



August 20, 2024

Gwen Carman, Superintendent
Lewiston-Altura Public School District, ISD #0857-01
100 County Road 25
Lewiston, MN 56438

Dear Superintendent Carman:

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, requires a review and comment statement on the educational and economic advisability of your proposed school construction project. Information supplied by your school district and from Minnesota Department of Education sources is the basis of this review and comment. With this positive review and comment, voter and school board approval is required for Lewiston-Altura Public School District, Independent School District #0857-01, to proceed with the proposed projects.

The district shall publish a summary of the review and comment statement (the final two pages) in the legal newspaper of the district at least 48 days, but not more than 60 days, prior to holding a referendum for bonds or soliciting any bids for the construction, expansion, or remodeling of an educational facility. The department may request a statement certifying the publication, and require the submission, review, and approval of preliminary and final construction plans.

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, requires the commissioner to include comments from residents of the school district in the review and comment. As of the date of this letter, no public comments have been received. In addition, Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, ***requires the school board hold a public meeting to discuss the review and comment prior to the date of the bond referendum election.***

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, ***requires that a school district, prior to occupying a new or renovated facility after July 1, 2002, must submit a certification prepared by a system inspector to the commissioner and the building code official that will provide an occupancy permit.*** The certification must verify that the facility's installed or modified heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system operates according to design specifications and code, a system for monitoring outdoor airflow and total airflow of ventilation systems has been installed, and any installed or modified heating, ventilation, or air conditioning system provides an indoor air quality filtration system that meets ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) Standard 52.1.

If you have any questions, please contact Cathy Erickson, Director of School Finance, at 651-582-8391 or catherine.erickson@state.mn.us. Thank you for working with us to improve school facilities for Minnesota students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Willie L. Jett II'.

Willie L. Jett II
Commissioner

cc: Brein Maki, School Board Chair

Enclosure

**The Commissioner of the Department of Education
Review and Comment on the School Construction
Proposal of Lewiston-Altura Public School District, ISD #0857-01**

A review and comment must be provided on a school district construction project proposal before the district conducts a referendum, solicits bids, or issues bonds for the project. A project proposal has been submitted for review and comment according to requirements set forth in Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, subdivisions 9 and 10, and Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.72. The district provides the following information:

1. The geographic area and population to be served:
 - a. preschool through grade 12 student enrollment for the past five years, and
 - b. student enrollment projections for the next five years.
2. A list of existing school facilities:
 - a. by year constructed,
 - b. their uses, and
 - c. an assessment of the extent to which alternate facilities are available within school district boundaries and in adjacent school districts.
3. A list of specific deficiencies of the facility:
 - a. demonstrating the need for a new or renovated facility to be provided,
 - b. the process used to determine the deficiencies,
 - c. a list of those deficiencies that will and will not be addressed by the proposed projects,
 - d. a list of specific benefits that the new or renovated facility will provide to students, teachers, and community users served by the facility.
4. A description of the project, including:
 - a. specifications of site and outdoor space acreage,
 - b. square footage allocations for classrooms, laboratories and support spaces,
 - c. estimated expenditures for major portions of the project,
 - d. estimated changes in facility operating costs, and
 - e. dates the project will begin and be completed.
5. A specification of the source of project financing, including:
 - a. applicable statutory citations,
 - b. the scheduled date for a bond issue or school board action,
 - c. a schedule of payments, including debt service equalization aid, and
 - d. the effect of a bond issue on local property taxes by property class and valuation.
6. Documentation obligating the school district and contractors to comply with the following items:
 - a. Minnesota Statutes, section 471.345 governing municipal contracts,
 - b. sustainable design,
 - c. school facility commissioning under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.72, certifying the plans and designs for heating, ventilating, air conditioning and air filtration for an extensively renovated or new facility meet or exceed current code standards, including ASHRAE air filtration Standard 52.1,
 - d. American National Standards Institute (ANSI) acoustical performance criteria, design requirements and guidelines for schools on maximum background noise levels and reverberation times,
 - e. state fire code,
 - f. chapter 326B governing building codes, and
 - g. consultation with affected government units about the impact of the project on utilities, roads, sewers, sidewalks, retention ponds, school bus and automobile traffic, access to mass transit and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists.

