

Closing McKenny, Madison, and LP Brown: the facts

Recruitment, not closure, is the answer.

The Olympia School District proposes closing McKenny, Madison, and LP Brown elementary schools at the end of this school year to save about \$3.1 million a year. The board votes on **November 12, 2026**. Everything below comes from the district's own budgets, studies, and meetings.

The money

- **This year's budget is balanced.** The 2026-27 budget runs a \$720,000 surplus. There is no financial emergency.
- **The gap ahead is small.** The district's adopted forecast shows spending exceeding revenue by about \$400,000 a year from 2027-28.
- **The reserve already meets district policy.** The 2026-27 budget ends with \$8.4 million in reserve, 4.4% of spending, inside the 3-7% range district policy sets. The 6-7% targets came from staff, not the board.
- **The closures mainly build the reserve.** The financial model shown to the board on Feb. 26, 2026 was built to cut until the reserve reached 7%. On Sept. 24, staff described a much larger gap, about \$3 million a year, but have not published numbers showing it.

The enrollment

- **Elementary enrollment is falling across the district.** The decline arrived after 2020 at nearly every school, not just these three.
- **Mostly, fewer families are choosing district schools.** Births for this fall's kindergartners were about 10% lower than for the 2019 class, but kindergarten enrollment fell 31%. The difference is families choosing private school, homeschool, or other options.
- **The students exist.** Had the district kept its pre-2020 share of local births, this fall's kindergarten would have had 110-155 more students. Families still join at every grade, including about 19 more a year at 6th grade since COVID.
- **Outreach already works.** Transfers in from other districts rose from 400 to 719 in three years, which the superintendent credited to signs and social media, with no recruitment plan or budget.
- **Births will fall further from 2028.** Planning for some decline makes sense, but the district's forecast assumes it never wins families back.

The path forward: recruit first

- **Close the small gap with the district's own options.** Boundary changes, ending reliance on portables, and other options from the district's plans are estimated at \$0.65-0.75 million a year.
- **Recruit 50 more students a year.** Each student brings about \$14,800 in state funding. With recruitment, the reserve would reach about 6% by 2030-31 without closing a school, about a year behind closure at realistic savings (estimate).
- **Set targets and test them fairly.** The board can adopt yearly enrollment and reserve targets, keep the three schools open while recruitment is tested, and revisit closure only if the targets are missed. A closed school is hard to get back.

What closing would mean for kids

- **Crowded receiving schools.** Receiving schools would grow 24% to 55%. At realistic K-3 class sizes, Centennial and Garfield would be at or over capacity and Pioneer and Roosevelt nearly full.
- **Common spaces built for smaller schools.** The district's facilities plan warns that expanded schools may have undersized hallways and gyms.
- **Higher-need students carry the most.** The plan raises the number of students attending majority low-income schools from about 570 to about 900. Hansen and Garfield take the most students, and Garfield takes four special education and preschool classrooms.
- **About 110 children who walk to school today would ride buses.**

- **Research does not show these closures improve learning.** Closures like these usually bring a short-term setback that falls hardest on high-need students.

What the district has not done

- **Give an accurate picture of closure.** The closure report overstates what closure saves and understates what it costs. It budgets \$50,199 a year to maintain three closed buildings (we estimate \$150,000-260,000), adds no custodians for 43 newly filled classrooms, rests its transportation savings on no route analysis, and assumes every displaced student stays. On Oct. 8 the district put its own low end at about \$2.24 million; adding the costs it still leaves out, net savings are more likely \$1.3-2.0 million a year than \$3.1 million (our estimate). A Stanford study of California closures (Pearman, 2026) found that revenue fell about as much as spending, leaving district budgets no better off.
- **Involve the community first.** State law requires citizen involvement before the board considers closing a school. District policy has no such step, the same problem that voided the 2023 closure vote. The 2023-24 committee does not count: that process ended in 2024, and LP Brown was not part of it.
- **Meet a neighbor's standard.** Bellingham, closing a school this year under the same law, convened a 34-member task force that met eight times in public and published a 154-page analysis for one school. Olympia's report covers three schools in 39 pages.
- **Cost any alternatives.** The closure report lists options but puts no dollar figure on any of them.
- **Keep its own promises.** In February the board committed to an equity lens, to showing class-size effects, and to evaluating impacts on student learning. None of that is in the closure report.
- **Get its numbers to agree.** District documents give different enrollment, savings, and portable figures.

What we are asking the board

Remove the closure vote from the November 12 agenda until the process is complete, **or** vote no. Either way, the board should first require the district to:

1. **Document citizen involvement** for this specific proposal, as state law requires.
2. **Publish the budget gap** with and without closures, in the same format as the adopted budget.
3. **Cost at least three alternatives**, including boundary changes and options from the district's own plans.
4. **Adopt a recruitment plan** with a lead, a budget, and yearly targets, keeping the three schools open while it is tested.
5. **Complete the analysis the board promised in February:** a review of the research on closures, reading and math effects by student group, projected class sizes at each receiving school, a costed support plan for Hansen and Garfield, transportation effects, and a record of translated closure materials.

How to get involved

Date	Event
Mon., Oct. 12, 6 p.m.	Public hearing: McKenny
Thu., Oct. 15, 6 p.m.	Public hearing: LP Brown
Mon., Oct. 19, 6 p.m.	Public hearing: Madison
Thu., Nov. 12	Board vote

- Speak at a hearing, or email all five directors and ask that your comments go in the record.
- Bring a neighbor. Every hearing is a separate chance to be heard.
- Contact board members:
 - o [Jess Tourtellotte-Palumbo: jtourtellottepalumbo@osd.wednet.edu](mailto:jtourtellottepalumbo@osd.wednet.edu)
 - o [Maria Flores: mflores@osd.wednet.edu](mailto:mflores@osd.wednet.edu)
 - o [Renee Fullerton: rfullerton@osd.wednet.edu](mailto:rfullerton@osd.wednet.edu)
 - o [Gilbert Lamont: glamont@osd.wednet.edu](mailto:glamont@osd.wednet.edu)
 - o [Hilary Seidel: hseidel@osd.wednet.edu](mailto:hseidel@osd.wednet.edu)

Full report, data, and sources: emersoncodeprojects.github.io/olympia-closures