

QuickPoint! - Portland Public Schools' Building Costs Are Shaking Up Budgets

By **Brittany Hjelte**

Worries about the Cascadia Subduction Zone have persisted for the last 50 years. Oregon school districts have considered the possibility of a major earthquake as they build and renovate existing structures.

In line with this approach, the Portland Public School district has embarked on a decades-long modernization project, most recently the proposed \$491 million modernization of Jefferson High School. The extensive renovation plans raise concerns about the necessity and benefits of the large-scale project, especially given the uncertainty of a potential Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

Oregon code requires schools to meet seismic Category III standards, prioritizing life safety. The district has chosen to construct the new Jefferson to Category IV standards. This level, typically reserved for emergency facilities, adds an extra \$5.00 per square foot to building cost.

Jefferson isn't the only school with an excessive budget. Cleveland and Ida B. Wells high schools have surpassed \$400 million in the last month. In contrast, the ongoing Bend Senior High rebuild has a budget of \$187 million and is compliant with the required seismic code.

While safety is important, overbuilding schools to an unnecessary standard is a misallocation of resources. School districts should focus on meeting the required safety codes while directing additional funds towards enhancing students' learning and development.

Brittany Hjelte is a Research Associate at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.

June 26, 2024

Word Count: 209

Attention editors
and producers:

Cascade Commentaries are provided for reprint in newspapers and other publications, with credit given to author(s) and Cascade. Contact Cascade to arrange print or broadcast interviews on this commentary topic.

Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
info@cascadepolicy.org

4850 SW Scholls Ferry Road
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

t: 503.242.0900
f: 503.242.3822
info@cascadepolicy.org
www.cascadepolicy.org

Cascade Policy Institute is a tax-exempt educational organization as defined under IRS code 501 (c)(3). Nothing appearing in this Cascade Commentary is to be construed as necessarily representing the views of Cascade or its donors. The views expressed herein are the author's own.

