

# Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030

## Recommendations

September 2025

### Introduction

Robbinsdale Area Schools is home to exceptional teachers and staff, strong music and performing arts programs, and a community deeply committed to equity and belonging. Our schools reflect rich cultural diversity and provide a place where every student and family can feel connected. Students are often the second or third generation of their respective families to attend our schools, and hundreds of alumni return to their home district to serve as employees. These are strengths that set Robbinsdale apart and give us a strong foundation for the future.

At the same time, the district has faced significant challenges for many years: test scores that fall below state averages, declining enrollment, frequent administrative leadership turnover, and aging facilities that require expensive upkeep.

That was the state of the district even before the district's \$21 million budget deficit, which put Robbinsdale Area Schools into Statutory Operating Debt and resulted in more than 180 staff being affected.

Change was needed before. Now, it is **essential**.

The Robbinsdale Area Schools School Board has an opportunity, and a responsibility, to lead this district forward. While past dynamics created division and frustration, today's board stands at a critical turning point. Working alongside district administration and staff, the board can help chart a path that strengthens our schools, supports our staff, and ensures better opportunities and outcomes for every student.

### ***Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030***

District administrators launched [Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030](#) in November 2024 to address these challenges and define the school experience our students *want, need, and deserve*. This report summarizes the process, findings, and recommendations of the Vision 2030 Team, one part of the larger Reimagine Rdale initiative that also included a comprehensive survey and robust community engagement campaign.

This report is more than a recommendation to close schools. It is a plan to *expand opportunities and raise academic excellence* by creating learning environments where every child is inspired, supported, and safe.

We ask the board to review our recommendations, ask clarifying questions, and then take bold, decisive action by directing staff to develop a plan to start implementing these recommendations.

## ***This Will Not Be Easy***

We believe it's critical to first acknowledge that the changes ahead will not be easy. In fact, we expect them to result in a range of strong emotions (both positive and apprehensive) from students, parents/caregivers, staff, and the larger community. But the cost of inaction is *far greater*.

Making decisions that impact the lives of children, families, staff, and the greater community requires compelling rationale, significant courage, and long-term commitment from leaders. We appreciate the difficult position board members are in as elected leaders.

The reality is that board members should expect a significant amount of feedback; history tells us that changes such as the ones the Vision Team is recommending will be received well by some and negatively by others. The question for the school board is whether board members believe the Vision Team's recommendations will lead to a brighter future for a reimagined, refocused, and reinvigorated Robbinsdale Area Schools, or if they prefer to preserve the status quo and all its challenges, including continuing financial crises.

Having spent the past eight months studying our district, the Vision Team believes this is our district's moment to come together to create the educational experience our children deserve. And we believe Robbinsdale Area Schools has what it needs to succeed in this bold initiative, at this exact moment: a board with a tremendous leadership opportunity, a new and committed administration, exceptional staff, curious and resilient students, a community that believes the district can provide better for its children, strong programs, and an unyielding commitment to equity and inclusion.

The time to act is **now**.

# About the Vision 2030 Team

The Vision 2030 Team convened for the first time in January 2025. We have spent the past eight months immersing ourselves in data, learning, and discussions. This section shares more about the Vision Team, how we were selected, and how we worked through various topics to come to consensus in our recommendations.

*(Note: Details about the process of writing this report are included in the appendix.)*

## **Purpose**

On every meeting agenda, the Vision 2030 Team was reminded of the purpose of the committee and our work together:

*“A community group reflective of the diverse makeup of our students and community population will engage in study, learning, and analysis to develop long-term recommendations for district priorities, financial stability, and considerations to reimagine the school district our students want, need, and deserve.”*

While we recognize the significant challenges our district currently faces, the Vision Team has stayed focused on possibility and potential. Our goal has been to entirely reimagine what *could* be, even when faced with the daunting challenges of our current conditions.

## **Responsibilities**

Within that overall purpose, the Vision Team was tasked with four core responsibilities:

1. *Academic Programming*
  - a. Identify key factors that support effective teaching and learning; provide input into the district’s academic vision.
2. *Outcomes and Measurements*
  - a. Provide input on student success measures for the Portrait of a Graduate (in development with district staff).
3. *Enrollment Assumptions*
  - a. Recommend 2030 total enrollment projection to inform the district’s work to more closely align overall building capacity to student enrollment.
4. *Facilities*
  - a. Examine current facility use and building needs. Recommend scenarios, including potential school closures, to address current and future needs.

## ***Team Selection & Composition***

District staff structured the Vision 2030 Team selection process to avoid any pre-determined outcomes (or appearance thereof). The goal was for team members to:

- Represent a broad spectrum of roles and perspectives within the overall district, including students, parents/caregivers, staff, community, and alumni.
- Closely reflect representation percentages of the district's student body and community
- Represent all 8 enrollment zones in the district
- Offer a range of perspectives and skills, contribute to equity and inclusion, and agree to participate for the duration of the team's work

Applicants were all assigned a 4-digit identification number to ensure anonymity. They were then reviewed and scored using a thorough process and then ranked according to their assigned role category: student, parent/caregiver, staff, community-at-large, or alumni. (Some members represent multiple roles. See the end of the report for names and roles of committee members.) The top scorers were then pulled into a central roster. Staff then compared the roster to the demographics of the district and community to ensure a strong alignment between the roster of applicants and the student body/community they were to represent.

Out of 155 applications received, 46 were invited to serve on the Vision 2030 Team, and all accepted. Over the course of eight months, 37 members stayed on the team from start to finish. While members were expected to serve the full duration, we anticipated some turnover given the significant time commitment and unexpected life changes.

Those who left the committee did so for various reasons. For example, Kenneth Wutoh stepped down from the committee after being appointed to the school board, and several members' work situations changed. The group most affected by turnover was students. It's worth noting that the commitment for students was particularly challenging given it spanned two academic years and a summer. Even so, the students who did stay on the committee were particularly engaged, and we felt that while we lost student representation, student voices came through loud and clear in everything we did.

Roles of members who left the committee (either formally or by no longer attending meetings):

- Parents of current students (2)
- Staff (3)
- Students (4)

*Please find additional detail about how the Vision Team was selected and how it reflects the district community in the appendix.*

# Process

Vision Team members have engaged in a thoughtful, intentional, and collaborative process since January 2025.

## *Meetings*

From January 29 through September 23, the Vision 2030 Team has convened 10 times, averaging four hours per meeting, in addition to a full day of visits to other schools in the metro area. It's fair to say that between in-person meetings and prep work outside of meetings, Vision 2030 Team members have volunteered about 2,000 cumulative hours over the past eight months. This estimate does not include significant staff time required to plan and facilitate the meetings – and the work is not yet finished.

The Superintendent's team served in support roles, ensuring that Vision Team members led and worked through our own conversations. The agenda and slides from each meeting can be found via [the “Meetings” Tab on the Vision 2030 Team webpage](#).

Typically, meetings looked like this:

- Spring 2025 meetings were mostly held in schools, providing first-hand exposure to the condition of many of our facilities. Over the summer and early fall, meetings were held at the Educational Services Center.
- The team studied a wide range of district data, including student achievement and demographics, enrollment trends, academic program options, facilities, and more.
- Student voice was centered in all meetings. Students were actively engaged as official members of the Vision Team, and other students shared their experiences through guest panel discussions. Adult team members regularly sought out and valued student team member perspectives on a wide variety of topics.
- The Vision Team used an equity lens throughout the process by regularly asking questions about impact, disparities, stakeholder engagement, and barriers. We used the district's [Equity Magnifier](#) to guide this process.

Other voices entered Vision Team conversations through district-led community outreach that engaged more than 17,000 community members, students, parents/caregivers, and staff who shared their opinions, desires, and priorities for Robbinsdale Area Schools.

This district-led community outreach included a comprehensive survey that invited participants to share their priorities, concerns, and ideas on critical topics such as academics, facilities, equity, and financial sustainability. It also included a community engagement campaign that included eight districtwide events, including two virtual sessions. Four of these events specifically engaged Indigenous, Pan African, Somali, and Latino affinity groups. Staff also

coordinated pop-up engagement events at locations across the district (e.g., libraries, grocery stores, faith organizations), and booths were hosted at popular community events. District administrators held student and staff engagement events in every building and in some departments. Grade-level meetings were held at every school, and student focus groups were held at every secondary school.

