



## LEWISTON-ALTURA PUBLIC SCHOOLS ISD 857 COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING SUMMARY

Updated – April 17, 2024

### BACKGROUND

The Lewiston-Altura School district (ISD 857) has been experiencing significant budget challenges impacted by declining enrollment, rising costs, decreasing state aid due to inflation and aging facilities. Currently at 559 K-12 students, ISD 857's total enrollment is projected to decline by roughly 14 percent to 483 over the next 5 years but stabilize in fiscal year 2030. The district's operating levy of \$52 per pupil unit (/PU) also expires in fiscal year 2026.

The district informally investigated potential opportunities to alleviate budget challenges including consolidating buildings to reduce operational costs, increasing class sizes, eliminating low participation activities, offering fewer electives at the high school, and reducing support staff and administration full-time employees.

Recognizing the need to uncover all factors impacting the district's general fund budget, the Lewiston-Altura School Board, in *April 2021*, officially selected a consulting firm to lead the district through a comprehensive process to both identify needs and better understand how to "right-size" the district for the future.

### PROCESS

#### Year 2021:

- **The first phase** of this 4-step process included working with the Administration and Board to develop a long-term planning vision. This vision initiated the **second phase**, "assessment", which analyzed:
  - the educational adequacy of existing spaces (administrators, students, teachers, and staff were surveyed and asked about their current spaces),
  - the current physical conditions of district facilities and
  - past and future student population.
- The district also worked with its financial advisors, Ehlers Inc., to analyze the district's operating needs and conducted a community strategic planning survey to solicit feedback on district operations from all district stakeholders.
- The Strategic Planning Survey results indicated support for continued facility planning and consolidation of buildings.
- **Phases 3 and 4** of the process involved engaging all district stakeholders to prioritize improvements and determine the best plan for the district.

#### Year 2022:

- On *May 26, 2022*, the district hosted the first of four community engagement meetings in the planning process to share and discuss the district challenges and results of the strategic planning survey.
- As part of the first engagement meeting, the district also solicited feedback and names of those interested in joining a Community Planning Task Force to assist the district in developing a community-supported solution.
- The 23-member community task force (number excludes board members and administrators) met with the district during *July and August 2022* to discuss assessment findings and preliminary options.
- The Task Force provided recommendations to the board and ultimately to the community in a 2<sup>nd</sup> Engagement Meeting on *October 5, 2022*, which included recommending the closing of Altura Intermediate School.
- On *November 14, 2023*, the board voted to close Altura Intermediate School and in *January of 2023* started a Strategic Planning process.



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PROCESS (Cont'd)

**Year 2023:**

- The district contracted with True North Consulting to work through a strategic planning process in *January of 2023* to determine long-term academic and financial goals for the district.
- During *March and April*, additional staff, task force, and engagement meetings were held to determine options to test with the community. Meetings were held on *March 1 and 27, April 3 and 6*.
- The district conducted a scientific survey in April. Results showed community support for a per pupil unit amount of less than \$850 and a bond amount of \$26M.
- The board voted on *July 10* to move forward with a 3-question ballot in the November 2023 election.
- The bond was unsuccessful by the following margins:
  - **Question 1** (Operating levy) **failed by 8 votes**,
  - **Question 2** (Bond: highest priority facilities needs, including mechanical, HVAC, plumbing and electrical infrastructure improvements, safety and security upgrades, and improvements to existing classrooms) **failed by 8 percentage points**, and
  - **Question 3** (Bond: performing arts space and replacement gym) **failed by 20 percentage points**.

**Year 2024:**

- In *January 2024*, the district proactively conducted a post-election survey to gain community feedback on why the election was unsuccessful as well as re-engaged a stakeholder task force to assist the district in determining next steps.
- The district has had two of three planned task force meetings. The first meeting was on *March 26*, second on *April 17* and third planned for *May 20*.
- Community Engagement meetings are scheduled for *May 1 in Altura and May 8 in Lewiston*. The district will be offering building tours prior to the May 8 meeting. Additional tours will be available by request.

**Difference between Operating Levy and Bond Referenda Elections**

When communities support an **Operating levy**, they are providing the district general funds to use for teachers' salaries, textbooks, co-curricular programs, transportation, computers, utilities and the general operation of the district.

On the other hand, **Bond Referenda** provide districts dollars to make improvements to facilities and building infrastructure only. For example, bonds can be used for major construction such as renovation, building an addition, building new schools or for general building projects such as addressing deferred maintenance and ventilation deficiencies. Bonds, however, cannot be used to hire teachers, buy textbooks, or for the operation of the district such as utilities.