

## **Introduction**

On June 20th of this year, the Board of Trustees made a significant decision that set us on a path towards a brighter future. They requested the administration conduct a comprehensive rightsizing study of our school district, all in the pursuit of ensuring that we are delivering the best possible education to our students and serving our communities to the fullest. Today, I will share with you the results of that study but also the journey that brought us to this pivotal moment.

The Board made its resolution informed by two long-term trends. The first was declining enrollment due to a combination of decreasing birth rates and a lack of housing affordable to families with school-aged children.

The second was a reluctance to reduce the number of schools as our enrollment declined. As a result, San Antonio ISD currently operates a higher number of buildings per student compared with similar school districts across the region and the country.

The Board was deeply concerned about the consequences of these two trends, which resulted in a growing and unintended inequitable distribution of our resources among our students. This inequity extended far beyond financial matters; it also affected our human resources and, most importantly, the quality of education we provide.

These challenges served as the background for initiating the rightsizing study, highlighting the need to re-evaluate and optimize our district's resources in light of changing demographics and the evolving needs of our students.

The Board's resolution called on me and my team to take five specific steps before arriving at a Final Recommendation:

- Develop a decision-making framework that would guide our analysis and decisions.
- Share the framework with our school staff and community, seeking their valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement.
- Make an Initial Recommendation for Rightsizing that used the revised Rightsizing Framework.
- Present the Initial Recommendation to the school staff and community, once again inviting their input and collaboration.
- Prepare a Final Recommendation that incorporated feedback and insights from the engagement process.

## **Neighborhood Meetings and the Recommendation**

Since the Board's resolution was passed, we have rigorously and purposefully followed through on the Board's direction. We should all be grateful for the unwavering dedication our staff put into this effort. They have given their heart and soul to this important work.

Immediately after the resolution passed, we began developing a draft Rightsizing Framework. This framework is the tool we would employ to assess facility use in all of our schools. Modeled after tools used by other school districts, our framework not only considers statistical facts of our schools, but also the unique contextual factors that define them and the values we cherish as a school district *familia*.

In August, once the Rightsizing Framework was drafted, we spread out across our neighborhoods hosting fourteen meetings to gather invaluable feedback. Based on this feedback, we revised the Rightsizing Framework, and then applied it to develop our Initial Rightsizing Recommendation. We presented it to the Board on September 18 and then immediately embarked on a second phase of community engagement. This second round involved 23 additional neighborhood meetings, located mainly at the affected schools.

In addition to these neighborhood meetings, we held numerous other meetings with various stakeholders including neighborhood associations, faith-based groups, the San Antonio Alliance and the Schools our Students Deserve Coalition, state, county and local elected officials, the Growth and Development Committee and the many other superintendent's advisory committees and councils, and the *Always Learning* Children's Cabinet.

In total, we have spent 146 days, which amounts to nearly five months, developing, presenting, discussing and deliberating over our recommendation. The neighborhood meetings alone drew more than 3,200 signed-in participants, 61 percent of whom identified as community and 33 percent of whom identified as school staff. We also extended several meetings through Zoom, attracting another 595 unique viewers. During the second phase, we collected questions through a "back channel" technology, allowing participants to write down thoughts rather than offer them directly to the room. Through that method, we gathered and answered more than 450 more questions. We recorded every meeting, collected and answered every question, and posted it all on the Rightsizing website, creating a rich record of the entire process and serving as a vital source of information that informed our deliberations.

This community engagement led to a thorough re-evaluation of our recommendations, including some substantial adjustments to our initial proposals, as you will see shortly. It is essential to emphasize that these modifications are firmly grounded in the established framework, ensuring that our decisions align with the established criteria and priorities.

By highlighting these many conversations and engagements, we underscore the collaborative nature of this rightsizing study and the genuine commitment to incorporate the concerns and hopes of our students, school staff, and community as we finalized it.

We hope that the community understands that while closing schools is a difficult decision, it is absolutely necessary for the academic and financial sustainability of our district. We must prioritize what is best for our students in the long term over immediate desires. This journey is not just about numbers and budgets; it's about creating a more equitable, inclusive, and thriving educational environment for all

our students. Together, we can shape a brighter future for our district and the young minds we are privileged to nurture.

### **The Final Recommendation**

In preparing our Final Recommendation, we reconsidered each proposal offered in our Initial Recommendation. We evaluated them using the Rightsizing Framework, taking into account feedback and changes proposed during the community conversations. Each proposal was then subjected to one of four choices: it was either withdrawn from the Final Recommendation, withdrawn and modified, modified, or sustained without changes.

