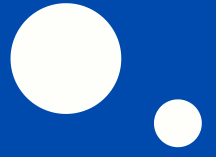


D[★]51



DISTRICT 51 SCHOOL CLOSURE RECOMMENDATION REPORT

November 2024



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LETTER TO THE BOARD

D51 Board of Education,

In accordance with D51 policy [FCB: CLOSING SCHOOLS](#), please accept this report as it relates to current declining enrollment trends, staffing impacts, financial impacts, and building conditions.

The rationale for the recommendation to close the following schools will be explained in more detail below, but to be clear from the beginning of this report, the recommendation is the closure of three elementary schools in D51 beginning in the 2025-26 school year. Those three elementary schools are Nisley Elementary School, Scenic Elementary School, and Clifton Elementary School.

Dr. Brian Hill

District 51 Superintendent

CURRENT DECLINING ENROLLMENT TRENDS



In March of 2023 the Board charged District staff to create a committee to address declining enrollment at the elementary level. The [Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee](#) was composed of district and school leadership, teachers, community members, family members and Board members. The EDEC developed a Problem Statement that stated “Current declining student enrollment negatively impacts d51 resources and infrastructure. The impact limits D51’s ability to assemble the critical resources and infrastructure to adequately support & implement the strategic plan. We desire to reallocate resources to create safe, successful classrooms for students and staff.” The goal of the committee was to develop viable pathways to address the issues that declining enrollment has created, and will create, at the elementary school level. Of the five pathways, the most viable pathway identified was school closures and/or consolidations. While the District has continued to work on the other four pathways, this report pertains to Pathway 1: School Closures.

Since 2019, D51 has seen a decline in student enrollment by 2,049 students. That is a 9.3% decrease. Factors include lower birth rates, affordability, housing, school options, etc.

While the District has been in an enrollment decline, our school buildings have continued to be underutilized. Empty Seats in D51:

- Elementary = 4,715 (65% utilization)
- Middle = 1,369 (74% utilization)
- High = 30 (98% utilization)
- Total = 6,114 (71% utilization)

Schools should ideally be at 85% or higher utilization.

According to our demographer, Shannon Bingham, District 51 is projected to continue declining in enrollment. You can view his latest analysis [here](#).



In 2019, D51 student enrollment was at 20,046 students. This year, the enrollment is down to 19,997, dropping below 20,000 for the first time. As of October 1 of this year, District 51 has declined by 326 students since October 1 of last year. If projections hold, District 51 will continue to decline by about 400 to 500 students a year, with projections showing District 51 dropping below 19,000 students in 2027 and dropping below 18,000 students by 2029.

The State Demographer, Elizabeth Garner, has presented District 51 with her latest demographic projections, and they are similarly showing a decline in school age children for years to come in Mesa County. You can view her latest analysis [here](#). According to Ms. Garner, the “Big Picture Trends” for Colorado are that population is growing at a slowing rate as births are down and deaths are up, migration and mobility is slowing, it is harder to attract and retaining the “best and brightest,” in migration is at similar levels and there is a growing out migration, the largest share of future growth is the 65+ age, and the early working age and youth are becoming a smaller share of the total population. 2010 to 2020 was the second slowest decade for the US in terms of growth. 2020 to 2021 was the slowest ever recorded growth rate in the US with 17 states losing population. 2021 to 2022 saw some return to pre-COVID19 states losing population. 2022 to 2023 saw eight states lose population with 19 states in natural decline with some offset by immigration increases. Colorado population growth has slowed from an annual average of 74,000 last decade to 30,000 average so far this decade.

In 2008, Mesa County had 2,062 births compared to only 1,428 births in 2023. The majority of in-migration to Mesa County over the last decade was from the 55+ age community. Ms. Garner is projecting Mesa County to continue declining in population through 2030 in the age ranges of 0 to 17 (-2,126), 18 to 24 (-279), and 45 to 64 (-2,007). She is projecting Mesa County to continue increasing in population through 2030 in the age ranges of 25 to 44 (5,113) and 65 to 100 (16,503). She is also now projecting that we will not return to the pre-pandemic number of students we had in Mesa County at that time, and it won't be until 2043 until we peak, but that peak year will still fall short of our pre-pandemic peak year of 2019 by about 450 kids. This means that as we continue to decline in the number of kids in Mesa County through 2032, which is her projection, we will never return to the number of kids we had in our county prior to the pandemic unless a major change happens in the community that attracts families with school age kids.





