



West Contra Costa Unified School District

School Closure Staff Recommendation January 29, 2009

The Richmond Unified School District peaked enrollment in 1968 with 43,000 students after being consolidated from four elementary school districts and one high school district in 1965. Over the next 16 years, enrollment declined by 37% to 27,000 students. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, the district closed many elementary schools, repurposed others and closed Harry Ells High School. After the mid-1980's the student population grew gradually until it peaked at 34,940 students in 2002.

Declining by 4,800 students since that time, the October 2008 enrollment in WCCUSD stood at 30,117 students in the K-12 program. In recognition of the pattern of declining enrollment, the District considered the closure of four elementary schools, Fairmont El Sobrante, Olinda and Seaview and closed one, Seaview, in 2005.

In April 2007, [MGT America](#) completed and published a [performance audit](#) of WCCUSD. That report was far reaching and included 80 recommendations for improvements in structure and processes as well as for financial savings. About 85% of the recommended financial savings came in two areas, employee benefits and school closure.

After a failed attempt to renew the 2004 parcel tax (Measure G), the Board held several public workshop meetings in the fall of 2007 to gain public input and plan a strategy for moving forward with school closures and the possibility of cutting the services that the parcel tax funded. By January 2008, the Board had determined to attempt an election to secure voter approval of the parcel tax that funds all the secondary counselors, the library services, class size reduction for K-3 and high school athletic programs. In June 2008, the Board approved the 2008-09 budget which includes specific language for a multi-year plan for closing schools and dealing with the structural deficit:

The multi-year assumptions include \$1.5 million savings in 2009-10 and an additional \$1.5 million in savings in 2010-11 based upon school closure. The exact number of schools to close would be determined based upon a combination of the demographer's report and the criteria set for school closure. A minimum lead time of nine months is recommended for the planning of school closure.

The approved budget also sets forth a path for financial solvency by approving the sale of closed properties:

School closure is a means to address the long term debt of the District. When the Board takes action to close schools, the sale of the property must be used to eliminate the debt.

The assumptions for 2009-10 and 2010-11 include utilizing site sale funds to pay debt service.

In approving the budget, as is required by statute, the County Superintendent of Schools made the additional requirements that the District provide a report to the County and State Trustee as of the Second Interim Report that includes:

1. *Approval of a list of permanent reductions to address the district's structural deficit;*
2. *Approval of a list of schools to be consolidated;*
3. *To address the rising costs of current employee and retiree health benefits.*

At the November general election, Measure D, the District's parcel tax, passed with overwhelming community support – 79% of the people voted “yes” on the tax extension that brings approximately \$10 million to the District each year for the next five years. With that major threat resolved, the Board took up the process and criteria for school closures at a Board workshop on November 12, 2008 and approved the process and criteria in December. Since that time, the District has held 10 public meetings about school closures. Nearly 800 community members participated in evaluating closure scenarios and suggesting alternative scenarios. The compiled data and comment from those meetings were made public on January 27 and are available along with many other documents and data files under the [school closures](#) tab on the district web.

Since the Board adopted the criteria and process for school closures, several critical things have happened:

1. The state budget situation has deteriorated substantially. When the 2008-09 budget was adopted in June 2008, the District faced a structural deficit (that is, having on-going spending in excess of revenues) of \$7.7 million. While the final resolution has not been forthcoming from the Legislature, both the Governor's and Legislative proposals would increase the 2008-09 deficit spending in WCCUSD to more than \$16 million. The structural deficit for 2009-10 will grow from an estimated \$5.4 million in June 2008 to more than \$25 million if either of the two proposals before the legislature is not passed.
2. As a result of the State's cash shortage and deferral of apportionment to school districts, the District, in an effort to meet payroll for the remainder of the year, has instituted a hiring freeze, and an expenditure freeze. To protect against running out of cash in 2009-10, the District will also be laying off employees in all classifications for 2009-10 as well as making substantial reductions to programs and services.
3. The District has received an updated seismic report for Adams Middle School. That report contains the following findings: *“In Dasse's opinion, the structure could experience significant and likely irreparable damage in a moderate earthquake... In a severe earthquake, with intense ground motion at the site, it is conceivable that these deficiencies will pose significant life safety hazards and localized collapse in several locations of the building is possible.”*
4. On December 16, the Pooled Money Investment Board which, among other duties, allocates state bond money to eligible projects, put a freeze on the distribution of funds as a result of the state's cash shortage. That action had the

