Uintah Middle School Proposed Closure: Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

Why is the district proposing the closure of Uintah Middle School?

Uintah School District has experienced declining student enrollment over the past decade, a trend that is projected to continue for the foreseeable future. Because much of the district's operating revenue is tied to student enrollment through the state's Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) funding formula, declining enrollment results in reduced funding. With the current WPU valued at $4,870, the district's loss of 1,011 students since 2018 represents approximately $4.9 million in reduced annual funding.

Additionally, the Board voted to significantly reduce property taxes in 2021 and 2022, resulting in a combined reduction of approximately $4.7 million in annual revenue available for capital improvements and facility maintenance.

In response to these financial challenges, the district has reduced staffing by 29 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions over the past two years, generating more than $2.3 million in annual savings. These measures have allowed the district to maintain a stable financial position despite declining revenue.

The proposed closure of Uintah Middle School (UMS) would generate an estimated $1.9 million in annual operating savings and avoid more than $12 million in projected capital expenditures over the next five years. These savings would help the district manage declining revenue, maintain its other school facilities, and strengthen its long-term financial stability. The savings would also provide the Board with greater flexibility to consider other priorities, including reducing class sizes in elementary schools.

Ultimately, the proposal is intended to align the district's facilities and expenditures with current and projected enrollment while preserving resources to support high-quality educational opportunities for students well into the future.

Why now? What is driving the timing?

The timing of this proposal is driven by two primary factors: declining student enrollment, which creates an opportunity to consolidate the district's middle schools, and the significant cost of maintaining the aging UMS building.

First, the combined enrollment of 7th and 8th grade students from both middle schools is projected to fall below the capacity of Vernal Middle School (VMS) for the first time next year and will continue declining each year thereafter. This provides the district with an opportunity to realize savings of approximately $1.9 million annually beginning with the 2027–2028 school year.

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Second, UMS was built in 1955 and requires extensive ongoing maintenance, and several major projects are planned for the next maintenance cycle. Closing the school after the current school year would allow the district to redirect those capital funds to other campuses.

Why is enrollment declining, and what is the district doing about it?

Student enrollment is declining in school districts across Utah and much of the nation. During the 2025–2026 school year, every school district in Utah experienced declining enrollment, with districts collectively losing approximately 2.4% of their students. Two primary factors are contributing to this trend: declining birth rates and increasing enrollment in charter schools and other educational options.

While the district cannot control birth rates, it recognizes and respects the importance of providing families with choices about their children's education. Charter schools and other educational options play an important role in meeting the diverse needs and preferences of families.

The district's response is to focus on what it can control: providing a high-quality education and meaningful opportunities for every student. Among Utah's 41 school districts, Uintah ranked third in overall academic growth between the 2018–2019 (pre-pandemic) and 2024–2025 school years. Although statewide comparison data for 2025–2026 was not available at the time of this analysis, Uintah students achieved their strongest academic performance to date on the spring 2026 RISE assessments in grades 3–8, along with strong results on the ACT Aspire assessments in grades 9 and 10.

Beyond academics, Uintah schools offer a wide range of opportunities for students to explore their interests and develop their talents through fine and performing arts, career and technical education (CTE), athletics, and other curricular and extracurricular activities.

The district is committed to providing a positive, engaging, and well-rounded educational experience in which students can thrive academically and socially while developing the knowledge and skills necessary for productive citizenship and lifelong learning. By continuing to strengthen the quality of education and opportunities available in its schools, the district aims to remain an attractive choice for families in the community.

What are the local enrollment trends, and how is future enrollment projected?

Overall enrollment in the Uintah School District has declined by 14.3% since 2018, an average annual decrease of approximately 1.9%.

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Future enrollment projections begin with the Oct. 1 enrollment count for each grade level at every school. Those numbers are then advanced to the next grade level for the upcoming year. New kindergarten enrollment is estimated using local live-birth data for the incoming kindergarten class, adjusted by the historical ratio of kindergarten enrollment to births.

This methodology has been consistently accurate in projecting overall district enrollment. Enrollment at individual schools may occasionally vary from projections due to other factors; however, overall projections have remained reliable.

For statewide enrollment trends, see the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) news release issued Oct. 22, 2026:

USBE News Release: Utah Public Schools Enrollment Decline, 2026–2027

How much funding has the district lost annually from the state as a result of declining enrollment since 2018?

