



Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia Public Schools: Updated Questions and Answers October 2019



Q: What is happening with the new high school design?

A: The architects are taking the information gathered from the various stakeholders over the past six months, and making draft designs of how the space might look in a new building. The architects need to consider the landscape, including rock formations, ravines and gullies, and wetlands and topography, which includes slope and changes in grades. Working with the landscape is critical in designing a high school which fits on the buildable land. The site overall, though challenging, is gorgeous and will serve students for many years to come.

Q: What about the athletic fields? When can I see a design of what they look like?

A: The architects are working with the Advisory Committee to design potential locations for all athletic fields, both indoor and outdoor. All designs are preliminary, and the architects are constantly updating and changing them to fit student needs and the budget.

Q: What is the Advisory Committee?

A: The Advisory Committee, which is composed of members of both the Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia school districts, exists because, as the process moves along, it will be important to have direct recommendations going to the architects and builders. The Advisory Committee will, in turn, report directly to the Joint Powers Board, which includes three school board members from Eveleth-Gilbert and three school board members from Virginia Public Schools.

Q: I belong to a group who has a vested interest in the high school. When will we be asked for our opinion?

A: All summer long the architects met with interested parties about their programming and building needs. All of these meetings were published in the papers. Moving forward, as appropriate and as topics come up, the parties most involved and impacted by the new construction will be consulted and involved in the process. For example, the coaches will be involved when it comes time to discuss the athletic fields, once the architects have a better idea of what is possible in those areas.

Q: I heard the schools are building only one softball field and one baseball field at the site of the new high school? Is this true?

A: No. We will build as many softball and baseball fields that we need and can afford at the new high school site. The first design the architects worked on had three softball fields and two baseball fields at the new high school site. But again, this was just a preliminary draft that could get changed and modified before the school boards finalize the outdoor and indoor design.

Q: Why can't the architects simply tell us and show us what is going to be built? Why is this taking so long?

A: The pace of the architectural design is normal for a project of this size. A school building project of this magnitude and scale has not happened on the Range in the last 100 years. We want to get this project right and we want to take the time to design the buildings correctly.

Q: How does the budget work for the construction of the high school and two elementary schools?

A: The total budget is \$178,475,000 for a new high school and two new elementary schools. Included in the budget is \$7,500,000 for the demolition of buildings which cannot be used or repurposed. The budget is specific and detailed for each building. Every square foot of building construction needs to be accounted for and taken into account. The budget requires attention to detail and precision and we intend to be prudent with taxpayer dollars. In addition, we are not moving money from one building to pay for something in another building. Each building had a specific budget when the plan went to the voters and we are sticking to the original budgetary plan. If costs rise or we run into unexpected expenses, then something will have to be reduced in that building to make the budget work. This is the same thing that happens with household budgets, and school construction budgets are no different.

Q: Why do we need so many classrooms? I want more athletic fields. Can't they cut the classrooms to build more athletic fields?

A: No. We're not going to do that. Education and classrooms come first. We are designing educational opportunities and learning spaces first and making sure our students and teachers have the space they need. Sports and athletic fields will come second. We are not going to sacrifice the educational futures of our children and grandchildren just to build another athletic field. That said, our athletic fields will be built very well and will serve our athletes well. The new athletic spaces will be huge upgrades over the current athletic spaces in both districts. Once people see and walk into/on the new athletic facilities, the majority of people will be amazed.

Q: I'm hearing that some people are upset about the space they are getting? What is happening?

A: The taxpayers were very generous with their "yes" vote to build a new high school and two elementary buildings. But it does not mean everybody gets everything they want. Just as in any household building project, there is a budget, and the school districts will build what they can afford within the budget. Compromises are part of any building budget. That said, once people walk into the new buildings, we believe they will be very happy with what they discover.

Q: Have teachers visited other schools and observed first-hand what is happening in newly-constructed schools off the Range?

A: Yes. Teachers have visited twelve schools so far, most of them in Minnesota. All of the schools they visited have been recently constructed. All of the teachers who have visited these schools have said that it was critical for them to see what was happening in modern school construction. The teachers, both elementary and high school, have collectively said the visits were some of the best things they have done. About forty elementary and high school teachers from both school districts participated in the visits.

Q: What about music in the high school?

A: We have worked with the music departments in both districts to ensure they are provided the necessary space to maintain high quality music programs in all areas of music. The new high school will include a performing arts auditorium, ample practice spaces, separate rooms for orchestra, band, and choir. There will also be musical instrument lockers, and an area for kids in music to congregate, talk, and study.

Q: What about tech ed in the new high school?

A: All designs are preliminary, but the current draft design will create, relative to the size of its general high school population, one of the largest tech ed areas in the upper Midwest. The total square footage allocated to tech ed will be larger than the equivalent of three full-size high school gyms. These spaces will allow our students to explore areas of interest and receive exposure and training in multiple areas, including those focused on future trends in technology education. (Note: This is where the building and trades are located.)

Q: What is happening with the swimming pools?

A: As we said in all the public meetings before the May 14 vote, there will be two pools located in the new high school. One will be a competitive swimming pool for our swimmers and the other will be a community pool. Our students and swimmers will take first precedence, but the community pool will be available at reasonable rates when our students and swimmers are not using the pools. The school boards have not yet determined how the management of the pool structure will operate. This will be one of the few indoor pools north of the Twin Cities which will be available to the general public when students are not using the pools. It will be a welcome area for the community to use, especially on weekends in the winter when the temperature is twenty below.

Q: What is happening with the elementary schools?

A: Design work is progressing nicely with the new Eveleth-Gilbert elementary school. The architects are working with the Advisory Committee to continue moving interior and exterior spaces around to maximize the learning opportunities for the students. Nothing has started on the new Roosevelt elementary school, because it will be the last building built. It will be the final building constructed because the high school students will need to be moved to the new high school before any construction on Roosevelt elementary can begin.

Q: Will these buildings be different than other school buildings in Minnesota?

A: Yes. Within budget, these buildings will be designed according to the learning needs of the students being considered first, as the number one important priority. In the high school, education will be transformed into something which is better aligned with student interests, helping students make wiser career decisions, which will include the opportunity for business and school partnerships. For high school students, it is a game changer. For elementary school students, the new elementary schools will be designed with 21st century skills as the backbone of educational architecture and programming.

Q: What is happening with the acquisition of land for the schools?

A: We are working with the City of Eveleth and the City of Virginia to acquire the necessary land for the high school and the Eveleth-Gilbert elementary school. We hope to have this part of the process completed in the next several months.

Q: When will construction start?

A: We are still targeting construction to begin in June of 2020.

Q: I have additional questions. How do I get answers?

A: The best and fastest way to get answers is to call/email the Virginia superintendent Dr. Noel Schmidt, at 218-749-5437, extension 1901/nschmidt@vmmps.org or call/email the Eveleth-Gilbert superintendent Jeff Carey at 218-744-7701/jcarey@egschools.org.