



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LA CROSSE

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Long Range Facility Plan 2050

This long range facility plan provides a framework for improvement of the physical facilities that students attend, staff work in, and our community utilizes. This plan builds on the last 20 years of facilities improvements and puts in place the first comprehensive long range facility plan in 15 years.

Enrollment. Enrollment in the School District of La Crosse has been on a 30 year decline. Since 1995, enrollment has fallen by 29% from 8,152 to 5,786 in 2023. The primary cause of declining enrollment is lower birth rates which have fallen by 30% since 1990 in La Crosse County. In the same 30 year timeframe, the total population within the boundaries of the school district has grown only 1%. Elementary enrollment was relatively stable between 2005 and 2015 but since 2015 has declined by 701 students, 20%.

Enrollment projections commissioned through the UW Applied Population lab, as well as locally developed projections using the cohort survival method show continued declining enrollment for the next five to ten years. The median, positive projection for enrollment over the next five years projects a loss of 746 students by 2028 with a decline of 284 elementary, 158 middle, and 289 high school students.

Financial Projections. School districts are funded on a per pupil basis. Fewer students results in less revenue for the operation of schools. Since 2019, the School District of La Crosse has lost \$5.7M in revenue limit authority due to declining enrollment with another loss of \$1.3M in revenue limit authority known for the 2024-2025 school year. Annual revenue limit reductions are anticipated to grow from -\$1.2M in 2025 to -\$2.0M in 2028 based on enrollment projections. Future enrollment declines will continue to have an impact on the district's revenue limit, limiting the financial resources naturally available to the school district.

Building Inventory and Condition. The School District of La Crosse has 16 buildings in its inventory including: 2 high schools (Logan and Central); 2 middle schools (Logan and Longfellow); 1, 6-12 charter school building (Polytechnic); 9 elementary schools (Emerson, Hamilton, Hintgen, Northside, North Woods, Southern Bluffs, Spence, State Road, and Summit); 1 district administration building (Hogan Administrative Center); and 1 facilities and grounds building located on Isle la Plume. Lincoln Middle School is still owned by the School District of La Crosse but is not currently used as an educational facility.

The average age of original construction of school district educational facilities is 1961 with a square foot average age of 50 years old. The district has identified \$23M of maintenance that would be best accomplished in the next five years to keep buildings in safe and usable condition as well as an additional \$95M in maintenance and capital projects anticipated over the following 15-20 years to maintain buildings and to create comparable opportunities for students.

Best Practice and Elementary Size. An ideal elementary size for both instructional best practice and economic efficiencies is a small school with a target size of 350-400 students. This size of an elementary school with the district's current class size guidelines allows for 18-20 sections with 3-4 sections per grade level. The efficiency of this size of an elementary school comes from providing an opportunity for full-time music, art, physical education, and library specialists as well as full-time support staff such as special education teachers, EL teachers, counselors, success coaches, and others. Additionally, providing buildings that have comparable economic status is desirable to best arrange resources and ensure similar experiences for students and families.

Facility Advisory Committee. Over eight months in 2023 a Facility Advisory Committee (FAC) made up of community members and led by an independent facilitator met to consider district facilities. The FAC reviewed a wide range of facility, fiscal, enrollment, and instructional information to address two primary tasks:

1. Explore, evaluate, and refine potential elementary school arrangement and facilities consolidation options.
2. Explore, evaluate, and refine middle and high school facilities improvements that result in comparable opportunities for students.

The FAC recommended the district develop a long range facility plan to replace/rejuvenate aging school district facilities through a process that might include referenda to replace older buildings or to make sufficient capital investments to bring the remaining buildings up to modern educational standards. The FAC recommendation to close two elementary schools to address declining enrollment was viewed as a necessary initial step in the strategy to improve the district's facilities as a whole. The FAC recognized that enrollment may continue to decline and recommended the district monitor the enrollment trend, revisit the issue periodically, and seek ways to stabilize or increase enrollment in the future.

The FAC developed consolidation parameters to guide recommendations related to elementary school building closure. The result of the FAC analysis and deliberation led to consensus around a recommendation to:

- Close two elementary schools to maximize the instructional benefit to students.
- Pair a north and south elementary school closure to address declining enrollment across the district and keep students together from elementary through high school.
- Close the North Woods International Elementary building.
- Close the Hintgen Elementary School building.
- Adjust elementary school boundaries in accordance with the recommendations of the administration.
- Retain the International Baccalaureate program at another site.

School Board Policy. School board policy outlines the board's values for how the school district should operate and the outcomes for students. Operational expectations policy, OE-12: Facilities, specifically addresses the board's expectations for school district facilities and states "the Superintendent shall ensure that physical facilities support the accomplishment of the Board's Results policies." OE-5: Financial Planning, indicates that "the Superintendent shall develop and present to the Board a multi-year financial plan that is related directly to the Board's Results priorities and Operational Expectations goals, and that avoids long-term fiscal jeopardy to the district." School board policies OE-7: Asset Protection and OE-11: Instructional Program provide additional guidance. Together these policies direct the district to ensure resources are available to provide excellence in education, a key element of the school board's mission statement.