District enrollment declined by 1,011 students between 2018 and 2026. Based on the 2026 WPU value of $4,870 per student, this represents approximately $4.9 million in lost annual revenue.

How can the district be certain the population will not increase, given the current price of oil and the local economy's reliance on energy production?

The district cannot predict future population changes with certainty, particularly given the community's reliance on the oil and gas industry. However, the district uses historical enrollment trends, birth rates, and other available data to make reasonable projections about future enrollment.

Recognizing the potential for unexpected population growth, the superintendent is recommending that the Board consider mothballing the UMS building for at least five years. Mothballing involves closing the building while maintaining it at a basic level so that it can be reopened if needed. This approach would give the district five additional years to monitor birth rates and enrollment trends, providing a clearer picture of future facility needs before a permanent decision is made about the property.

Maintaining the building would provide a cost-effective safeguard against unexpected enrollment growth, particularly if increased activity in the oil and gas industry leads to a significant population increase. Preserving the option to reopen UMS would allow the district to respond to changing enrollment needs without immediately investing in new school construction.

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How much will it cost the district annually to operate UMS at its current and projected enrollment?

The UMS operating budget for the 2026–2027 school year is approximately $5.67 million. A significant portion of these costs, including teacher salaries, would transfer to other schools along with students. The district estimates that closing UMS would generate approximately $1.9 million in annual operating savings. A more detailed breakdown of UMS-specific costs and costs that would transfer to other schools will be available later in the study process.

The Decision Process and Public Feedback

Has the decision already been made?

No. The Board has committed to considering all information provided by district administrators, school administration and staff, school community council members, and the public before it votes on the proposal. The Board will accept public comment on the proposal on the following dates:

- Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.: Regular Board business meeting at Eagle View Elementary
- Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2026, at 6 p.m.: Public hearing at Uintah Middle School
- Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2026, at 6 p.m.: Regular Board business meeting at the district office

A public comment form is also available on the district website for individuals who wish to provide written feedback. Contact information for Board members is available on the School Board page of the district website.

The Board will also accept public comment before voting on the proposal during a special business meeting at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2026, at the district office. The meeting will be open to the public.

Are the parts of the proposal being analyzed separately (UMS closure, realignment of middle and elementary schools, Dual Language Immersion expansion, etc.)?

The proposal to close UMS is directly connected to the proposed realignment of the district's middle schools and the return of 6th grade to the elementary schools. These components are being considered together. If the Board votes to close UMS, the action would also include approval of the middle school realignment and the transition of elementary schools from a K–5 to a K–6 configuration.

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If the Board approves these changes, the district would then have 60 days to study potential adjustments to elementary school boundaries, with the goal of balancing enrollment across the district's elementary schools.

The potential expansion of the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program would be evaluated as part of that boundary study. If the study identifies sufficient need and community support for expanding DLI to another elementary school, the Board may consider that option when reviewing proposed boundary changes.

At this time, DLI expansion is a possibility being explored rather than a formal proposal. It would be studied only if the Board approves the school reconfiguration, and it would be considered separately from the UMS closure decision as part of the subsequent elementary boundary review.

Will the Board seek an independent review of the proposal and study findings before deciding?

After reviewing the district's study, supporting data, and recommendations, the Board may determine whether an independent review is necessary before making a final decision.

Under Utah Code § 53G-4-402(24)(e), a school board must approve a school closure before Dec. 31 of the calendar year preceding the school year in which the closure would take effect. If the Board chooses to pursue an independent review and the process delays its decision beyond Dec. 31, 2026, the proposed closure would be postponed until at least the 2028–2029 school year.

Will the public get to see school-by-school projections for enrollment, capacity, and class sizes before the Board votes?

Yes. Enrollment projections based on current school boundaries will be made available, along with information related to building capacity and class sizes.

Will the Board see all online public feedback in its original form?

Yes. Board members will be provided with the original responses to the online public comment form, as well as an executive summary and sentiment analysis of the responses, to review before making a decision.

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The UMS Building and Property

Have repairs and updates been made at UMS in the same manner as at other schools?

Repairs and updates have been made at UMS on a regular basis, and the building remains in relatively good condition considering it was constructed in 1955. Like all district facilities, UMS requires ongoing maintenance and periodic repairs to keep the building safe and functional.

