# Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
# After-Action Review: June through December, 2022
# Published February 28, 2023

## Introduction and Context

In the spring of 2022, the Jeffco Public Schools Board of Education charged Superintendent Tracy Dorland with bringing forward a comprehensive plan for school consolidation to address two decades of shifting demographics in Jefferson County which have led to a declining school-age population and subsequent impacts on enrollment. Although the reality of declining enrollment has been a long-standing concern, previous considerations of school closures were halted.

When the district embarked on this work, its enrollment declines had been accelerated by circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic; Jeffco schools lost 5,000 students, more than any other school district in Colorado. The District had seats for 96,000 students in its district-managed schools, was serving only 69,000, and had made two untimely, emergency spring closure decisions in the prior two years (Allendale Elementary School in 2021 and Fitzmorris Elementary School in 2022) due to unsustainable enrollment numbers, the timing of which left both impacted families and staff members with limited options.

District staff began this work by evaluating and requesting revisions to Policy FCB, the district policy used to guide school closure decisions. This policy was revised with the Board's approval in June 2022 and guided the district in both the data to review in creating recommendations, as well as the timeline on which recommendations and decisions would be made. As part of an initiative that the district referred to as Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools (ROFTS), recommendations on school consolidations were announced on August 25, 2022[1] and on November 10, 2022, in a single package vote the Board approved the consolidation of 16 elementary schools.

**Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools Timeline and Process Steps**
The first phase of ROFTS began to unfold over an approximately five-month period from June 2022 through November 2022. Major milestones and process steps included the following:

- **June 8, 2022:** Working session presentation provided to the Board of Education. The items from the presentation included the following points: continuing to review/discuss the Board and district's definition of a thriving elementary school; Phase I planning scope including a review of analysis and assessment of district-managed elementary school enrollment; and recommended policy revisions. The policy revisions designated a specific date (June 30) for the district to provide reports for every elementary school for the public dissemination; designated a specific deadline for the Superintendent's recommendation (August) for a Board vote (November); and designated that at the time of the recommendation, an articulation-area committee would be formed.
- **June 30, 2022:** The Board of Education received access to a public dashboard on district-managed elementary schools providing data aligned with Policy FCB. Receipt of this report was the first step in the process anticipating a November 2022 Board vote.
- **July 26, 2022:** Study session presentation provided to the Board of Education outlining data for elementary schools available on the FCB dashboard.
- **July 27, 2022 through August 24, 2022:** The Jeffco Schools ROFTS team brought in principals in early August to share preliminary thinking and ask them to flag issues of concern, especially around building capacity and community context. The 2022-23 school year began on August 16 for all students, and the district paused enrollment numbers on August 24, 2022 for its decision-making purposes.
- **August 25, 2022**: The superintendent delivered a presentation with recommendations for a 16 elementary school package vote on consolidations to the Board.
- **September 6, 2022 through September 16, 2022:** The first round of community conversations were held at each closing school, facilitated by the Keystone Group.
- **September 7, 2022:** A presentation including new boundary maps, an analysis of planned developments in areas recommended for consolidation, and class size guidelines in the district's collective bargaining agreement was delivered to the Board.

[1] ROFTS process steps, timeline and recommendations can be found here:
https://go.boarddocs.com/co/jeffco/Board.nsf/files/CHMV2B7E9A61/$file/Aug%2025%20ROFTS%20Recommendation%20Final.pdf

- **October 4, 2022 through October 19, 2022**: The second round of community conversations were held at each closing school or, in some instances, at the receiving school with both the closing and receiving school communities, using professional facilitation.
- **October 12, 2022:** A presentation including a progress update and answers to frequently asked questions that emerged during community conversations were delivered to the Board.
- **October 24, 2022 through November 3, 2022**: The Board hosted a one-hour public hearing for each school recommended for closure at a nearby school.
- **November 2, 2022:** Keystone Policy Center presented a community conversation report to the Board.
- **November 10, 2022:** The Board of Education unanimously voted to approve the package of 16 school consolidations.
- **November 11, 2022 through January 13, 2023:** A team of trained Enrollment Specialists conducted individualized outreach to all families impacted by school consolidations to support them through the EnrollJeffco process for the 23/24 school year. All students (K-4 or K-5) attending a closing school received priority for all district-managed elementary schools above the students who reside in Jefferson County priority.

