Highline Public Schools Board Action Report

DATE: 11.12.26

FROM: Dr. Ivan Duran, Superintendent

LEAD STAFF: Holly Ferguson, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer

CABINET MEMBER: Holly Ferguson, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer

For Introduction: 11.18.26 For Action: 12.09.26

I.TITLE: Superintendent's Recommendation to Close Maritime High School

Select one: ☒ New Item ☐ Renewed Item ☐ Annual Item ☐ Revised Item

II. WHY BOARD ACTION IS NECESSARY

School Board Policy 9270 and RCW 28A.335.020 both require school board action to close a school facility.

III. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

We are recommending that the School Board close Maritime High School due to sustained low enrollment, the extremely high per-pupil cost of running the school, and the lack of a permanent facility.

If the School Board approves this recommendation, we are committed to working individually with each student to identify the school or program that will best meet their needs for the 2027-28 year and beyond. In addition, we are committed to supporting the staff as they transition to other roles. There is more information about next steps for students and staff in the attached Closure Report.

Maritime High School opened in Fall 2021 with an expectation that enrollment would grow into a sustainable four-year high school (400 students, 100 per grade level). 400 students was deemed to be the level at which a school could be sustained with state funding without substantial outside funding or significant extra resources from the district. The school was opened in conjunction with three key partners: Northwest Maritime Center, the Port of Seattle, and the Duwamish River Community Coalition.

The Port of Seattle has provided an annual grant to the school, although that funding declined in 2026. Northwest Maritime Center has also provided significant resources, including staffing at the school to support field work experiences (FWEs) and support for recruiting and communications.

As of the October 1, 2026, count date Maritime had a total enrollment of 84 students. The school has never met its projected enrollment numbers, and in the three years that the school has enrolled students in 9th through 12th grade enrollment has declined each year. The school opened the 2026-27 year with only 14 9th graders, down from 35 9th graders in the school's inaugural year. Please note that enrollment numbers can vary depending on the date enrollment is looked at.

These low numbers are despite a variety of outreach activities and promotional strategies over the past six years, including:

* Information nights, prospective student events, flyers, brochures, career expos and direct outreach to middle school students and families.

* Maritime staff visited middle schools to share information and connect with prospective students. The school also hosted field trips for middle school students from Highline and neighboring school districts to introduce them to the school's unique learning opportunities. Maritime staff also engaged middle school principals and counselors to ensure they had information about Maritime's programs and application process to share with students and families.

* Paid advertisements on social media and other websites to reach prospective students and families.

* Promotion through district and school websites, social media and family newsletters, particularly during the annual Schools of Choice application window.

* Dedicated stories, videos and program highlights featuring Maritime students, hands-on learning experiences and maritime career pathways.

* School staff and leaders, central office staff and leaders, and Northwest Maritime Center partners participated in twice-annual retreats to collaborate on school planning and recruitment strategies.

The school's extremely low enrollment has resulted in significant additional district resources going to the school. The budgeted per-pupil cost for Maritime High School is approximately $22,693 per student per year—approximately $9,478 more than the average per student cost at a comprehensive high school and $5,834 more than the average per-student cost at other choice (application) schools.

In light of the district's ongoing budget difficulties, it is not reasonable to continue spending so much money on one program or school. Highline is expecting to cut another $5 million from the 2027-28 budget. This follows $16 million in cuts that were taken in the 2024-25 ($8 million) and 2026-27 ($8 million) school years. The additional money that Highline spends comes from both the general fund and our local levy and is funding that can be re-allocated to other schools and programs to support them.

Highline Public Schools is committed to honoring all existing agreements with outside partners, including the Interlocal Agreement with the Port of Seattle, which expires in June 2027.

Maritime High School is currently located at the Olympic site, which is the district's interim site. The district maintains an interim site to ensure that schools can be temporarily located there when they are undergoing renovation or when there is some other need for a temporary new location. It is not a long-term solution as a permanent site. We searched for a permanent location that had good access to waterfront but have been unsuccessful. Sites evaluated included the former Des Moines Elementary School and the Beach Event Center in Des Moines.

Full background for this recommendation can be found in the attached Maritime High School Closure Report. There is an extensive FAQ available online.

IV. RECOMMENDED MOTION

I move that the School Board of Directors approve the recommendation to close Maritime High School at the end of the 2026-27 school year.

