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New Analysis of Lakewood City School District's Own Data Shows No Enrollment or Budget Crisis, and Raises Unaddressed Concerns About Traffic and Safety Issues That Conflict With City and District Goals

To help educate and inform the public, the parent-led group Friends of Lakewood Schools compiled the district's transportation, enrollment, and financial records into a single public analysis before the Tuesday, September 8, school board vote on a district-wide elementary overhaul

LAKEWOOD, Ohio, Sept. 4, 2026 — With the Lakewood Board of Education set to vote September 8 on reorganizing the district's elementary system, including closing an elementary school and effectively ending the neighborhood school model, Friends of Lakewood Schools has released an analysis built on the district's own records confirming that **no urgent district-wide change needs to happen and significant risks remain unaddressed**. This includes its enrollment study, its five-year financial forecast from the August 24 board of education meeting, its projected savings worksheet, and more—several of which were obtained through public records requests and have not been posted publicly or presented to the community as part of the case for the elementary overhaul, despite continued community requests.

Alongside those records and using the district's own provided data, the group conducted a transportation and safety analysis of the vote's potential outcomes. The full analysis includes routing every affected student's path to and from school along Lakewood's actual sidewalk network to measure what the proposal does to walking distances, street crossings, and impacts to city-wide traffic congestion and emissions.

"This discussion around consolidating our newly built elementary schools has been going on for more than two years. But very little coherent analysis or transparent information has been made available to the public, making it difficult for people to connect the dots to know what's really happening here," said Jeff McCourt, Friends of Lakewood Schools board member.

"It is unfortunate that so many community members have had to file public records requests to get basic information about major decisions our school board is making. But what has emerged is a clear picture of the very information the district should have developed and provided publicly years ago—and it refutes their current proposal and reasoning," continued McCourt. "We gathered what the district's own studies and forecasts actually say, added the transportation analysis the district skipped, and put it all in one place. Residents should read it and decide for themselves, but the district's own numbers don't describe a crisis, and they don't describe a plan that meets its own goals."

The parent-led group has previously documented that [the district advanced the plan without a written financial analysis and with a savings claim that dropped from roughly \\$1.5 million to about \\$600,000](#). The information here is designed to show the full picture of what the district's own data and projections show about the proposal and its impact, organized in three key areas: enrollment, finances, and transportation.

ENROLLMENT: The district's own consultant says the decline has stopped and numbers remain steady

One of the district's repeated reasons for closing a school is falling enrollment. The district's own enrollment consultant, FutureThink, found the opposite at the elementary level: elementary enrollment has stabilized after years of decline and has grown about 3.4 percent over the past five years, and birth counts in the district held

steady in 2022–2023, post-COVID. The consultant's own talking points to district leadership stated that the stabilization of elementary enrollment was the expected sign that the long decline had leveled off.

- Actual enrollment has outpaced the projections. The district's August 10, 2026, board meeting materials concede that 4,178 students enrolled this year—61 more than the consultant projected.
- Of the seven elementary schools, FutureThink projects Lincoln—the school slated for closure—as the one that holds its enrollment through 2034-35.
- Per the district's forecast, this year (2026-2027) has the largest kindergarten class since COVID.
- Ohio's official enrollment count for this year, the [state Report Card](#), will be released September 15—one week after the scheduled vote.

Supporting documents: [August 10, 2026 school board packet](#); [FutureThink Enrollment Study - Elementary Closure \(1.27.25\) \(pgs 29-32\)](#)

FINANCES: The district's own forecast shows a healthy budget, not an emergency

Prior to the school board's August 24, 2026, meeting, the board was presented with a five-year financial forecast, a public record that the group obtained but was never discussed publicly or posted to the school website containing such forecasts:

- This forecast does not describe a district under financial pressure. Due to the passage of the May 2026 levy, the forecast projects \$34.2 million in cash through 2031.
- With the new levy and the district's forecasted expense growth rate, Lakewood could operate the current school footprint through 2034 before needing to go back to voters.
- Voters passed a levy in May 2026 with about 66 percent support. While prudent financial management is always needed, the district has no financial emergency to justify making unplanned cuts to newly built facilities.

Against that backdrop, the district's savings estimate for the plan has shrunk every time it has been presented. A March 2025 forecast put closure savings at \$1.5 to \$1.8 million a year; the Elementary Task Force report of March 7, 2025 used \$913,000; and the only figure offered to the public before the vote has now declined to a "preliminary estimate" of "just over \$600,000"—roughly 0.7 percent of the \$90.2 million general fund.

Ten months after voting to approve the same plan in October 2025, the district's lowered preliminary estimate was offered only orally at the meeting, with no written analysis, even after a board member requested one. That oral savings estimate represents the district's entire financial rationale for the proposed plan offered publicly. Community members had to file a public records request to obtain the spreadsheet the treasurer used to calculate her oral preliminary estimate.

- The spreadsheet counts about \$564,300 in staff savings (5 teachers) and \$72,963 in rental revenue, minus \$25,000 to move furniture.
- The Elementary Task Force had been shown \$1.24 million in staff cuts (11 teachers), including "specials" teachers and a principal and secretary; none of those positions appear in the spreadsheet, which reaches its figure with fewer positions at a higher rate plus rent.
- It is never set against costs the district lists elsewhere, including playground upgrades, relocating programs or any of the citywide or recurring costs of transporting children to and from the proposed centralized preschool.

