



## Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

**Revised 01.23.25**

### 1. What is the 101 Next plan and what will it provide for the community?

The Morris Community High School District 101 Board of Education is asking residents to vote on a proposed \$67 million bond referendum on April 1st. If approved, the bond will fund a major renovation of the existing building and an addition that replaces the three detached buildings on campus. It would bring all Morris Community High School classes and offices under one roof and install a secure main entrance.

Projects included in the proposal are identified needs for the District:

- Replace three separate buildings with one connected building so that all programs are under one roof
- Secured entrance, vestibules, and visibility
- Improved science labs and classrooms, including a mix of new and renovated spaces
- New and renovated restrooms
- New cafeteria at ground level that functions as a multipurpose space and could serve all students at once, if needed
- Replace aging HVAC systems with energy efficient system
- Upgrade electrical service (most panels are at capacity)
- Upgrade plumbing infrastructure
- Improve site traffic flow
- LED lighting
- ADA accessibility

### 2. Why is this project needed?

This building has served the community well, but it is 75 years old and in need of investment to serve the educational needs of today's high school students. The north-south two-story portion of the school was built in 1949, with the east-west two-story addition constructed in 1959. The single-story western extension, including the fieldhouse and pool areas, were added in 1977, and the art building was added in 1974.

Today's best practices for safety and security require limiting the number of open doors during passing periods and keeping students from going from one building to another in all weather conditions.

### 3. What exactly are we getting from this project?

This project is a blend of a new addition that replaces the detached buildings and a renovation of most interior spaces in the main building. It includes more than two dozen new classrooms, about two dozen renovated classrooms, secure designated entrances, renovated restrooms, new restrooms in the addition, an expanded ground-level cafeteria, new performing arts rooms adjacent to the auditorium, a new library/media center, consolidated administrative and student services offices, additional parking spaces and drop-off locations, and new collaborative spaces for faculty and staff.

### 4. How was the community involved in developing this plan?

Discussions began in 2020 during the strategic planning process, which included students, parents, employees, and Board members. In 2022, the District identified its campus needs and began working on conceptual plans with its architects. Feedback from a public opinion survey that generated more than 840 responses was utilized to rank the importance of the projects.

In 2023, the District put together a committee of residents, faculty, parents, and students. This Committee became the foundation for *101 Next*.

The current proposal takes into account the work of *101 Next*, two sets of survey results, and the Board of Education's discussions.

**5. Why doesn't MCHS build a new school?**

After reviewing multiple scenarios of different sizes and touring our current facility, *101 Next* recommended a larger-scale plan that would replace all buildings in a phased approach. The District and *101 Next* hosted three community engagement sessions to educate attendees on the state and needs of the facilities, and to see if the public would support a complete building replacement.

After reviewing results from an additional community-wide survey, the Board of Education did not support asking the community to vote for such a large investment, so the project was scaled down to \$67 million (from a previous amount of \$126 million).

**6. Why do this now? Wouldn't it make sense to wait?**

Just as homeowners must sometimes spend money to maintain their homes, the District must spend money to protect the investment the community has made in its school.

A complaint among some community members is that this project should have been done years ago. However, it wasn't, so the question now becomes, "wait for what?" While the high school is structurally sound, it is old with many out-of-date conditions. Costs will only increase each year. If approved, the bond proposal can help support today's curriculum and instruction, infrastructure, and safety and security needs.

Investing in updated and improved buildings will benefit many generations of students and homeowners. The facilities will be more efficient to operate, thus saving our District money. It is good financial and educational planning.

**7. If the campus is open at lunch and students still must go outside to GAVC, how are we addressing security?**

The high school currently has three buildings with entrances that unlock at multiple times during the day. The District does its best to keep its students safe; however, it is difficult to completely secure entrances during the passing periods since students must travel among three buildings.

With this plan, the District can limit the entrance points for students to enter the building from the outside at lunch and from GAVC. Additionally, the entrances will have a security vestibule to help ensure no unauthorized parties enter the building.