The Vision 2030 Community Survey was key in the team's conversations. Peter Leatherman, a survey research professional, reviewed and summarized survey results. These following key findings were incorporated into Vision Team discussions:

- **Key Strengths of the District:** Dedicated Teachers & Caring Staff, Diversity & Inclusion, Unique Programs & Opportunities, Supportive Community, and Student-Centered Learning
- **Challenges & Areas for Growth:** Class Sizes & Staffing Levels, Facilities & Resources, Communication & Transparency, Academic Support & Rigor, Student Well-being, and Food & Scheduling
- **Priorities for the Future:** Equity & Excellence Together, Well-Rounded Education, 21st Century Skills, Cost-Saving & Efficiency, Partnership with Families & Staff

The following topics from the survey were particularly relevant to ongoing Vision Team discussions: how people envision an excellent, world-class education and comments around academic excellence, building improvement needs, school environment and culture, and safety and security (reflective of school climate as well as physical facilities).

*Note: Leatherman's survey summary will be posted to the Vision 2030 website after the Sept 23 work session.*

## ***The Work***

Early on, meetings were data-rich and featured speakers from across the district followed by small group discussion. The intent was to ensure that every committee member had a broad understanding of the district, its programs, safety and security protocols, and macro educational trends. From time to time, Vision Team members asked for additional information, and staff followed up to provide it.

By March, Vision Team members were engaged in activities that involved creative thinking, evaluating information, and generating team perspectives on topics related to the eventual recommendations. Activities ranged from:

- Homework to study Hazel Reinhardt's [enrollment projections](#) so each team member could come prepared with a recommended enrollment number to inform our recommendations

- Evaluating and ranking existing facilities (without building names attached) based on their costs to maintain and utilization rate
- Visual guides to help us envision how projected enrollment numbers fit within our existing facilities

The variety of activities, speakers, deep work, and perspectives among the committee itself kept team members fully engaged, informed, and prepared to make recommendations.

To ensure the recommendations reflect the Vision Team's work, district leaders intentionally kept to their roles as meeting facilitators (vs participants) throughout the process and did not actively engage in small group discussions.

## ***Differing Perspectives***

Because Vision Team members brought varying school and life experiences to each meeting, there were occasional conflicts among perspectives. These were not easy to work through and emotions sometimes ran high, particularly as the team started developing recommendations.

In any community, people are passionate about their children's education as well as the money it takes to provide it. Individuals bring their own emotion, interests, and concerns to school-related discussions. This is as true for the Vision Team as it is for over-the-fence conversations between neighbors or formal discussions among school board members. In fact, this is why the team was intentionally built to represent a wide range of identities and experiences across our district.

The Vision Team effectively worked through differences in a respectful, collaborative way and succeeded in achieving consensus\* on these final recommendations.

*\*Consensus definition: General agreement among a group of people.*

## **Findings and Considerations**

This section details the Vision Team's key insights. We start by sharing some of the strengths that make Robbinsdale Area Schools a great place to learn and work. Then we address the challenges we must face together.

## ***Exceptional Staff & Instruction Are the District's Greatest Strengths***

Robbinsdale has extraordinary teachers and staff who care deeply about students. Leatherman noted in his summary of the Vision 2030 Community Survey that dedicated teachers & caring staff are a key strength of the district, noting that “families, students, and staff overwhelmingly praised the quality, care, and commitment of educators.” Recent examples of staff recognitions include:

- Robert Ware (Robbinsdale Academy-Highview) was named 2025 Hennepin Division High School Principal of the Year by Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals
- Markus Hahn (Cooper High School) was named 2025 Teacher of the Year and Kelly Larson (FAIR School Crystal) was named 2025 Education Assistant of the Year by the Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers; Hahn was also featured in a KARE-11 [“Land of 10,000 Stories”](#) feature
- Two teachers, Garrett Bruce (Cooper High School) and Emma Withers (Meadow Lake Elementary), were named candidates for 2025 Minnesota Teacher of the Year; Bruce continued to the semi-finalist round
- Luke Becker (Armstrong High School) was named 2025 Teacher of the Year by the General Rawlings State Chapter of the Air & Space Forces Association and was also named the association’s third-place winner of the Thompson-Mallett National Teacher of the Year award
- Kimberly Keaton (FAIR School Crystal) was named 2025 Minnesota Middle School Music Educator of the Year
- Zoraba Ross (FAIR School Crystal) was awarded the Excellence in Education Award by The Ohio State University’s Alumni Society Board of Governors
- Michelle Berscheid (New Hope Learning Center) is past chair of the Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education

Our schools also offer a wide range of robust academic and extracurricular programs that enrich learning. The district’s high-quality programs and opportunities, including Spanish immersion, strong music programs, and extracurriculars (arts, sports, clubs) were seen as differentiators in the Vision 2030 Community Survey.

These strengths give Robbinsdale Area Schools a solid foundation for reimagining a future that provides each of our students with the same access to the exceptional educational experiences our district has become known for. With dedicated staff and strong programs, we can pursue ambitious goals with confidence.



## ***The Arts Are Foundational to the District***

Robbinsdale Area Schools has a long tradition of excellence in the arts, from performance and music to visual and applied arts. In the 2030 Community Survey, students ranked “the arts” among the most important areas they want to learn and participate in — alongside math, reading, and hands-on learning.

A sample of recent arts accomplishments includes:

- Seven district students were selected for the Minnesota Music Educators Association’s All-State Ensembles
- A [virtual art exhibit](#) showcases student works with 24/7 accessibility
- The Lakeview Destination Imagination team took 3rd place in state-level Fine Arts Challenge competition
- Fourteen Robbinsdale students were selected for the American Choral Directors Association of Minnesota honor choirs

Our district is also highly diverse. As noted in Leatherman’s summary of the community survey responses: “Respondents emphasized pride in the district’s cultural diversity, bilingual programs, and focus on equity.”

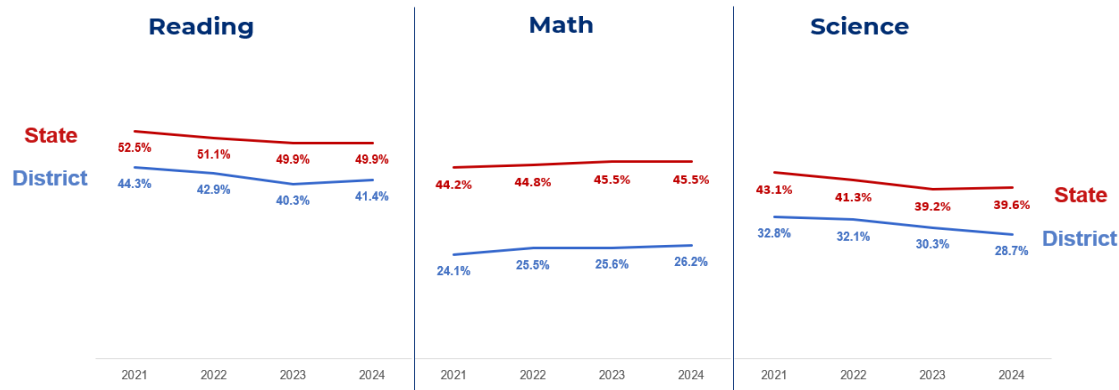
At first glance, arts and diversity may appear unrelated. But the Vision 2030 Team sees them as deeply connected. The arts give students powerful ways to learn about and celebrate their own identities and the diverse cultures, languages, and life experiences that enrich our community.

## ***Robbinsdale School District Lags Minnesota Averages on State Tests***

Student achievement in Robbinsdale Area Schools, as measured by state accountability assessments, is below Minnesota averages. On the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs), district proficiency scores regularly lag state averages in all subjects: reading, math, and science.