The Final Recommendation includes two *withdrawn* proposals; two *withdrawn and modified* proposals; seven *modified* proposals, and fourteen *sustained* proposals.

Let's begin with the two withdrawn scenarios, where we removed schools from the list of proposed closures:

**Collins Garden Elementary School** will remain open. Although there were several schools with significant amounts of unused space in the area surrounding Collins Garden, we acknowledged that Collins Garden was the elementary school with the highest enrollment recommended for rightsizing. We also took into account that more neighborhood students are choosing to enroll at Collins Garden, than those who are choosing schools outside their neighborhood, and to allow space for a growing immigrant population in that community. As such, it reflects its importance in the community. We initially believed that the highway posed a significant inconvenience and barrier for families. However, during the community meeting, we discovered that the railroad tracks were actually considered a more hazardous obstacle.

By choosing to keep Collins Garden open, the district remains committed to carrying out bond-funded facility renovations for this historic building. While this investment is substantial, it may not be of a scale that can entirely transform the structure into a modern 21st-century campus. However, we have received feedback from the community indicating their understanding and acceptance of this situation.

**Pershing Elementary School** will remain open. Although Pershing met two of the three primary criteria, we withdrew its proposal for two interrelated reasons. First, because the Sam Houston High School feeder pattern has experienced the highest rates of enrollment decline, the Initial Recommendation proposed a proportionally larger number of closures in that region. Upon further consideration, we decided to keep Pershing open to minimize further disinvestment in a neighborhood already grappling with challenges and to allow space for a growing immigrant population in that community. In addition, keeping Pershing open would have less impact on other Rightsizing scenarios in the neighborhood. By not closing Pershing, the district will continue operating three small elementary schools in the neighborhood, Cameron, Washington and Pershing.

The next two scenarios were withdrawn and resulted in modifications of the current conditions at the schools. These changes have been made with the belief that they will result in more effective use of the facilities and promote a more equitable distribution of resources for our students.

**Ogden Elementary School** will remain open and co-locate with Rodriguez Montessori Elementary School. Its facility has been recently renovated. Following suggestions offered at community meetings, we determined that it would make more effective use of the space to co-locate another school in the same building. We chose Rodriguez because it's experiencing growth, maintains a waiting list, and primarily serves students from across the district through our choice program. In Ogden, Rodriguez will continue to offer the West Side of San Antonio a Montessori choice that embraces the community's dual language heritage.

**Riverside Park Elementary School** will remain open and receive students from Green Elementary School. This decision was based on two fundamental reasons. First, by closing Riverside Park and sending their students to Japhet, we would have made the newly redesigned Japhet Elementary School over 900 students, a number that would have approached or exceeded the schools design capacity and made it the largest elementary school in San Antonio ISD. This substantially larger enrollment would have compounded traffic problems already experienced at the school. Second, by welcoming the students from Green, we bring a larger student body to Riverside Park. This solution was proposed by school staff and families at community meetings, who urged us to take into account that the two schools have a history of collaboration on academic, student and family services.

In addition, **Green Elementary School** will close and send students to Riverside Park in 2024-25. As we reconsidered Green, we recognized that the school had the smallest enrollment of San Antonio ISD's elementary schools, making it the most expensive elementary school in the district to operate on a per pupil basis. Sending its students to Riverside Park will help increase enrollment at Riverside Park, which is also under-enrolled, creating operating efficiencies and offering families and students in both communities more robust academic programs. This recommendation also takes into consideration the history of collaboration between the two schools.

Finally, **Bonham Academy**, a school with a waiting list and where the campus is overcrowded, will expand by using the Green facility, allowing them to address family demand for that school. Students from the Green neighborhood will be given enrollment priority at Bonham Academy.

Let's move on to the remaining modified scenarios. In these seven cases we are making specific changes to their initial proposals. In developing these changes, we relied on the Rightsizing Framework, as well as specific suggestions offered at neighborhood meetings by families, community members or school staff.

**Baskin Elementary School** will not proceed with the initial recommendation for closure in the 2024-25 school year. During the Baskin neighborhood meeting, parents and school staff voiced concerns about

housing students in portable classroom spaces at Maverick while waiting for the completion of expanded classroom facilities at Maverick. In response to these concerns, we suggest postponing the closure until the proposed expansion wing at Maverick is fully completed, which is expected to take at least two years.

The next three modified scenarios will focus on the neighborhood supported by Martin Luther King Academy. As the result of enrollment increases due to this set of rightsizing decisions, the district will be able to maximize bond investments into a fully renovated 21st century school facility at the Martin Luther King campus. While the renovations at MLK are exciting, they will move faster if there are no students on-site during construction. In the interest of giving students the opportunity to move into that new facility as soon as possible, current MLK students will be temporarily housed at the Gates campus.

