



# Frequently Asked Questions

Reinventing Our Future



SPRING

2020

**Q: Why is this K-8 plan better for our kids?**

The reduced number of facilities allows the District to concentrate its limited resources (staffing/operational) in ways that best support learners. Staff will be able to better collaborate with other professionals teaching the same grade and align resources. Additionally, staff will have the opportunity to learn and grow with additional colleagues during professional learning community (PLC) meetings.

**Q: What are current academic scores for elementary schools and how will this plan impact them?**

The focus of this referendum is to improve students' learning, achievement, and success. Discussions of academic scores/achievement can quickly take many varied paths so we recommend that interested people review that data as their interest dictates. All schools' academic achievement data are available on the District website.

**Q: Will all schools be updated to create adequate learning spaces?**

Each and every K-8 facility will receive updates as part of this proposal. The proposed additions and modifications allow for the optimization of staff in order to better invest resources to improve teaching and learning.

**Q: What will happen to the 4K Learning Academies?**

The 4K Learning Academies are not impacted by this proposal and will remain at G.D. Jones, Hawthorn Hills, Riverview, and Thomas Jefferson.

**Q: What is the actual student-teacher ratio now compared to the goal of 90% school capacity?**

This question combines two, unrelated concepts. The current student-teacher ratio is approximately 21:1 in K-1; 23:1 in grades 2-3; and 25:1 in grades 4-5. For elementary schools currently participating in the Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) program, the student-teacher ratio is 18:1 in K-3.

Optimal school capacity is 90% to allow for flexibility. With additional grade sections at each school, we decrease the likelihood of needing to District place students outside of their home school area.

**Q: How will the projected school sizes compare with regional sizes?**

The state-wide average of small sized elementary schools enrolls 333 students. The average elementary school in Wausau enrolls 260 students. Both of these values use 2018-19 school year data.

**Q: Will there be enough Pupil Services staff for each school?**

The plan proposes a full pupil service team consisting of a counselor, psychologist, and social worker at each school. These staffing decisions will be based upon student needs at individual buildings.

**Q. What does a 5-6 Middle and 7-8 intermediate school schedule look like and how does it benefit students?**

The middle school concept would be the foundation for these schools and could be implemented with fidelity. Additional academic opportunities present themselves when all District 5th graders are in one building. The collaboration among staff, and development of impactful and effective academic teams, provides better supports for students in this age range.

## Common Thoughts Exchanged

As we continue digital discussions about this K-8 plan, below are the most common topics being talked about:



### Elementary School Sizes

Propose building additions to support enrollment, balance school sizes



### Pupil Services at all Schools

Provide consistent, full-time support teams at each school



### Middle School Concept

Provide all students with age appropriate opportunities, increase level of support



### Busing & Staffing Decisions

Determine both busing and staffing levels in ways that best support student needs



### High School Plan

Conduct additional study to enhance education delivery methods and implement an Academy Model

**Q: How does this plan impact busing routes (pick-up times, length)?**

Busing costs will increase with a new plan that merges elementary schools as more students will qualify for busing. Additional expenses will also result as the entire footprint of the District will need busing to both the Intermediate School and the Middle School. Transfer buses may also need to be leveraged to maintain as much efficiency as possible. Somewhat longer average bus rides are also anticipated. In a multi-tier busing plan, 5th graders would be included in the secondary school bus tier, meaning 5th graders would ride with 12th graders.

**Q: How will staffing levels be decided and maintained?**

Staffing levels would continue to follow District guidelines. With larger elementary schools, class sizes will be more consistent across all schools. A task force of staff would be created to develop staffing procedures and be facilitated by the Human Resources, Pupil Services, and Education Departments.

**Q: What is planned for the closed schools?**

The District continues to evaluate possibilities for the closed elementary schools and proposed alternate uses. One example is to repurpose an elementary school as a permanent home for the Wausau Area Montessori Charter School, which is currently housed at Horace Mann Middle School. Another example is remodeling an existing elementary school to serve as a single school for our alternative education programs such as PEER, Alternative High School, Enrich Excel Achieve (EEA) Learning Academy, and Wausau Area Virtual Education (WAVE). Other buildings may be sold or re-purposed.

**Q: What safety investments are we making in our buildings?**

District-wide investments in this plan include securing entries connected to front offices, safety surfaces for playgrounds, fire alarm/ mass notification system upgrades, and improved parent drop-off at select schools.

**Q: What is the plan and timeline for the high school?**

Our K-8 and High School needs are two different issues and, while they are interconnected, they require separate approaches. The District is currently researching options for enhancing education delivery at the high school level with the intention to implement an Academy Model. A two-year study is expected to be conducted and followed by a community task force review. Investments in high school modernization and deferred maintenance are also being considered for this referendum.

**Q: If the proposal is accepted, when would changes be implemented?**

If the Board approves this proposal for a November 2020 referendum, and the community supports it, project work would begin in Summer 2021 and K-8 changes would be implemented in Fall 2023.

**Q: What is the projected cost and tax impact of this plan if accepted?**

The District has been utilizing a defeasance strategy (paying off debt faster than required) for a few years that provides an opportunity to take on additional debt while keeping taxes flat and ensuring a stable mill rate. If the community supports the referendum plan, the tax levy for referendum debt will decrease from what it is currently. The initially presented K-8 plan is estimated to cost \$85 million; however, other possible projects will add costs. The final project cost will be determined from results of community and staff input and task force recommendations. Additional investments being considered include; determining a permanent location for the Wausau Area Montessori Charter School, capital improvements at the Wausau School Forest including a new environmental learning center, as site for alternative education programming, athletic field improvements (including Thom Field), and various deferred maintenance and modernization at the high schools. Depending upon the scope of these additional investments the total project cost may reach \$150 million.

**Q. How much will the District save by merging elementary schools?**

There are several ways to measure "savings": 1) one-time savings by closing buildings; 2) cost savings by not having to complete deferred maintenance on closed buildings; and 3) recurring annual savings including those realized through staff attrition over time. There could be an estimated savings of \$2.5 million annually, as well as one-time cost savings of \$13 million in deferred maintenance cost avoidance, and \$17.4 million in modernization cost avoidance at the elementary schools in which we will no longer need to invest.

**Q: What happens if this plan is not accepted?**

If the plan is rejected, the need for modernization and maintenance would remain. The District will not be able to optimize facilities or utilize staff as effectively as it could, resulting in unresolved challenges such as inequitable class sizes, pupil services, and learning opportunities Districtwide. If state funding continues to decrease and some schools are forced to close, maintaining optimal class sizes would not be possible without additional funding to expand remaining buildings. Another option would be to catch up on deferred maintenance and modernize all schools at an estimated additional cost of \$25 million. It will be this expensive to catch up on deferred maintenance and modernize 13 elementary schools versus seven. Further, a current west side elementary school would need to move to an east side attendance area to balance enrollments in grades 6-12.