

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023 Published March 12, 2024

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 in August 2022, 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, the timing of which left both impacted families and staff members with limited options.

As part of an initiative that the district refers to as Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools (ROFTS), recommendations on school consolidations were announced on August 25, 2022¹ and on November 10, 2022, in a single package vote the Board approved the consolidation of 16 elementary schools.

Since November 2022, district staff and educators have worked to operationalize the changes needed to follow through on the Board decision, while continuing to focus on the three goals they adopted with the announcement of the recommendation:

- Impacted school leaders feel supported
- Impacted educators and school staff understand career opportunities
- Impacted families continue to attend Jeffco schools in the 2023-24 school year

The initial enrollment data collected at the conclusion of Round 1 EnrollJeffco in early 2023 showed that identified welcoming schools would receive anywhere from 49 to 95 percent of students from their closing school partner. While not initially identified as a welcoming school, Hackberry Hill had such a volume of interested students from closing schools that the district considered it a welcoming school for the 2023-2024 and, as such, provided aligned support. Enrollment at each welcoming school was projected to be more than 220 students in the 2023-24 school year.²

As of October 2023, designated welcoming schools received an average of 87 ROFTS-impacted students, representing an average of 54% of all students impacted by ROFTS. The school that received the greatest proportion of impacted students from its paired closing school received 76% of students. The school that received the smallest proportion of impacted students from its paired closing school received 31% of students.

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools Timeline November 2022-May 2023

The first phase of ROFTS unfolded between June 2022-November 2022, when recommendations for school closures were developed, announced and adopted by the Jeffco Board of Education. A detailed

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](https://go.boarddocs.com/co/jeffco/Board.nsf/files/CHMV2B7E9A61/$file/Aug%2025%20ROFTS%20Recommendation%20Final.pdf)

²The criteria for recommendations for school closure in Phase I of ROFTS were: 1) Enrollment of less than 220 K-2, K-5, K-6 students OR utilizing less than 45% of its facility; 2) presence of elementary schools less than 3.5 miles away that can serve students in the current articulation area

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

review of the process and lessons learned from that time period can be found in the [previously published Part I](#) of the ROFTS After-Action Review series. Below is an overview of the district’s work between November 2022 and May 2023 specifically related to hiring, enrollment support and planning for student and staff transitions. A future after-action review will cover what was required to pack up and move materials as well as the specific student and staff transition supports that took place throughout the fall of the 2023-24 school year.

- August 25, 2022: District staff recommends closing and consolidating 16 small elementary schools.
- November 10, 2022: The Board of Education unanimously approves the package of 16 school consolidations.
- November 11, 2022: Supports deployed to all closed schools in the form of structured SEL protocols for adults and children, therapy dogs, guest teachers, representatives from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and more.
- November, 2022 – April 15, 2023: Human Resources (HR) supports all licensed and classified staff to find new positions, following negotiated agreements and specific Memoranda of Understanding with bargaining units (see the appendix).
- December, 2022 – January 2023: Families make enrollment decisions, including indicating whether they will attend the welcoming school or submit a choice enrollment application to a different Jeffco school. Principals monitor and manage their enrollment for the following year.
- February – May, 2023: Led by two dedicated Administrators on Special Assignment, closing and welcoming school principals plan for student and staff transitions, including end-of-year celebrations, shared events to build culture and reviewing student data to prepare for the following school year.

Purpose of the After-Action Review Process

The Board of Education, in its November 10, 2022 resolution, requested after-action reviews³ to mine for lessons learned from the school consolidation process. The purpose of the after-action review is to identify successes for replication and process changes or improvements for any future closures and consolidations of schools.

This is the second 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 a similar after-action review in December 2023 to reflect on the school transition experiences for students, families and staff.

This second round after-action review is focused on experiences and perceptions around hiring, enrollment and efforts to prepare for student, family and staff transitions. Between May 3, 2023 and June 13, 2023, Amanda Perkins of Kochab Advising conducted after-action review conversations with those directly involved in, responsible for, or impacted by the change effort, including key internal staff, principals from closing and welcoming schools, community superintendents and educators.⁴ In

³ 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.*

⁴ Overview of the after action process with questions we asked can be found [here](#).

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

In addition, surveys of impacted families and closing school principals were administered to understand their perspectives on the process.

The after-action meetings were grounded in the goals Jeffco staff established at the onset of the ROFTS process. Those three goals were—that principals feel supported, staff understand career opportunities and our impacted families continue to attend Jeffco schools next year. The after-action meetings solicited discussion about what worked well, what did not and what could be improved about the process. This report summarizes the key themes and takeaways across three areas—hiring, enrollment and transitions—contributed by participants.

