



The Hidden Cost of Education: Are Administrative Salaries Undermining Student Resources?

Before We Close Schools, Let's Talk About Administrative Spending

As parents, taxpayers, and community members, we all want what's best for our children—and that starts with ensuring their schools are fully supported. But right now, our district is heading down a dangerous path: cutting school resources and closing campuses, all while administrative costs continue to balloon.

Our district is filled with overlapping positions, many of which serve similar purposes but are split among multiple employees. We've created layers of bureaucracy where one efficient role could replace two—or even three—existing positions. In fact, we currently have three separate positions that could reasonably be consolidated into one, without sacrificing effectiveness.

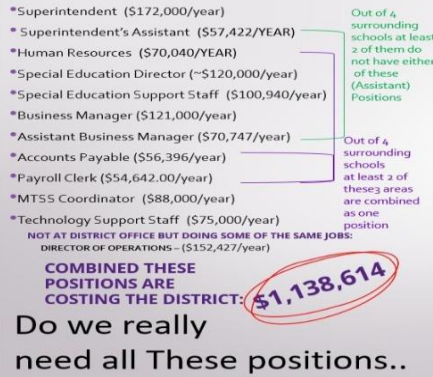
What's even more concerning is the sheer cost of these roles. The combined cost of our District Office and Director of Operations alone exceeds \$1,138,614. That's a staggering figure—especially as we face budget shortfalls and declining enrollment.

And it doesn't stop there.

Our district superintendents and principals are earning 19% more than the state average, raising serious questions about how taxpayer dollars are being allocated. Meanwhile, surrounding districts operate effectively without the volume or cost of high-paid assistant positions that we seem to be multiplying year after year.

If enrollment is declining, why are we adding more administrative positions instead of scaling back? How does it make sense to consider closing schools and disrupting students' lives, before we've even addressed the inefficiencies at the top?

This is a call for transparency, accountability, and common sense. Before we ask our children and their teachers to sacrifice, let's take a hard look at administrative spending. It's time to prioritize classrooms—not boardrooms.



Reassessing Staffing: Why Do We Need More Teachers for Social Studies, Science, and English Than Math?

As our district continues to face budget constraints, it's time to take a closer look at how our resources are being allocated. One glaring area of concern? The staffing levels at Community Middle School, particularly when it comes to the teaching staff for core subjects.

Currently, the school is operating with three math teachers to cover the entire student body. That's right—three math teachers are handling all the students in a subject that's a critical foundation for academic success. But here's the question: if three teachers can manage the math curriculum for the entire school, why does the district employ five Social Studies teachers, five Science teachers, and four English teachers?

At first glance, this staffing structure doesn't seem to add up. The class sizes are similar across all subjects, yet the staffing levels for subjects like Social Studies, Science, and English are disproportionate. Shouldn't all four core subjects—Math, English, Science, and Social Studies—have an equal number of teachers, especially when each subject is taught to the same group of students?



If we were to bring staffing for Social Studies, Science, and English in line with the Math department—by reducing each department to three teachers—we could save the district approximately \$461,372 per year.

That's a significant amount of taxpayer money that could be reinvested into classrooms, student resources, and other educational initiatives.

Of course, we don't want to compromise the quality of education. But when it comes to balancing fiscal responsibility with effective teaching, it's worth asking: are we overstaffed in some areas, while underfunded in others?

As enrollment declines, we need to carefully consider whether we are maximizing our resources in the most efficient way possible. There's no reason why one department should be overstaffed while others struggle to meet student needs. Equalizing the teacher-to-student ratio across all subjects would ensure fairness in staffing and save a substantial amount of money, all without negatively impacting student learning outcomes.

It's time to make sure our priorities are aligned with our students' needs—starting with the way we allocate resources in the classroom.



INSIGHTS AND INTERESTS



Why Are We Holding Onto Vacant Properties During a Financial Crisis?

Our school district is currently facing a serious financial crisis—but while programs are being cut and resources stretched thin, the district continues to hold onto eight unused properties. This includes four vacant parcels of wooded, tillable, and swamp land, as well as four empty residential lots on the west side of town.