The Vision Team is aware that while MCA proficiency rates are an important metric, they are not the sole measure of student achievement. However, since proficiency rates tend to be a common way for members of the public to evaluate schools, the Vision Team advises maintaining a relentless focus on improvement to achieve stronger results.

## State Accountability Assessments: % Proficient



Due to COVID-19 and lower than typical participation, caution should be used when interpreting the 2021 proficiency rate.

## Enrollment Is Declining — and Will Continue To

The district hired Hazel H. Reinhardt, an experienced demographer, to study the district and [provide enrollment projections](#). The following insights were gleaned from Reinhardt's comprehensive work.

From the 2014-2015 school year to the 2024-2025 school year, K–12 enrollment in Robbinsdale Area Schools has declined by 1,916 students, a decrease of 15.7 percent. Several factors — many of which are [being experienced nationwide](#) — contribute to this decline:

- The district's resident school-age population fell by 1,529 students (–10.1 percent), reflecting lower birth rates, very limited real estate for new housing growth that would attract school-aged families, and older residents staying longer in their homes.
- Competition for students has increased, particularly from other public school districts and charter schools. While the number of nonresidents the district attracts through open enrollment is nearly equal to the number of resident students leaving Robbinsdale, the significant loss of students to other districts is concerning; we want Robbinsdale to be the district of choice for our own resident students. Our capture rate\* of resident students is 62.5 percent, down from 70 percent in 2014-2015. Reinhardt notes that most first-ring suburban school districts have capture rates in the 73%-75% range. Minneapolis and St. Paul capture rates range from 55%-59%.

*\*Capture rates show how competitive a school district is among its own resident students who are choosing public education. Capture rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who live in the district and chose Robbinsdale Area Schools by the*

*number of students who live in the district but chose another form of public education (another school district or charter).*

The reimagining process creates an opportunity to strengthen Robbinsdale's appeal for both resident students and those who choose to open enroll here. That said, given birth rate trends described in Reinhardt's study, the district should continue to expect declining enrollment.

[Reinhardt's 2030-2031 enrollment projections](#) ranged from a low of 9,341 to a high of 9,759. Through an enrollment projections exercise, **the Vision 2030 team came to consensus to use the somewhat conservative number of 9,480 (rounded up to 9,500) students as our 2030 enrollment projection.** We took this number into consideration in subsequent conversations about facilities.

SOURCE: [Robbinsdale Area Schools ISD #281 Enrollment Projections](#)

## ***Robbinsdale Operates More Buildings Than Needed***

In 1971, the district enrolled more than 28,000 students. In 2009, the most recent year for school closures, enrollment was about 12,300, and it has declined by just over 2,000 students since then. In 2024-2025, the district enrolled 10,253 students. Enrollment data and the Reinhardt demographic study clearly show that Robbinsdale Area Schools operates more buildings than current and projected enrollment require. Operating excess facilities increases costs in almost all fund categories (e.g., general, capital, food service).

Robbinsdale Area Schools currently operates 18 school buildings (excluding the Educational Service Center, Crystal Learning Center, bus garage, and warehouse). The chart below reflects the methodology used for analyzing existing conditions in our district to get a realistic view of *generally* how full buildings are and how efficiently buildings are used during a typical school day.

*Building capacity* is a calculation of how many students each building can serve. It depends on variables such as how many spaces are used for art and music, special education, flex learning, and language or computer labs. It also takes into account the number of classrooms, square footage, collective bargaining class size ranges, and Minnesota Department of Education recommendations.

*Utilization rates* provide a snapshot of how efficiently buildings are used during a typical school day by comparing a building's capacity to its actual enrollment.

When examining secondary schools (middle and high), the utilization calculation factors in a multiplier (usually averaging .8) to provide a more accurate representation of the mobile nature

of a secondary student's school day. This multiplier accounts for the use of classroom space for subject-specific purposes, special education, and teacher prep time.

Capacity and utilization rate estimates are a common way for facilities professionals to gain an *overall* understanding of how buildings are used for their intended purposes and where space may be over-abundant or insufficient for student needs, as well as to allow a better understanding of how many buildings may be needed to serve projected enrollment in the future.

The chart below illustrates building capacity and utilization from two different lenses. First is "Current Programmed Capacity" and the "2024-2025 Utilization Rate." These calculations *include* existing specialized programming (such as special education) that our district's buildings have today. The impact of specialized programming on building capacity and utilization could increase or decrease in the future, depending on student needs and programmatic changes.

The second lens shows maximum capacity and utilization rates *without* existing programming. These calculations are included in the chart to provide a clearer understanding of what the base-level actual maximum capacity of individual school buildings would be, without specialized programming included. It's vital to include this second lens because it provides a baseline from which to gauge the impact that specialized programming has or could have on a school building and to calculate final capacity once specialized programming determinations have been made.

*Given how complex capacity and utilization rate calculations are, we asked district staff to provide a more detailed description of what these terms mean. You can find that summary in the appendix.*

HIGH SCHOOLS (2)					
School Name	2024-2025 Enrollment	Current Programmed Capacity	2024-2025 Utilization Rate	Max Capacity w/o Programming	Utilization Rate w/o Programming
Armstrong High School	1736	1710	102%	2030	85.53%
Cooper High School	1337	1604	83%	1944	68.78%

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (4)					
School Name	2024-2025 Enrollment	Current Building Capacity	2024-2025 Utilization Rate	Max Capacity w/o Programming	Utilization Rate w/o Programming
FAIR Crystal	462	603	77%	723	63.88%
Plymouth Middle School	787	1290	61%	1390	56.64%
Robbinsdale Middle School	577	1618	36%	1718	33.59%
Sandburg Middle School <i>Also houses Robbinsdale Academy-Highview and Robbinsdale Virtual Academy</i>	819	1402	58%	1522	53.80%
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BUILDINGS (12)					
School Name	2024-2025 Enrollment	Current Building Capacity	2024-2025 Utilization Rate	Max Capacity w/o Programming	Utilization Rate w/o Programming
FAIR School Pilgrim Lane	371	504	74%	624	59.46%
Forest Elementary	413	701	59%	841	49.11%
Lakeview Elementary	290	572	51%	612	47.39%
Meadow Lake Elementary	425	793	54%	953	44.60%
Neill Elementary	307	756	41%	876	35.05%

School Name	2024-2025 Enrollment	Current Building Capacity	2024-2025 Utilization Rate	Max Capacity w/o Programming	Utilization Rate w/o Programming
New Hope Early Learning Center*	272	558	49%	678	40.12%
Noble Elementary	228	542	42%	642	35.51%
Northport Elementary	467	717	65%	837	55.79%
Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion School (RSI)	738	920	80%	960	76.88%
Sonnesyn Elementary	294	724	41%	904	32.52%
School of Engineering & Arts (SEA)	465	467	100%	507	91.72%
Zachary Lane Elementary	404	628	64%	708	57.06%

\*New Hope Learning Center was built as an elementary school but is currently being utilized for early learning programming and an on-site health clinic. The utilization rate for this building was calculated using the same formula as the elementary schools. Other sites (and the programs located within or managed by them) may not be directly addressed by these recommendations because the sites are used for purposes other than K-12 instruction: Crystal Learning Center (housing the Robbinsdale Transition Center and Adult Learning), the Community Education wing of Fair Pilgrim Lane, Educational Service Center, and the Warehouse.

## ***Facilities Are Outdated and Expensive to Maintain***

The district's facilities were noted as a top challenge and area for growth according to the Vision 2030 Community Survey. Leatherman noted "Facilities & Resources" as one of these key areas, adding: "Students and staff cited the need for improved buildings, technology, and materials to support 21st-century learning."

The district conducted a comprehensive facilities assessment in 2025. This was an exhaustive effort by subject matter experts in mechanicals, electrical, engineering, architecture, and more. The assessments evaluated the facilities for their condition, remaining life expectancy, deferred maintenance needs, and performance. The Vision Team [reviewed results and data from this assessment](#) to draw conclusions about facilities.

