October 3, 2025

Washoe County School District's Facility Modernization Plan: Building a Stronger Future

The Washoe County School District (WCSD) believes every student deserves access to a high-quality education in modern, inspiring environments. The Facility Modernization Plan (FMP) helps us reconfigure, improve, and build new schools, so every student benefits from modernized facilities, safe spaces, and sustainable operations.

Strengthening Student Learning: Through modernized facilities and thoughtful school configurations, students will have access to updated programs, resources, and environments that support high-quality teaching and learning.

- At the middle school and high school levels, larger enrollments and the buildings to accommodate them ensure that elective course offerings are robust and more consistent throughout all schools.
- Exploratory areas within the facility allow for exposure at all levels to more clubs, activities, and electives that may spark curiosity with diverse populations.
- Larger buildings provide better opportunity to support lifelong learning skills as early as elementary school.
- By reducing the number of staff reporting to multiple schools, bus transportation costs are reduced, and staff have greater opportunity to work directly with students.
- Schools that feature state of the art technology allow for enhanced achievement in a 21st century learning environment. This includes interactive Promethean boards, upgraded audio enhancement, and STEAM labs for hands-on, inquiry-based learning.

Prioritizing Safety and Security: Safe, well-designed schools are the foundation for effective learning. Through the FMP, modernized campuses will include enhanced safety measures to keep students, staff, and families safe every day. These campuses feature:

- Buildings with modern safety designs that are aesthetically appealing, that reassure and calm students
- Single point of entry core to the design rather than retrofitted
- Enhanced intercom systems for quick communication during an emergency

- Use of electronic access for staff to allow for better tracking of adults in and out of the building
- Updated security camera systems
- Secured perimeter fencing to manage campus visitors

Maximizing Resources for the Future: By aligning schools with projected enrollment and streamlining operations, the district can reduce costs, reinvest savings into classrooms, and ensure long-term financial stability.

- School consolidations result in significant operational cost savings for the district, which is important as enrollment continues to fall, and the district faces flatter revenues in the future.
    - Elementary Schools: personnel savings of $650,000 to $850,000 per school
    - Middle Schools: personnel savings of approximately $1.5 million per school
    - High Schools: personnel savings of $3 million to 4 million per school
- Through Fiscal Year 2029-30, based on the FMP recommendations and further analysis by staff, the total cumulative potential cost savings per year of consolidations are close to $10 million. This is an important part of the solution to address the district's current budget deficit.
- WCSD's enrollment is down approximately 10% from its peak enrollment of 64,000 in 2019. That directly translates into lower tax revenues for the district. As a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars, it makes sense for the district to evaluate its costs and adjust to this lower enrollment environment.
- Due to demographic changes, higher housing costs, and other factors over the years, many of our older schools are operating at roughly half of their capacity, e.g., a school with a capacity of 500 students has only 250 students today.
    - It is more efficient to operate a school with a higher enrollment percentage than a smaller school with fewer students enrolled. This is because every school has a principal, assistant principal or dean, custodial staff, an office administrative staff, a counselor, etc., plus it takes the same amount of electricity and gas to run that school.
    - As a result, the operating cost of smaller schools with fewer than 300 enrolled can be 33% to 50% higher on a per-pupil cost basis than schools with 400-500 + students enrolled. This draws funding away from other schools, and that per-pupil cost disparity also conflicts with the philosophy of the State's school funding formula which strives to provide the same level of funding per student.
    - Repurposing closed school sites and other district buildings could result in additional revenue for WCSD.

- Many – if not most – larger school districts in the U.S. are seeing the same dynamics as WCSD, namely declining enrollment due to lower birth rates in the U.S. WCSD is taking a methodological, proactive approach to consolidations of schools. Other districts, like Seattle and San Antonio, faced huge budget deficits and are closing multiple schools each year. We are fortunate that we have the capital funding to modernize and upgrade older schools to modern standards, at the same time we re-evaluate our portfolio of assets.

- Older buildings are significantly less energy efficient than newer ones:
    - On average, schools built before 2000 consume more than twice the energy per square foot than the district's newest schools.
    - This efficiency not only creates more comfortable learning environments but also saves the district hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

- By decreasing operational costs, more funding is available to support academics.
    - Increased opportunities for STEAM
    - Increased opportunities to expand CTE
    - Opportunities to increase teacher supports as well as other adult supports

Supporting Our Educators to Help Students Succeed: Improved facilities and better resource distribution will create supportive, well-equipped environments where teachers and staff can focus on what they do best—helping students succeed. These facilities will feature:

- Flexible learning spaces that allow for group work, small group instruction, and station rotation

- Student presentations hubs to promote multimedia presentation skills

- Spaces that inspire lifelong learning skills
    - Communication - expressing ideas clearly and respectfully
    - Critical Thinking - analyzing information and making sound judgments
    - Problem-Solving - finding solutions to complex issues
    - Adaptability - adjusting to new situations and changes
    - Leadership - guiding and motivating others
    - Creativity - developing new ideas and approaches
    - Collaboration - working effectively with a team
    - Emotional Intelligence - understanding and managing one's own and others' emotions
    - Resilience - bouncing back from setbacks and adversity
    - Growth Mindset - believing in the ability to learn and improve

Revitalizing Neighborhoods and Providing a Welcoming Environment: Investments in schools breathe new life into communities, fostering pride, stability, and opportunities that extend well beyond the classroom. Modernized schools provide welcoming, accessible spaces that strengthen the connection between families, community members, and their schools, making it easier for parents to engage in their child's education.

- Modernized school symbolize a valuing of and investment in students and families.
- Modernized schools symbolize an investment in education by our community.
- Cutting-edge education facilities afford more opportunities for extracurricular activities, helping build the students' connection to the school community and improving attendance.
- Cutting-edge facilities attract more educators to work in an inspiring and innovative facility and can help reduce staffing shortages.
- Welcoming school environments promote WCSD as the premiere education provider.
- Quality schools attract and build a high-quality workforce.
- Schools can provide a beautiful space within the community that inspires exploration and inquiry.
- Modernized schools increase property values for entire neighborhoods.