IMPACT OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT

School districts are funded on a per pupil basis (PPR). When districts experience a loss of students, that equates to a loss of funding. At today's PPR rate, a loss of 2,049 students would equal a \$22.1 million loss in D51 per year. To make matters worse, Colorado ranks 39th in the country when it comes to school funding, and D51 ranks 174 out of 178 school districts in PPR.

Colorado ranks 39th in the country when it comes to school funding, and D51 ranks 174 out of 178 school districts in PPR.

School staffing allocations are assigned to schools based on student counts. Schools are able to staff to individual school needs within set parameters. When a school declines in enrollment, it becomes difficult to staff the building properly with the funding that we do receive. The continued cutting of staff leads to loss of programs, loss of services, and loss of support for students and staff. The EDEC desired to have quality facilities for students and staff that create adequate learning environments, fiscally responsible maintenance, and decisions that align with the goals in the Facility Master Plan. The EDEC Committee also desired to have Equipped & Empowered schools that have three to four teachers per grade level for strong professional learning communities, more staff to help reduce the load with essential duties, and more specials/enrichment classes. They also desired to have additional support at elementary schools like Assistant Principals, counselors, interventionists, behavior specialists, etc.

Principals expressed that an enrollment closer to 400 students is considered ideal, as it allows for better student support, adequate resources, and appropriate staffing. Based on enrollment projections for the upcoming school year:

- 3 elementary schools will have enrollment above 400
- 14 elementary schools will have enrollment between 300 and 400
- 6 elementary schools will have enrollment between 200 and 300
- 2 elementary schools will have enrollment below 200

In 2019, which was the peak enrollment year for District 51, our elementary schools had an average enrollment of 388 students, which was closer to the ideal number of 400 for staffing efficiency purposes. This year, due to declining enrollment since 2019, the average enrollment at District 51 elementary schools has dropped to 334, making it harder to staff our buildings. Closing three elementary schools is projected to get our average enrollment at D51 elementary schools up to 369. While closing four elementary schools gets that projected average elementary school enrollment up to 387, there is a risk that closing four schools might lead to the need for a reduction in force. We do not want to lay off teachers, so we are recommending the closure of three elementary schools at this time. But, it is essential that we continue to keep an eye on how enrollment declines are impacting our schools and staffing in the years to come.

Principals emphasized the importance of consistent staffing to ensure hiring and retention success and to best support our students. Effectively staffing schools is a challenge, and has been over the last few years, due to limited resources, with declining enrollment compounding that issue. In order to consistently staff all of our schools as an “Equipped and Empowered Elementary School,” regardless of student enrollment size, change has to happen as staffing the current 25 elementary schools at an Equipped and Empowered level would require additional funding.

School closures create efficiencies by not spreading students out to multiple schools that are then under-enrolled and hard to staff. For example, in the spring of 2023, when the District was initially looking at closing schools, pre-closure staffing for 2023-24 school year showed projected overages of 22.8 positions (SSE) in the D51 middle schools. The average classroom SSE (teachers and classified support) per middle school in 2022-23 was 26.5, meaning that D51 middle schools were overstaffed by about the equivalent amount of one entire middle school building’s staff SSE. Seven of eight middle schools were overstaffed based on projected student counts, ranging from 2 to 23% over. Due to prior reductions and use of temporary funding, addressing this level of overage while maintaining all buildings would have required cuts to academic programs and student supports. The District made the decision to close East Middle School. 14.96 of the middle school staffing overages were addressed through the closure of East Middle School. The closure resulted in a total recurring, annual savings of \$1.3 million. In addition to the East Middle School savings, 4 SSE were reduced at schools not directly impacted by the closure, which amounted to an average savings per year of \$300,000. In total, the District recouped 83% of the middle school unfunded positions for 2023-24 budget year, equalling \$1.6 million of \$1.9 million in unfunded positions. The remainder were addressed through Fruita returning to traditional grade configuration. One time ESSER grant dollars covered the remaining unfunded positions.