**Carroll Early Childhood Center** will remain open until bond-funded renovation at ML King is complete, at which point it will close, and its students will transition to the new facility.

**Gates Elementary School** will close and send its students to ML King in 2024-25. ML King, including students from Gates will temporarily be housed at the Gates facility in 2024-25 and remain at that facility until the bond-funded renovation of the ML King campus is finalized.

**Miller Elementary School** will close and send students to their respective attendance areas at either MLK at Gates or Smith in 2024-25. Considering that MLK will offer a dual language program, bilingual students attending Miller from the MLK, Gates, and Hirsch attendance areas will have the opportunity to continue their education within a vibrant dual language program at the MLK school, which will be temporarily located at the Gates campus. These students will transition to the new ML King building once the construction project is successfully completed.

**Foster Elementary School** will close in 2024-25 and send its students to Schenck, Ball and Highland Hills Elementary Schools. During the 2024-25 school year, Schenck will undergo bond-funded renovations. While these renovations are in progress, Schenck will temporarily move to the Foster building and accommodate the students assigned to Schenck from Foster. Once the construction is successfully completed, Schenck's students will then transition to the newly reconstructed Schenck building.

The **Highland Park Elementary School** will close and send students to Japhet and Highland Hills in 2024-25. Highland Hills and Japhet are more recently updated facilities, and more families are choosing those schools compared to Highland Park.

**Steele Montessori Academy** will relocate in 2024-25 to a facility to be determined after further community engagement, particularly in light of the decision to keep Riverside Park open. In the course of community engagement we learned that the educators and community at Steele were open to

relocating at campuses other than Riverside Park. It also allows the Steele community to consider their facility options as they decide on a suitable location that can accommodate families on their waiting list.

In addition, we also reconsidered each of the following fourteen proposals and sustained them, keeping them the same.

We will close our four early childhood education centers to offer families early childhood services at their neighborhood elementary schools. Further review of enrollment data taught us that our students in our early childhood centers were less likely to continue with neighborhood elementary school options than students who attended early childhood and kindergarten at their home school. This means that **Tynan, Knox, and Nelson** Early Childhood Centers will close in 2024-25. It also means that **Gonzales** Early Childhood Center will merge with Twain Dual Language Academy in 2024-25, allowing Twain to expand its enrollment in its early grades. And as described previously, **Carroll** Early Childhood Center will close when the facility renovation at M L King is complete. By relocating our early childhood education services in our neighborhood elementary schools, we will be better able to offer all of our youngest students a more full continuum of services and a seamless education experience from an earlier age.

**Beacon Hill Academy and Cotton Academy** will merge in 2024-25, forming a single PK-8 Academy under a single administration. By combining, the two smaller schools will see a substantial increase in academic program staff and resources, enabling them to improve services to students and families, especially for students in the middle years programs. In reconsidering this proposal, we took into account a wide range of alternatives, but none could better accommodate the middle years students from both schools. Neighboring middle years options (Rogers Academy, Woodlawn Academy and Mark Twain Dual Language Academy) are limited and already fully enrolled.

**Douglass Elementary School** will close and send students to Herff Elementary School in 2024-25. Douglass, one of the district's smallest elementary schools, met all three primary criteria. It is under enrolled and enrollment has been declining. In addition, it is an underused, very small facility and has among the highest elementary costs per pupil in the District. Given their close proximity and low and declining enrollment, Douglass and Herff are likely partners for a school consolidation. Herff is a larger facility on a larger campus, making Herff the better of the two campuses to grow. Because of its unique legacy in San Antonio's education history, the district is committed to repurposing the Douglass space in a manner dedicated to honor and commemorate the rich African American educational heritage in San Antonio.

**Forbes Elementary School** will close and send students to Highland Hills and Ball Elementary Schools in 2024-25. Forbes meets all three primary criteria. It is among the lowest enrolled, most under-used facilities, and most expensive elementary schools in the District. In addition, Forbes has one of the highest rates of families choosing to leave to attend other schools in the district. The receiving school, Highland Hills will receive major renovations and an addition under Bond 2020. The Forbes student body is small enough to move into Highland Hills even when the construction project is underway.

**Huppertz Elementary School** will close and send students to Fenwick Academy and Woodlawn Hills Elementary School in 2024-25. Huppertz meets two of three primary criteria. It has low enrollment that declined significantly since 2018 and is underused as a facility. Woodlawn Hills and Fenwick Academy are more suitable to receive students from Huppertz because they have more robust enrollment and facility use. Both also offer International Baccalaureate instructional programming, which is currently offered at Huppertz, so students will be able to continue that experience without interruption. Students who do not wish to continue with the IB program may go to Madison Elementary.

