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# GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2023 | GREENBAYPRESSGAZETTE.COM

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Hundreds of fans attend the Green Bay Packers Titledown District watch party for the regular season opener against the New Orleans Saints on Sept. 12, 2021, in Ashwaubenon. The Packers will host the 2025 NFL Draft, and both the Titledown District and Lambeau Field will be sites for fan experiences. PHOTOS BY SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? Area Latino community says schools' plan is unjust

**Danielle DuClos**  
Green Bay Press-Gazette  
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY — Green Bay's Hispanic community is mobilizing, calling on the Green Bay School Board to stop a plan to close 11 schools in the Green Bay School District. The Northeast Wisconsin Latino Education Task Force, or NEWLET, formed in late April in response to the school district's Facilities Task Force finalizing recommendations that are inequitable, according to the group. NEWLET is worried that the proposal will put an undue burden on students of color by splitting up their communities and removing the option to easily walk to school.

See **PLAN**, Page 5A

## 'We are a big community'

### Green Bay named host city for '25 NFL draft

**Richard Ryman**  
Green Bay Press-Gazette | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

The National Football League draft is coming to Green Bay. • The league awarded Green Bay the 2025 draft during the league meeting Monday in Minneapolis. It's the culmination of seven years effort by the Green Bay Packers and Discover Green Bay, the local tourism bureau. • The Packers estimate 240,000 people will attend the draft in Green Bay, generating a \$94 million economic impact statewide and \$20 million locally. Kansas City reported 320,000 visitors for the 2023 draft held in April. • "The Packers have a rich and proud history that goes back to the early days of the NFL and are the only community-owned team," Packers President and CEO Mark Murphy said in a written statement. "That connection to our league's heritage combined with the great passion Packers fans will bring will make the draft a memorable event for those in attendance and NFL fans watching around the world." See **HOST CITY**, Page 6A

**"We are the smallest market in the National Football League by a wide margin, but we are a big community. No other community on the planet has as close of a nexus to the past, present and future of the game of football than Green Bay."**

**Ed Policy**  
Packers chief operating officer



Members of the Northeast Wisconsin Latino Education Task Force gather outside Washington Middle School on May 19 in Green Bay. The group is calling for the Green Bay School Board to stop a plan to close 11 schools. DANIELLE DUCLOS/GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

## Sen. Baldwin proposes expanding mental health care

**Natalie Eilbert**  
Green Bay Press-Gazette  
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

At a time when the suicide rate among farmers is three-and-a-half times higher than the general population, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin has introduced bipartisan legislation to expand access to mental health support across farming communities. The legislation, known as Farmers First Act of 2023, is a continuation of bipartisan legislation established in 2018 by Baldwin and Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA). Farmers First is actually one big acronym that stands for Facilitating Accessible Resources for Mental health and Encouraging Rural Solutions For Immediate Response to Stressful Times. The Farmers First Act of 2023 reauthorizes the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), a nationwide program that connects farmers, ranchers, and other agriculture workers to stress assistance programs and resources, increasing funding for the program from \$10 million to \$15 million per year for the next five years.

See **HEALTH CARE**, Page 4A



Lambeau Field at sunset on Aug. 14, 2021.

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# Plan

Continued from Page 1A

“(It) impacts the quality of life of Latino students and takes away healthy walks to school by a predefined bus schedule with limited participation in sports, athletic events, musicals and other enrichment opportunities,” said Amanda Garcia, the executive director of Casa Alba Melanie and the chair of NEWLET. She was also a member of the district’s Facilities Task Force.

NEWLET is made of community members and leaders from four Green Bay Latino groups: Casa Alba Melanie, the Latino Professional Association of Northeast Wisconsin, Northeast Wisconsin Latinx Rising and Voces de la Frontera.

The group is asking for better communication with Hispanic and diverse families and for the board to pause voting on the proposal, called Schema 12, until families of color can be included in the process.

“Latino parents and families deserve to have a voice in the decision-making process, especially as it will directly impact them now and in the future,” Garcia said.