- immediate impact of impounding \$10.8 million to WCCUSD that would have been used to pay the state's portion of the El Cerrito High School project. To complete the projects in Measures D & J, the District is anticipating more than \$57 million in state revenue. While the locally approved bond program has funding to complete the projects that are in current construction phase, there won't be enough money to complete all the Measure J funded projects without the state matching funds.
5. The Board hosted a joint meeting of all the city councils and the County Supervisors for West Contra Costa. Subsequent to that meeting the City of Richmond has adopted, but not funded, a proposal to pay \$1.5 million a year to prevent the closure of small schools in the City of Richmond. One other city council has also discussed the possibility of direct aid to the District to prevent school closures.

In adopting the criteria for school closures in December, the Board approved six "Essential Assumptions about School Consolidation in WCCUSD." One of those assumptions was that the "State budget crisis will push the closures toward the maximum number." Therefore, given the state crisis, the uncertainty of federal assistance and to address the District's structural deficits, the recommendations for school closures goes beyond the minimum commitment that the Board made in adopting the 2008-09 budget.

For 2009-10, staff recommends that the Board close the schools listed below:
El Sobrante Elementary
Castro Elementary
Lake Elementary
Shannon Elementary
Adams Middle School

In addition, staff recommends that the following District facilities be closed and staff who are not laid off or reassigned to other positions, be placed at other district facilities. Those facilities are:
Seaview Staff Development Center
Furniture Warehouse

The rationale for making these recommendations follows:

1. **El Sobrante.** With only 215 students and 124 students who live in the school boundaries that attend the school, El Sobrante school must close. Both the Schreder & Associates and MGT reports agree that El Sobrante cannot be financially viable. El Sobrante was also high on the list of those considered for closure by the appointed school closure committees.
2. **Castro.** On December 10, the Board approved the Environmental Impact Review and named the Castro site as the project for the relocation of Portola Middle School. Castro is also a very small elementary school with only 236 students and 142 students who live in the school boundaries that attend the school. While there is community support for maintaining Castro as either elementary school or K-8,

the experts from MGT agree with the majority of the community about closing Castro and relocating Portola there.

3. **Lake.** While Lake is larger than other elementary schools that are recommended for closure in 2009-10, only 265 students who live within the Lake boundaries attend that school. More than 100 of the Lake resident students already attend Bayview which is less than ½ mile from Lake.
4. **Shannon.** Of the 311 students who attend Shannon, only 256 live within the Shannon attendance boundaries. The school has no multi-purpose or cafeteria facilities and uses a double-wide portable classroom for these purposes. As one of the smallest schools in the district, Shannon will be one of easiest to re-district to other school attendance areas.
5. **Adams.** There are two key reasons for closing Adams Middle School for 2009-10. The updated Dasse study shows that the school has seismic issues that call for immediate action. Adams is geographically located near the north-south center of the district so that Adams students could be reassigned to Crespi, Helms, DeJean and Portola.
6. **Seaview Staff Development Center.** With a budget reduction of more than \$6.4 million for this year, many of the staff who had been assigned to Seaview have been re-assigned back to classrooms or to other areas. Reductions for the current year left space at the Bissell Avenue offices as well. With additional reductions assured for 2009-10, it is reasonable to conclude that the staff from Seaview who remain will be assigned to other spaces within the district and/or at school sites.
7. **Furniture Warehouse.** With a budget reduction of more than \$6.4 million for this year, all of the staff who had been assigned to the Furniture Warehouse have been re-assigned to other areas or laid off. Usable furniture at that warehouse can be moved to other locations.

For the 2010-11 school year, staff recommends that the Board close the following schools sites:

Olinda Elementary

Nystrom Elementary with Grant Elementary as an alternate (see explanation below)

Kennedy High School

Gompers Continuation High School

North Campus Continuation High School/ Pupils Services Center

Serra Adult Education School

Alvarado Adult Education School

The rationale for these recommendations follows:

1. **Olinda.** While Olinda's enrollment has grown over the past three years, there are only 270 students who live within Olinda's boundaries who attend school there. According to the [Davis Demographic study](#) of 2008, the number of students who live within the Olinda attendance area will not grow substantially over the next ten years. Olinda was considered for closure in 2005 because it would be relatively easy to re-district Olinda's boundaries so that resident students attend either Ellerhorst, Valley View or Sheldon, all of which have adequate space to

