

# Anchorage School Board passes budget with closures and significant staff cuts

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Anchorage School District Superintendent Jharrett Bryantt, left, listens to School Board President Carl Jacobs as he spoke during the Anchorage School Board meeting on Tuesday. (Bill Roth / ADN)

Facing a \$90 million deficit, the Anchorage School Board on Tuesday passed a budget for next school year that increases class sizes, reduces hundreds of staff positions, closes schools and cuts popular educational programs.

Board members avoided some of the most unpopular cuts proposed by the district by amending the budget to reinstate most sports, some middle school teachers and most school nurses.

“These difficult reductions do not reflect our aspiration as ASD,” Superintendent Jharrett Bryantt said. “This budget purely reflects the difficult reality of the real world impacts of declining enrollment, rising costs and funding uncertainty.”

The budget passed by board members cuts the IGNITE program for gifted students, increases class sizes by four students per grade level and cuts eight nurses and nearly 50 middle school teachers.

The budget will also close Campbell STEM, Fire Lake and Lake Otis elementary schools at the end of the current school year.

Cuts were also made to counselors, principals, library assistants and district administrators.

Elementary specialists teaching music or art were also reduced, and those classes will be combined next year.

Students, parents and teachers waved signs outside the district office building ahead of Tuesday's meeting in support of programs they hoped would be spared. Families once again packed the school board chambers, and additional spectators watched from the building lobby.



School nurses show support for retaining positions during Tuesday's Anchorage School Board meeting. (Bill Roth / ADN)



Campbell STEM supporters waved signs before the Anchorage School Board meeting on Tuesday. (Bill Roth / ADN)

Board members voted to spend down district savings accounts last year to avoid many of the same budget cuts they were faced with this year.

Anchorage School District officials presented the initial budget proposal last month, saying the district fell \$90 million short of what it would cost to provide the current level of service to schools next year due to declining enrollment, rising labor and health care costs and years of inflation. Officials say the district already faces a \$42 million deficit for the 2027-28 school year.

However, some of the cuts approved Tuesday may be reversed. While the district cannot raise revenue before next school year starts, more funding may be headed to Anchorage schools later this spring.

Anchorage voters will decide whether to approve an additional \$11.8 million for the district in April. Board members on Tuesday passed an amendment that would use that money to effectively cut the class size increase in half by reinstating 80 teachers and three kindergarten paraprofessionals, if Proposition 9 passes.

Even though the budget would cut nearly 300 teaching positions, district officials said they will wait until after the April election to lay off teachers.

There has also been discussion of additional money from the state this year, but many board members do not anticipate the Legislature will pass a significant funding increase for schools this session.



Anchorage School District Chief Financial Officer Andy Ratliff, left, speaks about the budget during the Anchorage School Board meeting on Tuesday. ASD Deputy Superintendent Sven Gustafson is seated at right. (Bill Roth / ADN)



Anchorage Mayor Suzanne LaFrance, center, attended the Anchorage School Board meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026. (Bill Roth / ADN)

The board approved two budget amendments from School Board President Carl Jacobs and member Kelly Lessens that reinstated all sports except gymnastics and esports, and added some teachers and nurses back into the budget. As part of the recommendations to reduce the cost of providing sports, athletes will not have buses provided to games within Anchorage next year.

Currently, the district's budget allocates one nurse for each school building. The budget passed by board members moves to a "regional model" for school nurses by splitting the district into six regions. Groups of nurses will be assigned to each region.

The board voted 4-3 to close Campbell STEM, Fire Lake and Lake Otis elementary schools. Families in the audience were emotional after learning their schools would close. Children and parents cried while hugging each other, others slammed chairs and doors as they left the room.

Board member Dave Donley questioned whether the district met legal notice requirements to the local community council for closing Campbell STEM.



People show their support for Fire Lake Elementary School in Eagle River during the Anchorage School Board meeting on Tuesday. (Bill Roth / ADN)

“It’s not necessary at this moment in time to do these school closures, and there are other options available,” Donley said. “I’m just very, very concerned that we’re in a very, very legally questionable area here because we’re supposed to follow municipal law and I think there’s a strong case that we’re not.”

Donley and member Pat Higgins proposed several amendments that would have kept Campbell STEM open, but each of their five attempts were voted down by the board. The school closures were reintroduced this month after board members initially voted against closing Fire Lake and Lake Otis in November, following pushback against the planned move of programs for special needs students. Fire Lake and Lake Otis serve only about half as many students as they were built to hold. Administrators recommended closing Campbell STEM due to mechanical issues in the building.

“The desperation is real,” Lessens said. “We cannot meet all of our students’ needs at this point in time with the budget that we have been given with the footprint that we have with the way our students are spread out.”

Once Campbell, Fire Lake and Lake Otis close at the end of the school year, the district will have closed eight schools in the last 10 years.