*Note: Future after action reviews will cover activities between January and May 2023 and June 2023 and December 2023.*

## Purpose of the After-Action Review Process

The Board of Education requested an after-action review[2] related to ROFTS, via their November 10, 2022 resolution, to mine for lessons learned from the 2022 schools consolidation process, with the aim of identifying process changes and improvements for any future closures and consolidations of schools. Between November 30, 2022 and December 9, 2022, Amanda Perkins of Kochab Advising and Jeffco staff conducted after-action review conversations with those directly involved in, and responsible for, the change effort, including the Superintendent's Cabinet, key internal staff, principals from closing and receiving schools, Community Superintendents, and the Board of Education. In addition, a survey of FCB members was administered, via the Panorama platform, to understand their perspectives on the process.[3]

In each of the after-action meetings, participants were asked to ground in goals Jeffco staff established at the onset of the recommendations—that our principals feel supported, staff understand career opportunities, and our impacted families continue to attend Jeffco schools next year—and then offer and discuss what worked well, what did not, and what could be improved about the process. This report summarizes the key themes and takeaways across all groups.

This is the first of three after-action reviews the district expects to publish. In an effort to engage in real-time reflection and learning and to continuously improve, Jeffco Schools will conduct similar after-action reviews in August 2023 (to reflect on student enrollment and staff hiring January-June 2023) and December 2023 (to reflect on the school transition experiences for students, families, and staff July-December 2023).

### Key Decisions Related to the Timeline and Process

Throughout the process, the district faced decisions that had implications we outline in the next section. In this section, we lift up the most consequential decisions the district made and intentional approaches the district applied. While this is not a comprehensive list, it is the list that feels most important to elevate. In the Key Lessons Learned section, we capture how after-action review participants perceived the impact of these decisions and approaches.

[2] Lessons learned retrospectives or after action reviews require participants in a specific process to reflect on what went well and what didn't, as a way to mine for tension and understanding to inform a next experience. Participants adopt this directive: *We are not here to criticize negatively or find fault. The emphasis should be on learning. This only works if we can achieve maximum involvement, openness, and honesty. Regardless of what we discover, we must understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job they could, given what was known at the time, their skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand.*

[3]Summary survey results can be found here. Overview of the after action process with scripts can be found here.