Administrative Policy. Along with school board policy, administrative policies have been developed to guide short and long term facility planning. When addressing school facility needs, policy 9100 Facilities Development indicates what will be considered in construction, renovation, and maintenance of buildings and policy 9800 Retirement of Facilities outlines the considerations that must be taken into account when closing a building.

Facilities Mission

The School District of La Crosse provides physical facilities to support the accomplishment of the Board's Results policies.

Vision

The School District of La Crosse is the school district of choice.

Long Range Facility Plan Intent

The purpose of this long range facility plan is to ensure student access to modern facilities that support a comprehensive education, to efficiently use educational spaces to maximize staff support to students, to aid in efficient use of district resources, and to create a favorable impression of the school district.

Key tasks are:

1. Reduce the number of elementary buildings
2. Replace, renovate, or repurpose aging elementary facilities
3. Invest in public-facing facilities
4. Invest in underdeveloped career and technical education facilities
5. Adapt to future declining enrollment

The result of the long range facility plan is attractive, safe buildings and grounds that facilitate a world class education attracting families to the school district, facilities that are scaled to enrollment resulting in efficient use of resources to allow for continued investment in staff while avoiding fiscal jeopardy, and facilities that are the pride of La Crosse.

KEY TASKS

Key Task #1 - Reduce the Number of Elementary Buildings

Reduce the number of elementary buildings to ensure instructional resources are available to students and to create fiscal stability through efficient staffing. Currently, the district has low elementary enrollment that results in elementary buildings that are at 68% of capacity. Low enrollment in buildings creates part-time specialists and split classrooms leading to a loss of instructional capacity. Additionally, under enrolled buildings result in additional expense to support the building operation instead of support for instruction of students.

- Over the next 5 years, the school district should reduce the number of elementary schools by two to three. The primary buildings to consider are Emerson, Hintgen, North Woods, Spence, and Summit due to a combination of age and location.

Key Task #2 - Replace, Renovate, or Repurpose Elementary Facilities

Replace, renovate, or repurpose aging elementary facilities to extend the life cycle of facilities in the school district inventory and to provide instructional spaces that support modern instructional strategies for students. The average square foot age of the district's elementary buildings is 43 years old. Emerson, Spence, Summit, and Hintgen elementary schools have average square foot ages that exceed 50 years old which is prior to the implementation of disability and special education law, creating challenges in adapting spaces to meet modern educational expectations.

- Over the next 12 years replace or substantially renovate Emerson, Spence, and Summit elementary schools if kept in the inventory.
- Over the next 20 years renovate Hamilton and State Road to modernize older portions of the buildings.
- Over the next 25 years repurpose elementary facilities that are no longer used as schools for community benefit.

Key Task #3 - Invest in Public Facing Facilities

Invest available one-time funds in school district facilities that are public-facing or are gathering places that showcase the school district to internal and external audiences. Currently, the district's public facing spaces are outdated and insufficient for modern needs. As a result, the image that community members and visitors to the district have is a district that is outdated and does not meet students' needs.

- Over the next 5 years renovate performing arts and athletic facilities.
- Over the next 10 years renovate school entryways.
- Over the next 25 years build new or renovate other existing public spaces to benefit students and the community (e.g. gymnasiums, cafeterias, libraries, pools, auditoriums and conference spaces).

Key Task #4 - Invest in Underdeveloped Career and Technical Education Facilities

Invest in underdeveloped career and technical education (CTE) facilities to provide world class opportunities for all students. Currently, the district's CTE facilities are not sufficient to provide a comprehensive modern education. As a result, students are not exposed to, or prepared for, the full range of careers they may be interested in and are available in our community.

- Over the next 5 years renovate the Logan High School CTE facilities and construct an addition to Central High School for CTE facilities.

Key Task #5 - Adapt to Future Declining Enrollment

Create options to adjust to future declining enrollment so the district is prepared for future change. Enrollment projections indicate the school district will continue to shrink, likely down near 5,000 students in size over the next 5-10 years. As a result, to maintain the high quality education for students through building efficiencies, further consolidation of buildings should be considered.

- Over the next 25 years consider reducing the number of secondary facilities when secondary enrollment decline negatively impacts the availability of instructional resources and opportunities to students and when a reduction in secondary facilities is necessary to create efficiency through consolidated staffing to avoid fiscal jeopardy. Consider consolidation into existing secondary facilities when enrollment is less than capacity; Central High School capacity is 1,600 students, Logan High School capacity is 1,300 students.
- Over the next 25 years, consider future consolidation of elementary facilities if the low number of students in buildings negatively impacts the district's ability to ensure instructional resources are available to students and there is a financial need to create fiscal stability through more efficient staffing.

Additional Tasks

1. Retain property the school district currently owns to adapt to future school district needs. Future needs may include sites for new buildings or athletic facilities, temporary spaces for students while construction occurs, or space/sites for changing enrollment patterns in the future.
2. Acquire property near Central and Logan High Schools to provide additional parking and sites for student activities.
 - a. There is currently limited space for parking for public events and daily parking at both high schools. To accommodate these needs and not infringe on the spaces of other residents in the area, the district should acquire property to create space for parking.
 - b. Not all athletic facilities are located near high school sites which limits physical education opportunities and creates barriers for student participation in extracurricular activities. To provide a comprehensive physical education program and maximize opportunities for students, additional property should be acquired to create nearby athletic facilities.