V. FISCAL IMPACT/REVENUE SOURCE

The closure of Maritime High School is estimated to reduce expenditures by $2,100,000 annually.

Expenditure: ☐ One-time ☐ Annual

VI. APPLICABLE POLICY(S)

Policy 9270 Closure of Facilities

VII. ALTERNATIVES

One alternative would be to not close Maritime High School. This is not recommended, as the school remains severely underenrolled and is cost prohibitive to run, as explained in the attached Closure Report.

Another alternative would be to create a maritime pathway at another school. This was considered but is not recommended. Pathways such as the new Health Professionals Program at Tyee High School are created when there is demonstrated community interest in such a pathway. All Highline high schools have engaged their communities in a process to redesign their schools. The idea of a maritime pathway did not come up in those conversations; this lack of interest in a maritime program at other schools, combined with the lack of interest in Maritime High School, indicates that a pathway would not be successful.

VIII. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement Required: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Board Policy 9270 and RCW 28A.335.020 require a public hearing before the School Board can vote to close a school. The public hearing for this recommendation is scheduled for Wednesday December 2, at 5:00 PM in the Boardroom, located at 15675 SW Ambaum Boulevard, in Burien. Instructions for how to sign up to testify at the public hearing can be found on our website: Public Testimony (Please note the sign-up form is not available online yet, but it will be available on Monday, November 30 at 9:00 a.m.)

In addition to the public hearing, members of the community may provide public testimony at the November 18th and December 9th School Board meetings. Instructions for how to sign up to provide public testimony can be found on our website: Public Testimony

IX. ATTACHMENTS

Maritime High School Closure Report For Reference

To: Highline School District Board of Directors

From: Dr. Ivan Duran, Superintendent

Lead Staff: Jenniffer Reinig, Steve Grubb, Kisa Hendrickson, Holly Ferguson, Tove Tupper, Jackie Bryan, Teshon Christie, Erinn Bennett, Andrew Benitez, Bernard Koontz, Lauren McAlister, Micaela White, Katie Luksan, Sara Baker, Mandi LeCompte

Re: Recommendation to Close Maritime High School

Date: November 13, 2026

Pursuant to Board Policy 9270 and RCW 28A.335.020, this report is being submitted to the School Board to support the recommendation to close Maritime High School. This report consists of an introduction, five required sections, and three additional sections to cover enrollment, staffing, and next steps:

1. Projected or actual enrollment declines and the likelihood that they will remain permanent
2. The effect the school closure will have on other facilities and on the district's educational program offering
3. Potential for alternative use of the facility
4. Financial considerations in terms of such factors as cost savings, the cost of operating and maintenance, the potential revenue for sale or lease of property, the cost of closure and transferring operations elsewhere
5. Impact of safety, health, and fire regulations on closed facility
6. Enrollment of students in 2027-2028
7. Staffing in 2027-2028
8. Next steps

Introduction

Background

Maritime High School opened in the fall of 2021 with a class of 35 ninth graders. The school added one grade per year, with the inaugural class graduating in 2025. The school was conceived in partnership with Northwest Maritime Center, the Port of Seattle, and the Duwamish River Community Coalition. Maritime is a school of choice,

When created, the intention was for the school to educate about 400 students—100 students per grade. Enrollment in the school has not met expectations or projections, despite a variety of outreach activities and promotional strategies over the past six

years; as of November 12, 2026, the school has only 13 ninth graders and a total of 81 students in grades 9-12.

After six years, the enrollment, costs, and facilities needs have resulted in the recommendation to close Maritime High School. If the School Board approves this recommendation the school would close after school ends in June 2027.

Budget & Expenditures

Since the school's inception, the district has invested approximately $8.1 million into Maritime High School.

In addition to district funding, Northwest Maritime has invested to provide onsite staff and programming that supports maritime focused educational activities. Northwest Maritime has also provided ongoing support for recruitment, communications, and fundraising for the school. This is not reflected in the Highline budget amount as resources provided by Northwest Maritime are in addition to the resources provided by Highline or via grants to Highline for Maritime High School.