By closing East Middle School and relocating students to West Middle School, Bookcliff Middle School, and Orchard Mesa Middle School (Challenge Program), the enrollment at those schools were boosted, leading to a better utilized building and increased staffing allocations versus staffing cuts that were slated to happen. The same is true for the closure of Fruita 8/9, which was closed in the fall of 2023 and took effect in the fall of 2024. Since 2019, Fruita Middle School had declined by 150 students, Fruita 8/9 had declined by 212 students, and FMHS had declined by 61 students. The Fruita secondary schools were overstaffed at the time by nine FTE. The subsidizing of staff positions occurred in order to not staff the Fruita secondary schools in a way that cut programming. Even with the subsidizing of staff, Fruita secondary schools had to cut certain programs due to lack of FTE. The average teacher salary with benefits was around \$90,000. Subsidizing nine FTE at the average teacher salary equated to over \$800,000 in unfunded positions in the Fruita secondary schools, alone. District 51 used one time ESSER grant funds to subsidize these unfunded positions, but ESSER funds were expiring in Fall of 2024, and the subsidizing of FTE was not sustainable. Based on projections at the time, if D51 had kept the three secondary school models in Fruita in tact for the 2024-25 school year, Fruita Middle School was projected to decline by another 44 students, down to 415, and Fruita 8/9 & Fruita Monument High School were projected to decline by another 100 students, down to 589 at Fruita 8/9 & 1,195 at Fruita Monument High School. Based on 2024-25 enrollment projections (not including SOC), if we delayed the reconfiguration moves, Fruita Middle School would have been overstaffed by 4.22 FTE, Fruita 8/9 would have been overstaffed by 5.99 FTE, and Fruita Monument High School would have been overstaffed by 3.4 FTE. Subsidizing these staffing overages in order to not impact programming in the Fruita secondary schools would have cost \$1.2 million in unfunded positions that the district did not have. After the closure of Fruita 8/9, and the move to a traditional 6th through 8th grade school at FMS and a traditional 9th through 12th grade school at FMHS, the District recouped \$2.1 million in unfunded positions.

Through these closures, we were able to better staff schools receiving students from closed schools versus having to reduce staffing across the district, which would have meant programmatic cuts. 82% of our General Fund is spent on salaries & benefits. By not spending money on subsidizing unfunded positions at the middle and high school levels, with a smart use of one-time ESSER funds, a reduction \$1.3 million with Central Office staffing, plus an application of new dollars from the state towards better teacher pay, we have been able to prioritize competitive starting teacher salaries while increasing salaries for all other teachers and staff, too. The starting teacher salary is now \$50,015, up from \$37,500 in 2020 (Up 33%). D51 also moved to a Steps & Lanes salary schedule, rewarding teachers for continuing education.



The average teacher salary has increased by 39.8% since 2020-21, up from \$50,921 in 2020-21 to \$71,199 in 2024-25. Reserves are also up to over 20%, up from 5% just a few years ago. We have now met the objective of maintaining at least three months of payroll expenses, and current reserves are more in line with comparable districts and the state's benchmark for a reserve balance percentage. These financial moves, and freeing up money through necessary closures instead of spending money on unfunded positions, have allowed us to accomplish these goals and better pay staff.

CURRENT STAFFING ISSUES


We are currently overstaffed by 30.5 FTE as a district, with 26.7 FTE over at the elementary school level. We are projected to decline in student enrollment by 482 students next year, with 277 of that student decline projected at the elementary level. A loss in enrollment means the loss of per-pupil funding from the state for those students, which means a reduction in staffing at the school level. Our staffing projections for next year show that we would need to cut approximately 43 FTE from elementary schools. The average teacher salary with benefits is \$97,967. At the elementary level, using the average teacher cost, we are subsidizing staffing at a cost of \$2.6 million. Next year, if projections are correct, and we don't close schools, we would have to subsidize staffing at the elementary level at a cost of \$4.2 million. These are dollars that we do not have, and it would not be a sustainable model. Utilizing reserves for ongoing costs like this would be financially irresponsible and would deplete our reserves in the process. Or, absent school closures, we will have to continue to cut FTE from schools (approximately 43 at elementary next year). This would create a scenario where schools would not be properly staffed and would have a direct negative impact on both students and teachers.

The recommendation is to, instead, move to closure to "rightsizing" our district by closing elementary schools now so that we can better utilize and staff the remaining schools into the future.



Much like the outcome of the closure of East Middle School and Fruita 8/9, by relocating students from a closed school through a boundary change, and boosting the enrollment at the receiving schools, we can add staff to those receiving schools as opposed to reducing the number of staff. We would still need to reduce FTE at the elementary school level, based on projections, by about 16 FTE next year as not every school would be impacted by the school closures. But, the schools receiving students would see an increase in FTE as opposed to a reduction, which they are currently projected to have.