1. **Clear criteria.** Jeffco named a small, clear set of criteria they would use to make consolidation decisions for its elementary schools: School enrollment of less than 220 K-2, K-5, K-6 students OR is utilizing 45% or less of the capacity of its facility AND there is an elementary school or schools less than 3.5 miles away that can serve the students from the closing school within the current articulation area.
2. **Importance of school leaders.** Jeffco's superintendent considers her leadership team to be inclusive of all school leaders. This intentional approach recognizes that principals are leaders in and beyond their school communities, as well as a trusted source of information and someone from whom students, staff, families, and neighbors take their cues. Given the relationships they have established over time, principals have credibility with families and neighbors that the district does not. The district relied on the more than 30 elementary school principals impacted by ROFTS Phase I to act as vital sense-makers for their communities.
3. **Boundary study.** The district's recommendation had all schools consolidate within their current articulation areas. Recommendations for consolidation were developed before conducting a detailed study of school boundaries across the 800-square miles in which Jeffco operates schools, which was a point of contention within the impacted communities. The rationale behind this decision was made in the context of Colorado's Public Schools of Choice law, which allows resident pupils to enroll at schools in which they are not zoned. The data showed that on average, 45% of Jeffco families choice out of their neighborhood elementary school, and 38% choice in. At schools recommended for closure, on average, 57% of families choice out of their neighborhood elementary school, and 41% choice in. The district concluded that a boundary study and any subsequent redrawing of boundaries would elongate the overall timeline but likely not change the practical reality for extremely small elementary schools.
4. **One receiving school whenever possible.** The district hoped that designating one school as the receiving school whenever possible would allow students to move together, ease transitions, and preserve community. They did this understanding that some communities would question why they didn't instead transition students to multiple schools to shore up enrollment.
5. **Timing of announcement.** The district announced recommendations for consolidation after the 2022-23 school year began and within days of the closure of Round 2 of EnrollJeffco (August 31), the final opportunity for families to use the choice process to choose a school for the current school year. This timeline was intentional. Schools were already staffed and resourced for the current school year based on anticipated enrollment making it challenging to shift resources. Therefore, if recommendations had been announced prior to the start of the school year and, as a result, families submitted applications through EnrollJeffco for different schools: (1) schools recommended for closure due to low enrollment likely would have seen further enrollment drops going into the school year (2) applications would have been rejected in most cases due to set staffing/resource levels; and (3) from a customer service standpoint, the district did not have the capacity to support an influx of EnrollJeffco applications or the follow-up that would have been required. Administrative transfer data shows that out of 149 requests received through December 2022 for students in grades K-6, only five cited school closure as the reason for their request.
6. **One package recommendation for the closure of 16 schools.** Rather than having the Board vote on the closure and consolidation of each school separately, the district presented the recommendations as a package of schools for one vote, all of which met its outlined criteria. In the past, the outcome of Jeffco's school closure decisions was influenced by how organized or vocal a community was in its opposition to the closure. The district started this work with the presumption that each and every community fervently opposed the closure of its school regardless of how outspoken they were about the recommendation. The district's purpose in the package vote was to level the playing field in two ways: (1) to give each Board member equal responsibility in the decision-making process even though some had more schools affected in their Board district than others, and (2) to prevent bias and limit subjectivity – advocacy by a community for one school generally applied to all schools given the consistent criteria the district applied.
7. **Focus on three objectives throughout the decision-making process.** The district designed an 11-week decision-making process from initial recommendation to Board vote. It knew that those 11 weeks would likely test its capacity as it worked to support schools that were part of the recommendation, engage communities and staff, meet Board member needs, and prepare for the outcome of the vote. To stay focused and grounded during this time frame, it set three clear objectives: 1) Impacted school leaders feel

supported; 2) Impacted school staff understand career opportunities; 3) Impacted families continue to attend Jeffco schools in the 2023-24 school year.

8. **Timing of community engagement.** The district designed community engagement with families to occur during the 11 weeks between publicizing the recommendations and the Board's vote. This decision was intended to provide time to gather community concerns and input into potential transitions before the vote occurred. As noted in the lessons learned section, while some felt this period was too long, others stated that the required planning and community engagement could not have been pulled off in a shorter window. This is particularly the case because this was the first time Jeffco engaged in this process at this scale and it needed the time to build processes to support families and staff for both potential outcomes of the vote.
9. **Nature of community engagement.** The district decided from the onset that its approach to community engagement would be to inform communities and understand their most pressing concerns and challenges related to the transition that would occur if the recommendation was approved. In most communities, there were four separate engagements during the 11-week period: two community conversations, one public hearing, and an online survey. In addition, each school engaged an FCB committee of school and community representatives who contributed to school transition reports provided to the Board of Education.
10. **Integrity and transparency in the face of uncertainty.** District leaders knew they could not create the perfect plan, have an answer for every question, or satisfy everybody in this process. They also recognized that staff would need to learn as the process evolved. While they could not remove the uncertainty for staff and communities, it was within their control to act with integrity and optimal transparency and they aimed to do so throughout the process.

