

Lennox School District

Felton Elementary School Recommended Closure
Equity Impact Analysis

Purpose:

Assembly Bill 1912 (AB1912 – September 2022) requires school districts under financial distress, as defined, before approving the closure or consolidation of a school, to conduct an equity impact analysis in its consideration of school closures or consolidations, as provided. The bill would authorize, as a recommended best practice, the governing board of a school district to develop a set of metrics, as specified, for the development of the equity impact analysis, and to make those metrics public at a meeting of the governing board of the school district so that the public can provide input regarding the metrics being used to conduct the analysis, as provided.

Additionally, California Attorney General Letter (April 2023) - Guidance on School Closures recommends school districts, even if they are not in fiscal distress, as defined, to conduct an equity analysis study to ensure the nine metrics of AB1912 have been met. These metrics are:

1. The condition of a school facility
2. The operating cost of a school and the associated savings resulting from a closure;
3. The capacity of a school to accommodate excess pupils;
4. Special programs available at the schools being considered for closure and whether those programs will be provided at the same current level at the schools to which pupils will be diverted;
5. Environmental factors, including, but not limited to, traffic and proximity to freeway access;
6. Balance of pupil demographics, including race or ethnicity, pupils with disabilities, English learners, foster youth, and homeless youth, in the schools being considered for closure and the resulting demographic balance of pupils after placement in other schools, in order to determine if the decision to close or consolidate will have a disproportionate impact on any particular demographic group;
7. Transportation needs of pupils;
8. Aesthetics and the opportunity for blight and negative impact on the surrounding community; and
9. Impact on feeder school attendance patterns

Background:

The Lennox School District (LSD) has lost approximately 1,100 students since 2014-15. Also, future LSD enrollment through 2027-28 is projected to decline by another 600 students. From 2014-15 through 2027-28, LSD will have lost approximately 1,700 students, approximately a third of its student population.

California has experienced a decline in its population. Reasons such as low birth rates, lack of affordable housing, homelessness, COVID-19, alternative educational opportunities (Charters Schools, Home Schooling), and better tax environments for businesses in other states, have contributed to this population decline.

Superintendent Recommendation:

After requesting the help of an advisory committee (Superintendent's Advisory Council – SAC), whose main responsibility was to advise the Superintendent on potential recommendations, the Superintendent decided to move forward with recommending the closure of Felton Elementary School.

The potential impact of the recommended closure is filtered through the nine metrics associated with AB1912.

LSD's response to the nine metrics of AB1912:

1. The condition of a school facility

Response: *The Lennox School District conducted a Facility Needs Assessment in 2022 using the architectural firm of PBK. The assessment concluded that all LSD schools are either in Fair or Poor condition. Buford Elementary School and Felton Elementary (0.3 miles apart) are relatively the same in their condition, but Felton tends to have a slightly higher concentration of buildings that are in poor condition. The closure of Felton Elementary School would require the general education student population to attend Buford Elementary School. The recommendation to close Felton Elementary School was not necessarily based on the condition of the school's facilities, but rather on the past, present, and future declining enrollment of the school.*

2. The operating cost of a school and the associated savings resulting from a school closure

Response: *The projected savings from the recommended closure of Felton Elementary would yield between $600,000 - $900,000 in unrestricted General Fund savings. Most of the savings would result from personnel reductions mainly via management positions and non-teaching positions, e.g., clerical staff, custodians. The projected savings do not include categorical or supplemental & concentration grant funding. Those funds would follow the students to their new school sites. Additionally, an analysis of the operating costs for all the District's schools revealed that the expenses for Felton Elementary School far exceeded the revenue generated by the students attending the school. [How does Felton compare to Buford and other schools with respect to operating cost?]*

3. The capacity of a school to accommodate excess pupils;

Response: *The District has reviewed the available space at all schools. The recommendation for the Felton Elementary school closure would require the general education population to move to Buford Elementary School and the special education students would be distributed among the remaining schools. The District has confirmed that Buford Elementary School has enough space to accommodate the general education population from Felton Elementary School. Also, the District made an extra effort to ensure that special day classes currently available at Felton Elementary School would also be available at the receiving schools.*

4. Special programs available at the schools being considered for closure and whether those programs will be provided at the same current level at the schools to which pupils will be diverted;

Response: *The District will continue the education services (to include special programs) currently provided at Felton Elementary School for both the general education student population as well as the special education student population at the same level at the receiving schools to which students will be diverted.*

5. Environmental factors, including, but not limited to, traffic and proximity to freeway access;

Response: *The California Environmental Quality Act (**CEQA)** requires state and local government agencies to inform decision makers and the public about the potential environmental impacts of proposed projects (Traffic, Pollution, Noise, Parking), and to reduce those environmental impacts to the extent feasible.*

The District will take the CEQA guidelines into consideration and explore the impact of the Felton Elementary School closure, specifically traffic. The District could potentially receive a CEQA exemption.

6. Balance of pupil demographics, including race or ethnicity, pupils with disabilities, English learners, foster youth, and homeless youth, in the schools being considered for closure and the resulting demographic balance of pupils after placement in other schools, to determine if the decision to close or consolidate will have a disproportionate impact on any particular demographic group;

Response: *The Lennox School District student population is approximately 95% Hispanic/Latino. The recommended closure of Felton Elementary School (Student Population – 92% Hispanic/Latino) will not affect the demographic balance of students after placement in the receiving schools.*

Conversely, students with disabilities will be disproportionately affected in large part because Felton Elementary has a significantly higher special education student population than the other schools. The District is moving away from a centralized special education model to a decentralized model to educate its special education students in the "least restrictive environment."

7. Transportation needs of pupils

Response: *The District's attendance area is 1.3 square miles. The distance from Felton Elementary School to Buford Elementary School is 0.3 miles. Additional transportation needs should be minimal.*

For special education students at Felton Elementary School, their transportation needs will most likely decrease since the District's decentralized approach to special education will require special education students to attend their home school.

8. Aesthetics and the opportunity for blight and negative impact on the surrounding community; and

   Response: *The District does not anticipate blight or a negative impact on the surrounding community resulting from the closure of Felton Elementary School. To mitigate the potential for blight, the District will preemptively explore additional security measures, (e.g., Security Guard, surveillances cameras, alarm notification).*

   Also, to address concerns about gentrification, the District is not planning on selling the property when it becomes vacant.

9. Impact on feeder school attendance patterns

   Response: *All of the District's elementary schools feed into the District's only middle school (Lennox Middle School). Since the Felton Elementary School closure will prompt the movement of general education students to Buford Elementary School and the special education students to the other elementary schools, the impact on feeder school attendance patterns will most likely be very minimal if not non-existent.*

Summary: In compliance with AB1912 and the Attorney General of California letter of April 2023 regarding school closures, the District has provided an analysis of the nine metrics associated with AB1912. The analysis of the nine metrics supports a comprehensive Equity Impact Analysis and the best practices approach for school closures.

The recommendation for the closure of Felton Elementary School does not come lightly. Because of continuous declining enrollment, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars in ongoing funding, and the underutilization of district facility assets, the District is compelled to explore the closure of Felton Elementary School. The District is committed to ensuring that adequate resources are available to provide the best educational opportunities for the students of the Lennox community.