

Custer

high pupil costs over the past decade. Thankfully, other schools in Mandan are fully prepared to take in any child displaced by Custer's closure.

"We met with all of our elementary principals," said Bitz, "and asked if they would be able to accommodate all of Custer's students if it were no longer here. The answer was a resounding yes."

Under Bitz's proposal, the students of Custer Elementary will be split between four other elementary schools throughout the district. To help ease the transition, visitations and parent nights would take place once the closure is made official in May.

"It's a shame that some students might be separated from their friends," said Bitz, "but hopefully they're able to reunite outside of the classroom. We only have one middle school, so there's a strong chance they'll see each other there too."

With these potential changes, parents may also be concerned about how their kids will get to their new schools. Very few changes to the current transportation plan are currently scheduled, though bus schedules may change slightly.

"We already bus about 2,000 kids a day, including about 50 from Custer," said Bitz. "We'll continue to provide that transportation, and while we won't be creating any new bus routes, changing preexisting ones to pass through the area would be easy."

As for the staff of Custer Elementary, Bitz intends to avoid laying anyone off, and prom-

ises that teachers and faculty members will replace those who are retiring in the coming year. This, he claims, will help keep jobs in the community while also meeting the needs of their new schools.

"Nobody would be losing their job," said Bitz. "As an example, the principal of Red Trail Elementary is planning to retire soon. We can easily put Custer's principal there. It's the same with other staff... we can move them to fill the roles of retiring staff members across the district instead of replacing anyone."

Conservatively, repositioning their employees instead of hiring new ones is expected to save at least \$800,000 in hiring fees. These can then be used to meet the growing needs of Mandan's middle and high schools, which have not seen the same level of decline.

"Our overall enrollment is still going up in middle and high school," said Bitz. "Our middle and high schools are saying they'd like to add staff to help handle the influx of students. We can use some of the funding from Custer's closure to meet their needs, if we have to."

There is, of course, the possibility that birth rates do increase in 2026- but even then, Bitz states that there are far more logical ways to meet the new demands that are both cheaper and more efficient than giving Custer a second chance.

"If the 2026 birth rates increase," said Bitz, "we'll end up with a larger kindergarten class in 2031 and every

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year moving forward. At that point, it'd be cheaper and more educationally sound to add six classrooms onto Lakewood Elementary than reopen Custer... in fact, Lakewood was specifically designed to be added on to when enrollment increased. It would also allow for efficiencies created by a larger population of students. We wouldn't need to hire another principal, have traveling teachers, hire extra cooks, or pay extra for snow removal and lawn care."

Although classes at Custer may end, the building itself will remain a staple of downtown Mandan. Bitz states that while he is not at liberty to reveal any names, outside parties have already expressed interest in the schoolhouse. Regardless of what happens to the building, though, MPS is hopeful that shutting down Custer will help them focus on improving the quality of life for every student in Mandan.

"The closure will allow us to serve all of our kids better," said Bitz. "We can only spend each dollar once. If I'm spending it at Custer, I can't spend it at a school with more students. With this plan, we'll be putting more of our resources where the kids are, and doing it in a way that gets the most out of our money."

By the time this piece is published, the school board meeting discussing this matter will have already taken place. The results, and Custer Elementary's fate, will be presented in the Morton County News Journal's next issue.



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PUBLIC NOTICE

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF MORTON COUNTY, STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA

In the matter of the petition for name change of Xyla Pearl Custer, a minor child

NOTICE OF PETITION FOR NAME CHANGE

1. PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that a petition will be filed by the Petitioner with the above-entitled court requesting an Order changing the name of Xyla Pearl Custer to Xyla Pearl Peterson.

2. NOTICE IT FURTHER GIVEN that thirty days after publication, the Petitioner intends to file a petition requesting entry of the Court's Order changing the name of the minor child. Any objection to granting this name change must be given in writing to the address listed below within 30 days of the date of this publication. The written objection must also be filed with the Court. If no objections are given, the Court may respond to the Petition without further hearing.

Dated 2-24-2026

Chelsea Peterson

Petitioner

2003 Marina RD SE 209

Mandan, ND 58554

Published March 4, 2026

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WEEKLY SPECIALS

<p>MONDAY Lunch Chimichanga \$11.⁹⁹ Fajita Quesadilla \$15.⁹⁹</p> <p>TUESDAY Street Taco \$2.⁰⁰ Speedy Gonzalez \$10.⁹⁹</p> <p>WEDNESDAY Lunch Burrito Croqueta \$11.⁴⁹ Chicken Fajitas \$17.⁹⁹</p>	<p>THURSDAY Lunch California Burrito \$12.⁴⁹ Burrito Fajita \$16.⁹⁹ Half price house margaritas all day</p> <p>FRIDAY Lunch Ranchero Cheese Steak \$12.⁴⁹ Lindo Special \$19.⁹⁹</p> <p>SATURDAY Tacos Al Carbon \$13.⁹⁹ Mixed Fajitas \$22.⁹⁹</p>	<p>SUNDAY Arroz Con Pollo \$15.⁹⁹ Steak and Shrimp \$26.⁹⁹</p>
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**MON. - SAT.
11am - 10pm**

**SUNDAY
11am - 9pm**

Good luck

Good luck to the Braves Swim and Dive team as they head to West Fargo to participate in the State Tournament March 6-7!

Nine athletes are qualified in individual events. Alternates will swim on relays if needed.

Gavin Fry- diver

Michael Gerhardt- swimmer

Bennett Graff- swimmer

Vincent Keller- swimmer

Kye Knodel- swimmer

Ian Lahtinen- swimmer

Trevor Leingang- swimmer

Jared Lindsey- swimmer

Brendan Smith- diver

Alternates- Leonardo Feist, Joss Fraser, Alex Miller, Jacob Schanandore, Drake Schoellkopf

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The Morton County News Journal is published each Wednesday at GS Publishing, LLC, 514 Main Ave., New Salem, ND 58563. Periodicals postage is paid at New Salem, ND and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster send address changes to: GS Publishing, LLC • P.O. Box 416 New Salem, ND 58563

Morton County	\$50.00
All other subscriptions	\$60.00
E-edition	\$40.00