A final note on decisions and tradeoffs. Given the many stakeholders with a vested interest in the schools and the recommendations for consolidation, district leaders knew that there would be situations where the needs and preferences of different stakeholder groups would be at odds, and that its answers or methods wouldn't satisfy all parties. In those cases, the district's approach was to work through the tensions while always holding steady on decision #6 above, knowing there would be tradeoffs. Examples of these tensions:

1. Communities want to be a part of the decision about school closing criteria, but they also don't want their school to close.
2. After a decade of conversations about school closures, as well as one-off action on closures, this larger-scale consolidation of elementary schools impacted families and staff who had previously been part of school communities that had closed or had operated under the threat of being closed. The emotions and, oftentimes anger, that rose from distrust and previous dynamics within communities and between communities and the district was ever present in this work.
3. The district encountered significant anger and frustration that the community engagement was not focused on if a school or schools should be closed or strategies to keep the school open. Additionally, the district focused its engagement on families attending the closing schools, which frustrated neighbors with no children in the schools. They felt they were not properly informed or engaged given the impact on their neighborhood.
4. The district had never closed schools on this scale; very few districts have. They knew that they wouldn't anticipate every question they'd need to answer and that many would need to be answered as they went. This would be unsatisfying for families and likely cause more work for staff and school leaders, in particular.
5. Given the lift, the district knew staff would need to move with urgency and that there wouldn't always be time or capacity to examine every decision from every angle. But their mindset was that they couldn't let perfect be the enemy of good given the significant and harmful district-wide impact that declining enrollment was having on student and staff experiences and outcomes.
6. Community members want a voice and also want assurances. This plays out as simultaneous frustration that the train seems to already have left the station, and that every aspect of a potential consolidation is not yet decided and detailed.

## Key Lessons Learned

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School consolidation in any district is complex, difficult, and emotional work. Jeffco's process was challenging for all involved and included decision-makers, participants, and stakeholders with different understandings of the problem to be solved, viewed from different vantage points. Generally, families have chosen a specific school for their student(s) for a reason that is very personal to them; no matter the circumstances they generally and genuinely feel their child is having a thriving experience. The district has a broader, systemic view of the enrollment and educational realities that can be perceived as uncaring, impersonal, and, as some parents vocalized, that the district sees their child as just a number.

Given the option, many community members would choose not to close their neighborhood school. And yet, it's the responsibility of the school district to ensure a high-quality and equitable experience for all students, something they knew was not possible if they continued to operate many under enrolled schools. Creating the conditions for Jeffco to be a thriving district where all students achieve their biggest dreams was the motivation behind the consolidation process, and leaders never contemplated the option of asking if parents would settle for fewer academic and enrichment opportunities and experiences in order to keep their school open. Given the complexity of this work, there are valuable lessons for Jeffco and other districts faced with similar enrollment challenges as they reflect on the plan and execution.

What follows are the key takeaways we heard across all groups, organized into three big themes: (1) Process, logistics, timeline, roles (2) Collaboration and cross-functional work (3) School, community, and family experience. We include both aspects that went well that the district might replicate and areas for improvement and further refinement.

## 1. Process, Logistics, and Timeline

1. **Enabling an extraordinary student experience aligned with Jeffco Thrives 2025 values was the underlying motivation that guided all analysis.** This intentionality to go forward with a bold decision because District leaders believed it was right for kids is what created cohesion and alignment at the district, despite how challenging the process was.
2. **Clear, easy-to-understand consolidation criteria, consistently applied.** Given the uncertainty and emotion of any school closings process, it's critical to have a set of criteria to consistently turn to with integrity. The naming of a small list of easy-to-understand criteria was frequently named as a strength of the process by District stakeholders. However, impacted community members strongly disagreed with the criteria that were used for recommendations. They frequently cited that these criteria lacked an equity lens and did not capture other important information that they felt should be used in making decisions about closure, including academic performance, student demographics, programmatic offerings, and more.
3. **Transparent, compelling data, consistently grounding decisions and engagement.** Participants frequently cited the value of the FCB Dashboard as a way to share data and create a shared understanding of enrollment challenges. They also reported that decisions were grounded in data and always checked for alignment with the three project goals. However, doing this well means that there will be a regular stream of questions and new scenarios to consider that will also require quick responses. These data requests are fulfilled by staff members who already have full workloads. Jeffco drastically stretched its capacity as an organization to do this work, and leaders understand they pushed their staff extremely hard to carry out this process.
4. **Voting on all 16 consolidations as a package deal.** Although not universally popular, this was frequently cited by District staff members as a helpful aspect of the process in that it meant communities were not pitted against one another and avoided community-by-community negotiation and animosity. However, community members vehemently disagreed with the package approach. Related to the decision and feedback on school closure criteria, community members named that issues of individual school culture, programming, and demographics could not play a role if schools were not evaluated separately. Many community members felt this was both unfair and lacked a true equity lens. Public response to this aspect of the process is well documented in the Keystone report linked in the appendix.

