with an enrollment of 165 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing Essex Elementary School site; with an estimated project cost of $80-85 million. This option results in district-wide grades 4 through 5 enrollments attending the MSBA-funded Manchester Memorial Elementary School.
Option A2.2	New Construction for Kindergarten through grade 5 with an enrollment of 250 students, plus Pre-Kindergarten, at the existing Essex Elementary School site; with an estimated project cost of $90-95 million.

As a result of this analysis, the District determined that all seven (7) options would be considered for further evaluation. However, subsequent to the evaluation of preliminary options, the District voted to eliminate from further consideration “Option A0.1” and “Option A2.1” due to the District’s preference to maintain the existing grade configuration of Kindergarten through grade 5.

Additionally, subsequent to the evaluation of preliminary options the District developed sub-options for “Option A2.2” resulting in (2) additional new construction options described below:

- "Option A2.2B": New Construction for Kindergarten through grade 5 with an enrollment of 250 students, plus pre-Kindergarten, located on the southwest corner of the existing Essex Elementary School site.
- "Option A2.2F": New Construction (two-phases) for Kindergarten through grade 5 with an enrollment of 250 students, plus pre-Kindergarten, located on the northeast corner of the existing Essex Elementary School site.

Furthermore, the District further developed and renamed the following two options:
- "Option A1.2" is referred to as "Option A1.2B"
- "Option A2.2" is referred to as "Option A2.2A"

Upon further review, MSBA staff and the District agreed to the seven (7) final options for further development and consideration in the final evaluation and development of preliminary design pricing as presented below including one (1) code upgrade option, three (3) addition/renovation options, and three (3) new construction options.

Summary of Preliminary Design Pricing for Final Evaluation of Options

Option (Description)	Total Gross Square Feet	Square Feet of Renovated Space (cost*/sq. ft.)	Square Feet of New Construction (cost*/sq. ft.)	Site, Building Takedown, Haz Mat. Cost*	Estimated Total Construction ** (cost*/sq. ft.)	Estimated Total Project Costs
Option A0.2 Code Upgrade at Essex ES 250 students	53,036	53,036 ($594/sf)	N/A	$8,673,017	$40,194,433 ($758/sf)	$53,000,000
Option A1.1 Add/Reno at Essex ES 165 students	60,072	53,036 ($714/sf)	7,036 ($1,183/sf)	$15,900,651	$62,117,400 ($1,034/sf)	$79,000,000
Option A1.2-B Add/Reno at Essex ES 250 students	76,443	53,036 ($695/sf)	23,407 ($924/sf)	$16,083,842	$74,567,157 ($975/sf)	$95,000,000
Option A2.2A New Construction at Essex ES Site 250 students	72,443	N/A	72,443 ($760/sf)	$17,127,401	$72,172,490 ($996/sf)	$91,000,000
Option A2.2B New Construction at Essex ES Site 250 students	72,443	N/A	72,443 ($764 /sf)	$17,788,016	$73,150,405 ($1,010/sf)	$93,000,000
Option A2.2F New Construction at Essex ES Site 250 students***	***72,443***	***N/A***	***72,443 ($789/sf)***	***$17,325,466***	***$74,497,482 ($1,028/sf)***	***$93,000,000***
Option B1.1 Combined Add/reno at Memorial ES 515 students****	45,368	5,000 ($718/sf)	40,368 ($851/sf)	$11,408,256	$49,352,274 ($1,088/sf)	$64,000,000

** Marked up construction costs*
*** Does not include construction contingency*
******District's Preferred Schematic***

****This option proposed a 40,368 sf addition to the existing 77,102 sf Memorial ES as well as limited renovation of 5,000 sf within the existing Memorial ES facility. This option results in a 117,470 sf combined facility, with limited scope required at the existing Memorial Elementary School.

The District has selected "Option A2.2F" as the Preferred Schematic to proceed into Schematic Design. The District determined that this option best meets the needs of the District's educational program and allows the District to maintain its regional agreement. Additionally, the District indicated that this option provides a variety of spaces that can support flexible learning; has a compact footprint and site placement that could allow for increased site amenities; and proposes a lower impact on wetlands. Furthermore, this option is anticipated to take advantage of the sloped site to provide a separate entrance for Pre-K learners and allow for a new image of the school from the street, which was desired by the District.