However, several major building systems are approaching the end of their useful lives and will require replacement within the next few years. These include the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system—including boilers, chillers, air handlers, and controls—as well as flooring throughout the building. Based on estimates updated since the study began on Sept. 21, 2026, these improvements could cost more than $12 million over the next five years.

Maintaining one fewer large school building would allow the district to redirect resources toward maintaining and improving its other schools, helping the district manage rising facility maintenance costs without the need to increase property taxes.

Why is the condition of the UMS building a concern when VMS is also an older building with unreinforced masonry?

Both UMS and VMS are included on the state's list of buildings with unreinforced masonry, which can present structural safety concerns, particularly during an earthquake. Neither building has undergone a comprehensive structural evaluation to determine its current condition or seismic vulnerability.

However, there are important differences between the two buildings. VMS was constructed in 1965 and underwent significant renovations in 2008, including additions built with reinforced masonry. In comparison, UMS was constructed in 1955 and was last extensively renovated in 2004.

While both buildings have potential structural concerns, VMS is newer and has undergone more recent renovations that included reinforced masonry construction. Furthermore, the VMS building is larger and can accommodate more students. These differences are important considerations in evaluating the district's long-term facility needs.

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What will happen to UMS and the property it sits on if the district closes the school?

No decision has been made regarding the long-term future of the UMS building and property. The superintendent is recommending that the Board consider mothballing the main building for at least five years, preserving the option to reopen it if needed.

This approach would give the district five additional years to monitor birth rates and enrollment trends before making a permanent decision about the property, while providing a cost-effective safeguard against unexpected enrollment growth.

The Board would retain the authority to make decisions about the property's future at any time. Under the current recommendation, the main building would be mothballed while the grounds would remain open to the public. The blue buildings located west of the main building would continue to be used for youth wrestling and conditioning programs, as well as the district's special education program for adult students.

While the main building is mothballed, the district would provide basic maintenance and security to preserve the facility, maintain the appearance of the property, and keep the building in a condition that would allow it to reopen if future enrollment needs justify doing so.

Capacity and Class Sizes

How will VMS accommodate UMS's 7th and 8th grade students when only one grade (6th grade) is moving out?

Beginning with the 2027–2028 school year, 6th grade students would attend elementary schools, while all 7th and 8th grade students would attend VMS. Although UMS students would be moving to VMS, the combined enrollment of both schools is projected to remain within the building's capacity.

Based on the Oct. 1 enrollment count, combined 7th grade enrollment from both schools is projected to be approximately 438 students, with another 444 students in 8th grade. This would result in a total projected enrollment of 882 students at VMS, compared to the building's capacity of 900 students. These figures do not include 7th and 8th grade students who will attend Eagle View Elementary, which will remain a K–8 school.

Under these projections, VMS would operate at approximately 98% of its capacity during the 2027–2028 school year. Enrollment is projected to continue to decline in subsequent years, providing additional space within the building over time.

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How will class sizes at VMS be kept manageable?

Uintah School District allocates staffing and funding to schools based on projected student enrollment. Middle schools are staffed using a student-to-teacher ratio of 27:1 for 7th grade and 28:1 for 8th grade, a standard the district has maintained for many years.

School administrators and counselors will monitor class sizes during registration and throughout the school year to ensure classes remain manageable. Adjustments to course offerings and the number of class sections can be made each trimester to accommodate student needs and enrollment changes.

Combining seventh- and eighth-grade students into one school will also provide greater flexibility in scheduling. With more sections of the same courses available at each grade level, counselors will have more opportunities to balance enrollment across classes. This flexibility will also make it easier to adjust individual student schedules when needed.

Which elementary schools will take on more students under the anticipated boundary changes?

If the Board approves moving 6th grade back to elementary schools, Davis, Naples, Ashley, Maeser, and Lapoint elementary schools would each take on more students; whereas Discovery would see a drop in enrollment. The boundaries of the five Ashley Valley elementary schools would be adjusted to balance enrollment. Lapoint and Eagle View Elementary School boundaries would remain unchanged.