- accommodate additional students, although two of those campuses may need to have re-locatable classrooms added to accommodate the additional enrollment.
2. **Nystrom with Grant as an alternative.** While Nystrom was categorically exempt from consideration in the adopted criteria, events since the adoption of the criteria suggest that an exception should be made so that Nystrom could be considered for closure. The ‘freezing’ of state bond funding complicates an already difficult situation for the Nystrom project. Additionally, the loss of Nystrom would not have the impact on the parents that closing Coronado would have. Nystrom is less than 1/2 mile from Lincoln and only .6 of a mile from Coronado. Only 268 of the 350 students at Nystrom live within that attendance area. Many students who live in the Nystrom area already attend Lincoln, Washington, Peres, Grant or Coronado. In 2002-03, 681 students attended Nystrom. Since that time the enrollment has decreased by 48%. As the enrollment at Richmond College Prep (the charter school that is contiguous to the Nystrom site), has grown the enrollment at Nystrom is likely to continue to decline. Should the Board not be willing to make an exception to the criteria, staff is recommending that Grant Elementary be closed as recommended by the MGT study.
 3. **Kennedy High School.** Continuing to operate six comprehensive high schools in a district with 8,600 high school students is not financially prudent, particularly as high school enrollment is projected to decline over the next ten years. Closing Kennedy High would not only contribute at least \$800,000 in annual operating savings, the closure would also provide space for continuation schools, Leadership Charter School and Adult Education. Closing Kennedy will allow the District to sell several properties that will help pay down the debt, thus freeing up even more operating funds for the remaining schools.
 4. **Gompers High.** Gompers is scheduled to vacate the Gompers High building and move into the portable classrooms that Leadership Charter used prior to moving inside the Gompers building. In this recommendation, Gompers and North Campus would be combined into a single continuation high school at the Kennedy Education Center site. The City of Richmond has expressed interest in purchasing district properties that are in the redevelopment area. The impact of such sales would be to pay down the District’s debt back to the early 1990’s.
 5. **North Campus.** Closing North Campus would involve moving the continuation high schools students to the Kennedy Education Center as well as moving the Community Day and Harbour Way students into other facilities. TLC students would be housed at regular elementary and secondary schools. The pupil services staff would move into other district facilities including schools.
 6. **Serra / Alvarado Adult Schools.** The WCCUSD Adult School already operates at more than 60 sites around the community. Relocating the administrative space and classrooms for day-time classes into the Kennedy Educational Complex would increase the access to the community since Kennedy is located on a main street close to I-80.

This recommendation also includes the following grade level changes:
Mira Visa to K-7 for 2010-11 and K-8 for 2011-12

Chavez, Wilson, Coronado, King, Lincoln, Dover and Stege to K-6 for 2009-10

The rationale for these changes include:

1. **Mira Vista to K-8.** Mira Vista is sited on a relatively large acreage for WCCUSD. Adding relocatable classrooms would allow the school to expand to K-7 for 2010-11 and to K-8 for 2011-12. Having up to an additional 180 seats for middle school-aged students in the area between the current Adams and Portola middle schools would accommodate students having to deal with the closure of Adams and the relocation of Portola. It would also allow the district enough space so that Portola could be built to a maximum size of only 600 students on the Castro site. Parents who prefer having their students in a K-8 school could use the district's transfer process.
2. **Chavez, Wilson, Coronado, King, Lincoln, Dover and Stege to K-6.** This recommendation is based both on facilities needs and academic achievement. With a combination of both K-5 and K-6 grade configurations, there is significant inconsistency in support for curriculum, assessment and instruction in grades 5 and 6. Keeping this year's fifth graders at the elementary school (all schools except Ford and Madera), would allow for the closure of Adams and housing of Manzanita Middle School at DeJean. Madera is not included because it is a school at maximum capacity and located on a site too small for adding portable classrooms. Ford is in temporary quarters at the Downer site while the building on Maricopa Avenue is rebuilt. Ford would become K-6 when the students return to the Maricopa site.

Closing schools is not something anyone in WCCUSD desires. Rather it is driven by economic necessity. Many districts both in California and around the county are facing similar difficult choices. Closing the schools as recommended above would save the district more than \$18.6 million in operating expenses over the next five years.

Closing schools is but one component of the District's balanced plan for financial solvency. Many other difficult and painful decisions will come before the community and the Board before the 2008-09 school year comes to a close.