District facilities are outdated and no longer meet current or future needs. Addressing known deferred maintenance needs at all current buildings would cost nearly \$216.6 million over the next 10 years, with \$76.3 million of that in urgent needs over the next two years. "Urgent" needs are typically examined using the following lenses:

- Does the maintenance issue present a concern about the health, safety, and welfare of the building occupants? (Example: leaking plumbing that could allow for the growth of mold.)
- Considering the remaining lifespan of the component or system, would its failure result in exponentially higher costs than if it had been addressed sooner? (Example: a roof reaching the end of its expected life being replaced at a cost that is 20% of the cost compared to waiting for the roofing to fail, which would necessitate full replacement of not only the roof but also the roof insulation and possible interior finishes of the rooms below.)
- Is the condition of the component or system such that it runs the risk of catastrophic failure? For these purposes, "catastrophic failure" is defined as creating conditions that make portions of the building uninhabitable to occupants due to practical or life safety codes, and/or which would create an immediate risk to the safety of the occupants. (Example: HVAC equipment that is at its end of life, and if it totally fails could lead to a loss of ventilation [a requirement for occupancy] in portions of the building, which would cause those spaces to become uninhabitable while the system is down.)

## Deferred Maintenance Assessment Results

Building	Total Cost			Total Needs
	Urgent Need (1-2 Yrs)	High Need (3-5 Yrs)	Intermediate Need (6-10 Yrs)	
Cooper High School	\$9,903,387	\$10,575,575	\$8,292,661	\$28,771,623
Robbinsdale Middle School	\$8,349,640	\$15,837,830	\$3,952,521	\$28,139,991
Armstrong High School	\$5,600,435	\$5,826,899	\$11,352,700	\$23,780,034
Sandburg Middle School	\$7,323,131	\$6,742,168	\$3,412,433	\$17,477,731
Sonnesyn Elementary School	\$5,825,314	\$3,864,546	\$3,083,436	\$12,773,297
Neill Elementary School	\$1,377,167	\$7,807,899	\$2,789,585	\$11,974,650
Plymouth Middle School	\$2,673,090	\$4,143,690	\$4,879,339	\$11,696,119
Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion	\$8,643,322	\$1,756,262	\$1,203,783	\$11,603,367
Meadow Lake Elementary School	\$1,241,064	\$1,756,579	\$6,667,572	\$9,665,214
FAIR School Crystal	\$4,693,581	\$2,333,364	\$2,156,914	\$9,183,859
Forest Elementary School	\$1,248,147	\$5,219,672	\$1,775,258	\$8,243,077
Zachary Lane Elementary School	\$1,085,321	\$4,552,189	\$1,055,527	\$6,693,037
Noble Elementary School	\$1,228,188	\$3,960,001	\$408,836	\$5,597,025
New Hope Learning Center	\$1,191,580	\$369,734	\$1,682,441	\$3,243,754
Northport Elementary School	\$798,168	\$1,002,118	\$1,384,175	\$3,184,460
Lakeview Elementary School	\$919,370	\$563,927	\$1,572,392	\$3,055,689
SEA Olson	\$394,185	\$214,805	\$713,619	\$1,322,609
FAIR School Pilgrim Lane	\$373,295	\$461,289	\$372,604	\$1,207,188
Educational Services Center	\$8,824,566	\$1,807,673	\$400,140	\$11,032,379
Transportation/Bus Garage	\$4,608,320	\$1,658,386	\$1,683,221	\$7,949,926
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$76,301,269</b>	<b>\$81,454,606</b>	<b>\$58,839,155</b>	<b>\$216,595,030</b>

*Cost estimates from Robbinsdale Area Schools facilities assessments*

It wasn't just numbers that demonstrated the need to address our buildings. During an all-day tour of facilities in other districts (Shakopee, Prior Lake-Savage, Minneapolis, and White Bear Lake), Vision Team members were inspired by what could be possible for our own students. We saw bright, open, and airy communal spaces, state-of-the-art career training facilities, flexible learning areas, modern performance theaters, private music practice spaces, and safe and modern private-stall bathrooms. One student committee member remarked, *"I would really like to go to a school like this."*

Updated facilities don't just support more effective learning; they promote *pride and belonging*: two things every single one of our students deserve.

## Revitalizing Our Buildings Will Require Voter Support

Robbinsdale Area School voters recently approved the [2024 Capital Project Technology Levy](#), but available data indicate **our schools have not benefited from a voter-approved building bond for at least 45 years.\***



The renewed levy extended the 2014 voter-approved technology levy at the same tax rate. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, it provides about \$7 million in funds annually, with nearly two-thirds of funds dedicated to technology and one-third to safety and security upgrades across our schools.

This levy provides critical support, but it does not address the major facility needs across the district. Meeting those needs requires community support through a building bond. Robbinsdale would not be unique with this need; other metro districts are [investing heavily in updating their facilities via bonds](#):

- Osseo Area Schools: \$223 million bond in 2023 to enhance safety and security, modernize spaces, update classrooms and common areas, add an outdoor classroom, repurpose an existing elementary school for new needs, and construct a new elementary school.
- Independent School District 196 (Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan): \$493.7 million bond referendum in 2023 to relieve overcrowding, enhance safety and security, and create consistently high-quality learning environments across the district, including building a new elementary school.
- St. Louis Park Public Schools: \$135 million bond referendum in 2022 to restore, repair, and update facilities.
- School District 622 (North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale): \$275 million bond in 2019 to enhance security, update classrooms, renovate or expand five schools, and add two new elementary schools.
- Roseville Area Schools: \$144 million bond in 2017 to repair, upgrade, and add additions to all buildings.
- Wayzata School District: \$70 million bond in 2017 to address the district's facility needs.
- Anoka-Hennepin School District: \$249 million bond in 2017 for additions and renovations
- Other districts are introducing bond referendums this fall 2025 to improve facilities, including Hopkins Public Schools (\$140 million) and Minnetonka Public Schools (\$85 million).

Without significant investment, Robbinsdale Areas Schools is at risk of falling further behind our main competitors in the PreK-12 enrollment marketplace.

*\*In 2003, the Minnesota Legislature approved special funding to reconstruct Forest Elementary. This did not require voter approval.*

## ***Safety and Security Are Priorities***

Robbinsdale Area Schools has [fundamental safety and security protocols in place](#). At the same time, district audits of school facilities identified areas that could be strengthened. For example,

one assessment found the exterior perimeters of all 18 district buildings are secure, in that they have basic protections in place, e.g. the perimeter is locked (unless directly staffed) at all times. Thirteen of those sites, however, do not meet standards for a fully secure building as currently defined by the district's perimeter assessment criteria, and therefore could be improved.

Students have shared their perspectives on safety through annual surveys. Across time, more than 90% of district high school students and at least 87% of elementary and middle school students report feeling safe in the classroom. Generally (approximately 80%), students also feel safe in the hallway.

However, the percentage of students feeling safe in school bathrooms decreased from 2015 to 2024. Over that time frame, feelings of safety in bathrooms declined by 9 percentage points for elementary (84% to 75%), 18 percentage points for middle school (88% to 70%) and 23 percentage points for high school (83% to 60%). The design of most school bathrooms makes it difficult for staff to monitor those areas, and students and parents/caregivers have registered particular concerns about vaping in those facilities.

A portion of the recently renewed Capital Projects Levy as well as certain state funds are designated for specific safety and security improvements, but they are not sufficient to tackle the comprehensive list of currently identified needs.

## ***District's Reputation Deserves Attention***

A variety of factors contribute to a school district's reputation. In Robbinsdale's case, survey data show positive perceptions of staff, the district's diversity and inclusion, supportive school communities, and its programs and opportunities, all of which support a positive reputation. While it's almost impossible for any school system to over-communicate student and staff achievements (there is *always* room to do more), district communications (print, digital/social, and local media) and the [district website](#) provide *hundreds* of reasons to be proud of Robbinsdale Area Schools.

Unfortunately, Robbinsdale is also known (and followed by the media) for a characteristic that works against a positive district reputation: an "[embattled](#)" and "[dysfunctional](#)" school board. Governance was [cited as one of multiple factors contributing](#) to a recent decline in the district's bond rating, which has resulted in higher borrowing costs. As the board contemplates a potential bond referendum that would rely on community trust and support, the Vision Team encourages board members to work even harder to collaborate and seek consensus in order to demonstrate to both our community and bond rating agencies that our district has effective board governance.