CLOSURE RECOMMENDATIONS

NISLEY ELEMENTARY

The closure recommendations in this report begin with the rationale for closing Nisley Elementary School first as it is a recommendation outside of the Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee process. It is a recommendation that follows policy FCB, which states that, "Although declining enrollment is a significant factor that often leads to the consideration of school(s) consolidations or closures, it is not the only reason. A variety of factors, such as deteriorating facility conditions, academic underperformance, or financial challenges may also necessitate the consolidation or closure of a school(s). These factors, individually or in combination, could create a situation where maintaining a particular school(s) is no longer in the best interest of students, staff, or the District as a whole."

In the case of Nisley Elementary School, the recommendation is being made to close the school due to academic underperformance. This school year, Nisley Elementary School entered Year 5 of the Accountability Clock with the Colorado Department of Education. Every year schools receive a performance rating based on their academic performance. These reports are delivered in the form of a School Performance Framework (SPF). For elementary schools, the SPF is based on Academic Growth (60%) and Academic Achievement (40%). Schools can receive a rating, from lowest to highest, of Turnaround, Priority Improvement, Improvement, or Performance.

"On the Clock" status applies when a school or district receives a Priority Improvement or Turnaround rating, while "Off the Clock" status is achieved by sustaining Improvement/Performance ratings for two consecutive years. Schools/districts "On the Clock" are eligible for EASI grants to support improvement efforts. If a school/district remains "On the Clock" for five consecutive years, they must appear before the State Board of Education, which will then direct one of five possible improvement pathways.




The State Review Panel, managed by SchoolWorks, consists of Colorado education experts who assess schools/districts "On the Clock" to determine their capacity for significant improvement. The process includes reviewing documents, a 2-day site visit with staff and community engagement, and a final report recommending one of five improvement pathways: External Management, Innovation Status, Charter School Conversion, Closure, or Community School Conversion. The panel evaluates six criteria, including leadership, infrastructure, personnel readiness, engagement with external support, potential impact of state investment, and the necessity for the school/district to remain open. Capacity levels are rated from "Not Effective" to "Effective."

Nisley Elementary School's accountability clock status reveals that Nisley has scored in the bottom two academic levels on their School Performance Framework seven of the last eight years. Nisley Elementary School moved to a Priority Improvement rated school in 2017 and remained there until 2022. In 2022, Nisley Elementary School moved to Improvement status after the district submitted a "request to reconsider." A school must remain at either Improvement or Performance status for two consecutive years to exit the accountability clock. Nisley Elementary School dropped back to Priority Improvement in 2023 and has remained there. Because of a two year accountability clock pause during COVID-19, and because they achieved Improvement status in 2022, Nisley is now in Year 5 of the Accountability Clock, even though they have been at the bottom two academic rating levels for seven of the last eight years.

The State Review Panel's report for Nisley Elementary School, following a site visit on March 4, 2024, assessed the school's capacity for improvement. The school received an "Early Developing" rating in leadership, infrastructure, personnel readiness to implement improvements, and capacity to engage with external partners. However, it was rated "Not Effective" regarding the likelihood of positive returns on state investments in the current structure. Important to note. Even though the school scored in the bottom two capacity levels for each category, the panel did not recommend closure because of "the unique population the school serves and provides service to the only homeless sheltering serving families in Grand Junction. Transportation would be required for students to attend other schools."

While Nisley Elementary School has served our community since 1958, the school has not been performing well academically over the past eight years despite the district and state providing additional funding for training and support. The school has averaged a teacher turnover rate of 48.5% over the past six years with the highest turnover rate of 67.1% occurring in 2022-23. The District has also provided numerous supports to the Nisley administration and staff during their time in low performance.





Through Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) grant dollars, Nisley has received close to \$170,000 in additional support, and through Title I dollars, Nisley has received over \$2.5 million in additional support. In a time of declining enrollment in our district that is leading to the closure of elementary schools, the CDE pathway of “closure” is the preferred pathway at this time. While the state did not recommend closure, their rationale was that the school serves the only homeless shelter serving Grand Junction. The District recognizes this and is dedicated to serving the homeless students at Nisley just as we do at every school that serves homeless students. CDE has charged district leadership with developing a pathway plan for Nisley Elementary School that meets the needs of the school and the district. The recommendation is to close Nisley Elementary School beginning with the 2025-26 school year. Students who reside in Nisley Elementary School’s current attendance zone will have their boundaries adjusted to begin attending either Orchard Avenue Elementary School or Fruitvale Elementary School beginning in the 2025-26 school year. Orchard Avenue Elementary is a Performance rated school (highest academic rating in Colorado), and Fruitvale Elementary School is an Improvement rated school (second highest academic rating in Colorado). Nisley Elementary School currently has a little over 30 students attending their school on a transfer or School of Choice. Those students who do not reside in Nisley Elementary School’s current boundaries but attend the school will need to return to their neighborhood school beginning in the 2025-26 school year, or apply to a different school through the School of Choice process in January.

