



Ashland School District
Inspiring learning for life

2025

Consolidation Process Recommendation

Prepared For:

Ashland School District Board
November 13, 2025

Prepared By:

Superintendent
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Current Challenge

The height of enrollment for the Ashland School District since 2009 was during the 2017-18 school year when it topped out at 2950 according to the Oregon Department of Education's Fall Membership Report. Since then, we have experienced a steady decline in enrollment with the exception of a slight increase in the 2022-23 school year. Importantly, this demonstrates that recent enrollment declines are part of a much longer trend as forecast from a demographer's report conducted in November of 2022 (See Figure 16 from the Demographers Report).

Over the past several years, the Ashland School District has grappled with staffing level that the declining enrollment could not support, causing increasing deficits in special revenue funds and the general fund that have impacted the programming we can provide to our students. As enrollment continues to decrease and our schools have fewer students, our resources are spread further, impacting the depth of service at each school. This is most easily seen when our elementary school specialists cover multiple schools because there are not enough classrooms at a single school for them to work there full-time. This includes SLPs, Psychologists, music at some sites and physical education.

In addition, school districts are funded based on the number of students who attend school. Fewer students means less funding, which we have also seen over the past several years.

Phased Approach to Budgetary Rightsizing

During the spring of 2025, the Ashland School District initiated a Phased approach to addressing a severe budget deficit of nearly \$8,000,000 that was identified by the incoming Superintendent and Interim Director of Business Services.

Phase I:

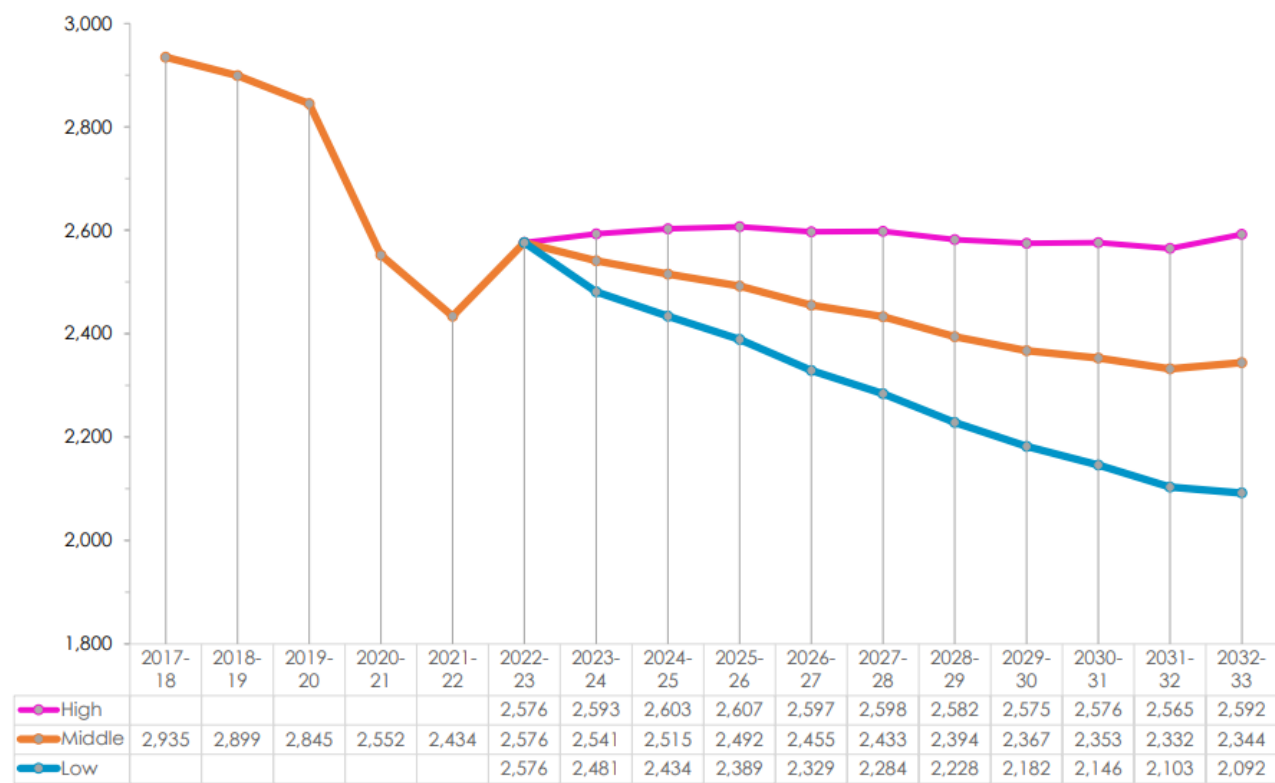
- Initial hiring and spending freezes
- Systems modifications with spending systems
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- Reduction in school days
- Discretionary funds to be frozen
- Staff reductions
- Class size increased to an average of 25 students per class which required some site to utilized blended learning.

