# Attachment 2 School Facilities Analysis for Petition to Transfer Sagebrush Territory from Glendale USD to La Cañada USD

## Memorandum

**Date:** December 28, 2023

**To:** Juan Mireles, Director

via: Lesley Taylor, Education Administrator I

**From:** Jennifer Schwinn,Rob Corley, Education Programs Consultants

via: John Gordon, Education Administrator I

**Subject:** School Facilities Analysis for Petition to Transfer Sagebrush Territory from Glendale USD to La Cañada USD.

Following is the requested analysis by the Facilities Planning Field Operations unit of a petition to transfer the petition territory described as “Sagebrush” from Glendale Unified School District (Glendale USD) to La Cañada Unified School District (La Cañada USD). The “Sagebrush territory consists of approximately 900 residential properties, generating approximately 400 K-12 students."[[1]](#footnote-1)¹ Currently, the Sagebrush territory students are assigned to Glendale USD for TK-12 grade, including the attendance areas of three Glendale USD schools: Mountain Avenue Elementary, Rosemont Middle School, and Crescenta Valley High. The Sagebrush territory is adjacent to the western boundary of La Cañada USD and entirely within the City of La Cañada-Flintridge.

California *Education Code* Section 35753(a) requires that nine conditions must be *substantially met* for the State Board of Education to approve a school district reorganization. Two of the nine conditions address school facilities—real property and bonded indebtedness:

* Condition 3 requires that "The proposal will result in an equitable division of property and facilities of the original district or districts."
* Condition 7 requires that "Any increase in school facilities costs as a result of the proposed reorganization will be insignificant and otherwise incidental to the reorganization."

The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) authorized their Business Services Division to conduct a feasibility study for the proposed Sagebrush territory transfer, which was prepared February 10, 2017, for presentation to the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Reorganization (Committee).

## Summary of Findings

EC 35576 requires that all property, funds, and obligations (other than real property and bonded indebtedness) shall be divided pro rata between the districts based on the number of affected students as a percentage of Glendale USD’s total student population.

The superintendents of the two districts worked with Capitol Advisors for two years (from 2015-2016) to negotiate the territory transfer. The division of funds is made more difficult by differing perspectives between the two districts. Capitol Advisors, serving as a neutral party, identified the following areas of impact (relating to equitable division of funds or properties) which would require mitigation to avoid harm to one or both districts:

* Equity in debt repayment for existing General Obligation (GO) bonds[[2]](#footnote-2)²
  + “The proposed Sagebrush territory transfer would likely reduce the taxable value of GUSD and remove the territory from tax levies that support GUSD GO bonds.”
  + “LCUSD would experience an equivalent growth in taxable value for its GO bonds.”
  + “As a result, the transfer would likely increase tax rates for GUSD residents outside of Sagebrush territory and decrease tax rates for LCUSD residents.”
* Distribution of property and maintenance of traditional access pathways[[3]](#footnote-3)³
  + The proposed Sagebrush transfer would surround Glendale USD’s undeveloped parcel called “Pickens Canyon Lot.” In previous transfer proposals, the sale of the parcel was considered as a mitigation solution. However, Glendale USD would also require an easement to provide emergency access to Mountain Avenue Elementary.
* Pupil funding impacts[[4]](#footnote-4)⁴
  + The proposed transfer would likely result in many students transferring from Glendale USD schools to La Cañada USD schools, resulting in a loss of per-pupil funding for Glendale USD and an increase in student funding to La Cañada USD.
  + The transfer places a burden on La Cañada USD to provide services to the influx of students, and the loss of enrollment also reduces operational efficiency for Glendale USD.[[5]](#footnote-5)⁵

Glendale USD states that the transfer would place the district at a fiscal disadvantage regarding loss of assessed valuation and enrollment-based student funds, which is why Glendale USD does not support the petition for transfer.

La Cañada USD has stated at previous public hearings on this matter that La Cañada USD would be negatively financially impacted if it had to house all Sagebrush students immediately. Therefore, La Cañada USD proposed a phased-in approach.

The two Superintendents and Capitol Advisors considered 20 mitigation options and combinations of options, but they could not devise a solution that both districts agreed would offset the negative impacts to one district or the other. Capitol Advisors’ report concluded, “In summary, it appears that currently no individual or combination of mitigation options explored in our review results in a comprehensive mitigation of the potential impacts resulting from the proposed Sagebrush territory transfer for both LCUSD and GUSD.”[[6]](#footnote-6)⁶

The Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization (County Committee) ultimately determined that this condition was met, despite the concerns identified in the staff report. Since that time, the possible impacts of housing all Sagebrush area students have been mitigated by an expansion/modernization project at the Palm Crest Elementary School (Palm Crest ES). The potential financial impacts from the loss of enrollment and the corresponding per-capita student funding to the Glendale USD is beyond the scope of this report and will be addressed in Attachment 3.

