School Consolidation Board Report

November 20, 2025

The Cambrian School District continues to face significant budget challenges due to declining student enrollment, rising operational costs, and a projected General Fund balance below the state-required 3% reserve. Despite prior fiscal stability plans and advisory committee efforts, decisive action is necessary to ensure long-term financial health and to preserve programs that directly support student learning. To address these challenges, the district proposes forming a school consolidation committee.

The Budget Advisory Committee

In the Fall of 2024, the Governing Board convened a Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) to study how the District could reduce deficit spending of $2 million in the 2025-2026 school year. As requested by the Governing Board, the BAC adopted recommendations for the 2025-2026 school year, which were adopted by the Governing Board at the February 6, 2025, board meeting.

At the start of the 2025 - 2026 school year, the District experienced an unexpected decline in enrollment from its June 2025 level. Based on the unanticipated enrollment decline, the BAC was reinstituted with the charge of "recommending strategies to reduce spending/revenue enhancements by roughly $2.6 million for the 2026–2027 school year".

The BAC has already met four times this school year, with two more meetings scheduled, covering the following dates:

- September 8, 2025
- October 6, 2025
- October 20, 2025
- November 3, 2025
- November 17, 2025
- December 8, 2025

At their November 3, 2025, meeting, the BAC took action to recommend that the Governing Board appoint a committee to review the District's use of school facilities with the goal of generating a potential $2 million benefit to the District's General Fund.

The BAC Recommendation

The BAC recommendation is more specifically to study potential school optimization options, including consolidation, closure, or repurposing of district schools, and to determine the most effective and equitable use of existing facilities. This recommendation is predicated upon the fact that cutting $2.6 million from next year's budget in other ways will have a detrimental impact on District programs, students, and staffing. A review of the District's four TK-5 elementary programs shows a capacity of 2,560 students, with 1,714 currently enrolled, leaving 846 seats unused. The demographic study also identified several key findings for the Governing Board's consideration, including the following:

- *Historical Enrollment Decline*: Since the 2016 - 17 school year, District enrollment has declined by 399 students, and projections indicate that this gradual decline will continue over the coming years.

- *Decline in Birth Rates*: Birth rates within the District's boundaries have decreased from 461 annual births to approximately 371, signaling a broader demographic shift that is affecting school-age population trends.
- *Nominal Growth Projected from New Housing*: While 654 new housing units are anticipated within District boundaries, they are expected to generate only approximately 139 additional students over the next six years, resulting in minimal offset to the broader enrollment decline

In addition to these factors, current school facility capacity data shows 846 unused seats across the district's four TK–5 elementary schools. In contrast, enrollment at both Price Middle School and Steindorf K–8 Magnet School remains strong, with Steindorf continuing to experience a waitlist each year.

Rational Supporting Recommendation

The rationale for considering school consolidation centers on improving efficiency, optimizing resources, and maintaining high-quality educational programs. By consolidating schools with similar grade configurations, the District can operate more efficiently and effectively. This approach is projected to reduce operational costs—including utilities, maintenance, and administrative expenses—by more than $1 million annually. Additionally, consolidating schools allows for better alignment of staffing and class sizes, resulting in fewer combination classes and more balanced student-to-teacher ratios across grade levels.

Concentrating resources and maintenance efforts on three fully utilized campuses would also allow the District to sustain and improve facility conditions where they are most needed. Taking proactive, planned action now will help the District address anticipated enrollment declines in a strategic, well-managed manner—avoiding the need for more reactive decisions in the future.

The Proposed Committee

It is recommended that the Governing Board approve the establishment of a School Consolidation Committee consisting of up to 11 members and operating in compliance with the Brown Act. Committee members would be appointed by the Superintendent, and the committee would convene its first meeting in December/January 2025.

The District will provide ongoing public updates and opportunities for engagement through its website and community meetings. The Committee's final report and recommendations are expected to be completed by February 2026, after which the Governing Board will deliberate and provide direction based on those recommendations.

The Proposed Consolidation Criteria

It is further recommended that the Governing Board adopt the following criteria for use by the School Consolidation Committee in its decision-making regarding potential school consolidation. While California law provides no specific criteria for school closures, the proposed framework is grounded in relevant Education Codes (17387–17391 and 56345(b)(5)) and Government Code 11135.

These criteria encompass educational, financial, demographic, facility, and community factors to ensure decisions are data-driven, equitable, and aligned with the District's long-term goals. They provide a structured way to evaluate and compare key considerations across each major category.

Proposed Consolidation Criteria:

- Educational Impact
- Enrollment and Demographics
- Financial Impact
- Facility Condition and Safety
- Community and Geographic Factors
- Student and Family Impact

Each of the Consolidation Criteria would be assigned a weight based on its relative importance and scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing the least favorable condition and 5 indicating the strongest alignment or benefit. Data sources such as enrollment projections, financial reports, facility inspections, and locations will provide objective evidence to support scoring and analysis.

By adopting this comprehensive and transparent evaluation model, the Governing Board will ensure that any future consolidation recommendations are guided by consistent, measurable, and equitable standards. This structured approach will enable the School Consolidation Committee to balance fiscal responsibility with educational quality, student safety, and community impact, helping the Governing Board make well-informed, future-focused decisions that best serve all students.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Governing Board adopt the BAC's recommendation, as set forth above, including convening a School Consolidation Committee whose work will be guided by the Consolidation Criteria set forth above.