



2026

Facilities Referendum

VOTE BY APRIL 7

Ensuring a Future for Our Middle School: Why Change is Needed

Whitefish Bay Middle School has served our community well as a community center and school since 1918. However, after over a century of use, and multiple additions, the building's infrastructure, accessibility, and site constraints have reached a critical point. Following a comprehensive facilities assessment, staff input, and an evaluation of current instructional needs, the District has determined that constructing a new middle school is the most responsible path forward.

Key Challenges Facing the Current Facility

The facility assessment completed in 2023 highlights several significant areas of concern that impact daily operations and the student experience:

1. Accessibility and Safety: The current building does not meet modern ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards, creating barriers for students, staff, and community members.

- **Physical Barriers:** Many areas, including classrooms, bathrooms, and offices, are inaccessible due to difficult level changes and poor clearance.
- **Inaccessible Interior:** Significant level changes and inadequate clearances in high-traffic areas, including classrooms and restrooms, restrict the independence and movement of individuals with mobility needs.
- **Lack of Sprinklers:** The building is not equipped with an automatic fire sprinkler system, and the existing water service is insufficient to support one in a renovation.

2. Aging Infrastructure and Maintenance: The building is showing signs of widespread wear, with many core components having reached or exceeded their expected service life.

- **Mechanical & Electrical:** While some recent upgrades have been made (such as LED lighting), other critical systems, including the public address system and older electrical panelboards, are nearing end-of-life or present safety concerns like potential arc flash hazards.
- **Building Envelope:** Exterior brick, mortar, windows, and roofing are in fair-to-poor condition, leading to ongoing maintenance costs and inefficiencies.



- **Interior Wear:** Flooring (tile and carpet), ceilings, casework, and interior doors are significantly aged and damaged.

3. Plumbing and Drainage: The building’s plumbing system is in poor condition, with piping that is largely past its life expectancy. This includes outdated systems in unrenovated areas, inefficient hot water delivery, and storm/sanitary piping that needs replacement.

4. Site Limitations

- **Insufficient Space:** At only 2.57 acres, the site is significantly smaller than the recommended 9.1 to 17 acres for a middle school of this size (624 students). Proximity to the High School campus provides middle school students with expanded facility access, compensating for limited site acreage.
- **Drainage & Paving:** There are persistent issues with ponding and drainage against the building, and the pavement shows noticeable cracking and heaving.

Key Challenges Facing the Learning Environment

The current Whitefish Bay Middle School, the evolution of 100 years of piecemeal additions, is no longer functionally adequate. The building’s design actively hinders student supervision, modern teaching practices, and whole child development.



1. Barriers to Student Supervision: The fragmented layout prevents effective monitoring, creating significant safety concerns.

- **Lack of Sightlines:** Key areas, including the cafeteria, locker bays, and grade-level commons, cannot be fully supervised from a single vantage point.
- **Poorly Situated/Inaccessible Facilities:** Student restrooms are isolated and distant from occupied classrooms, complicating staff supervision; some spaces (like the old gym, restrooms, and building exits to the blacktop/playground) are not accessible to students with mobility needs.

2. Antiquated Learning Environment: Teachers have difficulty implementing active and collaborative learning.

- **Mismatch with Modern Standards:** Small classrooms, inflexible layouts, obstructing pillars, and fixed furniture constrain the group-work dynamics essential for current instructional practices.
- **Rigid, Mazelike Infrastructure:** The building’s convoluted layout cannot be simply reconfigured to support the transition from lecture-based learning of the past to student-centered learning.

3. Incompatibility with “Whole Child” Development: The building’s architecture interferes with the district’s mission to support the social, emotional, and creative growth of students.

- **Exploratory Limitations:** Specialized programs, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and Art, are housed in spaces that lack the necessary square footage and infrastructure for modern tools, collaboration, and project-based learning.
- **Social Development Obstacles:** Middle school students require space to build social skills; however, the crowded, windowless, and inadequately sized cafeteria, stifles these vital social connections.

Why replace rather than remodel?

While the District has provided diligent upkeep, the building's age and inherent design flaws have reached a point where routine maintenance and minor repairs are no longer sufficient. Renovating the existing facility to meet current standards would prove more costly and time-consuming than a full replacement. Furthermore, a multi-year renovation would significantly disrupt student learning, whereas a new build offers a more seamless transition.