

*Reasons for rebuilding as opposed to renovating some existing schools:*

- new schools offer children and staff more space for teaching and learning
- upgraded electrical systems to accommodate instructional technology
- better fire protection with updated fire safety systems
- an efficient, cost-saving heating system
- clean air that is in compliance with current fresh air standards
- individualized classroom temperature settings that allow lower settings in rooms not being used (again saving money better used for teaching)
- security through the use of video cameras as well as improved security to door entrances
- better construction that meets new, current seismic codes in case of earthquakes
- better layout and design to allow more adult supervision to keep children safe
- better parking lot design to keep children and traffic separated
- better plumbing (as opposed to simply replacing pipes)



Construction continues on Campbell Hill Elementary School

Renton School District  
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# *Renton School District*

**New or Rebuilt Schools Offer Students, Staff Sense of Pride, Safer Environment and Better Opportunities for Learning**

**April 2002**

*Two veterans of Renton schools talk about how changes to their buildings bring changes in staff and student attitude and achievement*

**B**ryn Mawr Elementary School has been in place now for more than six years but Charlene Frasier still thinks of it as new. In fact, every day she watches how staff, students and parents continue to treat the building with the respect, care and attention of a new school.

Working at the school for more than 27 years, Frasier, lead secretary, knows how much better the new Bryn Mawr is compared to the old school. Her years of experience in the old building go back quite a bit. As a young girl, she attended first through sixth grade at the school. And later in life, her children attended the Bryn Mawr as well.

But, Frasier says even though the old school building, built in 1930, was such a big part of her and her children's life, when it came time to decide whether to renovate the old building or rebuild the school, the staff and community knew what had to be done: build a new school from the ground up.

There are always discussions about rebuilding schools rather than simply restoring them. It is agreed, considering a building's age and design, some schools are in need of major repairs that go beyond daily and yearly maintenance. But, for some, an understanding is needed about why some school buildings need to be razed and rebuilt.

Cost is one factor to consider. A typical 500-student elementary school is estimated to cost about \$10 million to build. It costs about \$8.5 million to restore that same

*“ A typical 500-student elementary school is estimated to cost about \$10 million to build. It costs about \$8.5 million to restore a smaller school building. ”*

## New or rebuilt schools offer students, staff sense of pride, safer environment and better opportunities for learning

school building. In restoring, you still have the same building, with the same design. A new building allows for future expansion and makes better use of exterior light and heat which cuts operating costs. Money that can be better used for teaching children. A new building is designed to keep children safe by keeping them in one building rather than in separate buildings where they would have to go outside to get to offices, lunch rooms, gyms and sometimes even the bathroom.

Cost alone is not the only factor to consider. Older buildings usually aren't configured for the way schools operate. They need areas for special-education students, reinforced for earthquakes, brought into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as upgraded ventilation systems to meet current air quality standards. Most need new plumbing, which sometimes means tearing up foundations to get to the pipes.

Other reasons for building new as opposed to renovating some existing buildings are that new school offers children and staff:

- more space for teaching and learning,
- electrical systems that accommodate instructional technology,
- better fire protection using updated fire safety systems,
- an efficient, cost-saving heating system,
- clean air that is in compliance with current fresh air standards,

- individualized classroom temperature settings that allow lower settings in rooms not being used (again saving money better used for teaching),
- security through the use of video surveillance cameras as well as improved security to door entrances,
- better construction that meets new, current seismic codes in case of earthquakes,
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- better plumbing (as opposed to simply replacing pipes).



Bryn Mawr Elementary School

With larger buildings, like high schools, that house in some cases more than 1,200 students, rebuilding is not an option. Refurbishing a large building can take one or two years and the district doesn't have anywhere to teach students while the renovations are taking

place. So, the work is done in stages while the education process continues.

Renton High School is currently undergoing major refurbishing thanks to a voter-approved construction measure in 1998. Teachers are moving into newly renovated classrooms in groups as work in classrooms, the library and commons area is complete.

And, as is the case with a new smaller school, a refurbished larger building gives teachers and staff a renewed sense of purpose and motivates students to

higher academic success.

Jennifer O'Roarty, Renton High School's Language Arts Department Chair, says students in her classes are now, more than ever, coming to class ready to learn.

"The quality of work being turned in by my students has changed drastically," O'Roarty says. "They talk of being in a quality environment, and want to turn in quality work. They're more excited about coming to class and they more respectful of their surroundings."

*"The community backed up the sentiment that 'educating Renton's youth is important' by passing school construction bonds to give us buildings that are conducive to learning."*

—Jennifer O'Roarty, Renton High School Language Arts Dept. Chair

O'Roarty gives credit to Renton voters who helped make the changes possible, saying, "the community backed up the sentiment that educating Renton's youth is important by passing school construction bonds to give us buildings that are conducive to learning."

At the beginning of the process, however, there is some anxiety about what changes will be made and if the people who work and learn in the



Removal of the old middle school wing is complete. Construction continues at Renton High School

buildings will have any say in the design. The Renton School District has a process to solicit input from staff, parents and community members long before an architect begins drawing plans. As they do

with all new or remodeling projects, the district hires an architect only after ensuring the designers will seek and use staff and community input. There is consideration given to teacher and staff needs and which programs are offered in the building. There are ongoing meets between staff, PTA, community members and project managers.

Frasier remembers the process well. She said she couldn't believe how much time architects and district maintenance personnel spent with the Bryn Mawr team gathering information.

"We had a lot of opportunity for input, and we were listened to," she says. "There were on-going meetings where we looked at classroom designs, wall color, furniture and even where the playground equipment would go. That blew me away."

Nostalgia sometimes comes into play when changes are made to schools. But, Frasier says, there comes a time when you have to move on.

"We'll always have the memories of the old building. It lasted for years," Frasier remembers. "I think we all felt the school was no longer in good shape or safe for students. A new school would give students much more than just better plumbing and lighting; it would be safer and give them a better place to learn. And you always want to do what's best for kids."