It's also important to note that many other factors contribute to the district's reputation, including concerns about the district's financial management, academic achievement, student behavior and safety-related incidents, and facilities that are in need of major updates.

## **Vision 2030 Team Recommendations**

Our district's unprecedented financial challenge demands prompt and decisive action. At the same time, these challenges present an opportunity to entirely transform our district to better support our students, staff, families, and our future.

After careful analysis of enrollment trends, financial realities, existing strengths, and community/student/staff input, we recommend changes to our schools to ensure both fiscal responsibility and educational excellence for every student.

Our recommendations include four key parts:

- Academic priorities to ensure student success
- Changes to the programmatic focus of our district
- Reduction in the number of school buildings the district operates
- Physical requirements for every school building

### ***Academic Priorities***

Much of this report addresses facilities, enrollment, and the need to close buildings given financial urgency. But before turning to facilities in our work, the Vision Team began by identifying what we believe must be the district's academic priorities. This distinction matters: our recommendations were not made in a vacuum. Our vision for academics, teaching and learning, and the student experience shaped our vision for facilities. These academic priorities should continue to drive all decisions as the board and staff move forward with an implementation plan.

With that in mind, the Vision Team worked together to define what we believe is most essential to creating a thriving educational environment for our students. The result is what we call the **Core Pillars for Reaching a Thriving Educational Environment**. This document can serve as a foundation on which we believe the district can build stronger schools where each student is seen, supported, and fully prepared for life beyond graduation.

## Core Pillars for Reaching a Thriving Educational Environment

### Pillar 1: Learning Pathways for *Every* Student

At Robbinsdale Area Schools, every student has access to learning opportunities that honor their unique gifts, experiences, interests, and ambitions. These opportunities develop enthusiastic, engaged, and adaptable learners eager to contribute to their communities and the world.

These opportunities will:

- Prioritize literacy and core life skills that form the foundation for success.
- Provide purposeful, relevant, and innovative learning that meets each student where they are and prepares them to thrive in an ever-changing world.
- Leverage technology to support individualized learning, digital literacy, and innovative instruction.
- Use policies, systems, and strategies to remove barriers, advance equity and inclusion, and ensure high-quality education for all students, especially students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Offer top-tier pathway programs designed to support both career pathways and college readiness.
- Integrate creative, hands-on, and play-based learning at all grade levels.
- Use data to guide decisions and ensure universal implementation of evidence-based core curriculum.

### Pillar 2: Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

At Robbinsdale Area Schools, every student has access to high-quality learning spaces that are safe and designed to support well-being and belonging. These environments promote effective learning, connection, and pride in the school community.

These environments will:

- Promote physical and psychological safety across all learning and community spaces, including through safe, clean, and accessible private single-stall bathrooms.
- Provide updated, clean, comfortable spaces filled with natural light that foster a sense of pride and belonging.
- Integrate technology into learning spaces to enhance student engagement and accessibility.
- Feature additional hands-on learning spaces, including outdoor classrooms and maker spaces.
- Offer equitable access to healthy, culturally-relevant food and nutrition programs.

### Pillar 3: Exceptional and Supported Staff

At Robbinsdale Area Schools, every student has access to exceptional educators and staff who are well-prepared, passionate, and supported to thrive in their roles. By investing in our staff, we strengthen the caliber of our district and academic experience.

Our commitments are to:

- Establish Robbinsdale Area Schools as the destination district for the most exceptional, caring, and passionate educators.
- Recruit and retain high-quality staff who are deeply committed to our students and reflective of our diverse community.
- Provide ongoing professional development, mentorship, and collaboration time, including training in technology and individualized instruction, to ensure excellence in teaching, leadership, and operations.
- Cultivate authentic relationships among staff and leaders built on respect, transparency, and communication.
- Welcome staff with diverse perspectives and ensure access to meaningful, culturally relevant professional development.
- Create a district culture where staff feel valued, respected, and fulfilled in their purpose — enabling them to best serve students.

### Pillar 4: Impactful Community Engagement and Partnerships

At Robbinsdale Area Schools, every student is supported by our active and engaged community of students, staff, and residents. This community connection creates belonging and positive collaboration — helping both the district and the community thrive.

Our community efforts will:

- Cultivate relationships that promote excellence, innovation, and meaningful impact across the district.
- Build stronger relationships with families, caregivers, and community members to deepen trust and engagement, including through transparent communication.
- Develop partnerships that directly support student learning and engagement, including pathway-specific programs.
- Engage community members, elders, and experts to enrich curriculum, including dynamic and holistic land-based education.
- Promote inclusion and advocacy by ensuring all voices are welcomed, heard, and valued.
- Address student enrollment and retention through proactive outreach and engagement strategies.

## ***Programmatic Focus: Arts & Innovation***

Magnet schools are an exception to the district's overall trend of declining enrollment. The popularity of our elementary and middle school magnet programs can lead to waiting lists. As we considered programs that are experiencing high demand (science, engineering, and outdoor learning integration) and are core to our district's identity (arts integration), the Vision Team thought that if those types of education are good for those who are fortunate enough to gain acceptance into a magnet school, they could also be good for ALL elementary and middle students in our district.

(Note: For the purpose of this section, we will focus only on the School of Engineering & Arts and FAIR magnets. We are not recommending that our Spanish Immersion program be implemented districtwide but rather retained as a standalone program given its unique need for staff to be proficient in Spanish.)

### **A New Districtwide Identity: Arts & Innovation**

Rather than providing a limited number of students access to the educational opportunities that are so highly sought after through our School of Engineering & Arts and FAIR, we encourage the district to adopt an entirely new identity as the district of Arts & Innovation. This would mean incorporating the most effective initiatives from these magnet schools across *all schools in the district*. While full implementation may require a phased approach, offering Arts & Innovation programming to *all* students would be a monumental step forward for our district.

Such programming would reflect what students, staff, and families have said they value most or consider priorities for the future. For example, through the Vision 2030 community survey and staff-facilitated focus groups, students clearly stated (and staff agreed) that they learn best through hands-on learning. Other survey feedback, summarized by Leatherman, emphasized preparing students with critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and real-world readiness — skills that are often built through project-based learning.

### **What Arts & Innovation Would Require**

The Vision Team believes districtwide Arts & Innovation would require a strong commitment from staff at every school, along with significant facility changes. For example, to support hands-on, project-based, and outdoor learning (including land-based education), every school at every grade level would need dedicated outdoor classroom space (like SEA), flexible learning spaces that adapt to different projects, and a performance space to fully integrate the arts (like FAIR).

**It is critical to note that the Vision Team expects Arts & Innovation programming to be delivered across the district at a high standard.** While districtwide programming will likely be

delivered differently than how it is currently delivered at our magnet schools, a high standard of excellence will be essential in order to reinforce the district's new Arts and Innovation identity.

Given the district is at a critical point in time when a building bond is necessary for multiple reasons, we believe now is the opportunity to reshape the district to support this programmatic change.

## What Arts & Innovation Implementation Would Mean

Implementing the new districtwide identity would mean:

- Children would be assigned to their neighborhood school using new boundaries, unless they opt into the Spanish immersion program. (Please note: A transition plan for students enrolled at any schools that would be closed is not within the scope of this team's work so would be addressed by district administration.)
- All teaching staff would undergo professional development to prepare them to effectively implement a robust Arts and Innovation curriculum across *all* schools, including Spanish Immersion.
- Facilities would be redesigned and renovated, where necessary, to include the functional learning spaces required to deliver on this curriculum (e.g., maker spaces, outdoor labs, performance arts spaces). These spaces would incorporate state-of-the-art technology, where appropriate, to maximize learning.
- Key partnerships, like those that already exist with the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources (SEA) and Stages Theatre Company (FAIR), would be expanded across the district to provide greater access to the educational opportunities some students in our district already receive through community partnerships.

If Robbinsdale is truly committed to equity, we believe all students should have the opportunity to participate in Arts and Innovation programming.

