

Whatcom Middle School exterior to remain, but interior will be redesigned

KIRA M. COX - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - The white columns and "Waste Not Thy Hour" motto chiseled above the front door will live on at Whatcom Middle School.

Engineers have determined the exterior walls of the burned-out middle school, after some stabilization, can remain and be used in the reconstruction of the school, the Bellingham School District announced Tuesday, May 4.

But it's a different story for the inside of the school.

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Over the next few months, crews will reinforce the exterior walls, gut the building and replace existing interior framing with steel framing. This will leave a shell for the school to be redesigned and constructed inside.

To secure the exterior walls, crews will install shotcrete, which is concrete or mortar that is applied with a high-pressure hose and nozzle. The shotcrete will be sprayed inside the walls, reinforcing them for construction.



Crews salvage Whatcom Middle School

- Read Bellingham School District's Q&A on rebuilding
- Apply to serve on the Whatcom Middle School Educational Specifications Committee

Some stabilization work was done earlier this winter and spring, including temporary shoring of the exterior walls and the removal of the parapet wall at the top of the building.

District officials are working with engineers to make a presentation about the upcoming stabilization work at the next Bellingham School Board meeting on Thursday, May 13.

The school has been standing empty since a Nov. 5 fire. The cause of the fire has not been determined.

While the building is being gutted and cleared of debris, planning for construction can start.

A committee of parents, students, community members and district employees will review the district's middle-school-level "educational facility specifications," which are guidelines for what building features are needed in a school to support the academic program.

For example, Bellingham middle schools use the team-teaching method, with a few teachers in different subjects working

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together to teach a group of students. This method is more effective with classrooms for different subjects clustered together so teachers can collaborate, rather than having all science labs at one end of the school and all math classrooms at the other.

The ed-specs, as they're better known, will be used by architects to design the school this summer. The guidelines for middle schools were updated in 2007 for the construction of the new Shuksan Middle School building.

The ed-specs review committee is expected to finish its work around the end of the school year. Construction likely will start in the fall.