5. **A clear commitment on the part of the district office to communicate with the public, communities, principals, and Board of Education.** From their perspective, district leadership attempted to be consistently honest, transparent, and in constant communication as the process evolved. Participants frequently cited a social media campaign focused on the "why" of school consolidations as a strength. However, communication sometimes fell short due to the speed at which decisions needed to be made, and the need to customize communication for specific stakeholders. All stakeholder groups felt this frustration at points in the process. For example, in order to make two of the one-site consolidations work, it was determined that facility additions were needed to support the increase in student population. While these and other required facility projects were published with the ROFTS recommendation in August 2022, the projects would only be priced and approved to move forward with an affirmative Board recommendation in November. Thus, Board approval of the recommendation was made without estimates for the cost of construction or upgrades in receiving schools to accommodate merged communities, which surfaced as a frustration point for Board members following the vote[4]. We discuss some of the shortcomings in communication with the community in more detail in the third section.
6. **Implementation support for principals post-vote.** The district brought on an experienced former community superintendent in November 2022 to provide dedicated leadership support to both closing and receiving school principals. Principal participants called out this person's ability to help schools see the big picture, familiarity with Jeffco and whom to contact for support, and ability to jump in to support consolidation transitions as key strengths. Principals appreciate this support immensely and noted it would have been ideal to bring this person on earlier.

***Process, logistics, and timeline questions Jeffco Schools should consider in the next major change effort:***

- What is the right amount of time between announcing a possible large-scale change and the Board voting on the change? How to ensure enough time to meaningfully engage the community and engage in planning, while not having it go on too long? Now that the district has done this work, are there efficiencies it can realize in processes and structures that will allow for an abbreviated time frame?
- The district opted to engage communities in visioning for possible consolidation pre-vote. Throughout the process, communities asked both: "Why don't you already have a plan?" and "Why didn't you involve us in the planning?" How might the district better balance these needs?
- The community was not always satisfied with the answers the district provided along the way, or the fact that they couldn't answer everything at once. Is there a response the district could have given that would have satisfied those impacted by the recommendation and ultimate decision?
- Consolidating schools requires resources, for example, to establish appropriate preschool classrooms, modify special ed center program areas, and build small additions to accommodate increases in student enrollment. How can the district effectively cost out, communicate, and explain the associated one-time capital costs and how they are different from ongoing general fund expenses?
- Are there additional criteria, or different layers of criteria, the district should consider? Is it possible to introduce more nuance while also keeping the criteria clear and easy to apply and also ensure it does not feel arbitrary? Are there any criteria that would have been acceptable to impacted families?
- How can the district explicitly factor equity into consolidation recommendations and decisions?

## 2. Culture, Collaboration, and Cross-Functional Work

1. **Leadership, alignment, and commitment from the Board, district staff, and the cabinet.** After-action participants cited their confidence in the leadership of the district and a belief in the vision of the superintendent as major positive factors. They also perceived the superintendent and cabinet's engagement with stakeholders as positive, honest, and true to their values of transparency. There was an

[4] In Jeffco, facility projects have a separate capital-specific funding source. The cost of an addition to a building is a one-time capital expenditure as opposed to the ongoing general fund expenses incurred when resourcing and supplementing an under-enrolled school, year after year.

overall sense among District staff that those around the table were equipped to lead the change that was needed and they supported one another as people throughout this challenging process.