Description of Proposed School Construction Project

Lewiston-Altura Public Schools, ISD #0857-01, is proposing a two-question referendum on November 5, 2024. After running a three-question ballot on November 7, 2023 and being unsuccessful, the district conducted a post-referendum survey and district residents indicated they should rerun the referendum portion, and offer a building construction and improvement question that was under \$20 million. This would require project reductions of around \$19,000,000.00. With this information, the district has approved a 2-question ballot based on the district survey results. The first ballot question is an operating referendum that would generate \$760 per Adjusted Pupil Unit with a renewal of \$52 and an increase of \$708 with an annual inflation factor for a ten-year term. This is the same ballot question proposed on November 7, 2023.

The next question authorizes bond proceeds to be used for construction, remodeling, and deferred maintenance needs. Question 2 would authorize \$19,950,000 in bonding authority for a twenty-year period. The question focuses on improvements to both the elementary and high school including, some electrical, plumbing, hardware, security and entrances, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, spaces in the high school will be remodeled to include Career & Technical Education (CTE), wrestling, dance, music and community use space, other site improvements, including a new parent pick up area.

Changes from the 2023 ballot, after receiving the post-referendum survey, include not addressing parts of the 2023 proposed additions that include music, media, receiving and general storage, elementary playground improvements, electrical panel upgrades, additional building envelope repairs and a new bus garage to support the storage and maintenance needs of 8-10 vehicles. Removing these items, and others, enabled the district to propose a question under \$20 million as indicated by the survey.

The following shows the breakdown of projected costs associated with this project:

Question #2	
Elementary	
Additions	\$ 233,231
Renovations	\$ 1,887,055
Deferred Maintenance	\$ 1,531,058
Site Work	\$ 738,416
Technology/FF&E	\$ 184,484
Contingency & Escalation	\$ 207,393
Project Soft Costs	\$ 613,472
Total:	\$ 5,395,109
High School	
Additions	\$ 672,805
Renovations	\$ 4,704,236
Deferred Maintenance	\$ 6,297,661
Site Work	\$ 338,710
Technology/FF&E	\$ 80,100
Contingency & Escalation	\$ 548,310
Project Soft Costs	\$ 1,621,913
Total:	\$ 14,263,735
Other Costs	
Capitalized Interest	\$ -
Bond Issuance	\$ 437,500.00
Total Other Costs:	\$ 437,500.00

Lewiston-Altura Public Schools began the process of strategic planning in the summer of 2021. A community task forces was very active and outlined three major areas for consideration, the closure of the Altura Intermediate site, an operating referendum increase, and a bond for building and site improvements. The school board took action to close the intermediate site at the end of Fiscal Year 2023, which is projected to provide operational cost savings of approximately \$255,000. The task force, along with feedback from community surveys and engagement, led the district to propose the 2-question construction-based requests, with the first question focusing on core building and site improvements, and a separate question to consider the auditorium and gymnasium conversion and construction.

The operating referendum is intended to address general operational and education needs, but if passed, would help to support the additional operational costs needed based on the potential improvements. The district is aware that should the construction question pass but the referendum is unsuccessful, a deep look into operational budgets will be required to maintain and support the new project, even with the costs savings derived from the building closure.

The district provided enrollment projections and there is recognition that declining enrollment is a factor, but those projections were taken into consideration and it was determined that the district would still need space for two sections per grade in addition to the community based priorities outlined in the referendum question. The pandemic played a large part in district reserves being used to maintain programs and services, and the district acknowledges that operational changes may be required if enrollment continues at the lower rates.

The community driven priorities collected after the November 2023 ballot, along with unanimous board support has led the district to propose the building bond question along with an operating referendum to address annual operational and educational funding needs. The proposal appears to be in the long-term best interest of the district, with acknowledgement that funding adjustments and considerations may be needed pending the outcome of the operational budget analysis and operating referendum in FY26 and beyond.

If the bond referendum is successful and bonds are sold, the debt service on the bonds will be eligible for debt service equalization under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.53, subdivision 3, if the bond schedule is approved. The amount of debt service equalization aid, if any, the district receives is determined annually and is dependent upon property wealth, student population, and other statutory requirements.

Review and Comment Statement

Based on the department's analysis of the school district's required documentation and other pertinent information from sources of the Minnesota Department of Education, the Commissioner of Education provides a positive review and comment.

Additional Information is Available

Persons desiring additional information regarding this proposal should contact the school district superintendent's office.



Willie L. Jett II
Commissioner

August 20, 2024