**8. A new cafeteria is part of this proposal. Does that mean that MCHS will no longer have open-campus lunch for upperclassmen?**

When the community was last polled about open-campus lunch for juniors and seniors, there was strong support for continuing that model. Therefore, the District has no plans at this time to end open-campus lunch for upperclassmen.

However, that does not change the need for a modern cafeteria at ground level that is air-conditioned and adequately sized to serve our students. If the decision were made in the future to close campus, this new cafeteria would offer enough space for all of our students to eat lunch on campus.

**9. How will you accommodate students impacted during the construction?**

A significant amount of planning and flexibility will be done in order to minimize disruptions. Some

programs may need to be housed in modular units. Construction can be completed in such a way that the noise impact to students is minimized.

**10. How will this project benefit academic departments?**

Most programs will see new or renovated spaces with larger classrooms. In addition, departments will be consolidated in specific areas. For example, English teachers are currently spread out in five different areas of campus. With this project, they, along with other departments, would now have a common area of classrooms and office space that would allow for better collaboration and sharing of resources.

**11. What is the timeline for the design and construction?**

A more exact timeline will be developed after a successful referendum. At this time, a very rough schedule would look like this:

- Spring 2025-Spring 2026: Facility and mechanical design
- Spring 2026-Summer 2027: East/front parking and addition
- Summer 2026: Phase 1 interior remodeling
- Spring 2027-Summer 2028: North parking and addition
- Summer 2027: Phase 2 interior remodeling
- Summer 2028: Phase 3 interior remodeling and completion of project

**12. What will this plan cost?**

The plan is estimated to cost the District about \$67 million. The Board of Education heard the community’s response to the \$126 million proposal that was under consideration in 2023 and responded with a significant scaling back of that proposal. The plan would be paid for by a bond issuance that would raise property taxes for all property owners inside District 101’s boundaries. The tax impact for the owner of a house currently valued at \$277,000 (fair market value) would be about \$20/month (\$243/year). The following chart shows the monthly tax impacts for homes of varying values.

Fair Market Value	Estimated Tax Impact in Calendar Year 2026
\$100,000	\$78.04 yearly \$6.50 monthly
\$200,000	\$171.23 yearly \$14.27 monthly
\$300,000	\$264.43 yearly \$22.04 monthly
\$400,000	\$357.63 yearly \$29.80 monthly

For a more precise number, [click here for a Tax Impact Calculator](#). (Enter your name and address on the Grundy County Property Tax Inquiry page. Then on the next page, click on “Print Tax Bill” toward the bottom on the right side of the page. When your tax bill opens up, the Fair Cash Value for your home is the third number from the top on the right side of the page.)

This calculator is for a 30-year, \$67 million building bond referendum in April 2025 that assumes the current market value of someone’s home will increase by 5.05% in levy year 2024 and 3% in levy year 2025, consistent with projected total EAV growth rates.

**13. Wouldn't it be better to wait until there is more business development in the District resulting in greater tax revenue?**

There is the potential for more development coming to Morris in the years ahead. However, it can take several years before taxing bodies start to see significant revenue from such developments. There is a risk in waiting for this to happen, as the District's maintenance costs will continue to increase, along with the costs of construction.

When the District does receive new revenue streams, there may be opportunities to refinance the bonds and lessen the impact on taxpayers.

**14. Wouldn't a county sales tax increase for facilities cover the cost of this project?**

If such an increase in the county sales tax were approved, it would help offset some of the cost, but it would not generate enough revenue to pay for the entire project.

**15. How are other school districts able to build new schools without raising the tax rate?**

Many districts have passed referendums in previous years. When they get to the end of the bond payments, instead of lowering the tax rate, districts sometimes decide to keep the tax rate the same so that they can issue additional bonds for a new project. This is very common when you consider that bonds typically span 25 or 30 years.