2. **ROFTS was prioritized by leadership and all staff, with one clear leader and a project manager dedicated to supporting the effort.** While the cabinet and the superintendent made decisions, there was one person at the center of the ROFTS effort who was directing, fielding questions and suggestions, and was available continuously as a resource to closing school principals. Participants reported that this clarity about who to go to, plus weekly project management meetings, kept internal stakeholders updated and focused on what to expect.
3. **Collaboration and responsiveness of district staff.** A universal theme from all after-action conversations was the remarkable responsiveness of district staff when it came to answering questions, preparing analysis, and making decisions, even if the first answer was "I'm not sure, let me work on that for you." However, it is important to cite that for community members whose schools were closing, this transparency into what was unknown was often received as an indication that the district did not have a coherent plan for closures. Internally, the district's commitment to convene folks at different levels, in group and 1:1 settings, created a shared understanding as the process evolved. And participants reported that, in those meetings, individuals didn't "stay in lanes", but rather engaged in cross-functional discussion and problem-solving. This collaboration also extended outside of the meeting rooms. While collaboration was strong, some departments should have been more deeply engaged sooner given the implications of the change. This work requires every cabinet chief to contemplate, design, and take responsibility for the role their team will play in the effort.
4. **Principal engagement to leverage their local insights, guide the process, and build trust.** The district engaged principals as thought partners, listened to and made adjustments based on their feedback, and counted on them as sense-makers. One shared: "On day one there was a sense of trust. They brought us into the conversations and listened to voices and perspectives. As a result of those conversations, there were multiple instances of the process being adjusted based on feedback. Or, if they didn't adjust, they came back and said why they couldn't. That contributed to the trust and confidentiality." This engagement allowed principals to lead the change in their schools. Not every principal felt equally engaged, with many receiving school principals reporting that it felt like it was assumed that they needed less support because their schools were not closing. In addition, where collaboration between closing and receiving school principals was strongest, it was often due to prior working relationships. The district could more proactively support that collaboration.

***As Jeffco embarks on future large-scale change, to keep culture, collaboration, and cross-functional work on track it should ask itself the following questions:***

- Are we designing this process in alignment with our values as a district?
- Do we have the buy-in of our principals or what do we need to do to get it?
- Are our principals adequately prepared and supported to be sense makers for our communities?
- How is the cabinet functioning? Are there high levels of trust and commitment? Do we have commitments and agreements to lean on when things get tough?
- What happens when these leaders walk out of this room? Are they accountable to one another?
- This process was extremely demanding of the time, energy, and resources of district and school staff, who already have very full plates. They did the remarkable work of keeping the district departments and their schools running well while also taking on additional responsibilities. How might the district build required capacity in future change efforts?

### 3. School, Community, and Family Experience

1. **A gap exists between what the public understands and what the district knows about demographic trends and enrollment declines, and that gap needs to close over time.** The scope of the enrollment and capacity issues had not been adequately communicated across the district, catching communities off guard when the consolidation announcement was made. Therefore, the district had a big job to do in helping families understand the need for consolidation. This meant that community engagement became more about

understanding the issue, debating the data, and answering questions, and less about planning for the best possible transitions as Jeffco leaders had hoped.

