

To: San José Unified Board of Education
From: Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee
Date: November 20, 2025
Re: Recommendation on Characteristics of an Ideal Elementary School

Dear Trustees,

As a committee representing employee groups, parents, guardians, and staff within the San José Unified community, we were charged with identifying the characteristics of the ideal elementary school. The committee met six times between October 7, 2025, and November 12, 2025 to fulfill its scope of making a recommendation to the Board of Education no later than November 20, 2025.

The committee reviewed extensive data, presentations, and pre-reading materials across four focus meetings to inform its decision:

- Elementary School Current Context: current number of elementary schools and their total enrollment, teacher full-time equivalent positions, special programs (Special Day Class, Two-Way Bilingual Immersion), enrollment of English Learners, foster youth, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, maximum special program capacity, number of classes, combination classes
- Overview of Elementary Staff Allocation Process: how elementary full-time equivalent (FTE) positions are currently allocated through staffing sheets, the district's equity policy, and principal consultation with staff
- SJTA Policy Document: San José Teachers Association recommendations for managing declining enrollment
- Elementary Teaching and Learning: the elementary instructional model, expectations for teaching, learning, and curriculum, instructional programs and supports for English Learners and students with IEPs and 504 plans, and the allocation processes for instructional coaches, PE specialists, and arts and music specialists
- Elementary School Operations: roles and allocation processes for elementary front office, campus supervisor, maintenance, grounds, operations, student nutrition, and technology staff
- Elementary Student Support: school climate and holistic safety expectations, social emotional and health services provided to students, and the allocation processes for counseling, nurse, and family liaison positions
- Elementary Special Education: programs and services, including the continuum of services, Special Day Classes, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, and the allocation processes for resource support program teachers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and school psychologist positions

- Commitment to Fiscal Responsibility: systems and practices implemented in accordance with Board Policy 3460 and Administrative Regulation 3460
- Elementary Site Administration: responsibilities and expectations of principal and assistant principal positions
- Elementary Budget: site budget allocation methodology and criteria-based additional funding (e.g., Title I, Arts and Music in Schools)
- Elementary Facilities: facilities capacity and utilization, amenities, and facility condition assessment

Core Recommendation

The Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee believes that the features of an ideal elementary school are interdependent given state-mandated and negotiated staffing ratios, existing job descriptions, and San José Unified’s commitment to fiscal responsibility. The foundation for establishing the ideal characteristics for continuing to prepare today’s students to be the thinkers, leaders, and creators of tomorrow is the number of classrooms per grade level given its impact on social and academic opportunities for students, teacher planning and collaboration, the likelihood of combination classes, and the availability of additional support offerings for students and staff.

The committee has identified that an ideal model for a standard elementary school in San José Unified should have sufficient teacher FTE to create 3 classes per grade level. Special Day Classes should ideally be clustered so that there are 3-4 Special Day Classes at each school where such programs are placed. Schools that provide both a standard structured English immersion program and a bilingual program should have sufficient teacher FTE to create 2 classes per grade level in each program.

In part because student enrollment is not the sole determinant of teacher FTE – due to San José Unified’s equity policy, for example, schools receive additional teacher FTE based on the number of students they serve who are English Learners, foster youth, and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged – and in part because many positions in San José Unified are centrally allocated based on a variety of factors instead of allocated at the site level, there is some variation in the FTE for other positions with which the ideal number of classes per grade level will correspond. Some staff positions at ideal schools that may vary based on the number of classes per grade level but for which the staffing methodology is more complicated and the committee’s recommendation would involve changing it are covered under the “Other Ideal Characteristics and Considerations” section below. However, 3 classes per grade level should generally correspond with and/or make possible a minimum 1.0 FTE PE teacher, 0.5 FTE office assistant in addition to an office manager and office specialist, and a 1.0 FTE campus supervisor without any changes to staffing ratios or methodology. The staffing at ideal schools with Special Day Class programs or bilingual programs would also typically include a 1.0 FTE site administrator in addition to the principal without any changes to staffing ratios or methodology.



The committee believes ideal schools should use their flexible FTE primarily to minimize the number of combination classes in general education.¹ To ensure there is sufficient space for programmatic uses such as confidential meetings with support providers, non-teaching staff workspaces, afterschool programming, and pull-out instruction for students with specific needs, the committee has identified that the ideal elementary school's facilities should reserve up to 6 of the school's classrooms for programmatic purposes, with the exact number dependent on the availability of appropriate smaller, non-classroom spaces.

Other Ideal Characteristics and Considerations

The committee believes that having as many staff members on campus five days a week as possible helps students thrive not just because of the services those staff members provide, but also because their regular presence strengthens relationships, school climate, and school culture. The committee recognizes that potential changes to existing staffing ratios and methodologies should be negotiated with employee groups, are outside of the committee's charge, and may have a variety of impacts, including on San José Unified's ability to maintain its commitment to fiscal responsibility; however, the committee encourages the Board of Education and staff to collaborate with employee groups to consider opportunities during the next steps in the Schools of Tomorrow initiative to increase the number of full-time support staff and/or the amount of time that support staff can spend on the ideal elementary school campus.

Specifically, the committee encourages the collaborative exploration of the appropriateness of implementing the following ideas at the ideal elementary school, listed in no particular order of priority or viability:

- increasing support for a positive climate, positive culture, and students' social emotional needs through a 1.0 FTE counselor;
- acknowledging the value of site administration in creating the best possible learning environment for students through their focus on instructional leadership, school safety, efficient school operations, and community engagement by adjusting technical aspects of the staffing allocation methodology for site administrators;
- supporting teachers in continuous improvement of and reflection on their instruction to students through a 1.0 FTE instructional coach;
- acknowledging different supervision needs among students of different ages and increasing student safety by adjusting the staffing allocation methodology for campus supervisors to include the grade level of elementary students;
- reducing situations in which individual schools might be unable to use fractional teacher FTE efficiently by adjusting technical aspects of the staffing allocation methodology (e.g., rounding rules) for teachers;
- providing regular arts and/or music instruction to every class through a 1.0 FTE arts and/or music teacher.

With the acknowledgment both that the committee cannot be sure about the extent of the facilities features that might be possible to implement at the ideal elementary school with finite Measure R funds and that much of the prioritization of facilities features will happen through

¹ Hammer Montessori at Galarza Elementary is an exception because multi-age classes are part of the school's instructional model.



other feedback obtained during San José Unified’s Facilities Master Plan process, the committee believes that ideal elementary school facilities priorities include sufficient classrooms with bathrooms inside to accommodate all TK and kinder classes; a multipurpose room large enough for all student lunch and PE periods to be held inside on rainy days; field and playground space appropriate for the school’s enrollment; staff bathroom space appropriate for the school’s staffing; parking options able to accommodate pickup and dropoff in addition to staff; and a library with sufficient space for all classes to be able to browse and comfortably read in it at least once a week. The committee believes these features help ensure student safety, build community, and enhance student learning.

Again, the committee recognizes that the Board of Education may consider a variety of factors outside of the committee’s charge along with the committee’s recommendation as it compares the ideal elementary school to San José Unified’s current school portfolio and determines next steps. We know that the practical path and timeline from our current reality to this ideal requires careful, deliberate planning and may depend on factors outside of the Board of Education’s control. If such factors prevent the realization of some aspect of this ideal at a particular school, the committee urges the Board of Education and staff to seek ways to realize other aspects. Every component of this recommendation is intended to enhance the district’s ability to continue to prepare today’s students to be the thinkers, leaders, and creators of tomorrow.

The committee thanks the Board of Education for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee
San José Unified School District