EDEC

CLOSURE CRITERIA

In March 2023, D51 engaged with Alvarez & Marsal to create a decision model that would apply the six closure criteria identified by the EDEC through a formula. A&M worked to develop an integrated model which applied a consistent methodology in a transparent manner which supports both objectivity and understanding. This process included data collection, subject matter expert interviews, a proposal of preliminary metrics, integrating and normalizing the metric results, a presentation summary of results to subject matter experts and district leadership, and an updated integrated analysis and finalized school scores/rankings. Throughout this process, A&M maintained independence from district or subject matter expert biases by only presenting analysis methodology with notional outputs, ensuring the methodology was understood and vetted, but not allowing modifications based on results of preliminary analysis.

Based on the EDEC criteria, and engagement with D51 leadership, A&M created data-informed methodologies to score elementary schools comparatively utilizing the EDEC's six consolidation factors and designate weights.

EDEC criteria and their weights include:

- Building Adequacy = 45.3
- Transportation / Proximity = 20.6
- Low Enrollment = 11.6
- Logic of Future Boundaries = 8.7
- School Performance = 7.6
- Geographic Future Growth = 6.4

In order to calculate scores for each of the criteria that could be applied to each elementary school, A&M developed a methodology for each criteria along with a source of data for each criteria for analysis.



- For Building Adequacy, the methodology used was the facility composite score, and the source of data for analysis was the 2024 Facilities Condition Assessment from the [25 Year Facility Master Plan](#).
- For Transportation/Proximity, the methodology used was the measure of closure impact on transportation distance, and the source of data for analysis was Student and School Location Data.
- For Low Enrollment, the methodology used was the facility's utilization today, and the source of data for analysis was October Count.
- For Logic of Future Boundaries, the methodology used was an analysis of open seats within 2 miles of each school (present + future), and the source of data for analysis was point-to-point distance and capacity analysis.
- For School Performance, the methodology used was academic achievement and growth across multiple assessments, and the source data for analysis was School Performance Frameworks data for Math and Literature scores since 2019.
- For Geographic Future Growth, the methodology used was projections of campus enrollment change over 5 years, and the source of data for analysis was the 5-year demographer projections.

For a deeper understanding of how the criteria were calculated, click [here](#). The EDEC analysis produced consolidated scores for the elementary campuses considered by EDEC. Results of each metric were normalized against peers schools to allow metrics of different magnitude and measure to be compared equally. The combination of scores across each factor is used to calculate a total score between 0 and 100.2 and create a ranked list which prioritizes schools for consolidation consideration. The Schools with the highest total rating were scored highly on the criteria established by EDEC, and are the least likely candidates for consolidation, while schools with lower scores are identified as priorities for school consolidation.

District leadership, along with support from the district demographer, then engaged in scenario planning and cost/benefit analysis.

This process included combining financial analysis and school health perspectives to understand the scale of consolidation needed, understanding the impact of enrollment forecasts on future state, identifying “floors” for savings and/or school size , considering the “network” impacts of consolidation (feeder patterns, transportation, etc.), developing several consolidation scenarios based on EDEC factors to include in further analysis, reviewing proposed scenarios for schools included and boundary phasing options, understanding the financial, enrollment, and community impacts of each scenario, understanding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for each proposed scenario, and ranking the scenarios based on impact.

Based on the results of this extensive process, and with Nisley being recommended for closure through the accountability clock process, the two lowest scoring schools (priorities for closure) were Scenic Elementary School (score of 28.14 out of 100.2) and Clifton Elementary School (score of 33.82 out of 100.2).

The closure decision matrix, when applying the criteria from the EDEC through the analysis done by A&M, rated these two schools as follows:

School	Building Adequacy (45.3 Possible)	Transportation/ Proximity (20.6 Possible)	Low Enrollment (11.6 Possible)	Logic of Future Boundaries (8.7 Possible)	School Performance (7.6 Possible)	Geographic Future Growth (6.4 Possible)	Total
Scenic	6.12	4.89	6.67	4.79	5.67	0	28.14
Clifton	9.29	9.62	4.69	5.05	0	5.18	33.82

It is important to note that the school that was the next possible option based on the application of the criteria through the decision matrix scored a 40.27, highlighting the gap between the two schools scoring the lowest and the next possible option.