**16. How does the MCHS tax rate compare with that of other school districts?**

For the most recent year that this data was published on the ISBE website, Morris Community High School's tax rate of \$1.97 was the 28th lowest out of 851 school districts. **More than 96% of Illinois school districts had a higher tax rate than MCHS.** Looking only at the 97 high school districts, MCHS had the 13th lowest rate, which means that **more than 86% of high school districts had a higher tax rate than MCHS.**

**17. Why haven't previous school boards and administrators proposed building projects or saved money for a new building?**

Morris Community High School District 101 has been extremely conservative with the tax levy, resulting in one of the lowest tax rates for Illinois high school districts at about \$1.96 to \$1.99 in recent years. One of the consequences of that is that the tax revenue received is just enough to cover necessary health life safety projects without being able to save funds for the future.

School districts also are not allowed to stockpile money for projects of this magnitude without having a plan in place. They would otherwise have to "spend down" those savings and/or lower the tax rate.

The time has come to make a decision because money is going to be spent regardless – on either maintenance or improvements. The longer this is delayed, the more it will cost in the future (a long-term average increase of about seven percent each year).

**18. Aren't there grants available to pay for this construction?**

There are no grants large enough to pay for this construction. While the Illinois State Board of Education has a School Construction Grant on their website, it has not been funded since 2003 and applications are currently closed. The District is working with its local state representatives on the status of this funding. If applications open again, the District will apply to be on the waiting list.

**19. How are we able to build on the front lawn? Aren't there mines?**

The District investigated the possibility of mines in the front lawn of the building by doing soil borings and going through documents dating back to the 1880s. The soil borings went out 30 feet and went down 25 feet. None of the boring encountered voided space that would indicate a mine shaft.

**20. Would school consolidation eliminate the need for this project at the high school or save enough money to pay for the project?**

If the school districts in Morris were to consolidate, there would likely be some cost savings, but not enough to pay for a project of this size. Also, Morris has only one high school, and there would not be enough room in the elementary schools to bring all of the high school students under the same roof. A high school would still be needed.

**21. Is it true that the cost of the stadium upgrades completed in 2020 was the same as the cost of this project? Was the money for the stadium upgrades donated?**

No. The cost of the stadium upgrades (turf, bleachers, scoreboards, lighting, electric, etc.) was approximately \$1.7 million. The cost of this project is about \$67 million, which is 40 times that amount. There were no donations received for the stadium upgrades. The amount of money that was borrowed for the stadium project was small enough that voter approval was not needed.

**22. Why was an elevator installed knowing that this proposal might be put to the voters?**

The elevator was needed regardless of what happens with this project because the chair lift does not adequately serve the students, staff, and visitors of MCHS. The chair lift causes students to miss instructional time because it cannot be operated during passing periods, and it also is difficult to maintain. The elevator will provide everyone with full access to all five floors of the current building. That will not change with a new addition and renovation. In fact, the new addition will also include an elevator that serves that portion of the building, but it would not reach all five floors of the current building.

**23. If this question is going to be on the ballot, why are gym renovations also being considered?**

Regardless of whether voters approve this project, there are other repairs and projects that must occur. This includes a new floor and new bleachers in the main gym. The floor can no longer be refinished and the boards are beginning to split; it must be replaced. The bleachers are not ADA compliant and also must be replaced. The District is also considering air conditioning for the main gym. This space is not merely an athletic space, as it is used for many assemblies, ceremonies, programs, and classes throughout the year. It is also used by organizations throughout the community for various events. The main gym has never had air conditioning, and adding it would serve the community well.

The main gym is not part of the proposed referendum and will therefore be a space that the District continues to use for many years, even if the referendum is successful.

**24. My taxes already went up \$1,000 in the last couple years. Why didn't the high school use that money to pay for a new building?**

There was no referendum question placed before the voters. Many homeowners have seen significant increases in their **property values** recently. That will increase your tax bill even if the tax rate stays the same. The overall tax rate is the sum of the rates for all taxing bodies, so that rate can go up or down accordingly. Those dollars are then distributed to each of the taxing bodies. In other words, not all of your increase went directly to MCHS. Additionally, as your costs have increased the last several years, so have the District's. The District has also taken on projects such as roof replacements, asbestos abatement, fire alarm upgrades, improved storm drains onsite to address flooding issues, an elevator to address ADA compliance, and replaced some aging heating and ventilation systems over the past five years.

