**Mesa Public Schools might close two junior highs**

by **Cathryn Creno** - Sept. 28, 2011 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Mesa Public Schools, the state's largest district, is considering closing two junior highs, including one of its oldest schools, and consolidating its popular "back to basics" schools in an attempt to save $2.3 million.

Under a plan outlined by Superintendent Mike Cowan on Tuesday, the district would close the venerable Mesa Junior High as well as three back-to-basics Franklin schools at the end of this school year. That would allow the half-empty Brimhall Junior High in the eastern part of the city to become a center for 1,000 Franklin kindergarteners through eighth-graders.

Cowan and other officials explained preliminary plans for school consolidation, saying the district needs to close an undetermined number of its 83 schools in the next two years because of an enrollment decline of 9,000 students in the past decade.

"We understand this process is challenging for our students and staff," Cowan said. "We are trying to do things as openly as possible."

Cowan also noted that the governing board will not vote to close any schools until after two October public hearings.

Bobette Sylvester, assistant superintendent for business and support services, said she and her staff have spent the past few months studying factors such as student vacancies, building ages and utility and maintenance costs at the district's 12 junior highs. But selecting schools for consolidation wasn't as simple as picking out the oldest, emptiest, least [energy-efficient](http://www.azcentral.com/community/mesa/articles/2011/09/28/20110928mesa-might-close-4-schools.html) schools, she said.

For instance, while Mesa and Carson are the oldest junior highs in the district, Mesa and Brimhall have the lowest student enrollments, according to Tuesday's presentation.

Brimhall, in southeast Mesa, is one of the district's newer schools but is surrounded by [retirement](http://www.azcentral.com/community/mesa/articles/2011/09/28/20110928mesa-might-close-4-schools.html) communities and agriculture. It has space for 1,127 students but only 666 enrolled.

Cowan said it seemed logical to plan to close and either sell or demolish several portable buildings that now house Franklin Junior High and the Franklin Northeast and Franklin South elementary schools. Those students would attend Brimhall - to be renamed Franklin - in fall 2012.

Mesa Junior High, meanwhile, is 59 years old and needs approximately $4 million in repairs, Cowan said. Cowan said he recently spoke to city officials about the possibility of demolishing the Mesa Junior High building and turning the site into a park with a [soccer](http://www.azcentral.com/community/mesa/articles/2011/09/28/20110928mesa-might-close-4-schools.html) field.