Under the proposed plan, each of the five Ashley Valley elementary schools would serve approximately 535 students in grades K–6, leaving room for additional students within existing building capacity. Projected building utilization is as follows:

- Ashley and Maeser: 71%
- Davis and Naples: 69%
- Discovery: 76%
- Lapoint: 33%

These are preliminary projections and may change as plans are finalized.

<u>Students: 6th Grade Instruction, Athletics, and Special Education</u>

What would 6th graders gain or lose under the proposed instructional model?

As part of the study, district leaders and elementary principals are examining how different 6th grade models could fit into an elementary setting while maintaining strong

instruction, intervention, and student support. This includes exploring opportunities in career and technical education (CTE), computer science, physical education, and the arts, along with how those opportunities may differ from current 6th grade offerings. The district will also study multiple instructional models to identify what best meets the needs of 6th grade students, whose instructional day may look different from that of 5th grade or other elementary grades.

What extracurricular activities would be available to 6th graders under the proposed model?

Sixth grade students competing in wrestling and cross-country will continue to compete in the same manner as in past years.

How would the proposal affect middle school sports teams, and what impact would it have on high school teams?

Under the proposed middle school realignment, athletic and extracurricular programs would be consolidated into a single-school model. The goal is to maintain meaningful opportunities for students to participate in athletics and extracurricular activities while adapting programs to the new school configuration.

For volleyball and basketball, the district is exploring the possibility of creating larger grade-level teams with A and B team schedules. This approach would provide more students with opportunities to participate in games, including opportunities to start and receive meaningful playing time.

Students participating in wrestling and cross-country would continue to compete in much the same way they have in previous years. Additionally, the district is working with Uintah Special Service District 1 (USSD1) to expand recreational athletic opportunities for middle school students. Programs such as dance, football, and soccer would continue to be available through community-based organizations.

While the structure of some middle school athletic programs may change, the district remains committed to providing opportunities for students to develop their athletic skills, gain competitive experience, and prepare for participation in high school athletics.

Will students with IEPs receive all their required minutes?

When a student qualifies for special education, service needs and minutes are determined by the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Special education services follow students regardless of location. Staffing allocations are determined based on student-to-staff ratios, teacher caseloads, and the complexity of student support needs.

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UMS Staff and Jobs

Will UMS teachers and staff keep their jobs, or will there be a reduction in force?

Staffing ratios for teaching and administrative staff at all schools will continue to be determined by student enrollment. Building size is also a factor for classified and non-contract positions. All positions are affected by local, state, and federal funding. Attrition—including retirements, resignations, and nonrenewals—also affects the need to reduce staffing or positions. Ultimately, the Board will determine whether a reduction in force is necessary.

What happens to employees on contracts and to non-contract employees?

All staffing decisions will be made collaboratively, with input from district and school administration, and in accordance with district policy:

- USD Policy 005.0900 Assignments and Transfers
- USD Policy 005.0310 Reduction in Force

Will test scores and teacher evaluations at the middle schools be used to decide teaching and administrative staffing?

All staffing decisions will be made collaboratively, with input from district and school administration, and in accordance with district policy:

- USD Policy 005.0900 Assignments and Transfers
- USD Policy 005.0310 Reduction in Force

Student Safety and Transportation

With only one middle school, how will the district protect students who need to be kept apart from another student, or who changed schools because of bullying?

Supportive measures can be implemented at the school level to manage interactions between specific students, consistent with current practice. Uintah School District also offers flexible educational options, including Uintah Online, Ashley Valley Education Center, and dual enrollment.

Will students who live near UMS be offered busing to VMS?

Transportation eligibility will be based on the distance from a student's home to VMS. Under District Policy 009.0100, secondary students who live within 2 miles of their

assigned school are in the parent responsibility zone, where families provide transportation.

How will the district ensure the safety of students who must cross US-40 to reach VMS?

The district's Transportation Department has recommended a limited number of courtesy stops on existing bus routes serving affected areas. This approach would allow students to reach VMS without walking across US-40.

The recommendation could include one designated courtesy stop per affected route, with UMS as a potential location. The Transportation Department would determine whether to add courtesy stops and where to locate them.

How will the district address increased traffic around VMS during drop-off and pick-up times?

The district will work with school administrators, law enforcement, and Vernal City officials to develop safe and efficient drop-off and pick-up procedures. Traffic patterns will be monitored, and adjustments will be made as needed to minimize congestion and keep students safe.

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