- The demographic reality of the district is that there are far fewer students than the 96,000 Jeffco Schools has the capacity to serve, and there's no expectation that student enrollment will increase. Even with the 16 closures, Jeffco has reduced its capacity from 96,000 to 89,000, and less than 68,000 are enrolled.
- The 2020 Census shows a population increase in Jefferson County of 55,854 residents from 2000 to 2020. In the same time period, the population of school-aged children (5-19) decreased by 29,918. In addition, the under age 5 population has decreased and, in 2020, the lowest number of births was recorded in 15 years.
- However, the family perspective is based on their own lived experience and also influenced by how much new construction they see in the area and who they perceive might move in, so it's hard to reconcile the enrollment crisis and data trends with individual and public perception, especially when families are just hearing about them as part of a school closing process.
- A moratorium on school closures by prior district leadership amplified these challenges, resulting in many small elementary schools continuing to operate amid consistently declining enrollment and depleted resources. That decision, along with further declines in enrollment post-pandemic, gave current district leadership little choice but to make big decisions or face many more emergency closures. This conflicting action (from moratorium to large-scale closure recommendation) likely contributed to the gap in understanding between the public and the district of the severity of the situation, including the fact that the district had run out of options.

2. **Increased outreach to communities to make clear that a thriving student experience is not achievable when so many schools are under-enrolled.** The district has articulated and communicated the student experience it's holding itself accountable to inJeffco Thrives 2025, Our Learners: Our Future. Many parents at community meetings expressed a love of the small school feel and yet, without anything to compare it to, they do not realize the opportunities their child could be having at a better-resourced school. Additionally, few connections are made to how supplementing resources at an under-enrolled school impacts both staffing and programming at other district schools, K-12. Helping parents to see that the enrollment reality means educators are split between two buildings, go without a planning partner, buildings don't have sufficient administrative or support staff, and that all of these realities mean a lesser experience for their child, is key.
3. **Multiple opportunities for community meetings and Board meetings.** The process included two community meetings, FCB meetings, a one-hour public hearing for each closing school community, and public comment opportunities at three regular Board meetings including the November 10 vote, in addition to school-based conversations hosted by the school principal and/or their community superintendent. After-action participants felt this was the right number of opportunities, however, they shared several observations and areas of improvement, including:
    - The district communicated that the decision to consolidate was not done until the vote, but communities felt it was a done deal before the vote. This disconnect was due both to past experiences families had had with the district as well as statements made by Board members regarding how they intended to vote during the current process that, while made in a good faith effort to be honest about their perspectives, caused significant tension in community engagements.
    - The first round of community meetings moved too quickly to a conversation about hopes and dreams, rather than giving school communities the space to fully understand the "why" and background for the district's challenge with enrollment. They also didn't have the space and time they needed to be frustrated, to process, and to grieve. The district realized this misstep and pivoted for the second round of meetings.
    - Community sessions were emotionally challenging for families and school and district staff. As noted in a prior section, the district relied heavily on the elementary school principals who were impacted by the recommendations to act as sense makers for the community. No one was better equipped to share the challenges of declining enrollment and resourcing an under-enrolled school,

more so than the school principal. They hosted parent and staff meetings and worked with district staff to provide supports for students and this made a significant difference in how people in their communities reacted to the consolidation recommendation. However, this reliance on school principals was extraordinarily taxing on them. It also put them in the difficult position of needing to champion district decisions that they might not personally agree with.

- As noted in a prior section, the district's overall approach to community engagement was to inform communities about the change and understand their concerns and challenges. However, many community members felt that this kind of engagement was transactional and disrespectful. Throughout the process, community members repeated feedback that they would have liked to be engaged much earlier in discussions regarding whether their school should be recommended for closure and to create solutions to the problem.

