

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 709
Duluth Public Schools

**In the Matter of the Proposed Closing
Of Woodland Middle School**

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS,

A hearing on the proposed closing of Woodland Middle School (“Woodland Middle School”) by Independent School District No. 709, Duluth Public Schools (“School District”) was held on May 6, 2013, at 7:30 P.M. at Woodland Middle School.

The hearing was conducted pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.51. The hearing was recorded by a court reporter. A transcript of the hearing has been provided to the members of the School Board. Exhibits were offered, received, and kept as part of the record of the hearing. All individuals wishing to speak and offer evidence in favor of, or in opposition to, the proposed closing were given the opportunity to testify during the hearing.

FINDINGS

1. Woodland Middle School, located at 201 Clover Street in Duluth, sits on an approximate 5.7 acre site. Woodland Middle School is a two story, 119,800 square foot building. The building was constructed in 1958-93,578 square feet, 1994-25,829 square feet, 2005-393 square feet.
2. Woodland Middle School is currently configured as a K-5 program.
3. Woodland Middle School has an enrollment capacity of 899 students. This number is based on a classroom size of 27 students.
4. The School District currently operates two high schools, two middle schools and nine elementary schools.
5. In accordance with its long range facilities plan, the School District completed construction of a new/renovated middle school building (at the current Ordean East Middle School) within Woodland Middle School’s enrollment area. This new facility was opened in September of 2012.
6. The Ordean East Middle School has an enrollment capacity of 1,200 students.
7. In 2006, the School District commissioned a report from Dr. Hazel Reinhart. Her demographics report predicted a 10 year decline in the School District’s enrollment of approximately 25%. The demographics report attributed this decline to shifting age demographics in the area served by the School District.

8. Since 2006, the School District's enrollment has been, on average, less than what the demographics report predicted.
9. Considering the enrollment capacity at the new Woodland Middle School, the current enrollment of Ordean East Middle School, the enrollment figures predicted in the demographics report, and the enrollment trend, it is not necessary to keep Woodland Middle School open to provide enrollment capacity for students. Closing Woodland Middle School would eliminate the excess use of a separate building.
10. During the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the total building operations cost (including utilities, supplies, and custodial labor) for Woodland Middle School was \$482,565.
11. The projected building operations cost for Ordean East Middle School for the 2012-2013 fiscal year is \$521,299, a slight increase in total cost of \$38,734, but a 28% decrease in cost per sq ft (Woodland 128,820 compared to Ordean East 192,750).
12. During the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the total cost of employing administrators and school support personnel (such as nurses, nutritionists, media specialists, etc.) at Woodland Middle School was \$593,082
13. The projected cost of employing administrators and school support personnel for Ordean East Middle School for the 2012-2013 fiscal year is projected to be roughly the same as 2011-2012.
14. Consolidating the four buildings with middle school enrollment into two buildings allows the School District to streamline student transportation.
15. During the 2011-2012 school year, operating fewer school buildings has already saved the School District's general fund approximately \$5.2 million. These savings have primarily been used to offset potential deficits.
16. In order to consolidate Woodland Middle School into the new Ordean East Middle School and realize the benefits associated with student transportation, the School District must first close Woodland Middle School.
17. The School Board has authorized the sale of the Woodland School pending the school closing and citizens were provided the chance to speak for or against the sale at that time.
18. If the School District does not sell the Woodland Middle School building it will not be able to use the proceeds from such sale to pay down the School District's bonded debt. Instead, the anticipated value of that sale will be drawn from either or both of: (1) an additional tax levy; or (2) a reduction from the School District's general fund.

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19. Closing Woodland Middle School will not necessitate the non-renewal, termination, or layoff of any classroom teacher. Teachers currently assigned to Woodland Middle School will be reassigned to other teaching positions, based on enrollment, and in accordance with the provisions of the applicable collective bargaining agreement and/or School District policies.
 20. Programs offered at Woodland Middle School are available at Ordean East Middle School.

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 21. The School District has published notice of the school closing hearing in the official newspaper for two weeks before the hearing.
 22. At the hearing, the School District administration presented documentary evidence regarding the proposed closure of Woodland Middle School. Specifically, the following documents were entered as exhibits:
 - a. An Educational Adequacy Report completed in connection with the School District's Long Range Facilities Plan;
 - b. A Facility Assessment Report completed in connection with the School District's Long Range Facilities Plan;
 - c. A Property Value Report completed in connection with the School District's Long Range Facilities Plan;
 - d. A Solutions Options Report completed in connection with the School District's Long Range Facilities Plan;
 - e. The Review and Comment Documents that the School District submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education in connection with its Long Range Facilities Plan; and
 - f. The Demographic Report from former State Demographer, Dr. Hazel Reinhart.

The School Board has fully considered this evidence prior to reaching any conclusion or adopting any resolution regarding the closure of Woodland Middle School.

23. At the hearing, members of the public were allowed to present testimony for and against the proposed closure of Woodland Middle School. The School Board has considered all comments by members of the public prior to reaching any conclusion or adopting any resolution regarding the closure of Woodland Middle School.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The closure of Woodland Middle School is necessary and practicable.
2. The School District has complied with the procedural requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.51, subdivision 3, for the purpose of closing Woodland Middle School.