Key Decisions and Activities Related to this Process

The Board of Education’s November 10, 2022 resolution to close 16 elementary schools also directed district staff to “take the steps necessary to ensure that the staff, students, and families in the affected schools are assisted in transitioning to other schools and other positions in accordance with district policy, negotiated agreements, state law.” This required examining existing processes and ensuring that the systems enabled a focus on the students, families, staff and school leaders affected by the Board’s decision to close schools. Throughout the November–May time period, the district provided strategic, planned and also just-in-time supports. This section lifts up the most consequential actions the district took, the intentional decisions it made and the critical wraparound supports it employed for those impacted by consolidations. In the Key Lessons Learned section, we capture how after-action review participants perceived the impact and value of these actions.

- **Proactively manage student enrollment, transitions and success through centralized supports.** One of the chief goals of this initiative was to continue serving students in Jeffco schools as they transitioned from their closing school. 84% of all students impacted by the school closures during the 2022-23 school year re-enrolled in another Jeffco school as of October 2023.
 - **Enrollment Guarantees:** The district ensured that every student currently enrolled in a closing school, whether they lived in that school’s boundary or choiced-in, would have a place at the designated welcoming school. This was done in part by absorbing the closing school’s boundary into the welcoming school’s boundary. Choice-in students attending closing schools had a guaranteed spot at the welcoming school as well as their own boundary elementary school (as dictated by their residential address).
 - **Choice Lottery Priority:** All impacted students attending a closing school received a special level of priority in the choice lottery for all district-managed elementary schools. This special level of priority placed students impacted by closures one step above the “Students who reside in Jefferson County” priority level during Round 1 and Round 2 of the EnrollJeffco process.
 - **Enrollment Specialists:** To ensure that impacted families had access to a dedicated support person as they navigated the enrollment process, the district hired, trained and managed 17 Enrollment Specialists to provide 1:1 support to the 2,464 impacted students..
 - **Management of the Number of Available Seats and Decisions About Adding Seats:** District staff monitored EnrollJeffco throughout the choice windows. In one case, they made an additional school a welcoming school based on the number of students impacted by a school closure who enrolled there. In other cases, the district worked with specific schools to ensure they had the physical space they needed to receive the students they anticipated. The Property and Planning team (part of the facilities department) worked with each individual principal to adjust the use of space (e.g., where

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

small group learning or counseling sessions were held), which sometimes included moving walls or creating built-in storage to free up a book room for example.

- **School-Based Events and Opportunities for Closing School Parents to Learn More About Welcoming Schools:** These took many forms. They were planned by school leaders and staff and included: open houses; community nights; scheduled group tours; 1:1 tours with the principal or led by students; and having the welcoming school principal attend PTA and SAC meetings to share about their school and vice versa.
- **Transition Support Events:** After the round 1 enrollment period closed and offers were extended, welcoming and closing schools collaborated on events to begin building a shared school culture. These included “Better Together” events like joint field trips, pen pals, buddy programs, student shadowing experiences, virtual collaborative projects, spring after school clubs at welcoming schools, and a community/belonging mural project in collaboration with Red Rocks Community College, a local community college partner.
- **Take care of the employees who were impacted by school closures.** Jeffco’s strategic plan, Jeffco Thrives 2025, names a priority area around “Our People, Our Strength.” As it navigated school closures, it sought to actualize this priority by taking every possible step to ensure that employees had the career, emotional and logistical support needed to make a smooth transition. 100% of all staff impacted by a school closure who sought another position in Jeffco were able to find one for the 2023-24 school year
 - **District Systems Shift to Support Closing School Staff:** Principals submitted their school-year budgets on an expedited timeline to provide the district with line-of-sight into how many open positions there would be in the forthcoming school year and where those positions would be located.
 - **School-Level Support for Hiring:** Human Resources provided central workshops to support resume writing. Principals in closing schools also helped their teachers with resume reviews, mock interviews, references and other hiring supports. Many principals used resources that HR and EAP provided to support their teachers. Principals also provided emotional support and thought partnership to teachers in identifying schools that would be a good fit for their professional goals and personal circumstances. Additionally, principals were aware of hiring timelines and attuned to emotions as some educators and staff received offers, while others did not. Community Superintendents also stepped in to advocate for educators in closing buildings.
 - **Direct Support for Educators from our Employee Assistance Program Office:** In addition to HR-provided support, EAP members supported impacted teachers and staff by conducting resume reviews, mock interviews and primers on interviewing skills upon request. They also provided support to those who felt fearful about the change.
 - **ROFTS Educator Staffing Event:** Jeffco hosted a central staffing event for impacted teachers, both probationary and non-probationary to help match them with a mutual consent position for 2023-24. 148 teachers participated. 700 mini conferences (interviews) were pre-scheduled and conducted by school teams that had 305 open positions. Educators with the longest tenure with the district received the first interview slots of the day. The goals of this event were: (1) That all licensed educators, non-probationary and probationary, would have an ongoing position in a preferred school that provides opportunities to succeed; and (2) That teachers felt supported, cared for and had the resources they needed to be successful in the mini conferences that served as interviews.
 - **JESPA Meet and Greet:** Jeffco hosted a meet and greet for ROFTS-impacted support staff to facilitate introductions between staff members and principals and department

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

leaders who were hiring for the 2023-24 school year. 137 para-professionals, health aides, secretaries and tutors were invited to the event.