**Condition 3 is met.**

Since the LACOE report was issued, La Cañada USD has addressed the over-crowding at Palm Crest ES with an expansion and modernization project. $48 Million in existing facility work required at Palm Crest Elementary was identified per the 2016 Facility Master Plan (2016 FMP). The result of this modernization project is two new two-story buildings that have increased playground space while also adding two net classrooms to the site. While a PE plan would still be required due to the small size of the overall site, at more recent public meetings in January and December of 2023, representatives of La Cañada USD have stated publicly that the district is now confident it is able to house all Sagebrush-area students following the approval of the petition.

**Condition 7 is met.**

## Analysis of Condition 3

### Real Property

EC 35576 requires that all property, funds, and obligations (other than real property and bonded indebtedness) shall be divided pro rata between the districts based on the number of affected students as a percentage of Glendale USD’s total student population.

Because no real property belonging to Glendale USD resides within the Sagebrush territory and under 400 students reside within the territory, a division of real property would not be required in this case. However, if the transfer of Sagebrush were to take place, Glendale USD’s undeveloped parcel called “Pickins Canyon Lot” would be virtually surrounded by La Cañada USD territory. Therefore, the two districts considered a sale of Pickins Canyon Lot, if Glendale USD could retain an easement that allowed them emergency access to Mountain Avenue Elementary. Per Capitol Advisors (2016) a division of Pickins Lot was feasible, but required an agreement between Glendale USD, La Cañada USD and the City. The districts met in 2016 but could not come to an agreement regarding the division of Pickins Lot, without commitment of additional financial contributions from the City.

### Bonded Indebtedness and Tax Rate

EC 35575 states that when territory is taken from one school district and annexed to another school district and the area transferred contains no public-school property and buildings, the territory shall drop any liability for outstanding bonded indebtedness in the district of which it was formerly a part (Glendale USD) and shall automatically assume its proportionate share of the outstanding bonded indebtedness of the district of which it becomes a part (La Cañada USD). Therefore, if the Sagebrush area would transfer to La Cañada USD, it would add households to lower the individual tax burden of those living in La Cañada USD. Conversely, the remaining residents of Glendale USD would take on the local bond burden divided among fewer households, thus raising their tax burden.

In addition, GUSD would lose bond capability with the loss of property value in their district. La Cañada USD would have an increase in bonding capability if the transfer took place.

Table 1 demonstrates the capacity, existing enrollment, and unused space available at La Cañada USD schools, to accept new students if the petition were granted.

#### **Table 1. La Cañada USD schools impacted by the Petition**

| **School Name** | **Capacity** | **Pupils 2021-22** | **Available seats** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Palm Crest Elementary | 710\* | 608 | 64 |
| La Cañada JR/SR High | 2,160 | 2,024 | 136 |
| **Total** | **2,778** | **2,754** | **24** |

\*This capacity number is based on the current configuration of the school. The Bond Program Manager’s enrollment analysis of the maximum capacity at Palm Crest ES identified a potential maximum capacity of 840 students with the new two-story buildings.

Materials provided for this territory transfer review are reliant on 2016-17 data. The pandemic has further interfered with enrollment trend data from 2020-2022. Therefore, an additional five years of enrollment trend data is provided here for greater context.

This table demonstrates that both districts have experienced declining enrollment over the last five school years.

*Table 2a. Enrollment Trends In La Cañada USD*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School Name** | **2017-18** | **2018-19** | **2019-20** | **2020-21** | **2021-22** |
| Palm Crest Elementary | 654 | 677 | 670 | 620 | 608 |
| La Cañada JR/SR High | 2079 | 2068 | 2069 | 2058 | 2,024 |

*Table 2b. Enrollment Trends In Glendale USD*

| **School Name** | **2017-18** | **2018-19** | **2019-20** | **2020-21** | **2021-22** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mountain Avenue ES | 560 | 548 | 587 | 556 | 534 |
| Rosemont Middle | 1316 | 1225 | 1208 | 1180 | 1,159 |
| Crescenta Valley High | 2,645 | 2,608 | 2,643 | 2,569 | 2,497 |

Table 3 demonstrates the estimated number of students residing in the petition area at the time of the petition, which would transfer if the petition were granted, as well as the number of students estimated to currently reside in the petition area. Currently 10% of students in Glendale USD qualify for special services, so 10% of transferring students could be expected to require special services, additional support, space in resource classrooms, and space available on specialist teachers’ caseloads.