SCENIC ELEMENTARY

Scenic Elementary School scored a 28.14 out of a possible 100.2 points in the decision matrix that was guided by the application of the closure criteria developed by the Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee. Scenic Elementary School scored a 6.12 out of a possible 45.3 points on Building Adequacy, a 4.89 out of a possible 20.6 points on Transportation/Proximity, a 6.67 out of a possible 11.6 on Low Enrollment, a 4.79 out of a possible 8.7 on Logic of Future Boundaries, a 5.67 out of a possible 7.6 on School Performance, and a 0 out of a possible 6.4 on Geographic Future Growth.

Scenic Elementary School was rated an “F” as a school facility in the Facility Master Plan. Scenic Elementary School was built in 1969. The building scored a 45% on Building Condition and a 41% on Building Adequacy in the District 51 Facility Master Plan. The Narrative Summary of the Building and Site section of the Facility Master Plan states that “Scenic Elementary School is in a distressed condition. Physical needs include replacing HVAC systems, plumbing and lighting fixtures, adding a fire sprinkler system and elevator, site and parking lot paving, ADA upgrades, floor finishes and casework. This school's educational adequacy would benefit greatly from acoustical and physical separation between learning environments.” The building is a 29,675 square foot building on a 17.03 acre parcel of land. The building needs an estimated \$7,657,945.05 worth of work to address the issues listed above. A total replacement cost of the building, at its current size, capacity, and design would cost approximately \$13,798,652.44. It is important to note, though, that if the District were to replace an elementary school, we would model it with a similar size, capacity, and design as our latest elementary school build, Monument Ridge Elementary. That building is a 65,170 square foot building with a capacity of 468, and it would cost an estimated \$30,303,561.23 in today's dollars to build.

Scenic Elementary School has a capacity of 304 students, and the school's current enrollment is 241. Scenic currently has 144 students attending who live in the school's attendance boundary, 25 students attending on a Transfer from another school, and 72 students attending on a School of Choice Transfer from another school. Scenic also currently has 27 students who live in the school's attendance boundary who attend a Choice/Option School in the district, 9 students attending another school on a Transfer, and 23 students attending another school on a School of Choice Transfer. While Scenic Elementary School saw an increase in student enrollment this year after recent declines in enrollment, many of those new students were from the School of Choice and Transfer Process and not from natural growth in the school's boundaries.




Scenic Elementary School is projected to decline in enrollment moving forward, as it had prior to this year, with a projected enrollment of less than 200 students as early as the 2027 school year.

The closure of Scenic Elementary School would require a boundary change, sending current and future students who reside in the current Scenic Elementary School boundary to both Broadway Elementary School and Wingate Elementary School beginning in the 2025-26 school year. This would boost enrollment at both of those schools, provide more staffing, and allow students at Scenic (a Performance School) to attend two schools that are also Performance Schools. Students who attend Scenic Elementary School and do not reside in the Scenic Elementary School attendance boundary would return to the school where they reside. They will have the option to either attend their neighborhood school, apply for School of Choice to another school, or apply for a Transfer to another school. More information on the scenarios and potential boundary changes are in the section below.

CLIFTON ELEMENTARY

Clifton Elementary School scored a 33.82 out of a possible 100.2 points in the decision matrix that was guided by the application of the closure criteria developed by the Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee. Clifton Elementary School scored a 9.28 out of a possible 45.3 points on Building Adequacy, a 9.62 out of a possible 20.6 points on Transportation/Proximity, a 4.69 out of a possible 11.6 on Low Enrollment, a 5.05 out of a possible 8.7 on Logic of Future Boundaries, a 0 out of a possible 7.6 on School Performance, and a 5.18 out of a possible 6.4 on Geographic Future Growth.