The district has received approximately $2.1 million in grants specific to Maritime High School. This included approximately $1.2 million in allocations from the Port of Seattle via an Interlocal Agreement, and a one-time grant of approximately $1 million from the U.S. Department of Education. The balance came from smaller one-time grants from the New Schools Venture Fund, a State Board of Education mastery learning grant, an OSPI outdoor learning grant, and a 4Culture grant.

Over the last six years, approximately $10.3 million from all sources has been budgeted for Maritime High School.

Despite strong partnerships and outside funding, Highline's budgeted per pupil cost (including grants) based on full-time enrollment[1] (FTE) for 94 students at Maritime High School was approximately $22,693 per student per year—approximately $9,478 more than the average per student cost at a comprehensive high school and $5,834 more than other choice schools.

Interlocal Agreement with the Port of Seattle

Highline currently has an interlocal agreement (ILA) in place with the Port of Seattle through June 2027. The ILAs that the district has had with the Port over the years have

[1] Student enrollment can be looked at in two ways: headcount and full-time enrollment (FTE). "Headcount" is the number of students who are actually enrolled in a school or program; we project enrollment based on headcount. "Full-time enrollment" is used to track the amount of time (hours) that a student is enrolled in a school or program. Many students at Maritime High School are enrolled in both Maritime High School and a Running Start program, which means that Maritime's headcount (used for projections) differs from their FTE (used for budgeting). State funding is calculated based on FTE.

included annual monetary support (referenced above) for Maritime High School. The amounts have varied over the years and decreased in 2026.

As outlined in the interlocal agreement, we anticipate sending a report of Maritime's work to the Port of Seattle and expect the interlocal agreement to be fulfilled through the remainder of the agreement, which expires in June 2027.

If the School Board approves this recommendation, Maritime will close at the end of the 2026-27 school year, which coincides with the end of the interlocal agreement.

Facility Needs

Finding a permanent site for Maritime has proven unsuccessful. Remaining permanently at the Olympic site is not possible as the district will continue to need Olympic as an interim site.

Ideally, a permanent site would have easy access to water to support the school's maritime focus. We evaluated renovating the former Des Moines Elementary School to provide a permanent home; while that site is close to water and is owned by the district, renovations proved to be cost prohibitive. The Des Moines Beach Event Center was also considered, but the site is not owned by the district and would not be able to be reserved for exclusive use by the school, as it is in a public park. Additionally, the buildings on site would only accommodate about 200 students, below the threshold needed to be sustainable. We also held discussions with the City Manager of Des Moines and staff at Highline College around a possible collaboration connected with the renovation of the Des Moines Marina.

Other properties were discussed, including the former Emerald Queen Casino, space in the Tukwila Community Center, a site near Raisbeck Aviation High School, space in the Federal building on East Marginal Way, and a few sites in Seattle's industrial area. Ultimately these sites were rejected because they were not owned by the district, were not proximate to Highline's boundaries, did not have easy access to water, were too small for the expected enrollment, would have been extremely expensive to renovate, or a combination of those factors.

Maritime Industry and Washington State

We recognize the importance of Washington's maritime industry and the need to introduce young people to careers in this field. Partnerships with organizations like Northwest Maritime Center and the Port of Seattle have been an important part of Maritime's educational experience.

We are grateful to the industry partners who have invested their time, expertise, and resources in our students.

The recommendation to close Maritime is not a reflection of the value of maritime education or the industry's workforce needs. It reflects the challenges of sustaining this particular school model.

Conclusion

We understand that closing a school is difficult for everyone who is affected: students, families, staff and partners. We do not take this recommendation lightly. We will support the Maritime community and are committed to working with every Maritime student and their family to develop an individualized transition plan that meets their needs and supports their path to graduation and beyond. Please see Section 6 for additional information about supporting students.

We recognize that this recommendation will create uncertainty for staff. Staffing impacts will be determined in accordance with applicable collective bargaining agreements. We are committed to communicating with staff as decisions are made and supporting them through this transition. Please see Section 7 for additional information about supporting staff.

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1. Projected or actual enrollment declines and the likelihood that they will remain permanent.

Maritime High School is a school of choice and therefore does not have a designated enrollment catchment area. However, as part of Highline's annual staffing process we project enrollment numbers. The projections for Maritime High School were as follows:

School Year	Projection (Headcount)	Actual Enrollment (October 1 count)
2021-22	0	35
2022-23	70	84
2023-24	127	119
2024-25	170	124
2025-26	119	113
2026-27	110	84

Students interested in a Schools of Choice program must complete a two-step process: apply first, then enroll. Applicants are entered into a lottery, and placement offers are made based on lottery results. If a student receives an offer, they must accept or

decline to finalize their placement before completing enrollment. Students may apply to multiple schools and may receive more than one offer.

