

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 709  
Duluth Public Schools**

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**In the Matter of the Proposed Closing  
Of Lester Park Elementary School**

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS,**

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A hearing on the proposed closing of the Lester Park Elementary School (“Lester Park”) by Independent School District No. 709, Duluth Public Schools (“School District”) was held on May 5, 2011, at 6:00 P.M. at Lester Park.

The hearing was conducted pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.51, subdivision 5. 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. The Lester Park Elementary School, located at 315 North 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue East in Duluth, sits on an approximate 2.7 acre site. Lester Park is a three story, 48,430 square foot building. The first 35,830 square feet of the building was constructed in 1917. In 1954, the District constructed an 12,600 square foot addition to Lester Park.
2. Lester Park is currently configured as a grade 2-5 program. After completing first grade, Rockridge Elementary School (a K-1 school) students transfer to the Lester Park Elementary School for grades 2-5.
3. Lester Park has an enrollment capacity of 322 students. This number is based on a classroom size of 23 students.
4. Lester Park is one of ten elementary schools currently operated by the School District.
5. In accordance with its long range facilities plan, the School District is completing construction of a new school building (for purposes of this document, hereafter referred to as “New Lester Park”) within Lester Park’s enrollment area. New Lester Park will open in September of 2011.

6. The combined enrollment of the Lester Park and Rockridge schools in the 2010-2011 school year was 518 students.
7. Currently, the Lester Park and Rockridge schools have a combined enrollment capacity of 1,075 students. Given the 2010-2011 enrollment of the Lester Park and Lester Park schools, this is an excess capacity of 557 students.
8. New Lester Park has an enrollment capacity of 546 students. Therefore, it will house the combined enrollment of the existing Lester Park and Rockridge schools without the need to increase class size.
9. In 2006, the School District commissioned a report from Dr. Hazel Reinhardt. 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.
10. Since 2006, the School District's enrollment has been, on average, less than what the demographics report predicted.
11. Considering the enrollment capacity New Lester Park, the current enrollment of Lester Park and Rockridge, the enrollment figures predicted in the demographics report, and the enrollment trend, it is not necessary to keep the Lester Park Elementary School open to provide enrollment capacity for students. Closing Lester Park would eliminate the excess use of a separate building.
12. During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, the total building operations cost (including utilities, supplies, and custodial labor) for Rockridge Elementary School was \$157,676. During the same time period, the total building operations cost for the existing Lester Park school was \$113,020, for a total building operations cost of \$290,696 for the two schools.
13. The projected building operations cost for New Lester Park for the 2011-2012 fiscal year is \$240,435.
14. Consolidating Lester Park and Rockridge into one school building is expected to save the School District \$50,261 in building operations costs.
15. During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, the total cost of employing administrators and school support personnel (such as nurses, nutritionists, media specialists, etc.) at Rockridge was \$171,833. During the same time period, the total cost of employing administrators and school support personnel at Lester Park was \$179,581 for a total cost of \$351,414.

16. The projected cost of employing administrators and school support personnel at New Lester Park for the 2011-2012 fiscal year is \$244,824.
17. Consolidating Lester Park and Rockridge into one school building is expected to save the School District approximately \$106,590, in costs related to employing administrators and school support personnel.
18. In order to consolidate Lester Park and Rockridge into one school building and realize the financial savings described in paragraphs 14 and 17, the School District must first close the Lester Park Elementary School.
19. Consolidating Lester Park and Rockridge into one school building also allows the School District to streamline student transportation.
20. During the 2010-2011 school year, operating fewer school buildings has already saved the School District's general fund approximately \$4,400,000. These savings have primarily been used to offset potential deficits.
21. In order to consolidate Lester Park and Rockridge and realize the benefits associated with student transportation, the School District must first close the Lester Park Elementary School.
22. Closing the Lester Park building allows the old school building to be demolished and the construction of an underground storm water management system with a new play field constructed for recess, physical education and community use.
23. The demolition of the Lester Park building structure is required by building code in order to receive certificate of occupancy for the new school building.
24. Closing Lester Park will not necessitate the non-renewal, termination, or layoff of any classroom teacher. Teachers currently assigned to Lester Park will be reassigned to other teaching positions based on enrollment, and in accordance with applicable provisions of the collective bargaining agreement and/or School District policies.
25. All classes and services, including special education classes and services, currently available at Lester Park will be available at New Lester Park.
26. If Lester Park is closed, all students currently attending Lester Park will attend New Lester Park starting in the 2011-2012 school year.

27. The educational benefits of closing Lester Park include a reduction in split classes and travel time for specialists (art, media, physical education, and music) who travel between buildings.
28. The School District has published notice of the school closing hearing in the official newspaper for two weeks before the hearing.
29. At the hearing, the School District administration presented documentary evidence regarding the proposed closure of Lester Park. 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 Reinhardt.

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

30. At the hearing, members of the public were allowed to present testimony for and against the proposed closure of Lester Park. 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 Lester Park.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. The closure of the Lester Park Elementary School is necessary and practicable.
2. The School District has complied with the procedural requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.51, subdivision 5, for the purpose of closing the Lester Park Elementary School.