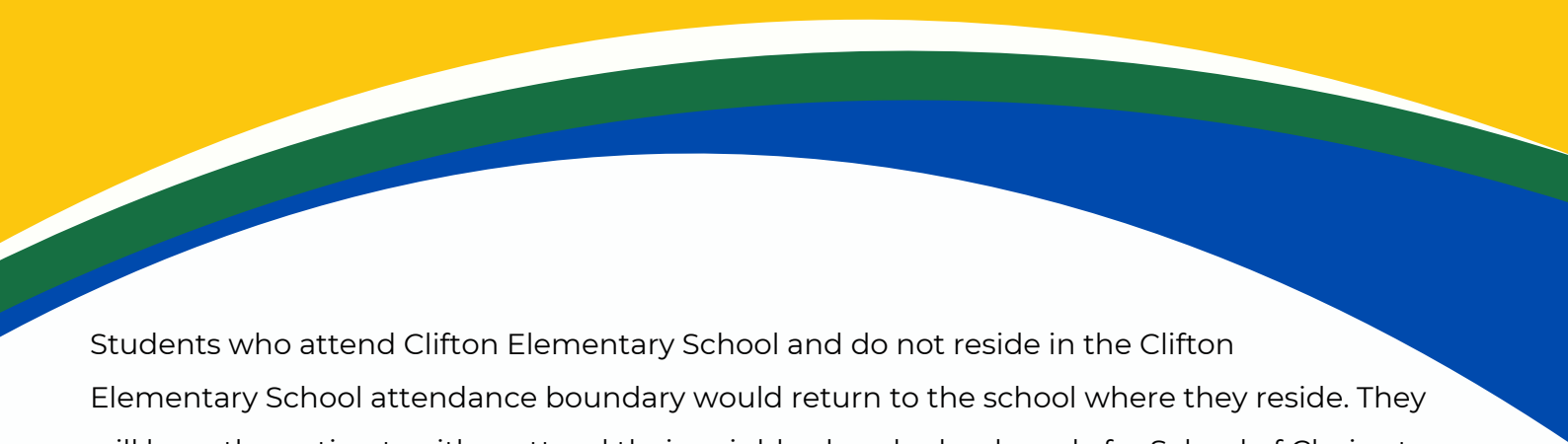
Clifton Elementary School was rated an “D” as a school facility in the Facility Master Plan. Clifton Elementary School was built in 1968 with some renovations in 1982. The building scored a 41% on Building Condition and a 71% on Building Adequacy in the District 51 Facility Master Plan. The Narrative Summary of the Building and Site section of the Facility Master Plan states that “Clifton Elementary School is in poor condition.



The most significant physical needs are related to replacing HVAC rooftop units and controls, adding a fire sprinkler system, site and parking lot paving, restroom renovations for ADA access, flooring replacement and an upcoming need for window replacement. This school's educational adequacy would benefit from modernized special education and small group support spaces, and improved acoustical and conditions in the learning environments.” The building is a 53,714 square foot building on a 8.42 acre parcel of land. The building needs an estimated \$14,830,334.25 worth of work to address the issues listed above. A total replacement cost of the building, at its current size, capacity, and design would cost approximately \$24,976,607.15. It is important to note, though, that if the District were to replace an elementary school, we would model it with a similar size, capacity, and design as our latest elementary school build, Monument Ridge Elementary. That building is a 65,170 square foot building with a capacity of 468, and it would cost an estimated \$30,303,561.23 in today's dollars to build.

Clifton Elementary School has a capacity of 492 students, and the school's current enrollment is 305. Clifton currently has 272 students attending who live in the school's attendance boundary, 9 students attending on a Transfer from another school, 19 students attending on a School of Choice Transfer from another school, and 5 students attending for other reasons. Clifton also currently has 27 students who live in the school's attendance boundary who attend a Choice/Option School in the district, 14 students attending another school on a Transfer, 30 students attending another school on a School of Choice Transfer, and 2 students attending other schools for other reasons. Clifton Elementary School saw a decrease in student enrollment this year after previous declines in enrollment. Clifton Elementary School is projected to decline in enrollment moving forward, as it has in current and previous years, with a projected enrollment of less than 300 students as early as the 2027 school year.

The closure of Clifton Elementary School would require a boundary change, sending current and future students who reside in the current Clifton Elementary School boundary to either both Thunder Mountain Elementary School and Rocky Mountain Elementary School, or to Thunder Mountain Elementary School, Rocky Mountain Elementary School, and Chatfield Elementary School beginning in the 2025-26 school year. This would boost enrollment at those schools, provide more staffing, and allow students at Clifton (a Turnaround School) to attend schools that are a Performance, Improvement, and Turnaround School (was an Improvement School prior).



Students who attend Clifton Elementary School and do not reside in the Clifton Elementary School attendance boundary would return to the school where they reside. They will have the option to either attend their neighborhood school, apply for School of Choice to another school, or apply for a Transfer to another school. More information on the scenarios and potential boundary changes are in the section below.

SCENARIOS & ANALYSIS



Linked [here](#) are the different scenarios that were analyzed by Shannon Bingham at Western Demographics. Important to note that the scenarios report has multiple options for boundary changes for two of the three closures. I am recommending "Nisley Consolidation Scenario 1" for Nisley and "Clifton Consolidation Scenario 1A" for Clifton. These can obviously be adjusted if the Board so chooses to do so. The scenarios for each school show where the students would attend once boundaries are adjusted, the additional cost of transportation, and projections for enrollment next year and into the future.

