



# **Balsz Elementary School District**

Governing Board Study Session

February 5th, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.



# Balsz Elementary School District

School Repurpose Consideration



## Current State

We have worked collaboratively to determine the need for the footprint of our district to change.

We know that we are to locate \$3 million dollars going into the 26/27 school year.

We are looking for ways to remain innovative as we look to retain students and families as well as recruit new enrollment to our district.

There are limitations to what we can offer in our efforts to compete, but we have seen academic and cultural growth in specific areas of the district and would like to continue the momentum.

There is a need for growth in our reading and math grade level proficiency across the district and we will continue to strive for excellence.



# The Voices of the Stakeholders

During the communication efforts of the current budget adjustments, we heard a variety of desires:

- Keep specials (art and music at K5 schools and elective options at middle school)
- Keep a socio-emotional support component via social workers and continue to support mental wellness
- Keep class sizes low
- Keep Special Education intact



## Divided Stakeholders

Strong voices on both sides of the possible options.

Each school and community asked that it would not be “their school” to be closed.

Data shows that a change of Principal at any school is one of the most likely reasons to lose certified staff.

The Advisory Committee voted unanimously for a school to be closed after wrestling with the data that was offered at the time.

Several stakeholders requested “more time” and space to be proactive before we close,



## A Consideration for Next Steps

Our next steps would include the Governing Board voting for a school to be closed for the 26/27 school year.

Regardless of which school site is selected, there could be various details involved that could impact various stakeholders and the community overall.

As we have stated several times in our previous choice between our budget adjustment paths, there are no “easy” decisions.

The decision includes two large sites (Crockett and Griffith) and one small site (Brunson Lee).



## Small Site (Brunson Lee) Closure

Lowest enrollment in the district, but has the fewest enrollment fields in district boundaries.

Highest matriculation rates to Tillman with a community population most likely to attend a district school (3 year average at 87%).

Geographically closest to Griffith location.

Entire enrollment shifted into Griffith would increase student to teacher ratio to high-middle to capacity (slightly above in higher grades).

Splitting the small site between the two campuses adds a potential emotional conflict in the transition, but it could occur.

Small site to two large sites is possible and logical with an increase in class size and the option of slight growth for both of the two large sites with the small site closed.



# Large Site Closure

Both large sites have lower than capacity enrollment.

Crockett has seen outlier enrollment growth at times in the district, but has a predicted reduction in enrollment in the years to come per the demographic report.

Crockett attendance rate was the highest in district by 1% during the first semester this year.

Crockett has recently seen a decline in matriculation to Tillman, but remains the second highest based on a three year average for the district (3 year avg at 80% and 25/26 is at 78%).

Griffith has seen a reduction in enrollment in Kindergarten cohorts over two years at 50 and below in enrollment.

Griffith has seen growth in matriculation to Tillman over the years, but three year average ranks them lowest in the district (3 year average at 75% and 25/26 highest year at 81%).



# Large Site Closure

Both large sites reside on competitive borders that have and could create easy exit options for families.

Moving a large site into potential small site (Brunson Lee) could be possible, however doing so would:

- Require minor to major physical adjustments at small site.
- Impact the ability for the district to enroll K5 students without reopening third school again.
- Increase class sizes to near, at, and beyond capacity in the majority of grades.



## A Word of Wisdom

A mention offered from the most recent Governing Board meeting were the wise words,

“I can’t vote for closure without a plan for repurpose”.

Our community members, our taxpayers, and those who will vote for our bond override, which allows us to continue to strive for excellence, deserve a plan as we continue to consider which school is closed.



# An Apology, a Plan, and a Proposal

Throughout this process we have been iterative in the goal for \$3 million dollars for the M&O.

As noted since the first public forum, we would have always appreciated a third option.

By listening to the various stakeholders, there were countless attempts to look at spreadsheets and rework the budget.

I apologize as this option was only finalized in the recent days based on the communication from the various points of view.



# A Plan for Repurpose

There have been mentions of what the future of the closed school could be.

Regardless of the school site, in most cases it does not have to be an either/or decision as we have heard ideas of family resource, early childhood, etc..

However, I would like the Governing Board to consider an academy option to open in the place of the proposed school site.



# **Brunson Lee Elementary to Brunson Lee Academy**

Brunson Lee once had a vision of a small, walkable neighborhood campus.

The campus was never supposed to be a Crockett or a Griffith as remains evident with our current enrollment boundaries.

A viable solution may be for the district to get back to the small school initiative.

Brunson Lee is the most logical opportunity for a STEM Academy.



# Proposal

We have always attempted to build K5s that offered the same vision and programs to ensure equity.

As a district, we should consider an alternative option for students and families to be retained and to recruit families within and surrounding our district boundaries.

Based on the most recent demographic data, there are over 1000 students who could be attending a Balsz school.

I propose we aggressively approach our next opportunities in the 26/27 school year.



# A STEAM Pathway

Tillman needs a public relations and marketing boost.

