

# **Preliminary written summary for the proposed closure of Wainwright Elementary School**

April 20, 2011

## **Introduction**

Due to a dramatic cut in state funding for K-12 education and the end of temporary federal economic stimulus funding, Tacoma Public Schools faces a budget shortfall of approximately \$23 million for the 2011-2012 school year. In addition, the district faces additional shortfalls estimated at \$17.5 million and \$16 million the following two school years.

As a result of these projected shortfalls, the district developed a three-year budget strategy. For the 2011-2012 school year, that strategy includes the following recommendations:

- Cut administration and operational expenses
- Through negotiation with the Tacoma Education Association, seek an increase in class sizes at elementary grade levels of one student per class
- Eliminate approximately 56 positions and cut funding for programs previously funded by federal economic stimulus funds or other one-time funding sources
- Close low-enrollment elementary schools

## **Enrollment Trends**

Enrollment in Tacoma Public Schools has declined by 4,000 students since 2001.

At the elementary school level, enrollment declined by more than 1,600 students during the same time period. That leaves the district with capacity for approximately 3,000 more students in 37 elementary schools than are currently enrolled today.

## **Rationale to Close Wainwright Elementary School**

To identify schools for potential closure, Tacoma Public Schools first looked at elementary schools with the lowest enrollment – below 300 students. The initial list of low-enrollment elementary schools included Franklin, Lyon, McKinley, Roosevelt, Stanley and Wainwright.

Low-enrollment schools typically operate at the highest cost-per-student. The following chart identifies the schools with the lowest 2010-2011 enrollment and projected 2011-2012 enrollment:

# Elementary enrollment

## - Low enrollment schools

Schools	Student FTE Oct 2010	Student FTE Oct 2011*	Student Variance
McKinley	227	219	(8)
Franklin	258	250	(8)
Wainwright	283	289	6
Stanley	285	275	(10)
Lyon	290	284	(6)
Roosevelt	298	294	(4)

\* Projected if no consolidations

In a comparison of elementary school operating costs for 2009-2010, Wainwright Elementary operated at a cost of \$9,683 per student for 235 students – well above the district average of \$8,255 per student among all elementary schools. Since then, the number of students enrolled at Wainwright Elementary has continued to decline.

During initial discussion of potential school closures with the School Board, some board members indicated a preference for avoiding multiple school closures in the same area of the city.

Administration representatives convened focus groups of elementary school principals from various areas of the city to look at enrollment trend data and discuss school closure options. One focus group of principals identified Wainwright as a candidate for closure.

Additional criteria considered during the evaluation process included age and condition of facilities, availability of space at nearby schools to easily accommodate additional students, ease of relocation of special education or other specialty programs and other potential uses for the school facility.

Wainwright represents one of the oldest schools in the district. Its history dates to 1911, although the oldest portions of the current school facility – which does not meet federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements – date to 1924 with improvements made in 1954, 1957 and 1971.

Of Wainwright's current enrollment, just 106 students of its students live within the Wainwright attendance area boundaries.

## **Effects of Proposed Closure of Wainwright**

The closure of Wainwright Elementary will require the reassignment of students who attend there. The relocation plan includes:

- Shifting the entire population of Wainwright students who live in the school's attendance area to nearby DeLong Elementary. All of these students will receive bus transportation to and from school. Parents of these students will have the option to transfer their child to any other elementary school with space available; however, they will have to provide their own transportation to and from school.
- Reassigning students who have optionally enrolled into Wainwright back to the school in whose attendance area they live. These students will receive bus transportation to and from that school unless they live closer than 1 mile from school and have no hazardous streets to cross. Parents of these students will have the option to transfer their child to any other elementary school with space available; however, they will have to provide their own transportation to and from school.
- Relocating the SAIL program for highly capable students to Point Defiance Elementary School. All of these students will receive bus transportation to and from school.

If the district closes Wainwright, the district will go through a process of evaluating other potential district uses for the facility, including program relocations or retention as a swing school site. In the absence of district uses, the School Board could identify the facility as surplus to the district's needs. The surplus process requires a series of steps that, ultimately, could conclude with the sale of the property.