Combined, these properties are estimated to be worth around \$570,000—a figure that could make a significant difference in stabilizing our schools and supporting students and teachers.

So the question is: Why are we holding on to these assets when we so urgently need funding?

Selling these properties wouldn't solve every problem overnight, but it would be a meaningful step toward financial recovery. At the very least, the district owes the community a clear explanation for why these parcels remain unused and unsold.

It's time to re-evaluate our priorities. Our kids deserve better

ACRES	ADDRESS	EST MRK VALUE
14.5	Little Falls	\$96,400.00
39.83	710 13th St NW (LF)	\$99,200.00
14.26	15812 153rd St (LF)	\$62,300.00
40	Iris Road (LF)	\$189,700.00
	412 7th St SW (LF)	\$33,600.00
	404 7th St SW (LF)	\$44,800.00
	400 7th St SW (LF)	\$11,200.00
	413 7th St SW (LF)	\$33,600.00
		\$570,800.00
the top four properties host wooded acres, swamp land and tillable land, while the other four are vacant lots within the city!		

When Do the Needs of Students Outweigh the Wants of Staff?

As our school district faces a financial crisis serious enough to warrant closing a school building, tough questions must be asked—and answered.

Why, for example, has the district continued to spend over \$62,000 per year to maintain a separate business office for just 11 administrative staff? If enrollment is as low as officials claim, there should be more than enough space available within the high school to accommodate these positions. Consolidating offices into existing school buildings wouldn't just save money—it could also bring our administration closer to the heart of the district: our students and teachers.

What message does it send when we're closing schools while holding onto a standalone office building valued at an estimated \$581,600, plus an adjacent lot worth another \$38,000?

And it doesn't stop there.

The district also continues to hold on to a separate community service building, used part-time for gymnastics and housing just two staff members. That building alone could be sold for an estimated \$711,900. Is it really worth keeping a part-time facility when selling it could help fund programs, retain educators, or support student services?

It's time to prioritize what truly matters: the students.

Maintaining separate, costly facilities while classrooms are being shuttered and resources are stretched thin sends the wrong message. The district must begin weighing its wants against the community's very real needs. Because at the end of the day, the future of our students should come before the comfort of offsite offices



What's Really Behind the Closure of Dr. Knight Elementary?

In 2018, the district invested over \$3 million into upgrades for Dr. Knight Elementary—funded by a bond that taxpayers will be repaying until 2036. That's nearly \$172,600 per year, regardless of whether the school remains open or not.

Now, just a few years later, the district is planning to close Dr. Knight and let the building sit empty while continuing to make those annual payments. How does it make financial sense to keep pouring money into a vacant building?

The district claims the closure is necessary due to declining enrollment. This year's Pre-K class had just 14 students, and next year looks similar. But what they're not saying is that this drop in enrollment was manufactured by their own decisions. A district subcommittee quietly restricted enrollment at Dr. Knight to just three zip codes, while placing no such limits on other schools in the district.

If we're truly supposed to "look at the district as a whole," why was only one school targeted for limited enrollment? Why was Dr. Knight singled out?

The district boasts that closing the school will save money on staffing, but at what long-term cost? A school isn't just a building—it's a cornerstone of the community. It's where families gather, children learn, and neighborhoods stay connected. Closing it without transparency or equity in the decision-making process erodes trust.

It's time to question what the true intentions are behind the closure of Dr. Knight Elementary. Is this really about finances—or is it about phasing out a small-town school that some have decided no longer fits into their vision of the district?

Our students, families, and communities deserve better.

As the school board prepares to vote on the closure of Dr. Knight Elementary, the question that keeps echoing—yet never truly answered—is: What does this mean for our students?

If the board chooses to close Dr. Knight, more than 100 students will be uprooted and shifted into Lincoln and Lindberg Elementary Schools. But the district has already made it clear: there will be no additional support staff following these children into their new classrooms. In fact, they've stated that five paraeducator positions will be cut altogether.