The data below shows the number of application submissions from incoming 9th-grade students compared with total enrollment by year. Enrollment in this table is from the October 1 headcount for each year.

School Year	9th Grade Applicants	9th Grade Enrollment	10th Grade Enrollment	11th Grade Enrollment	12th Grade Enrollment
2021-22	60	35	0	0	0
2022-23	74	46	38	0	0
2023-24	101	44	39	36	0
2024-25	57	25	37	30	33
2025-26	68	25	25	37	26
2026-27	55	14	17	17	36

Enrollment is not reaching the level necessary to sustain this school.

Maritime High School staff and leaders have actively recruited prospective students each year, working in partnership with Highline central office staff and Northwest Maritime Center staff.

Recruitment efforts have included a variety of outreach activities and promotional strategies over the past six years, including:

- Information nights, prospective student events, flyers, brochures, career expos and direct outreach to middle school students and families.
- Maritime staff visited middle schools to share information and connect with prospective students. The school also hosted field trips for middle school students from Highline and neighboring school districts to introduce them to the school's unique learning opportunities. Maritime staff also engaged middle school principals and counselors to ensure they had information about Maritime's programs and application process to share with students and families.
- Paid advertisements on social media and other websites to reach prospective students and families.
- Promotion through district and school websites, social media and family newsletters, particularly during the annual Schools of Choice application window.
- Dedicated stories, videos and program highlights featuring Maritime students, hands-on learning experiences and maritime career pathways.
- School staff and leaders, central office staff and leaders, and Northwest Maritime Center partners participated in twice-annual retreats to collaborate on school planning and recruitment strategies.

We also took additional steps to support enrollment, including adjusting application timelines to provide more opportunities and support for students and families to complete the application process.

Highline also made intentional staffing investments to support recruitment and enrollment growth. When Maritime High School opened, Highline staffed the school with both a full-time principal and a full-time office manager, despite the school's small enrollment. This staffing model was an intentional investment in launching and growing the school. At a school of this size, these positions would not typically both be funded as full-time positions. The additional staffing capacity was intended, in part, to allow school staff to dedicate time to student recruitment, family outreach and enrollment growth.

2. The effect the school closure will have on other facilities and on the district's educational program offering.

The closure of Maritime High School will result in 45[2] students moving into other schools (36 students are in 12th grade and expected to graduate in June 2027). While we cannot identify which school(s) students will move into, we are committed to working individually with students and their families to identify the appropriate school moving forward that will support their path to graduation and beyond.

Because the number of students moving is relatively small, we do not anticipate overcrowding at other schools. There is not expected to be a negative impact on the district's overall educational program; although a full 9th-12th grade school will be gone, the Puget Sound Skills Center (PSSC) offers a marine sciences program for 11th and 12th graders, and we will be evaluating whether other maritime-related activities could continue, including with the Advanced Construction Technology program at PSSC and the Construction Trades Pre-Apprenticeship programs at Highline and Tyee High Schools.

Please see Section 6, below, for more information about student placement.

3. Potential for alternative use of the facility.

Maritime High School is located at the Olympic Interim site, which is Highline's interim school facility. Schools move into Olympic when they need to be relocated for a temporary amount of time. At the end of this school year Pacific Middle School (also located at the Olympic site) will return to its permanent site. If this recommendation is

[2] Enrollment can fluctuate depending on the date the enrollment numbers are pulled. As of 11.12.26 Maritime has 36 12th graders, 16 11th graders, 16 10th graders, and 13 9th graders for a total enrollment of 81 students. Because 36 are expected to graduate, 45 students will remain who will need new placements for the 2027-28 school year.

approved, then it is expected that Olympic will continue to be available as an interim site.

4. Financial considerations in terms of such factors as cost savings, the cost of operating and maintenance, the potential revenue for sale or lease of property, the cost of closure and transferring operations elsewhere.

The closure of Maritime High School is estimated to reduce expenditures by $2,100,000 annually. This amount includes reductions of administrator, certificated, and classified staff. We do not anticipate selling or leasing the Olympic site as it is still needed as an interim site.