The opportunities and growth and the current culture of Tillman is often overshadowed by outlier incidents and past events.

Meanwhile, surrounded by data centers, around the corner from Gateway Community College, and minutes away from Arizona State University, Tillman stands at the epicenter as a potential beacon of innovation.

While Tillman stakeholders called for arts to remain, we can revitalize the STEM building via strong partnerships to create a highly recognized STEAM program as well as continue to build on the current culture.



# Tillman Tomorrow

Tillman would need to market down to K5 families by attending events as well as the K5s will look for opportunities to showcase and partner at and with Tillman in sporting events and arts programs.

Tillman will need continued improvement in academics and we will remain aggressive with marketing such achievement.

A key alignment with Tillman will be growing choice secondary programming into acclaimed academic programs at Camelback, achievements at Gateway Early College, and a possible early Algebra program at Arcadia High School.



## Less Humility and Louder Achievement

Our current K5 models will need to move from specials classes to specials programs in which we need to work with our schools and teachers from K8 in creating signature programs and events that are revered throughout the Valley.

Schools will need to have regular events at apartment complexes in partnership with apartment complex managers to market to families and further connect our schools with current and future students.

We will need to continue to see and hold ourselves accountable to continued academic growth and achieve 2% proficiency growth per year in math and reading on the AASA for state grade accountability for 3rd to 8th grades as well as measured DIBELS growth in grades K2.



## Strategic Growth Efforts via District Initiatives

We will continue to partner with CaissaK12 and look to develop more grassroots efforts in the community to push for recruitment and increased enrollment.

We will extend our marketing efforts and our bus routes in “stretch” locations to aid families who would like to consider Balsz, but need transportation to become one of our families.

We will grow under the leadership of Darren Hill, other school and district leaders, and community partners to become the community sports program the central and east Phoenix area needs. This will move us from our current 4/5 sports model to more ages, more games, specific seasons, mixed teams, community building, and charging families outside of the district.



# Strategic Growth Efforts via District Initiatives

Preschool and before and after school school options were mentioned several times during our budget conversation with stakeholders.

The concepts have been brought to the attention to the district to help aid in retaining and recruiting families.

To initiate an option for preschool, the district can determine viable options in the district open as soon as 26/27 and continue to review the district to look for spaces that may require upgrades or improvements to offer a preschool on the needed site.

Having at least two sites with at least one preschool classroom each as we open in 26/27 will allow us to take strong advancements towards what the community at large communicated.

We could also continue to consider before and after school options for the 26/27 school year.



## Strategic Growth Efforts via District Initiatives

To further connect our parents and families with needed resources, we can transition available classroom space in one or more schools and create resource centers.

Via partnering deeper with our current community organizations and more, we can create spaces to offer needed items for families.

Spaces could have regular hours to receive families of need and the space(s) could be a great warm connection to more services and locations outside of schools.

Most optimal option would include an outside organization managing the space via their employees/volunteers who are background cleared for schools.



# An Additional Path to Excellence

This vision starts with agreeing on a STEM school for a K5 option for our district in 26/27.

As a small school model, the school site would exist on a skeleton staff and have limited seats via our open enrollment application process with first right of refusal to current attendees and a possible lottery if needed.

As an academy site, the other two K5 schools would increase their attendance boundaries to acquire the enrollment fields of the closing school.

The academy would not provide transportation to or from the school.

The academy would not have an Assistant Principal, but would have access to Title funds to consider the placement of an Academic Dean, Reading and/or Math Interventionist.

Academy students will only have STEM as a special outside of physical education which is required by law.



# STEM Partnership

GenTech has had powerful partnerships throughout the Valley and played an important role with Balsz via Crockett in the past when the need called upon the opportunity.

As an organization, GenTech provides all curriculum and supplies, the teacher, and a substitute teacher of high quality in the absence of the lead teacher.

GenTech operates via the Department of Education Science and Technology standards and has the capacity to develop and lead competitive clubs.

The cost of GenTech is the same price as a teacher with benefits.

We would also consider other organizations as we vet quotes and offerings.



# The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

This alignment with Policy IIB would not impact Special Education across the district or any specials offered at the two, larger school sites.

## [Policy IIB](#) (Class Size)

KG - 2nd grade = 25-28 students per teacher

3rd - 5th grade = 27-32 students per teacher

6th - 8th grade = 27- 35 students per teacher

## [Regulation IIB-R](#) (Class Size for Special Education)

Specialized Programs = 6 to 12 with Instructional Assistance Support

Resource Programs = 25 to 30 students

Speech/Language, OT,PT = 50-75 students per case load



# The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

As the Governing Board recently agreed to a 2% raise for 26/27 with a 3/2 vote for closure, we will still be able to adhere to the approval.

Via reviewing the overall budget and making reductions in budget line items, we are able to adjust enough to offer 2% raises to the proposed staffing of 26/27.

Raises beyond the 26/27 school year would be contingent on enrollment data of the future.