FUTURE USE OF BUILDINGS & OTHER SCHOOL BUILDINGS TO CONSIDER

The future use of the closed school buildings will be considered, and recommendations will be made to the Board in the future. Since the District owns the buildings and the land, we can either repurpose the buildings if we have a need for them in D51. Or, we can sell the buildings and land and use the money from the sale to fund other capital needs.

Two other school buildings that we need to discuss, but didn't fit within the EDEC conversation, are Gateway School and New Emerson.

GATEWAY SCHOOL

Gateway serves only 12 students currently. The school's location makes it difficult to decide the future viability of it remaining a school. The low numbers of students makes it very expensive to staff per student, and the location makes it hard to recruit and retain staff. Gateway School was rated an "F" as a school facility in the Facility Master Plan. Gateway School was built in 1946 with some renovations in 1957, 1968, 1971, and 1984. The building scored a 15% on Building Condition and a 58% on Building Adequacy in the District 51 Facility Master Plan.



The Narrative Summary of the Building and Site section of the Facility Master Plan states that “The Gateway K-12 School is in a distressed condition. Physical needs include replacing HVAC systems, lighting fixtures, site and parking lot paving, ADA upgrades for toilets and doors, exterior cladding, window and door replacement, some roof replacement, casework, and fire sprinklers. The main building needs a new roof urgently. This school's educational adequacy would benefit from modernized special education and small group support spaces, enhanced acoustics in the learning environments, bigger music room and library, and resolved site traffic safety concerns. The school enrollment is very far below capacity.” The building is a 18,470 square foot building on a 5 acre parcel of land. The building needs an estimated \$7,279,161.75 worth of work to address the issues listed above. A total replacement cost of the building, at its current size, capacity, and design would cost approximately \$8,588,411.48. That is a lot of money to run the school and to try and fix the building. We need to have a discussion about the future educational model delivered to students in Gateway and whether or not we want to continue to invest millions of dollars into it.

NEW EMERSON SCHOOL

New Emerson serves as a magnet/choice school for the district. The building is in bad condition, but the programming offered there is good, has a waitlist, and having choice options like New Emerson is one of the Pathways the EDEC identified in the report. New Emerson School was rated an “F” as a school facility in the Facility Master Plan. New Emerson School was built in 1949 with some renovations in 1970. The building scored a 23% on Building Condition and a 65% on Building Adequacy in the District 51 Facility Master Plan. The Narrative Summary of the Building and Site section of the Facility Master Plan states that “New Emerson at Columbus Elementary School is in a distressed condition. The most significant physical needs include replacing HVAC equipment, adding a fire sprinkler system, site and parking lot paving, exterior windows and doors, replacing the roof, interior finishes, and plumbing fixtures. This school's educational adequacy would benefit from modernized special education and small group support spaces, improved acoustical and lighting conditions in the learning environments, better preschool classrooms and kitchen, and resolving traffic safety issues.” The building is a 23,464 square foot building on a 3.69 acre parcel of land.

The building needs an estimated \$8,433,713.40 worth of work to address the issues listed above. A total replacement cost of the building, at its current size, capacity, and design would cost approximately \$10,910,584.02. It is important to note, though, that if the District were to replace an elementary school, we would model it with a similar size, capacity, and design as our latest elementary school build, Monument Ridge Elementary. That building is a 65,170 square foot building with a capacity of 468, and it would cost an estimated \$30,303,561.23 in today's dollars to build. New Emerson is a Choice School that many families want as an option, but the school has to turn families away every year through the lottery process because they don't have room to grow. With the closure of school buildings, this could create an opportunity to repurpose one of them as the New Emerson School. The school would be located in a better building with the possibility of room to expand with additional rooms.

CLOSING

I recognize that this can be a tough decision. School closures are never easy, yet we find ourselves in a situation that was not our making and that we can't change. I believe that our community is ready for closure on this chapter and to move forward. No scenario will be perfect, but these recommendations are objective and rely on the work of the EDEC and A&M, and the closure of Nisley for being on the Accountability Clock is necessary as well. These recommendations have been vetted in order to try and present to you the best possible scenarios in a difficult decision making time. We have followed the policy on school closures, the requests of the Board and community to slow down and create an Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee, and we have stuck with the criteria developed by that group throughout this process. Thank you for your leadership.