## ***Reduction in the Number of Schools Operated***

Analysis of enrollment and facilities use data clearly shows the district is operating more buildings than necessary for current and projected enrollment. Closing excess buildings would help the district gain financial and operational efficiencies that could, in turn, positively impact the student experience (described later in this paper).

Using 9,500 total students as our enrollment projection (determined using Reinhardt's report and committee consensus), we propose realigning our schools as follows:

- **One High School** — a united campus where all students would have equal access to secondary school opportunities.

- We believe creating a single new high school would help the district shape a stronger, more unified identity. Ideally, this high school would be a new build in an entirely new location instead of renovating an existing campus. However, we recognize that a new building and/or a new location may not be feasible, so we recommend that the board rely on financial estimates, land availability and costs, as well as feedback from the community through a scientific survey conducted by an independent professional research firm to determine the best and most financially sound path forward. We would also note that a move to one high school would not affect current high school students; it would take several years to implement.
- We recommend constructing this school around specialized learning communities, sometimes called academies (similar to [what we saw at Shakopee High School](#).) These learning communities could serve three primary goals: 1) create smaller, connected communities within the larger school, 2) encourage college and career readiness by helping students explore their interests and determine plans for life after high school, 3) ensure the Arts & Innovation identity (is extended to the high school by incorporating project-based and hands-on learning opportunities within each learning community).
- Based on enrollment projections from Reinhardt, we estimate about 2,800-2,900 students in grades 9-12 would attend this combined high school by the 2030-2031 school year.
- **Fewer Middle Schools** – Data reviewed by the Vision Team indicate that fewer middle schools are needed to serve current and projected enrollment. The exact number of middle schools needed will become clearer over time as additional variables play out, such as whether Spanish Immersion becomes a PreK-8 program vs PreK-5 and 6-8 (detailed below). At this time, we estimate that two or three middle schools would be needed, and we recommend that the retained middle schools be strategically located to balance enrollment and access.
- **Fewer Elementary Schools** – Again, the exact number of elementary schools needed to serve current and projected enrollment will become clearer over time as various variables play out.
  - Given our work so far, the Vision Team estimates the district needs six to nine elementary school buildings to serve enrollment over the next decade. (The district currently has 12 elementary school buildings, inclusive of the New Hope Learning Center.) However, we believe this estimate requires additional refinement from staff experienced in capacity planning given how many variable factors are involved.
  - We recommend that each elementary school have space for PreK, including a PreK Spanish Immersion program at Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion.



Additional study by staff will help determine if the Robbinsdale Transition Center, Robbinsdale Virtual Academy, and Highview programs should be co-located with the high school or in a different building.

### **Key notes:**

- It will take significant staff effort to 1) determine how many schools can be efficiently and effectively operated and 2) implement a building reconfiguration plan; building closures and transitions would likely require a phased process.
- As noted in Findings & Considerations, *a bond requiring voter approval will be necessary to effectively execute on these facility improvements.*
- We **do not** recommend increasing class size maximums from what exists today.
- The Vision Team recommends continuing the Spanish Immersion program based on strong market demand, the district's opportunity to grow this program, the unique value it provides students, and its effectiveness in helping all its students build meaningful global connections — including through [RSI's Amity Intern Program](#). For English-speaking students, it offers the chance to learn a second language and deepen cultural understanding. For students from Spanish-speaking families, it provides the opportunity to learn in their family's native language, honor their culture, and strengthen the connection between home and school. Keeping it as a separate program also reflects the reality that it requires staff who are proficient in the language of instruction (Spanish).

However, the team did not reach consensus about whether the district would benefit from a PreK-8 (vs. PreK-5 and 6-8) program. As a group, we could see both the pros and the cons of a single PreK-8 school, and we recommend staff study the benefits and challenges of each option to determine the optimal Spanish Immersion program grade configuration.

- Reducing the number of schools the district operates would allow it to reduce operating costs, eliminate unnecessary redundancies, and invest in modern, safe, flexible learning spaces in which students are well prepared for the future.

## ***Physical Requirements For Every School Building***

Our students deserve not just adequate buildings, but contemporary, safe, and secure spaces that foster academic excellence, innovation, collaboration, and equity. As the district administration and school board further evaluate building capacity and enrollment projections to make facilities decisions, we ask that they incorporate the following into every school across the district:

- Flexible learning spaces that support small-group collaboration, project-based learning, and individualized instruction.

- Special education classrooms.
- Dedicated art space.
- Dedicated music space.
- Outdoor learning opportunities, including green spaces, gardens, and hands-on science and environmental learning areas.
- Technology-rich classrooms that ensure every student has the tools needed for 21st-century success.
- Reliable air conditioning and heating.
- Community-centered facilities that serve not only our students, but also provide opportunities for partnerships, family engagement, and after-school enrichment.
- Comprehensive security technologies — including secure entry systems, surveillance where appropriate, and advanced communication tools — that provide the highest level of safety for our children and staff. These systems would allow administrators to secure sections of a building at the click of a button, ensuring rapid protection in the event of an emergency.
- Private single-stall bathrooms.\*

We recommend that district staff use the list above as they continue to analyze capacity and utilization rates in existing buildings and while planning remodeled spaces. Certain types of spaces, like flexible learning and performance spaces, will impact both types of analyses.

\*Based on student input and Vision Team tours of other schools, the team recommends that, as one component of a comprehensive bond-funded approach to facilities improvements, restrooms across the district be remodeled with private single stalls and shared, openly visible handwashing areas to promote student safety in these areas. Some elementary schools in the district have already moved to private single-stall bathrooms. Feedback from principals reflects that private stalls have significantly reduced bathroom horseplay, and they create a more comfortable environment for students who are anxious about relieving themselves in a less private space.

## **Intended Outcomes & Potential Challenges**

### ***Financial Responsibility***

The district has a financial responsibility to operate within its financial means. School board members, in particular, hold a fiduciary duty to ensure the responsible use of all district assets, including facilities, staff, and community goodwill. Given the current financial situation, we believe the district must close multiple school buildings to align facilities with enrollment trends. The board may also find that building a new high school (if suitable property is available) may be more cost-effective than maintaining outdated facilities for another decade.

Closing schools to align facilities with enrollment projections would stabilize operating budgets, with fewer facilities to maintain, heat, and staff. There is also an opportunity to sell unused buildings or repurpose existing ones.

Initial financial projections from Chief Financial Officer Kristen Hoheisel roughly estimate the following cost savings on a per building basis\*:

- \$505,000 average annual savings for each closed elementary school
- \$1M average annual savings for each closed middle school
- \$1.5M average annual savings for a closed high school

\*These are general fund savings and do not include potential savings from factors like streamlined programming, staffing, food service, or transportation. Additionally, the district could invest its allocation of Long-Term Facilities Maintenance (LTFM) funds into fewer buildings, likely resulting in greater positive impact per building.

Staff anticipates additional savings (or revenue) from the following factors:

- Lower transportation costs overall, as fewer buildings and more efficient routes would reduce duplication of services.
- Potential revenue generation from facility rentals: Updated schools could provide high-quality gyms, auditoriums, fields, and multipurpose spaces that could be rented out to community organizations, youth programs, and regional events. For example:
  - Hosting dance competitions, basketball tournaments, and athletic showcases.
  - Renting auditoriums for concerts, theater and dance productions, and community meetings.
  - Partnering with local recreation leagues and clubs to use gym and field space.

Funds saved through building reductions could be redirected to benefit students while stabilizing district finances.

## ***Community Support Through a Bond Referendum***

While consolidating schools would significantly reduce ongoing operating expenses, the transformations the Vision Team is recommending would also require upfront investment. To create modernized, future-ready schools with enhanced security, the district would need the community's support through a bond initiative.

The bond would ensure that every student, regardless of which Robbinsdale school they attend, learns in a safe, high-quality environment designed for the future.

## ***Narrower Focus — But With Expanded Opportunities***

We are recommending that the district double down on exactly what has made its magnet programs so desirable: hands-on and project-based learning, outdoor learning, arts integration, and more. Narrowing the district's curricular focus — delivered in this hands-on, innovation-minded, and arts-focused way — would allow the district to offer *more* opportunities to more of its students.

