

MEMO

To: Minneapolis Public Schools' School Board
From: Tom Parent, Senior Operations Officer
Dan Goemann, Director of Facilities - Planning, Design, and Construction
Date: 3.26.2026

Re: New Home for Anishinabe Academy – Gate Check A – Project Charter Approval

On May 13, 2025, the Board of Education passed Resolution No. 2025-0030 directing staff to further explore and begin to implement the recommendation of the Anishinabe Academy Facility Advisory Committee. The recommendation was to support Anishinabe Academy's mission of integrating and reclaiming American Indian identities, cultures, and languages through authentic academic experience by constructing a purpose-built new PK-8 school building on the site of the former Cooper Elementary or an alternative site if available and approved by the committee.

Following that guidance, the Facilities Planning, Design, & Construction (PDC) department worked with Cuningham Group Architecture and Full Circle Indigenous Planning throughout the fall and winter of 2025 – 2026 to engage community stakeholders and evaluate the feasibility of the project. Over the course of the study period, MPS hosted or attended 12 events where we directly engaged about 220 students, about 30 staff, and more than 120 community leaders, current & former parents, and Longfellow neighbors. Ultimately, four options are presented which investigate a PK-5 or a PK-8 model either renovating the existing building or new construction. Preliminary cost estimates were developed for each option by H+U Construction. Concept 1B (PK-8 New Construction) was explored deeper through detailed floor plans, site plan design, and massing as it was determined to most effectively support the long-term academic continuity, cultural connections, and meaningful partnerships envisioned by the school community while still providing generous ground-level outdoor space, and access to outdoor learning and gathering areas desired by the surrounding neighbors.

The focus of this study was to investigate the physical and programmatic components required to implement the recommendation. The following items should be considered and could influence the Board's decision on how to proceed:

1. School Transformation – As MPS works through the goal of reimagining district-wide needs, the Transformation process could offer additional locations for the Anishinabe Academy steering committee to consider that are presently unavailable. It is worth noting, however, that the unique character and needs of the Anishinabe Academy program do not align to any existing MPS facility and would likely require extensive capital work regardless of location.

2. MPS Student Experience – As presented to the Board in the MPS Student Experience report on January 20, 2026, the recommended minimum enrollment for a K-8 School is between 1,018 – 1,133 students. Anishinabe Academy's Option 1B is designed around the desire to maintain strong cultural connections and programming, and maximizes the allowable space for construction at the Cooper site, but the enrollment capacity would be approximately 650-700 students (inclusive of PreKindergarten). The Student Experience Report also suggests a minimum size of 424 – 544 students for a K-5 magnet school. While Anishinabe Academy's Option 1B is envisioned as a PreK-8 program, its size and massing would reasonably align with the needed PreK-5 holistic student experience enrollment. In all scenarios, the enrollment of Anishinabe Academy would need to realize significant enrollment growth to be a sustainable PreK-5 or PreK-8.

3. Funding Structure & Capital Plan – Considering the estimated potential cost of this project, the School Board will need to consider whether this project should be financed by reprioritizing other previously planned projects that are part of the current capital plan to offset the inclusion of this project or leverage alternative and / or additional funding over and above what is already in place for the capital plan, or some combination of both. That decision will come at the next Gate Check, and may require an in-depth analysis of the impacts in relation to the Board's existing debt policy.

Next Steps

The next step in moving this project forward is the approval by the Board to proceed to Gate Check B, which would create a finalized budget and proposed funding structure.

This would entail the project team proceeding to Schematic and Design Development stages of design, which would take approximately 4 months and cost approximately \$2,300,000. Staff would access funding from the District’s approved Capital Plan (Strategic Direction / Transformation) for these professional services and other required due diligence items. As part of the approval process to move to that step, staff needs specific direction about:

A. Recommended Option – The predesign report presents four possible options. Staff is asking for approval to further pursue development of the recommended Concept 1B, which represents a new PreK-8 building of approximately 128,200 square feet and a rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost between \$90M - \$105M. This approval would include enrollment capacity of 650 - 700 students, serving grades PreK through 8, and demolition of the existing Cooper school building. Staff is supportive of the recommendation to not reuse the existing building based on its physical condition and significant maintenance/repair needs that would be required. The District has been holding this property for strategic future use and this purpose would meet that objective in a way that values the unique location of the site. We recognize the misalignment of the proposed enrollment capacity with the recommended MPS Student Experience minimum size for a K-8 program, but believe the scale and massing of the building would be appropriate if the program is either Pre-8 or PreK-5, so the grade-level configuration could be finalized at a future step. The size of the proposed building maximizes the allowable construction while still balancing having open green space.

B. Schedule – The predesign report and associated pricing estimates reflect current market conditions. Timeline for approval to the next gate check will determine occupancy and impact of inflation on estimated construction cost.

Gate Check B Approval By:	School Occupancy	Impact of Inflation
May 2026	School Year 2028 - 2029	Included in current ROM estimate
October 2026	School Year 2029 - 2030	Potential increase in ROM pricing estimate (~5%)

The Team is ready to proceed and welcomes feedback from the Board.