4. **The district's highly customized approach to community engagement based on what communities were ready for was a strength.** The district acknowledged that each community was different, and consulted school leaders on what kind of engagement their communities were ready for. In the second round of engagement, some school communities were ready to share hopes and fears for potential consolidations in a large group setting, while others needed more time in smaller groups to process questions and frustrations. Similarly, some closing school communities were ready to meet jointly with families and staff at receiving schools, while others preferred for conversations to stay within and among the closing school community until after the vote.
    - While participants shared that this high level of customization is necessary, it also meant that meetings looked different from one place to another. This sometimes created confusion, when for instance, it was not always clear whether receiving school staff should attend meetings at closing schools, leading to inconsistencies across school communities.
5. **Teachers and staff at closing and receiving schools were present and engaged in community meetings.** From greeting parents, to taking attendance to ensuring everybody got dinner, to representing their schools in conversation, this level of commitment was not at all surprising given the quality and commitment of Jeffco educators but is worth acknowledging. These sessions, plus open houses and other school-based meetings, represent significant additional work for principals and school-based staff.
6. **FCB committee process.**[5] After-action participants noted the process of engaging local school committees as a positive. Per the FCB survey responses, it was important for them to come together to plan for possible transitions prior to the Board vote, to report out on school values and challenges associated with closure, and to have representatives from the proposed closing and receiving school as part of the committee.[6] However, respondents have questions about if/how the FCB report will be used by the district. Many expressed skepticism about the transparency of the process itself and the utility of the FCB recommendations. Some expressed that the process between schools being announced and the Board vote felt too long, while others thought it should have started several months earlier. Consistent with what Keystone reported, FCB members feel emotional, angry, dissatisfied, and skeptical about the process, a reality Jeffco Schools will need to address as school transitions continue.
7. **Board and district leadership participation in community conversations.** After action participants consistently underscored the importance of community superintendent, district staff, and Board presence at community meetings, Board comment, and in closing schools the day after the announcement of consolidation recommendations. Their presence conveyed a high level of alignment and support.
    - While this alignment and support was well-received, it also had the effect of creating tension between Board members' roles as sense-makers for their communities and decision-makers on the recommendation. The Board asked for a comprehensive plan to consolidate schools and had the exclusive authority to vote to close schools, but they did not create the recommendation, district staff did. This division of responsibilities meant that Board members were stuck in the middle. Community members often requested hearing directly from the Board instead of staff, which

[5] FCB committee process is explained on slides 49-50, here: https://go.boarddocs.com/co/jeffco/Board.nsf/files/CHMV2B7E9A61/$file/Aug%2025%20ROFTS%20Recommendation%20Final.pdf

[6] A summary of all survey results can be found here.

meant that Board members were asked to provide detailed answers on recommendations they did not create.
- This lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities also showed up in public meetings. For example, there was a perception by school communities that the Board wasn't listening during public hearings and public comment sessions because they could not respond directly to individuals, per Board rules. However, it should be noted that Board members did meet with and respond to constituents in many other forums including 1:1 meetings, written communication, and in some of the community conversations.

***School, Community, and Family Experience questions Jeffco Schools should consider in a next major change effort:***

- How can the district help its communities understand complex issues with district-wide impact like under enrollment, and effectively frame up that the equity issue as it relates to the educational experience reaches far beyond one school and one level (e.g., elementary)? What is the role of something like an FCB dashboard in accomplishing this?
- Community members were not always satisfied with the answers Jeffco schools provided and that they couldn't answer everything at once. They were often frustrated that there wasn't a detailed plan for all aspects of consolidation even before the vote to consolidate. How could Jeffco Schools have previewed this tension for them?
- When planning community engagement, how can the district better "meet communities where they are at," and design discussions that feel healthy and productive? How might Jeffco begin to move into the role of "recipient" of viable solutions that are generated within the communities impacted?
- How can Jeffco Schools partner with municipal leaders and elected officials to support intentional trust and relationship building between the district and impacted communities?
- Roles at community meetings were not always clear. How can Jeffco Schools clarify the roles of Board members, district staff, school staff, and facilitators in community meetings?
- How can Jeffco Schools create the capacity for all staff members to show up to meetings and represent the evolving situation accurately and empathetically? How can it build the capacity of more staff to accurately represent the district with communities?

## Appendix

Media

**Fall 2022** FCB Survey summary (from Panorama)

**After Action Review Process and Sample Facilitation Plan:**
ROFTS Lessons Learned After Action Review Scope and Process
ROFTS Lessons Learned Meeting Facilitation Plan--sample protocol

**October 2022 Keystone Report:** REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THRIVING SCHOOLS SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: Listening & Learning to Inform District Supports & Strategy

November 2022 Board Session Materials