Consolidating facilities would also positively impact athletics and activities. Many of our sports programs already operate as co-ops between Armstrong and Cooper and, in some cases, with other districts because there is not enough participation for each school to sustain its own team. For example, six teams are already co-oped between Armstrong and Cooper, all adapted programs are co-oped, and Cooper swimming has a co-op with Columbia Heights High School. Even at the club level, Armstrong and Cooper share several activities. In this way, combining schools is a natural extension of what is already happening — and it would allow the district to expand offerings rather than cut them.

In general, larger schools can offer more teams, clubs, and activities because they have the numbers to support them. A combined high school may be able to offer new programs like gymnastics, add new levels to existing teams such as dance and girls' soccer, and even open the door to new activities, like a one-act play. Expanded and updated facilities could also create space for new clubs that we cannot currently offer due to a lack of the right type of space.

While combining schools creates new opportunities, it could also become more competitive for students to earn a spot on certain teams and groups. For example, the district has seven boys' soccer teams across the two high schools. Most schools of a similar size to the proposed combined high school have 4-5 boys' soccer teams. Undoubtedly, this would require the district to hold tryouts and some students might not make the team. The “upside” of this would be the district's ability to compete at a higher, more competitive level *and* still offer the athletes who may have been cut many other options for activities and clubs. Other sports that could experience a similar shift include girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, baseball, and softball.

That said, without combining the high schools, some of the district's existing teams are likely at risk of being cut or needing to find new co-ops with other teams to have the necessary numbers to support the program.

## ***Stronger, More Unified District Community***

Robbinsdale Area Schools spans seven municipalities, including all or parts of Robbinsdale, Crystal, New Hope, Golden Valley, Plymouth, Brooklyn Center, and Brooklyn Park.

It is not an easy feat to build a unified identity across multiple cities, each with their own individual sense of community. Implementing a focused vision districtwide creates an opportunity to change that — fostering greater unity as students, families, and staff rally around one vision instead of being divided across competing schools or programs.

A key part of this shift draws from our recommendation to combine our existing high schools into one. This means every student, beginning in PreK, would start their educational journey connected to the same brand. The new high school would carry a new name, mascot, and colors, creating a powerful districtwide identity. From the earliest grades through graduation, every student would share the same school pride — wearing the same colors, cheering for the same teams, and belonging to the same Robbinsdale Area Schools community.

We believe this change represents a profound opportunity: to unify a diverse district around a core identity, strengthen community pride, and build a sense of belonging that spans all seven cities.

## ***Increased Equity***

Equity has guided the development of our recommendations, and we believe increased equity would be a key outcome of this process. By moving to one high school, we eliminate the divisiveness between the current two high schools and ensure that every student has access to the same teachers, extracurricular programs, advanced learning opportunities, and high-quality facilities.

This unified approach prevents disparities in offerings and resources by expanding Arts and Innovation programs districtwide (instead of having arts and science magnet schools). A lottery system would no longer determine who benefits from that type of learning. This approach would allow us to build a culture of one district, one community, and one vision.

At the elementary and middle school levels, every child would benefit from strong, consistent offerings — no matter which school they attend.

## ***Better Supported Staff***

Consolidating into fewer, better-supported schools may also strengthen collaboration and camaraderie among staff. Teachers could gain more time and support to focus on what matters most: their students and instruction. In addition, reducing the need for teachers who are currently assigned to multiple sites to travel between buildings would likely give them more time in classrooms, directly supporting student learning.

## ***Timeline***

We are urging prompt school board action on these recommendations because our district does not have the luxury of time. The reality is that the district has pressing financial problems and is now in Statutory Operating Debt (SOD). **A school board-approved SOD plan must be submitted to the Minnesota Dept. of Education by January 31, 2026, outlining how the district will get out of debt.** The Vision Team is not engaged in the development of that plan, but we would anticipate that some of the cost containment measures recommended in this paper will need to be implemented sooner than later in order to make aggressive progress toward a healthier financial position.

While we are aware that many in our community may desire more concrete details about exactly what will occur and when, we would encourage all to consider that the district's current situation has many interrelated variables, and any actions taken will likely cause impact in other areas. We trust the school board and administration to determine how to best move forward, knowing that these recommendations and the SOD plan may have to go hand in hand. We also recommend communicating as *transparently* and *proactively* as possible with the community as implementation details become clearer.

## ***Potential Challenges***

We acknowledge that with bold change comes real challenges, including:

- Building closures: Closing schools can cause grief and loss in our community, as these buildings hold deep personal and historical significance. Open and transparent communication will be key throughout this process — as would investing in closing ceremonies to honor the history of affected school communities.
- Transportation adjustments: While costs may go down overall, fewer schools may mean some students face longer bus rides. Special care to drawing school boundaries that minimize negative impacts would be important.
- Transition stress: Students, families, and staff would need time, resources, and support to adjust to new routines and environments. As with all change, we anticipate initial resistance. It will be critical for staff and school board members to be compassionate about impact while at the same time being clear about enhanced opportunities for families impacted by these changes.
- Tax tolerance: We are living through a period of economic uncertainty and for some, financial stress. Taxpayers recently voted to renew the district's Capital Projects Levy. In every district, there is typically some taxpayer resistance to approving levies or bond referenda. However, we believe potential resistance can be mitigated through a strong

alignment of the school board, district administration, staff, and parents/caregivers and providing a clear vision of what we can all achieve together.

We are confident that district staff will address each of these challenges with transparency, empathy, and a strong transition plan that ensures students feel warmly welcomed, well supported, and eager to thrive in their new schools.

## Closing

The Vision 2030 Team is confident in our recommendations and yet we are aware that such bold changes would lead some to feel anger, fear, and grief. Pushback is inevitable. It will also take time and deeper analysis to finalize the details many community members wish to know now, including exactly how many schools need to be closed, which ones, and when.

However, we also believe there is a genuine opportunity for the community to feel hopeful, inspired, and excited about the district's new direction. Much of this hinges on the school board's ability to respectfully and effectively work toward consensus, positively collaborate with district administration, and most importantly, lead with bold action, courage, and a unified voice while staying focused on what is best for our students.

With one high school, right-sized middle and elementary schools, modernized facilities, a deeper commitment to equity, and a renewed focus on Arts and Innovation, we can build a stronger, more unified district that prepares *all* students for success.

If the school board hesitates in making the bold changes needed, it risks prolonging pain, confusion, and uncertainty. If the school board chooses to avoid change altogether, it will ensure that our district's current challenges will persist and worsen, and we will miss this valuable opportunity to chart a new course.

We urge the school board to collaborate with district administration to adopt a clear, decisive plan. Phased implementation may make sense, but phased decision-making will only slow progress. Once a decision is made, the community deserves to know the full path forward.

Change will be difficult. But working together — school board, staff, students and families, and community — we can create a district we're all proud to share.