#### Table 3. Students residing in the Proposed Territory

| **Sagebrush Territory Students** | **Pupils 2016–17** | **Pupils 2022-23** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Elementary Students** | **218** | **78** |
| **JR/SR High Students** | **193** | **78** |
| **Total students** | **411** | **156** |

## Analysis of Condition 7

### 2.1 Available Space to House Students in La Cañada USD

Our analysis further concludes that La Cañada USD’s campus of Palm Crest ES, which would be closest to Sagebrush territory and therefore the most likely to take on the additional students, is presently undersized at 64.95% of CDE’s recommended site size based on the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS). The site is on a hilly terrain, so usable space on the site is limited to 6.43AC. Palm Crest Elementary School was identified as over-crowded, according to La Cañada USD’s 2016 FMP. Per the 2016 FMP there were “not enough classrooms” at Palm Crest Elementary, with “several programs sharing classroom spaces.” “The older original classroom buildings... are a little ‘crowded’ for upper grades (class size of 30).” “The portable bungalow buildings... are smaller.” “The are crowded for primary and upper grades.” Additionally, the 2016 FMP noted that there was insufficient space in the kindergarten play area to accommodate the existing number of TK/K students. For the 2021-22 school year, there were 218 elementary-aged students living in the petition area not currently attending La Cañada USD schools. This number appears to be relatively consistent with previous years. However, in 2022-23, this number dropped sharply to 78. If the approximately 78 TK-6 grade children living in the petition territory were added to the current Palm Crest ES enrollment of 590, to accommodate the addition of the petition territory enrollment, the California Department of Education would recommend a site size of 14.7 acres. Therefore, Palm Crest’s site (net 6.43 AC) compared to CDE’s required site size (14.7 AC) drops to just 44% of the recommended size. This would result in new requirements for La Cañada USD to submit to the CDE a Small School Site Worksheet, ensuring minimum facility requirements, and a PE Plan for Palm Crest ES. If enrollment were to revert to previous levels, the addition of the approximately 218 petition area elementary students could raise the demand for enrollment on the Palm Crest campus to approximately 808.

The result of the findings of the 2016 FMP was a modernization/expansion project at the site, as noted above in the analysis of Condition 3. This project has led to increased capacity, while also replacing portable classrooms with two-story buildings. While the site is still undersized based on the usable acreage and number of students, the amount of useable recreational space has actually increased due to the smaller footprint of the new buildings. The addition of the territory students would still require the school to submit a PE plan, ensuring that sufficient planning has gone into enabling all students to receive adequate exercise and PE instruction. At two public hearings held on this petition during the County Committee process, La Cañada USD stated that it did not have sufficient space available to house all petition-area students at that time. Due to the expansion/modernization of the Palm Crest campus and continued decline in enrollment, the district currently anticipates being able to house all of the transfer area students, and ensure adequate recreational space at Palm Crest ES.

La Cañada High School’s campus is 25.85 AC and houses students grades 7-12. The campus has a capacity of 2160 students. Given the data in Table 1 above, the number of seats available at Palm Crest for TK-6 is 64, and the number of seats available at La Cañada JR/SR HS is 136. Table 3 provides updated student attendance data demonstrating that 156 students (78 TK-6th grade and 78 7-12th grade) living in the Sagebrush territory are attending Glendale USD schools in the 2022-23 school year. Given that it is likely that some students would choose to remain in the Glendale USD via interdistrict transfer (La Cañada USD has adopted a policy that would allow students displaced by the territory transfer to apply for a one-time, permanent interdistrict transfer to remain in the Glendale USD) the La Cañada USD facilities appear sufficient for the requirements of the proposed territory transfer.

Currently 10% of students in LCUSD and GUSD qualify for special services, so 10% of transferring students (15-16 students) could be expected to require special services, potentially requiring additional teacher support and space in special education programs.

### 2.2 Condition of Available La Cañada USD School Facilities

The original facilities analysis raised some transportation issues including a lack of safe pedestrian walkways, bridges or bike lanes for students in the transfer area to access Palm Crest elementary school or La Canada High School. It also questioned the sufficiency of parking at the high school, which LCUSD currently addresses through a leased parking space agreement with the Methodist Church across the street from the high school.

CDE recognizes that while these conditions exist, they are not within the scope of the nine criteria of EC 35753. In addition, the residents seeking the territory transfer are aware of these conditions, and it has not dissuaded them from pursuing the transfer. Finally, the Los Angeles County committee also did not find these issues sufficient reason to deny the transfer.

1. ¹ Summary of Mitigation Options, Capitol Advisors, (2015-16) page 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ² Ibid., Page 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ³ Ibid., Page 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ⁴ Ibid., Page 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ⁵ Ibid., Page 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ⁶ Ibid., Page 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)