# The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Crockett Elementary School Teachers remain the same FTE teacher allotment based on their potential enrollment and they remain with class sizes that are within Policy IIB expectations on the lower end and even slightly below the minimum. Based on the demographic study, unless we are successful in recruitment, we may see a reduction in enrollment and will need to reduce in the future based on our annual budget conversations.

All Specials/Electives would remain.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Griffith Elementary School Teachers would reduce per Policy IIB by up to 3 teachers. Due to a decline in enrollment in the specific attendance boundary and beyond, we will expect a reduction in grade Kindergarten, 1st Grade, and 2nd Grade. It may be wise to reduce by two to allow flexibility for possible growth in 26/27. Based on the demographic study, unless we are successful in recruitment, we may see a reduction in enrollment and will need to reduce in the future based on our annual budget conversations.

All Specials/Electives would remain.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

We would need to adjust the current social worker position which serves individual schools in the district with a social worker at each school location to a model in which one social worker would service the three K5s via a rotational split and one social worker at the middle school.

A schedule to consider would be a 2-2-1 with the 1 day being at the academy.

Schools would continue with current outside partners for support.

Tillman would continue to have their SEAD position.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

We would need to remove the current Assistant Principal position from the M&O budget and replace it with a Title grant funded position that could perform the duties of both the Assistant Principal and the Academic Dean.

We would still offer the Academic Dean position as a hireable position for a Principal who had the space in their Title budget if a Principal elected to have an Academic Dean role over the new hybrid role.

Regarding the case of the newly created hybrid position, we would require administrative certification to ensure the opportunity to support the school in teacher evaluations.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

- Balsz did not have social workers in the past and relied on partnerships for support.
- Balsz did not have Assistant Principals in the past.
- Most districts require enrollment of over 600 before Assistant Principals are offered.



# The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Other positions impacted by potential Title use:

- Reading Interventionist (currently paid via Title)
- Math Interventionist (currently paid via Title)
- Library/Media Specialist (.5 currently paid via Title)

Regardless of the current budget complications, we would have required Principals to lean into their Title funds differently to ensure overall budget sustainability. In the past, the district office was able to carry the weight of schools working outside of their Title funds to locate a needed role or person. We started stepping back from the practice as early as this year as Brunson Lee could not “afford” a Librarian while other schools could.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Tillman currently has an enrollment of 552 students. Based on utilizing the mid range of 30 of Policy IIB (27-35), we could expect a 19 teacher FTEs at Tillman.

Going into budget reduction conversations, Tillman was tasked to reduce by 10 teacher FTEs. The reduction does not include any request to reduce Special Education staffing.

The current teacher FTE is 29 which is a reduction in 4 FTE as the campus started at 33 in 25/26 and has since reduced due to teacher exit during the year.

Holding to the original task of 10 FTE, Tillman may land with enough teacher FTEs to remain at student to teacher ratio well below the Policy IIB guidelines as the end result will be approximately 23 Teacher FTEs at Tillman.

This reduction may impact specials/elective options, but does not have to. Currently, Tillman has Art and Digital Art as an elective option, but does not have many other options, if any, based on not finding teachers in the past to teach opportunities in courses such as music and STEM.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Another opportunity to consider would be to use a FTE or grant funding to consider a strong Behavior support role in administration for the campus.

This person ideally would build relationships with students and families and work as a step before higher level discipline measures handled by the appropriate administrators.

This person could also be a strong leader in athletics and/or other programs offered at Tillman to develop the culture on campus and in the community.

Depending on the funding available in 26/27 or later, we could consider an hourly role to work with this person as we create an “in school suspension/redirection space” option.



# The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

1 Technology Support Assistant (Vacant)

.5 Physical Therapist

.2 Occupational Therapist

1 Tillman School Office Assistant

1.475 Bus Drivers (Vacant)

.75 Van Drivers (Vacant)

1 Maintenance and Transportation Admn Assistant

1 District Substitute

1 Chief Human Capital Officer (Vacant)

1 Assistant Principal (Brunson Lee)

3 K5 Social Worker positions (replaced with one district wide social worker)

12 Custodians (replaced by cost efficient overnight outsourced model)



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Teacher FTE

10 FTE - Tillman

7 FTE - Academy Site

Up to 3 FTE - Griffith

Total - 19 to 20 Teacher FTE reduction

7 currently vacant

4 expected openings (more may come)



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

Another consideration-

By closing the district for classified operations during the full day Professional Development days, we could regain approximately \$20K per day.

We currently have five PD days and this would equate to approximately \$100K back to M&O.



## The District Impact Regarding the 26/27 Adjustment

- \$3 million in savings
- Immediate occupancy of a building with room to grow
- Time to recruit and observe
- Family Options
- Low Student to Teacher ratio in the majority of the district
- A sustainable vision for the future



## **Not Timely, but a Possibility**

This entire experience has been challenging.

We would all rather not have to go down any of these paths and we could all remain together to continue our work.

However, considering the parameters that were set before at the beginning of this process, this choice offers a sound option.

We can pivot. We can build. We can achieve excellence via innovation and community.



**Thank you.**