

## QuickPoint! - With Declining Enrollments, Why Is Portland Building Bigger High Schools?

By Ethan Rohrbach

The modernization of Benson Polytechnic High School is nearing completion. Originally budgeted for \$202 million in 2016 and funded by a voter-approved bond in 2017, the scope of the project was subsequently expanded along with the cost. The revised budget, partially paid for through another bond in 2020, was \$410 million.

Part of the problem is that the school is oversized. Benson enrollment last year was 823, but the new school was designed for 1,700. Enrollment has decreased by almost 50% over the past 30 years, and there is little chance that it will grow significantly. Many of the classrooms will simply be mothballed.

The next school up for modernization is Jefferson High School, and the Board plans to make the same mistake. The target enrollment is 1,700, but there were only 481 students in May. The construction budget has grown from \$311 million in 2020 to \$491 in 2024. Since the District doesn't have the money, the Board plans to ask for an additional \$125 million in May of 2025, as part of a much larger bond request of \$2.9 billion.

School board members are required to manage public funds as a "prudent person" would, but overbuilding schools by 100% or more is the opposite of prudent behavior.

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