Using Portable/Demountable Classrooms

Model/Option Overview

Portable classrooms (sometimes referred to as demountable classrooms, or simply “portables”) are temporary classrooms that provide a short-term, lower-cost solution to overcrowding in schools. This option is the most popular approach to overcrowding schools in the US\(^1\) due to providing increased flexibility and cost-effectiveness compared to conventional construction methods.\(^2\) Low-end traditional models with a single classroom can be purchased for as low as $50,000 per unit for a single-classroom unit.\(^3\) Bethel School District is exploring double (two classroom) portables as a solution to overcrowding, which costs approximately $150,000 to construct, or $85 per square foot. These costs include transporting the portables and installing them on a foundation.\(^4\)

There are some additional set up costs associated with installing portables; some installation fees can include a one-time fee of $65,000, which may not provide all the necessary equipment to install the portable.\(^5\) Site preparation, student furniture, permits, design and construction management fees, staff time, and aluminum ADA ramps can cause some portables to exceed $650,000 in the Bethel School District.\(^6\) It’s worth noting that a portable classroom can still cost roughly half of a traditional classroom.\(^7\) If the needs of the portables are shorter-term, school districts may also lease portables for as low as $500 a month.\(^8\)

Portables can provide quick and temporary relief from overcrowding while school districts determine more long-term solutions.

Bethel Specific Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anticipated cost</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Middle school</th>
<th>Elementary school</th>
<th>District wide</th>
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<th>Potential capacity increase</th>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary: 88 student capacity being added in 2019 at Graham and Kapowsin, future capacity district wide 308 students with addition of portables at Centennial, Rocky Ridge and Kapowsin</td>
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<td>Middle: future capacity district wide 600 students with the addition of portables at Cougar Mt, Liberty, Spanaway.</td>
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<td>High School: 240(^9) student capacity being added in 2019. Zero future capacity</td>
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(Based on Districts assessment of sites that could accommodate additional portables.)

What would change? (schools affected)

- Use of school facilities
- Storage space usage
- Operation costs
• Air-conditioning usage

Benefits of the Model

✓ Additional capacity

*Portable classrooms create additional capacity by adding more physical classroom space at each school. A double portable can house 44 total students, with 22 students in each elementary classroom and 60 total students, with 30 students in each high school classroom.*\(^{10}\)

✓ Impacts fewer students (school-specific vs district-wide)

*Each school can determine if the site and/or building has capacity for additional portables needed to be purchased to partially combat overcrowding.*

Challenges of the Model

Community/Family

• Family schedule
• Vacation
• After-school care

Student

✓ Safety

*Portable classrooms are often located further from school services (i.e. administrative offices, restrooms, libraries, etc.) and the lack of restrooms in some portables requires students to walk long distances to the main buildings. Portables may also require special security procedures, such as walking with classmates or going in supervised groups to use the restrooms in the main school building.*\(^{11,12}\)

Instructional

✓ Student achievement/learning outcomes

*Older portables may have issues with providing proper ventilation for students and teachers. According to the largest U.S. study on ventilation rates in classrooms, poor ventilation is correlated with student absences due to illness.*\(^{13}\)

Summer school/remediation

Teaching staff

✓ Classroom space

*While portables can help ease overcrowding within classrooms, other common areas – such as gyms, playgrounds, parking lots, and cafeterias – may still be overcrowded since portables only address classroom space and do not address other spaces for students.*\(^{14}\)

Additional staff
• Curriculum

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Development
State testing

Administration
Additional staff
Professional development

Extracurricular activities
✓ Athletics
The location of portable classrooms may negatively impact extracurricular activities, such as athletics. Each classroom needs to be placed in a location that provides sufficient space due to the footprint of each portable. Portables are often situated in parking lots or recreational fields, which takes away space that is required for outdoor sports. However, portables are versatile and can be customized acoustically and aesthetically to fit the needs of other extracurricular activities, such as music or band.¹⁵

Music / band
Clubs / social organizations

Facilities maintenance
✓ Increase in wear and tear
While portables require less up-front capital than traditional classrooms, older portables may end up costing more than a traditional classroom. Portables frequently require minor repairs and, if used long-term, the cost of the accumulated repairs can be more expensive than a traditional classroom.¹⁶

Additional staff
Access
Time
Storage space

Transportation
Additional buses/routes
Additional bus drivers
Increase in traffic during student pick-up & drop-off

Resources

7 Newquist, C. (1997)
9 Assumes continued use of existing portables in poor condition