## District says June vote isn’t final as board members make commitment to making equitable decisions

On May 18, NEWLET met with Interim Superintendent Vicki Bayer, School Board President Laura McCoy, Vice President James Lyerly, district officials and Green Bay Mayor Eric Gerich to discuss their concerns.

Garcia said that after the meeting, it wasn’t clear whether the board would be voting on closing schools on June 5 or on next steps to evaluate the plan.

According to a timeline document created by the district and handed out at the May 8 board meeting, on June 5, the board “will vote on the Task Force recommendations.”

Board member Nancy Welch asked at Monday’s meeting what the board should be prepared to do on June 5.

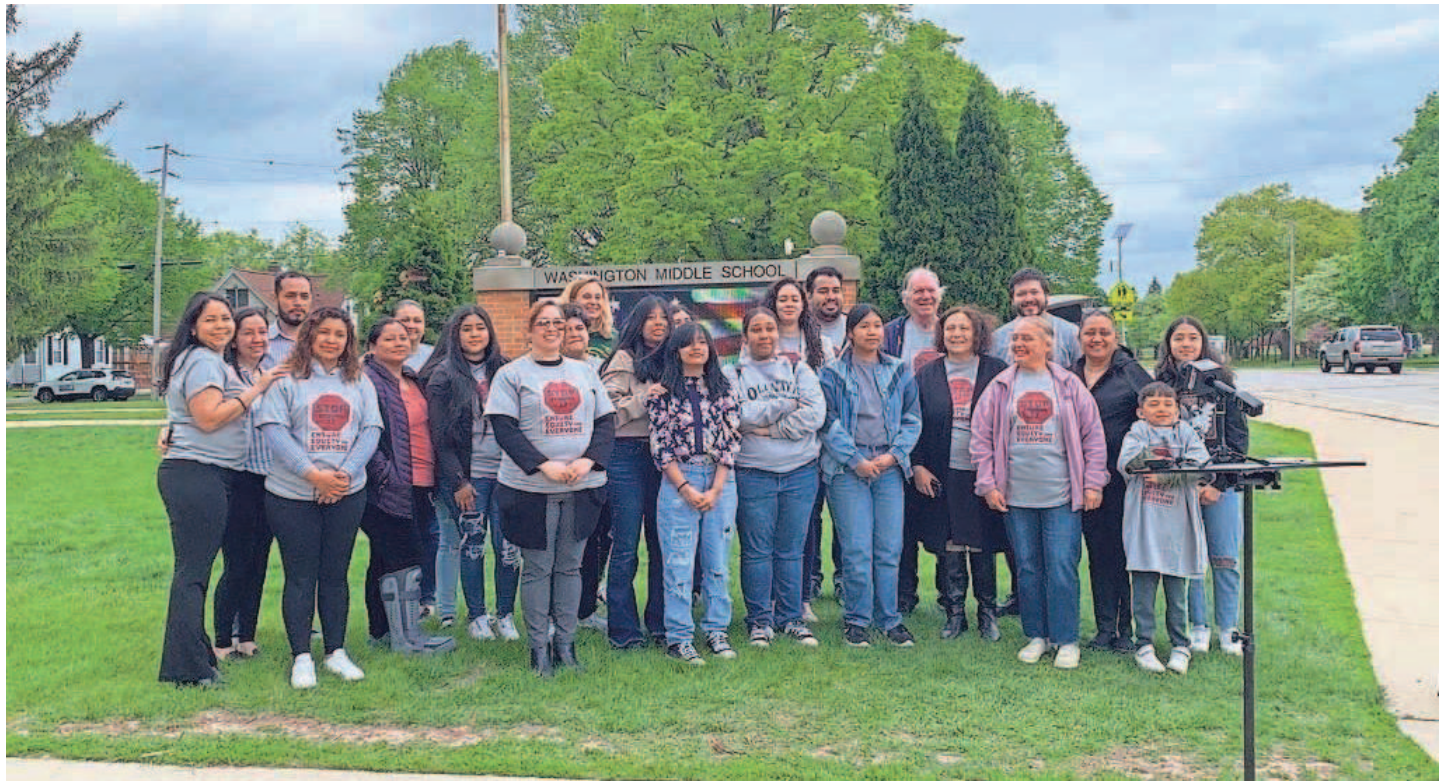
“How do I prepare for June 5?” she said. “I don’t know what to do.”