"Option A1.1" and "Option B1.1" were not selected by the District primarily because these options would require an amendment to the District's regional agreement and could result in a negative impact on the social emotional development on the students and equity between the towns. In addition, for "Option A1.1" the specific renovation scope would likely result in challenges in meeting the educational program and would require an additional transition for students after grade 3 which was not desired by the District. In addition, "Option B1.1" is anticipated to result in an increase to traffic for the Manchester-Memorial Elementary School, negatively impacting the already tight existing site, which was not desired by the District.

"Option A0.2" was not selected by the District because this option would not meet the needs of the District's educational program. Additionally, the District noted that this option is anticipated to require extensive phasing during construction and modular swing spaces while still not addressing difficult site circulation conditions.

"Option A1.2B" was not selected by the District because the layout of the renovated classrooms and community spaces associated with this option would not allow for separation and learning neighborhoods, which was desired by the District. Additionally, the District indicated that this option is anticipated to require extensive phasing during construction, which could be highly disruptive to teaching and learning. Furthermore, the proposed building location associated with this option does not address existing shortcomings or the concerns associated with the overall estimated cost of the project.

"Option A2.2A" was not selected by the District due to regulatory concerns related to the placement of the building within the existing wetlands buffer zone. In addition, the District noted that the proposed location of the building associated with this option would be in close proximity to neighbors and far from the road, resulting in long utility runs, and would locate play areas in close proximity to the street, which was not desired by the District.

"Option A2.2B" was not selected by the District because the proposed building location associated with this option would result in close proximity to neighbors and far from the road, resulting in long utility runs; would locate play areas in close proximity to the street; and could potentially include additional project phasing complexity.

The District presented its proposed Preferred Schematic to the MSBA Facilities Assessment Subcommittee ("FAS") on May 13, 2026. At that meeting, members of the FAS discussed the following items: appreciation for the Educational Program and the updates made since the original submission; distribution of special education spaces and the DESE review process following

Schematic Design; integration of other subject areas with English/Language Arts and balancing programs to improve student engagement; appreciation for the outdoor spaces, their intended use, and proposed activities; accessibility considerations for outdoor spaces and opportunities for community use, summer school programming, and recreation; maintenance considerations associated with the proposed greenhouse; community outreach and support for the project among non-school affiliated voters; construction phasing considerations, including the choice of construction delivery method; further development of the site plan, specifically relating to site access and circulation at the car drop-off loop; further development of the landscape plan, specifically relating to hardscape versus greenspace and landscaping near the wetlands/walking path; massing of the academic wing; character of the entrance to the PreK classrooms; and, current maintenance operations and the importance of including maintenance/facilities staff in planning for the proposed building.

MSBA staff reviewed the conclusions of the Feasibility Study and all other subsequent submittals with the District and found:

1) The options investigated were sufficiently comprehensive in scope, the approach undertaken in this study was appropriate, and the District's Preferred Schematic is reasonable and cost-effective and meets the needs identified by the District.

2) The District has submitted an operational budget for educational objectives and a capital budget statement for MSBA review.

3) The District's Special Education submission will be subject to final review and approval by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as part of the Schematic Design submittal, which is prior to executing a Project Scope and Budget Agreement.

4) Subject to Board approval, the MSBA will participate in a project that includes spaces that meet MSBA guidelines, except for variations previously agreed to by the MSBA. All proposed spaces will be reviewed during the Schematic Design phase.

5) As part of the Schematic Design phase, the District will work with the MSBA to determine a mutually agreeable methodology to differentiate eligible costs from ineligible costs.

Based on the review outlined above, staff recommend that the Manchester-Essex Regional School District be approved to proceed into Schematic Design to replace the existing Essex Elementary School with a new facility serving Kindergarten through grade 5, plus Pre-Kindergarten, on the site of the existing Essex Elementary School.