**25. Is there a plan for renovating or replacing the areas that are not included in this proposal?**

The areas that are not included in this proposal may still receive some upgrades through smaller projects, such as floor replacements in the main gym and fieldhouse. An eventual replacement or more significant renovation of those spaces could be part of a later proposal that would be presented to voters at another time. As bonds are paid down and interest rates change, there may be opportunities to issue bonds in future years to address those spaces. Waiting to include this in a later project lowers the cost for taxpayers at one time and allows time to decide how to best reconstruct those spaces, pending any future enrollment changes.

**26. What are the benefits to this proposal compared to doing something less expensive or nothing at all?**

The current needs will not go away. A smaller renovation without an addition would result in losing several classrooms as adjacent classrooms become larger and restrooms are renovated. The disconnect among buildings would still present security concerns, and there would still be routine maintenance and updates in systems such as HVAC, electrical, and plumbing. The estimated cost for this approach is \$21 million. Also, there would be very little savings in energy efficiency, as replacements would have to fit existing piping and no building envelope issues would be addressed.

Replacing the outbuildings with an addition for connectivity and adding a small vestibule at the main entrance with no additional renovation would cost \$35 million. There would be modest energy savings as the issues in the main building would remain. Additional renovation would cost \$19 million for a total of \$54 million and would still result in losing some classrooms.

In this proposed \$67 million project, planned geothermal energy would eliminate the natural gas bill of \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year. Districts that have implemented geothermal energy have projected a return on their investment after about 10-15 years.

In summary, the cost of doing nothing at all is still tens of millions of dollars in ongoing maintenance and upgrades.

**27. I don't have children who attend MCHS. How does the bond referendum benefit me?**

A quality high school education and a high-quality high school are two of the most impactful factors when looking at thriving, successful communities, and they help to maintain strong property values. Protecting our school is also an investment in our community.

**28. What happens if economic conditions change and prices for projects increase?**

If the proposal is approved by the voters, the District will be diligent in protecting the taxpayer's investment while completing the identified projects. The current budgets are based on local and regional projects of similar scopes and types. These figures also include contingency dollars that allow for unknown items to be accomplished as the design progresses. There are no guarantees when it comes to construction, but the District and its architects have taken every measure to accurately estimate the project's cost.

**29. What is a bond referendum?**

An individual generally approaches a financial institution for a mortgage because they don't have the means to pay for their home with one large initial payment. A bond is much like a personal home loan, and is a way for government entities, such as school districts, to borrow money for large projects and repay them with future tax proceeds.

**30. What is the ballot language?**

On April 1, 2025, the MCHS District 101 community will be asked to decide on the following question: ***Shall the Board of Education of Morris Community High School District Number 101, Grundy and Kendall Counties, Illinois, build and equip an addition to and alter, repair and equip the Morris Community High School Building, including constructing secured entryways and new classrooms, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) labs, performing arts and other instructional spaces, cafeteria and library/media center, improving heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and technology infrastructure and equipment and constructing parking lot and drop-off/pick-up zone improvements, demolish other buildings on the Morris Community High School campus, and issue its bonds to the amount of \$67,000,000 for the purpose of paying the costs thereof?***

**31. How do I vote?**

All registered voters in MCHS District 101 are eligible to vote in this election. Residents may also request absentee ballots and find a complete list of voting locations by visiting the [Grundy County Clerk website](#).

**32. Can I vote early?**

Yes! Early Voting and Vote by Mail will begin on Thursday, March 13 for the April 1 Consolidated Election. Any qualified voter may vote prior to Election Day at any site established for early voting by the election authority. The most up-to-date information about early voting can be found by visiting the [Grundy County Clerk website](#).