Let that sink in—more students, fewer helping hands.

At the same time, teachers at Lincoln and Lindberg are being told they may lose their positions to incoming Dr. Knight staff members with more seniority. It's a game of musical chairs, but the stakes are far higher than just job security. This uncertainty, instability, and lack of transparency is affecting real people—dedicated educators, overburdened support staff, and most importantly, the children who depend on them.

**Class sizes will grow.
Support will shrink.
Students will suffer.**

Overworked teachers will have even less time to focus on individual student needs. Without enough paraeducators, teachers will be forced to pause lessons to handle behavioral needs, bathroom breaks, or assist students with special learning challenges—tasks that para staff were trained and trusted to manage.

This isn't just about numbers. It's about kids falling through the cracks.

Our students deserve better than being shuffled around to make space for cost-saving measures. They deserve consistency. They deserve attention. They deserve to feel like someone is fighting for their education.

We elected our board members and superintendent because we believed they would advocate for our students. We trusted them to put children first. But what we see instead are rising administrative salaries, new assistant positions being filled at an alarming rate, and a growing disconnect between those in charge and the daily realities in our schools.

While our students and teachers face overcrowded classrooms and dwindling support, district leadership remains tucked away in a separate, high-priced office building, far removed from the challenges and heart of our schools.

If the district truly values students—the very reason any of us are here—then they must prove it. That means re-examining priorities, not just slashing schools to make the budget look better on paper. That means putting students' needs above administrative comfort. That means making choices rooted in equity, transparency, and compassion.

This is our wake-up call. We need to stand up. Speak out. Ask the hard questions. Demand better—not just for Dr. Knight, but for every student who will be impacted by these decisions. Our kids only get one chance at a childhood. Let's make sure the adults entrusted with their education are worthy of that responsibility.

Transparency Questioned at April School Board Meeting Amid Enrollment Debate

A contentious discussion on transparency emerged during the recent April school board meeting, drawing attention to past decisions impacting enrollment at Dr. Knight Elementary School.

While the meeting began with a presentation on the definition and importance of transparency, many in attendance noted a stark contradiction as the evening progressed. During a discussion on declining student enrollment at Dr. Knight, board member Sharon raised a concern about the school's current zip code-based enrollment restriction, expressing confusion over when and why the policy was approved.

Though Sharon stopped short of formally requesting clarification, the moment presented a clear opportunity for Board Chair Doug Dahlberg to provide the transparency emphasized earlier in the meeting. Instead, no explanation was offered. Notably, the Board Chair did not disclose that the restriction had never been brought before the full board as a resolution, never voted on, never discussed in public meetings, and never recorded in meeting minutes.

Sources indicate that prior to the 2023–24 school year, the Board Chair established a subgroup that independently decided to limit enrollment at Dr. Knight Elementary based on residential zip codes—a decision made without broader board involvement or public disclosure.

Critics argue that withholding such decisions from the public and other board members undermines the very definition of transparency promoted by the board itself.

The superintendent later addressed the issue, stating that zip code-based enrollment practices are common in many districts, particularly to prevent schools from taking on more students with special needs than they can support. However, some parents and community members are questioning whether this rationale applies equitably across the district.

"Is that not a concern for all schools?" one parent asked. "What safeguards are in place to ensure that no school takes on more than it can handle—especially when it comes to students with special needs?" Historically, Dr. Knight Elementary supported two to three classes per grade level. That began to change after district-wide bussing restrictions were introduced several years ago. With the recent zip code limitations layered on top, the school has seen a further drop in enrollment—raising additional concerns about long-term viability and equity. As calls for greater accountability grow louder, it remains to be seen how the board will respond to mounting questions about how decisions are made and communicated to the public.