Signed,

Shadia Abdihakim, Current student

Mary Jane Adams, Staff member or administrator

Nicole Armstrong, Parent/Guardian of a current student

Sandy Boren-Barrett, Community member (district partner)

Will Cardenas, Elected official, business leader, government partner  
Annie Christenson, Staff member or administrator  
Cathy Estrada, Community member (resident)  
Joan Evans, Parent of a graduate  
Ryan Fair, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Rachael Flanery, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Osha Flannigan, Staff member or administrator  
Matt Gust, Staff member or administrator  
Annie Hansen-Burke, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
BriAnn Henderson, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Kirby Hoberg, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Willie Howard, Parent/Guardian of a current student; Staff member or administrator; Parent of a graduate; Community member (resident)  
Debra Irrgang, Staff member or administrator, Community member (resident)  
Cassandra Jaramillo, Staff member or administrator; Parent of a graduate; Community member (resident)  
Kimberly Johnson, Parent of a graduate  
Jill Kaufman, Community member (resident)  
Aunnie Kramber, Staff member or administrator  
Sasha Kuznetsov, Community member (resident)  
Deb Link, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Katie Mittelstadt, Community member (resident)  
Kyllander Nelson Chupurdia, Current student  
Barb Olson, Parent of a graduate  
Eric Pone, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Renata Ramirez, Current student  
Richard Rucker, Staff member or administrator  
Cathy Rude, Elected official, business leader, government partner  
Julie Ritz-Schlaifer, Parent of a graduate  
Kaytlin Smith, Current student  
Julianna Strand, Parent/Guardian of a current student; Staff member or administrator; Alumnus/alumna; Community member (resident)  
Nil Torrent Adell, Staff member or administrator  
Linda Valentine, Community member (resident)  
Willette Whitted, Parent/Guardian of a current student  
Becca Wurgler, Parent/Guardian of a current student



# Appendix

## ***Report Writing Process***

To ensure this report is representative of the entire Vision Team, we took a very intentional approach to drafting it. Here is how we did it:

1. Vision team members volunteered for writing, editing, and presenting.
2. Five of those volunteers (a mix of the roles within the committee: student, staff, community members, parents) convened as the “writing team.”
3. The writing team delegated tasks among ourselves, with two members leading the report writing and the remaining three members leading the presentation creation.
4. The two writers worked collaboratively to ensure the consensus recommendations of the Vision Team were as adequately reflected as possible in the first draft.
5. During our September 9 Vision Team meeting, the same two writers facilitated and led the review of the initial draft.
  - Every Vision Team member was given a printed copy of the initial draft and was given one hour to read, review, and mark it up with comments and suggested revisions. Each copy was marked with the Vision Team member’s name and collected at the end of the meeting, so the writers could incorporate all feedback and follow up individually with team members if clarity was needed.
  - Once every team member was done reading the draft, each table broke out for small group discussion for about one hour. The writing team provided them with a discussion guide to focus their conversations and document feedback.
  - The Vision Team then reconvened as a full group and spent the remaining hour “sharing out” each table’s feedback and discussing important themes that emerged.
  - The writing team left the September 9 meeting with documented individual feedback from every Vision Team member in attendance and each table’s responses to the discussion guide.
  - Vision Team members who were unable to attend the September 9 meeting were contacted and given the opportunity to review the draft in the Education Services Center by the end of the week.
  - All Vision Team members were provided with the opportunity to remove their name from the signing of this report if they did not feel like they were in consensus with the team’s recommendations. No one removed their name, further emphasizing the achievement of team consensus.
6. The two writers then worked together to make revisions that captured the team’s feedback to create the final draft.

7. The final draft was shared for review by the remaining members of the Vision Team who had volunteered to write/edit/present to ensure that the feedback received had been sufficiently and accurately reflected in the final draft.
8. The editors provided feedback to the writers who finalized the document and sent it to the superintendent to share with the board and post for the public.

## ***Vision Team Selection (V-Team)***

*This write-up was provided by district staff responsible for the V-Team selection process.*

One portion of the community engagement efforts in Reimagine Rdale was the creation of a Vision Team (V-Team) whose purpose was to *develop long-term recommendations for district priorities, financial stability, and considerations to reimagine the school district our students want, need, and deserve.*

The applications were all assigned a 4-digit identification number based on their role (parent/student/staff/community member/etc.). Each application was then reviewed and scored individually by three individuals (randomly) from an 11-person team. Each application received 3 separate scores from 3 different people. The three scores for each 4-digit identification number were then tabulated and an average score per applicant was generated.

The applications were then ranked in their role categories (student / parent / staff / community-at-large / alumni), and the top scorers from each category were pulled into a central roster.

The selection team then examined the statistical representation of the resultant roster and compared those numbers to the percentages present in our district and community. We were pleased to note that there was great alignment between the committee and the student body/community they were selected to represent.

One gap in representation was noted, however, and applicants who filled that gap were then added to the final roster so those perspectives would be present on the team. (This was specifically related to individuals and the Americans with Disabilities Act.)

Invitations to serve on the Vision 2030 Team were then sent out on Friday, January 17, 2025, with a request to confirm their commitment to participate by Wednesday, January 22, 2025. Once confirmations were received, the remaining applicants were informed that they were not selected but that there would be many more opportunities to engage and share their voice. (This communication did not go out until RSVPs had been received, in the event that we needed to fill any positions that were declined. There were none that were declined.)

We received 155 applications, of which 46 were invited to serve on the Vision 2030 Team.

### **The representation of the V-Team was as such:**

#### **School Representation:**

We had broad representation across our buildings. All buildings in our district had at least one person on the V-team (who either works there, is alumni of there, is the parent/guardian of a child there, or volunteers there), with the exception of 1 elementary school, and the Warehouse.

#### **Of the district staff who served on the V-Team, the breakdown was as such:**

Principal / AP: 2	Achievement and Integration Dept.: 2
Early Learning: 1	Psychologist/Counselor/Mental Health Professional: 1
Elementary School Teacher: 3	Adventure Club / Community Education: 1
Middle School Teacher: 1	Transportation: 0
High School Teacher: 1	Central Administration: 0
SPED Teacher: 1	Facilities & Operations: 0
EA's: 1	Grounds / Maintenance: 0
Athletic Director/Personnel: 1	

The composition of the V-Team was compared with relevant available data from the Minnesota Dept of Education (MDE) for both Minnesota as a whole, as well as Rdale specifically, for representation purposes.

In the 8 months since the inception of the V-Team, 9 people have stepped down from serving on the committee (either formally or unofficially by no longer attending meetings).

#### **Other Means of Engaging in Reimagine Rdale:**

Reimagine Rdale engagement efforts extended far beyond the Vision Team and included participation in the following as of August 2025:

- Staff Meetings at every building in the district: 1,207 participants
- Student Focus Groups at the secondary level: 393 participants
- Teacher Focus Groups (August 2025): 20 participants
- Community Meetings (both in person and virtual): 446 participants
- Pop-Up Engagement Events: 928 participants
- Student Meetings and Input Activities: 9,543 participants
- Communitywide, Multi-Question Survey: 5,010 participants

## ***The Methodology Behind Capacity of Our School Buildings***

*This write-up was provided by Alissa D.Luepke Pier, AIA, Director of Architecture & Planning.*

The best way to explain how we determined capacity for this report is to walk you through a sample scenario. We'll use a hypothetical "Imaginary Elementary School" as an example.

It is important to remember that elementary students and their classrooms are calculated based on the assumption that the student has a primary classroom that they do most of their day's work in. This is in contrast to middle school and high school, where students move from classroom to classroom as the day progresses.

We know the average elementary school class size based on the parameters set by the Imaginary District is 28 students. (i.e., Kindergarten could have 25 students, 5th grade could have 31, and numbers distributed in between aligning with the same ratios Robbinsdale uses.)

Imaginary Elementary School has 20 classrooms. You might think the capacity of Imaginary Elementary School is therefore 560 students (28 students per each of the 20 classrooms). However, there are other factors to consider, including classrooms used for other purposes.



Imaginary Elementary School also has a dedicated art classroom, dedicated music classroom, student wellness room, and a staff lounge. This removes 4 of the 20 classrooms from providing student capacity. So, instead of having 20 classrooms that can each serve 28 students, we actually have 16 classrooms.

You might now be thinking that the capacity is 448 students (28 students per each of the 16 remaining classrooms). However, we still have other factors to consider, including special education (SPED) classrooms.



In this instance, Imaginary Elementary School has 2 SPED classrooms. The school's district follows the best practices of having a classroom capacity of 8 students for SPED rooms, instead of 28 students. This creates a net loss of 20 students per SPED room in capacity. The capacity of Imaginary Elementary School is **408**.



This same methodology was used to determine capacity for the Vision Team's work since Robbinsdale School District's elementary school buildings currently operate with classroom ratios like this example (including having dedicated rooms for things like art, music, and special education). We then referenced the actual school buildings in our district, and used their actual classroom square footage to determine the capacity you see in this report.

This is also how we could determine future capacity if any of the above variables changed. For example, if we wanted to configure classrooms to create flexible learning environments, this would impact student capacity because of the additional square footage these spaces require.