5. Impact of safety, health, and fire regulations on closed facility.

When the site is vacant, if not occupied as an interim site, the district will be responsible for ongoing security of the site.

Fire regulations do not relax at an empty site. All fire suppression and fire monitoring/alarm equipment will continue to function and be monitored by the district.

6. Enrollment of students in 2027-2028

Beginning in January 2027, we will work with each student and their family to develop a personalized transition plan that meets student needs and supports their path to graduation and beyond. Steps to identify a new school can include:

- Reviewing each student's High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP)
- Reviewing individual student interests and goals, including interest in staying in a mastery-based transcript school
- Reviewing school and program options
- Reviewing the student's mastery-based transcript and discuss translation to a traditional transcript if the student will move to a non-mastery-based transcript school

Maritime High School students will have priority in choosing their next school, within certain parameters, including the existing capacity at the school or grade level:

- Puget Sound Skills Center (PSSC) programs are only open to rising 11^{th} and 12^{th} graders (PSSC does not enroll 9^{th} or 10^{th} graders)
- Health Professionals Pathway @ Tyee is only open to rising 10^{th} and 11^{th} graders
- Raisbeck Aviation HS is only open to rising 10^{th} graders
- Highline Virtual Academy, CHOICE & Big Picture are available for rising 10^{th}, 11^{th}, and 12^{th} graders
- Comprehensive high schools are open to rising 10^{th}, 11^{th}, and 12^{th} graders

- Construction Trades Pre-Apprenticeship programs are available at Highline High School and Tyee High School

If there are more students interested in a school or program than there are seats, the district will draw names to determine how seats will be allocated.

District staff will centrally place students (rather than going through enrollment or the in-district transfer processes).

Transportation will be offered pursuant to normal transportation rules.

Big Picture offers a program based on internships and also uses a mastery-based transcript. Students who are interested in exploring maritime internships and maintaining their mastery-based transcript may wish to explore Big Picture.

PSSC offers both a marine science program as well as an advanced construction program. Rising 11th or 12th grade students interested in continuing a hands-on program in either of those areas may wish to explore PSSC.

If this closure recommendation is approved, current 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students will receive information about options prior to winter break to allow time for review prior to discussions with the school counselor and other staff.

If a student would like a letter explaining the school closure to share with colleges, universities or employers, we will provide one upon request.

7. Staffing in 2027-2028

As with student enrollment, we cannot identify specific assignments or locations for staff for next year. In alignment with our collective bargaining agreements, we are committed to working with our labor partners through applicable displacement processes and any resulting district-wide reductions in force. In alignment with district practice, staff will receive individualized notice of impact in Spring 2027, and the district will maintain a website of resources and updates on the district intranet.

Pursuant to our certificated collective bargaining agreement, certificated (teaching and non-teaching) staff will have an opportunity to identify preferences for placement in Spring 2027, for assignments effective September 1, 2027. In the event of a district-wide reduction in force, the district will observe its past practice to identify opportunities to minimize such a reduction through levers including but not limited to attrition, retirements, reassignments, etc.

Pursuant to our classified collective bargaining agreements, classified (instructional, administrative or operational) staff will be reassigned to open vacancies or in accordance with their rights to exercise seniority when comparable positions are not

available. In the event of district-wide overstaffing, the district will observe the applicable collective bargaining agreement to issue classified layoff notices in accordance with seniority ranking. Additionally, classified instructional and administrative staff impacted by layoff actions are maintained on a reemployment list for up to one year, reserving the right of refusal for the next available comparable vacancy.

Administrator staffing will follow the association agreement with Highline Association of Washington School Principals and applicable state statutes.

8. Next Steps:

- A recommendation to close Maritime High School will be introduced at the School Board meeting on 11.18.26.
- A public hearing will be held on 12.02.26 from 5:00-7:00 pm at the Board room at the central office (15675 Ambaum Blvd SW, Burien).
- The School Board is scheduled to vote on the recommendation at the School Board meeting on 12.9.26.
- Individualized student support will begin in January to support seniors in completing their final year and to support ninth through eleventh graders in transitioning to a new school for fall 2027.
- An extensive frequently asked questions can be found online at gethps.info/MaritimeFAQs.