School District: Financial challenges are complex

JEFFREY HAGE
Morrison County Record

Difficult decisions lie ahead for the Little Falls School District where finances have been significantly affected by Minnesota's birth rates, enrollment trends within the school district, staffing costs and budget adjustments the District has made the past two years. Superintendent Greg Johnson gave a report at

the April 14 school board meeting as the District prepared for a now-completed community survey and prepares for an April 30 district-wide listening session. The State is projecting a \$6 billion deficit in two years, resulting in Gov. Tim Walz proposing cuts to special education, school transportation and the potential requirement for districts to take over

unemployment insurance, Johnson said. After cutting \$3 million from the budget for the past two school years, the School District established a task force to look at future budget challenges, as cuts in the State education budget could lead to even more financial challenges in the future. The majority of the \$3 million in reductions occurred in Little Falls buildings, Johnson said,

with no reductions being made at Dr. Knight Elementary School in Randall during the two-year belt-tightening cycle. In fact, additional nurse hours, additional media center hours and increased principal support were added at Dr. Knight Elementary, Johnson said. One suggestion that came out of the task force is closing Dr. Knight Elementary. While Johnson

stresses that no school closure decisions have been made by the school board, numbers have been crunched to illustrate the potential impact of the closure of the Randall school. If Dr. Knight closes, there could be potential savings of \$1.1 million, Johnson said. That figure includes potential staff reductions including: four to five teacher positions, a principal position, an

interventionist, four to five paraprofessionals, two custodians, two cooks and a secretary. Johnson noted again that his presentation emphasized that these were potential scenarios and no final decisions had been made about school closures. Historically, school enrollment has been

See FINANCE | PAGE 2

Finance/From 1 declining, Johnson said. That's relevant because school districts receive state education funding on a per-pupil basis. He shared data with the school board showing that in 2002–2003, the district had 3,022 students. By 2006–2007, enrollment dropped to 2,530, Johnson said. Currently, 2,300 students are enrolled in Little Falls School District schools. Further declines in enrollment could be on

the horizon. The State's birth rate fell nearly 21% between 2007 and 2022, Johnson said, dropping from 14.1 births per 1,000 people to 11.2 births per 1,000 people. Johnson noted that the State Demographer suggested a recent plateau in birth rates, which is likely a pandemic-related temporary blip. The demographer's office expects a continued decline in future years, Johnson said. Declining enrollment has significantly impacted Little Falls Schools, but

nowhere more than at Dr. Knight Elementary where next year's first and second grade enrollments are estimated at 14 students per class. Johnson used these numbers to illustrate the ongoing trend of declining enrollment at Dr. Knight Elementary. Also affecting the School District budget are the increasing costs of employee benefits including insurance. Health insurance costs increased 18 percent this year, Johnson said.

Articles from the Morrison County Record

Don't be fooled by the poor journalistic integrity of this article. They FAILED to mention that the reason there is an "ongoing trend of declining enrollment" at Dr. Knight is because of the -mysterious- ZIP CODE RESTRICTION that they put in place to limit enrollment in Randall. The school is SO tight-lipped about this mysterious zip code restriction that no one can seem to tell us why, when or even specifically who implemented this restriction. Just that it was put into motion several years ago - and has done just that - created a trend of declining enrollment. Because local families and students are being TURNED AWAY. Even families that live 2-3 miles outside of the Randall city limits - are being told NO.

THE DECK HAS BEEN STACKED IN FAVOR OF THEIR AGENDA
So please - do not believe all you read. And do your homework.

what can YOU do as a community member or district parent?

Attend the district "Listening" session

* Meeting to be Held April 30th, 7:00pm at Little Falls Community High School

* Stand with us and ask questions, speak at the session and tell the board your honest opinions and concerns about the decisions being made, and how they will affect ALL elementary students in district 482.

Attend the upcoming Board Meetings

* Monday May 12th, 6:00pm (held at Lindbergh Elementary PAC)
* Monday June 9th, 5:00pm

WATCH FOR ANY SPECIAL MEETINGS

DO YOUR RESEARCH /LOOK INTO THE DISTRICT

*ASK QUESTIONS

REACH OUT AND FIND INFORMATION AT:

*Our Facebook Page "Save Dr. Knight Elementary"
*Our upcoming website www.forum482.com
*Your board and superintendent