At Monday’s meeting, Bayer recommended in a memo that the board advises district administration to “move forward with exploring specific options of Schema 12.” She recommended that the exploration include “impact on areas such as demographics, socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, programming,” and the budget.

She also recommended the board direct the district to hire a consulting firm to complete an “equity analysis” of the plan to see how feasible different parts of it are.

Bayer told the Press-Gazette that her memo was “the result of my realizing, I haven’t been very clear about what June 5 should look like.”

Board member Lynn Gerlach said she isn’t prepared to approve the plan or to



Members of the Northeast Wisconsin Latino Education Task Force gather outside Washington Middle School on May 19 in Green Bay. The group is calling for the Green Bay School Board to stop a plan to close 11 schools.

DANIELLE DUCLOS/GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

**“This trust-building process was fostered by being transparent with them, acknowledging their barriers and removing those barriers before working towards a resolution. ... I sincerely hope that the Green Bay School District will do the same before making decisions, as they have echoed multiple times over the last few weeks, their commitment to engage all communities.”**

### Gabriela Para

NEWLET’s vice chair and a Green Bay immigration attorney

throw it away on June 5. She said the board could possibly have a plan by the end of July.

“I just don’t believe the world is going to come to an end if we don’t have this done by June 5,” she said.

The more concrete deadline is January, so the district can prepare to go to referendum in 2024, according to the district’s Chief Operating Officer Josh Patchak.

Lyerly, the School Board vice president, expressed concerns about the process and timeline. He wants decisions to take the demographic study into account, which may take a month or more to complete, once a firm is selected.

“I’m very interested in getting this right, and I’m not wanting to curtail the studies and the dedication that we have to making sure, that through an equity lens, we’re doing the right thing, in order to make the referendum,” he said.

Lyerly wants to ensure that there’s enough time for community input before any final decisions are made.

Board members agreed that there would be no final vote on which schools would be closing on June 5. Instead, members will likely advise the district

on next steps and what parts of the plan the district should research.

### Facilities Task Force not representative of the student population; district says it could have done better

The school district created a 26-member Facilities Task Force to develop recommendations for restructuring and closing schools with the help of ATSR, the architecture firm hired by the district. The majority of task force members were white despite the district’s

population being 60% students of color.

Patchak told the Press-Gazette that school demographics were not part of the initial development of the plans. That focused on building conditions, costs for maintenance and possibilities for expansion.

After that, the district would tell the task force and the architecture firm whether a plan was feasible.

“As the task force was going along, we, as district administration, were kind of checking behind the scenes to see, ‘OK, is it possible to draw boundaries in such a way that they’re fair and don’t result in really crazy things?’” Patchak said.

The district’s slogan is “Engagement. Equity. Excellence.” But the lack of representation on the task force raises questions about the district’s commitment to that mission.

“We shouldn’t have started with facilities,” Garcia previously told the Press-Gazette. “We should have started with students and families and how it’s going to impact them and their concerns and making sure that they’re part of the decision-making process, which did not

See PLAN, Page 8A

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# Plan

Continued from Page 5A

happen.”

Patchak said the district will do things differently in the future.

“I think for future task forces we will work with the board on formalizing criteria because I think that’s something that has resulted in people not being so happy with this process. ... But in terms of the sheer number of people, we probably could have done better in terms of demographic representation,” he said.

Bayer said she takes responsibility for the way the task force was formed “100%.” She apologized to community members May 10 at an East High School tabletop discussion.

“What I apologized for is that it made people feel like they weren’t represented,” she told the Press-Gazette. “We can do better.”

