

West's future may involve closing three schools

By [Tim Wagner](#)
STAFF WRITER

AURORA — Discussion began this week about the future restructuring of the West Aurora School District when an architect presented four options to the Board of Education.

Though plans are at the earliest stage, one idea remains consistent in all four proposals: Lincoln and Nicholson elementary schools and Todd Early Childhood Development Center would close. Students there would be channeled to other schools in the district. With the closing of three schools, most existing ones would be renovated or expanded to accommodate more students, and school boundaries likely would need to be restructured.

Such renovations and expansions would require the passage of a construction bond referendum, and the earliest one could appear on the ballot is April 2008, said Kevin Wegner, the district's assistant superintendent for finance.

West first is considering a referendum that would ask voters to support a 45- to 50-cent tax rate increase to maintain current programs and services. Results of a recent survey, completed by 1,300 residents, indicated that 46 percent would vote "yes," while 17 percent are undecided. Given the data, Superintendent Jim Rydland said it would be "too premature" to ask voters to pass a referendum in November, and the district would be better suited to wait until April 2007.

One theme that came from the survey was that the community wants to be informed of all plans and decisions and expects complete honesty from the district.

"Community members expect us to be responsible, practical and frugal," Rydland said.

"Feedback (from residents) will make a difference on how we make our decisions and, ultimately, what decisions we make."

At this week's School Board meeting, Pat Callahan — project principal at Gilfillan Callahan Architects — presented four options that could steer the future of the district.

One calls for the addition of a new K-8 school on the "Prairie Property," which is south of Washington Middle School. Another possibility is building a new middle school on the Prairie Property, hence turning Washington into an elementary school. One more calls for building a new elementary school to accommodate students who normally would have attended Lincoln or Nicholson.

Options for the Todd students include moving the early childhood center to either West High School, the new elementary school or possibly Jefferson Middle School. There has been prior discussion of converting Jefferson into a freshman or senior academy.

Lincoln (built in 1892), Todd (1934) and Nicholson (1938) are among the oldest schools in the district, and a recent audit indicated each facility would require major renovation to keep the learning environment safe and the buildings operating efficiently.

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