**Japhet Academy** will be redesigned, becoming a PK-5 in 2024-25. Its middle years students will move to Hot Wells Middle School in 2024-25. This recommendation will allow better use of the recently renovated Japhet facility, which is better suited for elementary grade students and to provide enhanced academic offerings for middle year students in grades 6 to 8. It will also create space for students from Highland Park.

**Lowell Middle School** will close and send students to Kelly Academy at Lowell in 2024-25. Both Lowell and Kelly are relatively small, under-enrolled schools. Kelly meets two of the primary criteria, with low enrollment and exceeding the average cost per pupil. However, it is a small facility and other elementary schools within three miles will be well-enrolled if other rightsizing recommendations are approved. Lowell meets all three primary criteria. The Lowell facility, however, is larger and better suited to become a PK-8 academy that serves the neighborhood. To accommodate all of Kelly's younger students, Lowell will require some updates. In the interim, younger students can be accommodated at the Kelly facility. Given the "neighborhood school" aspect of both Kelly and Lowell and the lack of geographic barriers in the neighborhood, the consolidation of Lowell into Kelly is a practical and viable recommendation.

**Lamar Elementary School** will close and move to Hawthorne Academy in 2024-25. Despite Lamar experiencing a slight increase of 19 students this year, its current enrollment of 316 falls short of the 350-student threshold. Moreover, the historical waitlist data for Lamar reveals significantly lower demand compared to other highly sought-out choice schools.

Over the past five years, the yearly average number of students on Lamar's waitlist has remained at 42, a figure significantly lower than those for other schools such as 888 at ALA, 366 at Bonham, 226 at Rodriguez, 419 at Steele, and 415 at Twain. Additionally, Lamar's enrollment is small and constrained by its facility, making it one of the most expensive elementary schools in San Antonio ISD on a per-pupil basis. The planned bond projects are primarily focused on common spaces, such as the cafeteria and auditorium, and will not increase building capacity. If these conditions are allowed to persist, Lamar is at risk of remaining one of the most disproportionately costly elementary schools in our district for the foreseeable future.

In addition, only one-third of the school population comes from the neighborhood.

**Storm Elementary School** will close and send students to Barkley-Ruiz and Sarah King in 2024-25. Storm meets two primary criteria; it has low enrollment and under used the facility. Families are “choicing out” of Storm at a higher rate than other schools in the region. The Storm facility is also in less desirable condition than either of the campuses that will receive Storm Elementary students. This decision will increase Sarah King and Barkley/Ruiz enrollment to levels the schools experienced in the mid-2010s. We recognize that at community meetings, families and staff at Storm proposed partnering with Ogden, another school in the Si Se Puede partnership. Nonetheless, it's important to note that the distance to Ogden exceeds the 2-mile radius criteria outlined in the framework. However, parents interested in enrolling their students at Ogden can take advantage of our transfer policy and will be given priority.

**Washington Elementary School** will be redesigned, making it a PK-5 like the district’s other elementary schools. This unique configuration had many disadvantages, the most important being diminished academic program offerings for 6th graders, a critical year in a student’s academic story, and creating a challenging transition to seventh grade.

**CAST Med High School** will co-locate with another school affiliated with their partner and to be determined through a public process. This will maximize the utilization of the state-of-the-art school facility located on the growing Brooks development.

## **Conclusion**

If approved, our proposal will result in a major transformation of our great school district.

From the moment the Board Board of Trustees passed its Resolution to the presentation of this Final Recommendation, we all understood the gravity of the work. We have reached back to this district’s proud past with the hope of making a positive difference for our future – one where our schools, our staff, our families and our students are more likely to thrive.

We are glad that we spent as much time as we did in dialogue with our community as we prepared this Final Recommendation. We learned many, many things, and we have incorporated some of it into our work. Above all, we learned how much the community cares about and loves their schools and the people who work in them.

Our schools touch the lives of thousands – not just the students and staff, but families and neighbors, and ultimately our well-being as a community. That is why the changes we propose to our schools are met with powerful emotions – anger or hope, sadness or contentment.

As we navigate these forward, let us all keep this in mind: every decision we make is driven by a shared commitment to a brighter future for our students, families, and the entire community. While change can sometimes be challenging, it is also an opportunity for growth, improvement, and progress.



These shifts in our educational journey are not just about closing doors but opening new ones. They represent the chance to create more equitable, efficient, and responsive learning environments for our students. Together, we are building a foundation for the dreams and aspirations of the next generation.