The work NEWLET has done showed Gabriela Para “how much work the Green Bay School District has ahead if they truly are committed to all students in their district.” She’s NEWLET’s vice chair and an immigration attorney in Green Bay.

“This trust-building process was fostered by being transparent with them,” Para said, “acknowledging their barriers and removing those barriers before working towards a resolution. ... I sincerely hope that the Green Bay School District will do the same before making decisions, as they have echoed multiple times over the last few weeks, their commitment to engage all communities.”

## NEWLET says the plan will perpetuate existing segregation in the district

NEWLET says the recommended plan, if implemented as is, would perpetuate and intensify the “existing segregation in the GBAPS District.”

Of the 11 schools recommended to close, nine are traditional neighborhood schools: Belmont Elementary, Doty Elementary, Elmore Elementary, Keller Elementary, Kennedy Elementary, MacArthur Elementary, Tank Elementary, Wequiock Elementary and Washington Middle. Leonardo da Vinci and Minoka-Hill are specialty schools that are recommended to close.

Except for Wequiock, over 70% of the



Washington Middle School located at 314 S. Baird St. in Green Bay. SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

students at these schools are considered economically disadvantaged, and over half of the students are students of color, according to the Department of Public Instruction’s enrollment data.

Over 52% of Washington Middle School’s 711 students are Hispanic and over 80% are students of color. It has the largest the most diverse middle school in the district.

It’s recommended to close because it doesn’t have on-site greenspace; it’s an older building; and its roof needs to be replaced. The roof was approved to be fixed using the \$92.6 million capital referendum money, but the project has been delayed until the board decides on whether the school is closing or not.

“Schema 12 recommends school closings without properly addressing cultural factors that would ensure equity for Latino students,” Garcia said.

Tank Elementary, which is 82% students of color, is proposed to close. All the students would go to Fort Howard Elementary.

Even if the district provides transportation, NEWLET worries that students who miss the bus or stay after school for activities will have to walk home on congested Ashland Avenue, crossing busy streets like West Walnut and East Mason, or past bars on Broadway.

Bayer said some of the NEWLET’s concerns would be “absolutely unacceptable,” and that the next phase of the

facilities plan will look at demographics and programming.

“We don’t intend to do anything that will purposefully harm or put our students in a worse place than they are today,” she said.

## Hispanic parents unaware of plans to close schools until NEWLET told them

NEWLET members have gone door-to-door and presented in local churches to inform Hispanic parents about the proposal to close schools.

Most families were unaware of the plans or had a vague understanding based on information they got from their children, Para said.

“Our team has worked tirelessly over the last few weeks to contact Latino parents and inform them of Schema 12,” she said. “To reach the parents, we’ve gone door to door, used our social media, gone to spaces where they feel seen and heard, and combined our collective influence and connections we have formed for many years.”

While parents want to work with the district, collaboration can only happen if barriers are removed, and it won’t happen overnight, Para said.

Rosalia Sandoval, a parent in the district, spoke at a NEWLET news conference Friday afternoon about her concerns.

“I am very upset that the school dis-

trict did not consider us. I’m worried about the future of my kids,” she said. “And I invite all the Latina community to come together, so we fight together for the future of our kids.”

## Final community session before vote is May 24 at Washington Middle School

A public forum will be held from 4-7 p.m. May 24 at Washington Middle School, 314 S. Baird St. Speakers must sign up during the forum and will have three minutes to share feedback with the board.

The forum will last until everyone who signed up has a chance to speak, according to the district’s website.

There is also a feedback form community members can fill out with questions about the proposal.

Danielle DuClos is a Report for America corps member who covers K-12 education for the Green Bay Press-Gazette. Contact her at dduclos@gannett.com. Follow on Twitter @danielle\_duclos. You can directly support her work with a tax-deductible donation at GreenBayPressGazette.com/RFA or by check made out to The GroundTruth Project with subject line Report for America Green Bay Press Gazette Campaign. Address: The GroundTruth Project, Lockbox Services, 9450 SW Gemini Drive, PMB 46837, Beaverton, Oregon 97008-7105.

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