As we move through the 2025-26 School year, Phase II is designed to evaluate the impact to student learning and determine necessary adjustments to the district organization to ensure we are utilizing all resources efficiently to serve all students. The following will be necessary data-points for the board, staff, and community to consider as we engage to determine the best model to operate the Ashland School District:

- Current Enrollment
- Projected Enrollment
- Building Capacity and Current Usage
- Current status of each facility
- Educational Best Practices
- Focus on future development and growth (charter, virtual, childcare, etc.).



Figure 16: Districtwide Enrollment Forecasts: Low, Middle, and High Scenarios



Ashland School District October 2017–18 to 2022–23 enrollment and FLO 2023–24 to 2032–33 enrollment forecasts. Enrollment values include all students living within and outside the district boundary.

Purpose of Proposal

The Ashland School District (ASD) is entering the next phase of its multi-year fiscal stabilization plan. Following significant work in 2024-25 and 2025-26 to right size the budget and align staffing levels with enrollment, it is now essential to examine whether the district's current facility configuration continues to represent the most effective and sustainable model for serving students.

This process is **not** intended to be a predetermined decision to close or reconfigure any school. Rather, it is an opportunity for the district and community to evaluate multiple options together—grounded in data, transparency, and student-centered values.

Process Considerations

The Ashland School District (ASD) is entering the next phase of its multi-year fiscal stabilization plan. Following significant work in 2024-25 and 2025-26 to right-size the budget and align staffing levels with enrollment, it is now essential to examine whether the district's current facility configuration remains the most effective and sustainable model for serving students.

This next phase is **not** a predetermined decision to close or reconfigure any school. Rather, it is an opportunity for the district and the community to evaluate a range of options together—grounded in data, transparency, and student-centered values. We know we must closely examine how our facilities are being utilized in light of current and projected enrollment. The real question before us is **what process will best serve our district and our community's needs?**

We also recognize that meaningful change is challenging, and there are both advantages and drawbacks to an expedited process versus a more extended, detailed process. For that reason, I am asking the Board to consider both pathways.

As we consider options, we need to first consider how quickly the process should take. In this, it may be advantageous to consider whether we should "run" or "walk".

- **"Run"**: Move through the analysis and decision-making process within a matter of months, determining whether a school should be closed for the 2026–27 school year, which would consolidate enrollment and resources as early as fall 2026.
- **"Walk"**: Engage in a longer, more detailed process with expanded community involvement, culminating in a potential consolidation decision for the 2027–28 school year.



Pros and Cons: Expedited vs. Extended Process

"Run" — Expedited Process (Decision for Fall 2026)

Pros

1. Faster financial impact

- a. Consolidation (if chosen) would take effect a full year earlier, potentially reducing costs sooner and accelerating long-term fiscal stabilization.

2. Earlier relief on staffing and class-size pressures

- a. Consolidating sooner could reduce the need for multi-grade blended classrooms.
- b. Staffing and resources could be more efficiently distributed as early as 2026–27.

3. Clearer, quicker direction for families and staff

- a. Uncertainty is shortened; communities can begin planning sooner for potential changes.
- b. Helps stabilize staffing assignments and minimize prolonged anxiety.

4. Aligns decisions with known enrollment trends

- a. Current projections already signal declining or flattening enrollment; acting quickly reduces risk of over-extending resources.

5. Shows decisive action

- a. Demonstrates that the district recognizes the urgency of its fiscal and operational challenges and is acting responsibly.