TRANSPORTATION: The analysis of district data shows longer walks and more crossings of major dangerous intersections—working against its own stated goals and Lakewood city policies

The superintendent's stated priorities when closing a school were "shortest travel distances" and "minimizing the need to cross major roads." Those were also the community's top priorities in the district's own survey of more than 2,100 residents in January and February 2025: "minimizing walking time and distance" ranked first (83 percent), and "avoiding students crossing major thoroughfares" ranked among the top three (78 percent). A majority of students walk or bike to school—about 65 percent of elementary families.

The district counted road crossings using straight lines drawn from each school to each home, which do not account for how students actually travel. Friends of Lakewood Schools routed every affected student's actual path to and from school along Lakewood's real sidewalk network. On actual streets and travel paths, the district's current proposal moves against both stated goals of minimizing walking time and distance and ensuring students avoid crossing major thoroughfares. If the board votes to adopt the plan to close Lincoln Elementary School and repurpose it into an early childhood learning center, here's how students district-wide will be affected:

- **Longer walks.** The number of children walking more than a mile more than doubles, from 138 to 294. For Lincoln's children, the average walk grows from about a half-mile to nearly a full mile; 53 of the 130 kindergarten-through-second-graders at Lincoln would walk more than a mile each way.
- **More major-road crossings.** Daily crossings of the district's six main roads rise about 6.5 percent, from roughly 1,431 to 1,542. On Bunts Road alone, the number of children crossing jumps from 1 to 42. The City's own Safety Action Plan found that 67 percent of fatal and serious-injury pedestrian crashes from 2017-2021 occurred within a quarter-mile of a school, and the new boundaries follow three of the City's designated high-risk corridors.
- **Moves every preschooler onto one block.** Closing all neighborhood preschools sends about 198 three- and four-year-olds to a single early learning center on one block of Clifton Boulevard. The district's own FAQ acknowledges transportation "could be a concern" but does not commit to providing transportation, and Lakewood provides no busing for general-education students, leaving those trips to families.

The district's proposal—justified by shorter, safer trips—actually produces longer walks and more crossings, against the two priorities the district's own survey found the community valued most, as well as Lakewood's Active Transportation Plan, which had input from both the school district and city.

Supporting document: [Before Lakewood Moves 816 Children](#); [Lakewood City Schools Community Survey for Elementary Facilities 2025](#)

The scope: 816 students—41 percent of every preschool to fifth-grade student, district-wide

Counted together—the Lincoln closure, the assumed redrawn boundaries, and the moves of the gifted, CHAMPS, and RISE programs and every neighborhood preschool—the plan changes the school building for 816 children, **roughly 41 percent of every preschool-through-fifth-grade student in the district.** The district's own scenario worksheet shows that redrawing boundaries while keeping all seven schools open would move 197 students.

Pause the September 8 vote

Friends of Lakewood Schools is asking the Board to table the September 8 vote until the district completes and publishes the analyses a decision of this size, scope and impact warrants: the actual routes children will walk, on real sidewalks; safety impacts measured against the City's Safety Action Plan and Vision Zero commitment; added driving and emissions measured against the City's Climate Action Plan; and the full economic picture, citywide, rather than the school budget alone.

"This is no longer a school problem. This is a transportation problem. This is a safety problem. And the district's proposal works against established city policies and voters' decision in 2013 to pay for the seven elementary schools for decades to come," said Brittany Bocker, Friends of Lakewood Schools board member. "We're asking the school board to acknowledge that there are more impacts that need to be considered before a decision of this city-wide magnitude can be made—and to weigh it before Tuesday, not after."

How to take action before the vote:

- *Sign the petition and contact the board and city council.* Residents are encouraged to reach Lakewood school board members and city council before the meeting. To get started and sign the petition, visit www.friendsoflakewoodschools.org/take-action.
- *Join the rally*—Tuesday, Sept. 8, 6:15 p.m., Taft Center for Innovation. Because no public comment will be allowed inside, residents will gather beforehand to make the community's feedback heard.
- *Attend the meeting*—7:00 p.m., Taft Center for Innovation. The Board will deliberate and vote immediately following.

About Friends of Lakewood Schools

Friends of Lakewood Schools is an Ohio nonprofit formed in May 2025 by Lakewood residents and parents of public-school students. Lakewood has nonprofit organizations supporting its parks, arts, public health, and athletics; none existed to support the long-term success of its schools. FLS was formed to fill that gap—advocating for strategic planning, good governance, and community engagement in the district, and for accountability when those are absent.

Friends of Lakewood Schools has been entirely volunteer-led since its formation and has neither raised nor spent any money.

FLS will continue attending and reporting on board meetings, tracking public records, and pressing for the strategic and facilities master planning the district does not currently have, well past the September vote.

FLS is a separate organization from Preserve Lakewood Schools, a political action committee.

For more information and to get involved, visit <https://www.friendsoflakewoodschools.org/>

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