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DORCHESTER

Two Dorchester schools earn 'poor' building, physical environment marks

Posted by Matt Rocheleau May 2, 2011 05:59 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Both the building condition and the general physical environment of two century-old Dorchester elementary school facilities were classified as “poor” – the worst of four possible ratings -- in a recently released state report.

Mather Elementary on Parish Street and Holmes Elementary on School Street were the only schools of 134 in the Boston district to receive a “poor” rating in either category, according to a report that collected data during 2010 and was released Friday by the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Only 20, or around one percent, of the 1,757 schools surveyed in Massachusetts received a poor rating in both categories. Additionally, seven Bay State schools received the worst classification for general environment, but received a “fair” or better rating for building condition; and three schools were given the poor rating for building condition, but received a “fair” or better rating general environment.

The building condition category looked closely at such features as: the building’s structural soundness; electrical, plumbing, heating, fire and safety systems; doors, walls, windows and accessibility; as well as taking into account the condition of sites surrounding the facility, including parking lots, walkways and playgrounds.

The general environment category focused on aspects including classroom size, floor-plan openness; classrooms’ natural lighting; daily maintenance, technological offerings and appropriately-sized libraries, gymnasiums and cafeterias.

The two “poor” definition ratings are each defined in the report as: “The building is in poor condition, many building systems require attention, and further study is required to determine the extent of renovations or potential replacement” and “The school’s general physical environment is poor and many conditions present obstacles to learning and teaching.”

The Mather School’s current 80,000-square-foot facility enrolled 550 students last year and was built in 1905. The 60,000 square-foot Holmes School was built one year later and served 280 students during 2010, the report said.

The Holmes’ last underwent a major interior renovation in the late 1990s. The

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project included accessibility upgrades and the installation of an elevator. An outdoor schoolyard was installed there in 1997.

Meanwhile, the Mather has had two upgrades since last June when researchers surveyed the site for the state school building authority's report. Last summer, the Mather had its external masonry refurbished – a process designed to keep outside moisture from getting in – and an outdoor schoolyard added.

Another recent upgrade came during fall 2009, when the Mather's library underwent a total renovation – a project completed and funded by two private, partnering entities. Established in 1639, the Mather School is the oldest public elementary school in America, according to the city's school department.

Though the Boston school district's overall budget has increased by 39 percent since 2001, investments toward the system's facilities have increased just one percent over the past decade, school officials reported recently.

Inflation jumped 27 percent in the past 10 years, and during that time the district's spending on salaries and benefits rose faster than inflation in every category – administrative salaries rose by 39 percent, teacher salaries by 48 percent, paraprofessional salaries by 53 percent, secretary salaries by 57 percent and employee benefits surged 111 percent.

Transportation spending jumped 33 percent; meanwhile, spending on instructional supplies was cut by 65 percent in the last decade.

"As is the story for many school districts across the state, one of the first things to be cut in an ongoing budget crisis are dollars for facilities improvements so we can focus on keeping great teachers and running great schools," said Boston Public School's spokesman Lee McGuire. "We recognize that many of our school buildings could benefit from upgrades, which is why we are working to make structural changes in the way we run our system so more dollars can become available for these important projects."

The report also found nearly a quarter of school buildings across the state are significantly larger than enrollment and educational programs require. The Holmes School received a "below average" rating for space utilization, while the Mather received an "average" rating.

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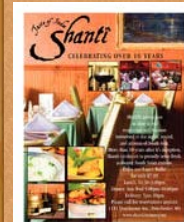
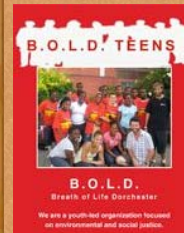
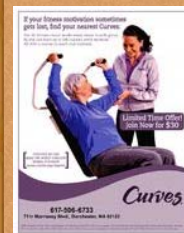


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