



Your Voice in Education

FOR NEWSLETTER

October 26, 2023

Is now the time to commit \$60M to a 550-student Early Childhood Center?

The LISD Long Range Planning Committee made a recommendation to the Board of Trustees on September 21, 2023 to build a \$60M Early Childhood Center (ECC) on the District's Halsey site in Leander. At its October 26th meeting, the Board voted to move ahead with this project. They are telling us the Early Childhood Center is needed to open in 2025/26 to alleviate projected overcrowding of elementary schools in the northern portion of the district, but the district's own enrollment data projections indicate such relief won't be needed until at least 2028.

Is this decision premature?

Accounting for the opening of new elementary schools #30 and #31 and expected transfers, current projections indicate real relief won't be needed until 2028/29. Shouldn't leadership take the available time to get better understand:

- Updated PASA⁽¹⁾ enrollment projections which show enrollment is BELOW expectations
- Recommendations regarding closure of low enrollment schools
- Long term M&O and I&S budget impacts of a centralized Early Childhood Center
- Likelihood of state-wide school choice

How did we get here?

In the fall of 2021, a capital bond that LISD placed on the ballot failed. The community had lost trust in LISD leadership over issues including inappropriate curriculum materials, chaos in the classroom, dumbing down of curriculum, and a lack of transparency. Due to the failed bond, LISD leadership formed a Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) to recommend how to best optimize facility utilization in line with the strategic plan. The LRPC was composed solely of staff and board members, unlike most advisory committees, parents and community members were not invited to participate.

In early 2023, the LISD Board of Trustees voted to place a bond on the ballot that included \$750 million for new facilities, facility improvements, capital expenditures and facility repurposing. Portions of this bond reflected about \$600 million in priorities set by the Citizens Facility Advisory Committee, but an additional \$150 million in projects were added to the bond by the Board of Trustees based on recommendations from the LRPC.



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These additional projects were arrived at without community input. These projects included, among other things, plans to close elementary schools in the central and southern portions of the district. Not surprisingly, community pushback was loud and strong. Most community members were not aware of plans to close their neighborhood schools until they saw them on the proposed ballot measure.

Facing significant resistance, the Board agreed to “pause” the plans to close and repurpose projected low enrollment elementary schools and to include, for the first time, parent and community participation in the Long Range Planning Committee. The bond ultimately passed, but many community members felt it was an all or nothing Hobson’s choice. If voters wanted projects necessary to address growth and crumbling infrastructure, they had to vote for the bloated bond which included many projects that even the Citizens Facility Advisory Committee deemed lower priority.

Relieving overcrowding in the north is a complicated question, but staff made it clear to the Long Range Planning Committee that their preferred solution included building an Early Childhood Center (ECC). Ultimately, the LRPC voted to recommend building an ECC on the Halsey site as soon as possible.

Recommendation:

- Build ECC at Halsey Site - Open 25/26
- Leave option open to close and repurpose a central school for new NHHS
- Leave option open to close and repurpose a central school for LEO
- Leave option open to repurpose LEO for a SECOND ECC (28/29)

Observations:

- The LRPC did not consider or have access to any comparative budget impact studies when they made their recommendation.
- Rather than converting an existing facility for \$37M, this option would build a brand new facility dedicated to early childhood for \$60M.
- A new ECC facility will limit flexibility in the future since the infrastructure will conform to the needs of 3 and 4 year olds.
- The new facility will be located in an already congested area (right near Glenn HS). What impact will this new facility have on traffic?
- How do our already stretched drivers feel about transporting a bus full of 3 and 4 year olds? Will bus monitors be needed?
- How comfortable will parents be with their young children riding on a bus without older siblings and away from their neighborhood?
- The question of whether or not to close one or two or more elementary schools has not yet been addressed by the LRPC. Shouldn’t the decision about closing central elementary schools come first?



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- How can the Board vote without the benefit of long term M&O and I&S budget impact studies?
 - Is it imprudent to go ahead with facility recommendations for one portion of the district (northern elementary schools), without considering the entire network of facilities and needs. Wouldn't it make more sense to hold off on formal recommendations until a complete plan is envisioned?
 - Has leadership given key stakeholder groups, including preschool parents, bus drivers and preschool teachers, an opportunity for input on the concept of an Early Childhood Center?
 - Will the board base their decision on a false sense of urgency? A map was included in the Superintendent's LRPC recommendation to the Board which incorrectly implied 4 elementary schools were projected to have enrollment that would put them over capacity by at least 20% for the 24/25 school year.
- (1) PASA is the company which Leander ISD has contracted with to generate 10-year enrollment projections. Their projections are based on a complex analysis of demographic data and are presented annually to the Board of Trustees.
- (2) LEO is the Leander Extended Opportunity Center, the Discipline Alternative Educational Placement (DAEP) school for Leander ISD and Liberty Hill ISD. The purpose of a DAEP is to keep students learning while suspended from their campus.