Cons

1. Less time for deep community engagement

- a. A faster timeline may limit the depth and breadth of dialogue with staff, families, and community partners.

2. Higher emotional impact

- a. The process may feel rushed, which can create frustration and stress even when the rationale is sound.

3. Less time for transition planning

- a. Transportation, boundary changes (if any), program placements, and staffing adjustments must be managed more quickly.
- b. Risk of implementation gaps increases under a compressed timeline.

4. Potential perception of predetermined outcomes

- a. Even with transparency, some may feel the district made decisions too quickly.

5. Limited time to explore creative alternatives

- a. Childcare partnerships, reimagined program placements (e.g., virtual school, charter options), or grade-band configurations may require more design time than an expedited process allows.
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"Walk" — Extended Process (Decision for Fall 2027)

Pros

- 1. More comprehensive community engagement**
 - a. Allows families, staff, and community partners (city, childcare providers, nonprofits) more time to participate meaningfully.
 - b. Builds broader understanding and collaboration.
 - 2. Expanded opportunity for creative solutions**
 - a. More time to evaluate uses for facilities.
 - b. Allows the district to develop and refine multiple scenarios.
 - 3. Smoother operational transitions**
 - a. Transportation routes, staffing changes, program placements, and facility adjustments can be planned with more care and collaboration.
 - b. More time to mitigate disruption for students.
 - 4. Better alignment with long-term vision**
 - a. A longer process provides opportunities to connect the facilities plan with strategic goals, academic priorities, and enrollment projections beyond two years.
 - 5. Reduces community stress**
 - a. Slower pacing may feel more respectful and thoughtful to families and staff.
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Cons

- 1. Delays potential cost savings**
 - a. Waiting until 2027–28 to implement consolidation postpones financial relief for one additional year, which may slow the district's fiscal recovery timeline.
 - b. Further exacerbated with revenue uncertainty.
 - 2. Prolongs uncertainty**
 - a. Staff, students, and families may experience more anxiety over a multi-year discussion period.
 - b. May impact staff recruitment and retention during the interim.
 - 3. Risk of compounding enrollment decline**
 - a. Community perception of instability over a longer timeline may influence families' enrollment decisions.
 - 4. Could require additional short-term reductions**
 - a. If cost savings from facility changes are delayed, the district may face continued or additional cuts in staffing, programs, or days in the interim years.
 - 5. Longer process can become more complex**
 - a. The extended timeline may introduce shifting conditions (enrollment, legislation, budget changes), requiring the district to repeatedly update and recalibrate the plan.
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Next Steps

Beginning next week, the district will launch a brief survey for staff focused on *process*. Specifically, we will ask whether—when engaging in discussions about potential school consolidation or closure—it is more beneficial to run or to walk:

- “Run”: Move through the analysis and decision-making process within a matter of months, determining whether a school should be closed for the 2026–27 school year, which would consolidate enrollment and resources as early as fall 2026.
- “Walk”: Engage in a longer, more detailed process with expanded community involvement, culminating in a potential consolidation decision for the 2027–28 school year.

A similar survey will be sent to families next week to ensure we gather broad input from across the district.

This feedback will be compiled and shared with the Board during the **December 11 board meeting**, at which time the district will bring forward a final recommendation and ask the Board to determine the preferred timeline and process.

Additionally, the district will provide more information about enrollment, facilities, and any additional information the board would request that is available at that time.

Summary

In conclusion, this proposal is meant to begin a thoughtful, structured process for the board’s consideration. We want to acknowledge openly that no one enters this work eagerly. These conversations are difficult, uncomfortable, and heavy—because they involve our schools, our people, and the future of our community.

Yet it is our responsibility to engage in this process with honesty, transparency, and care. While none of us wants to be weighing options like these, we also know that responsible leadership requires us to examine every possibility with clarity and courage.

As the board moves forward—reviewing these options, gathering information, and listening closely to staff, families, and community members—it will be essential to keep the human impact at the heart of every discussion. The feelings, questions, and concerns that arise are real, and they matter.

Even in the midst of difficult decisions, our commitment remains the same: to support our students, staff, and families every step of the way and to communicate openly throughout this process.

