



February 18, 2026

Daniel Stifter, Superintendent  
Aitkin Public School District, ISD #0001-01  
306 2<sup>nd</sup> St NW  
Aitkin, MN 56431-1289

Dear Superintendent Stifter:

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, requires a review and comment statement on the educational and economic advisability of your proposed school construction project. Information supplied by your school district and from Minnesota Department of Education sources is the basis of this review and comment. With this positive review and comment, voter and school board approval are required for Aitkin Public School District, Independent School District #0001-01, to proceed with the proposed projects.

***The district shall publish a summary of the review and comment statement (the final two pages) in the legal newspaper of the district at least 48 days, but not more than 70 days, prior to holding a referendum or soliciting any bids for the construction, expansion, or remodeling of an educational facility.*** The department may request a statement certifying the publication, and require the submission, review, and approval of preliminary and final construction plans.

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, requires the commissioner to include comments from residents of the school district in the review and comment. As of the date of this letter, no public comments have been received. In addition, Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, ***requires the school board hold a public meeting to discuss the review and comment prior to the date of the election.***

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, ***requires that a school district, prior to occupying a new or renovated facility after July 1, 2002, must submit a certification prepared by a system inspector to the commissioner and the building code official that will provide an occupancy permit.*** The certification must verify that the facility's installed or modified heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system operates according to design specifications and code, a system for monitoring outdoor airflow and total airflow of ventilation systems has been installed, and any installed or modified heating, ventilation, or air conditioning system provides an indoor air quality filtration system that meets ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) Standard 52.1.

If you have any questions, please contact Chris Kubesh, Education Finance specialist, at 651-582-8319 or [chris.kubesh@state.mn.us](mailto:chris.kubesh@state.mn.us). Thank you for working with us to improve school facilities for Minnesota students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Willie L. Jett II'.

Willie L. Jett II  
Commissioner

cc: Cindi Hills, School Board Chair

Enclosure

**The Commissioner of the Department of Education  
Review and Comment on the School Construction  
Proposal of Aitkin Public School District, ISD #0001-01**

A review and comment must be provided on a school district construction project proposal before the district conducts a referendum, solicits bids, or issues bonds for the project. A project proposal has been submitted for review and comment according to requirements set forth in Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.71, subdivisions 9 and 10, and Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.72. The district provides the following information:

1. The geographic area and population to be served:
  - a. preschool through grade 12 student enrollment for the past five years, and
  - b. student enrollment projections for the next five years.
2. A list of existing school facilities:
  - a. by year constructed,
  - b. their uses, and
  - c. an assessment of the extent to which alternate facilities are available within school district boundaries and in adjacent school districts.
3. A list of specific deficiencies of the facility:
  - a. demonstrating the need for a new or renovated facility to be provided,
  - b. the process used to determine the deficiencies,
  - c. a list of those deficiencies that will and will not be addressed by the proposed projects,
  - d. a list of specific benefits that the new or renovated facility will provide to students, teachers, and community users served by the facility.
4. A description of the project, including:
  - a. specifications of site and outdoor space acreage,
  - b. square footage allocations for classrooms, laboratories and support spaces,
  - c. estimated expenditures for major portions of the project,
  - d. estimated changes in facility operating costs, and
  - e. dates the project will begin and be completed.
5. A specification of the source of project financing, including:
  - a. applicable statutory citations,
  - b. the scheduled date for a bond issue or school board action,
  - c. a schedule of payments, including debt service equalization aid, and
  - d. the effect of a bond issue on local property taxes by property class and valuation.
6. Documentation obligating the school district and contractors to comply with the following items:
  - a. Minnesota Statutes, section 471.345 governing municipal contracts,
  - b. sustainable design,
  - c. school facility commissioning under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.72, certifying the plans and designs for heating, ventilating, air conditioning and air filtration for an extensively renovated or new facility meet or exceed current code standards, including ASHRAE air filtration Standard 52.1,
  - d. American National Standards Institute (ANSI) acoustical performance criteria, design requirements and guidelines for schools on maximum background noise levels and reverberation times,
  - e. state fire code,
  - f. chapter 326B governing building codes, and
  - g. consultation with affected government units about the impact of the project on utilities, roads, sewers, sidewalks, retention ponds, school bus and automobile traffic, access to mass transit and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists.

## Description of Proposed School Construction Project

Aitkin Public School District, ISD #0001-01 is proposing a three-question referendum on April 14, 2026. The first ballot question would authorize \$49.79 million in bonding authority to finance a new PK-6 elementary school. The second ballot question would authorize \$3.19 million in bonding authority to finance a transportation building. The third ballot question would authorize \$2.325 million in bonding authority to finance a single station gymnasium at the elementary school proposed in first ballot question.

Passage of the second ballot question is contingent upon the passage of ballot question #1 and passage of the third ballot question is contingent upon passage of ballot questions 1 & 2. In addition to the ballot question contingencies, if ballot question #1 passes, an Iron Range Resource and Rehabilitation (IRRR) grant of \$5 million would fund the remainder of the question #1 project costs, which total \$55,507,012.

The proposed projects would be scheduled for completion in calendar years 2027 through 2028. Cost estimates by ballot question/project cost component are as follows:

Question #1		Question #2	
New PK-6 School		Transportation Center	
Building Construction	\$ 31,154,880	Building Construction	\$ 2,470,440
Technology / FF&E	\$ 1,500,000	Fees, Permits & Testing	\$ 376,170
Site Improvements	\$ 9,789,066	Contingencies / Inflation	\$ 268,390
Fees, Permits & Testing	\$ 6,462,722	Bond Issuance Costs	\$ 41,284
Contingencies / Inflation	\$ 4,611,132	Capitalized Interest	\$ 79,750
Bond Issuance Costs	\$ 744,462		<b>\$ 3,236,034</b>
Capitalized Interest	\$ 1,244,750		
IRRR Grant	\$ (5,000,000)	Question #3	
	<b>\$ 50,507,012</b>	Single Station Gym @ New PK-6 School	
		Building Construction	\$ 1,799,851
		Fees, Permits & Testing	\$ 274,014
		Contingencies / Inflation	\$ 195,537
		Bond Issuance Costs	\$ 31,013
		Capitalized Interest	\$ 58,123
			<b>\$ 2,358,538</b>

The district last went to the voters in November 2025 with a similar proposal for a new PK-6 elementary school. The November 2025 referendum also included a \$4.5 million transportation building in the first ballot question and a roughly \$6 million gymnasium/fitness center as a second ballot question. Both ballot questions failed to pass. The current referendum reduces the cost of both the proposed transportation center and gymnasium component at the new elementary school.

The district currently has approximately 920 students currently enrolled in K-12 programming and is projecting a decline in enrollment to around 842 students over the next five years. The district reviewed multiple scenarios to address the aging elementary school and has found a new PK-6 facility on a larger site, as proposed, is the most cost-effective solution going forward and will result in significantly lower operating costs. The proposed projects appear to be in the long-term interest of the district.

If the bond referendum is successful and bonds are sold, the debt service on the bonds will be eligible for debt service equalization under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.53, subdivision 3, if the bond schedule is approved. The amount of debt service equalization aid, if any, the district receives is determined annually and is dependent upon property wealth, student population, and other statutory requirements.

### **Review and Comment Statement**

Based on the department's analysis of the school district's required documentation and other pertinent information from sources of the Minnesota Department of Education, the Commissioner of Education provides a positive review and comment.

### **Additional Information is Available**

Persons desiring additional information regarding this proposal should contact the school district superintendent's office.



Willie L. Jett II

Commissioner

February 18, 2026