- **Packing Support:** The ROFTS team worked with 35 departments to inventory and pack specific items for impacted staff. This process began in Spring 2023 and will be covered in detail in the next after-action review.
- **Support for the leaders of closing and welcoming schools.** As the first part of this after-action review series uplifted, the role of a principal in leading a community through a period of great change is crucial. Jeffco's superintendent views each principal in the district as a critical part of her leadership team, a dynamic which was front and center as leaders prepared for the transition.
 - **Hiring Administrators on Special Assignment:** One full-time and one part-time administrator on special assignment provided support to principals impacted by ROFTS as a day-to-day problem solver. Their support included: weekly communication updates; bi-weekly meeting of closing and welcoming school principals; facilitation of work between closing and welcoming school principals; consultation with central departments on processes; flagging and elevating issues; and daily troubleshooting. Although we've captured this under transitions, the administrators on special assignment provided support for educator and staff hiring, student enrollment and identifying staff professional development needs for the forthcoming school year using real-time data.
 - **2023-24 Academic Success Planning:** Welcoming and closing school principals worked together to plan for the upcoming academic year. This collaboration included co-developing class lists using name, strength, need, monitoring class sizes, preparing for academic and behavior transitions, additional high dosage tutors and mental health supports.
 - **Assignment of Facilities Planning Resources:** In order to ensure that welcoming school buildings were prepared for new students, the district facilities planning team evaluated the needs of each school site based on expected enrollment data. In some cases, adjustments were made to construction plans in order to respond to unique needs or concerns from the principal.
 - **Specific Transition Supports Offered by Central Services Departments:** Central services departments such as EAP and Student Success (which oversee the district's special education, gifted and talented, and social emotional learning services) compiled toolkits for schools experiencing transitions.
 - **Expert, External Coaching and Social Emotional Support:** Disruptive partners was retained to provide coaching and emotional support for individual principals and community superintendents as they navigated changes for themselves and their staff. Their role was to help maintain momentum in their schools through May.
- **Fulfill additional directives from the Board of Education in its November 10, 2022 resolution.** In addition to taking all necessary steps to support transitions, the Board requested specific and additional plans in response to the community feedback they heard during community meetings and public hearings with families from closing schools. These activities included the following:
 - Student Success developed a transition plan for students in center-based special education programs that were relocated as a result of a school closure.
 - In February 2023, district staff presented an evidence-based plan for Title I and at-risk funding allocation in support of FRL-eligible students across the district. The district adjusted the distribution of Title I funding to reach more students and schools so that 45% of FRL students benefit from the combined Title I and at-risk supplemental funding factors.

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- In December 2022, district staff presented an articulated district-wide strategy for preschool as part of students’ PK-12 educational experience, including program placements for classrooms that had been affected by school closure recommendations.
- The district commissioned traffic studies as a starting point for collaboration with municipalities to increase safety and address traffic issues that may occur due to an increase in the number of students attending a school.
- The district partnered with the City of Edgewater and Edgewater Collective to conduct a demographic study of the district’s smallest articulation area, which was affected by a closure. This initiative served as a pilot for the district’s planned efforts to strengthen PK-12 pathways in partnership with its municipalities. It concluded with a joint session between the Board of Education and the Edgewater City Council on May 11, 2023, where they reviewed the study and established a shared understanding.
- Recognizing that closing 16 elementary schools increased the number of un- or under-utilized buildings and properties that are the property of Jeffco Public Schools, district staff developed a transparent and inclusive process for property disposition.

Key Lessons Learned

School consolidation in any district is complex, difficult and emotional work. In this phase, Jeffco was charged with operationalizing the decision to consolidate schools, knowing that the actions it took had real implications for students, families, educators, staff and communities. Once it was decided that schools would close, the district had to make “consolidating schools well” its focus . By that, the district meant supporting principals, ensuring educators had jobs, helping families enroll in a school that was a good fit for their students and ensuring students had a positive end of school experience while creating connections to their new school.

This was the district’s first time consolidating schools at this scale and this report is an attempt to catalog what the district tried and learned in its efforts to close schools and transition students, families and staff to ensure the smoothest possible outcome. 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 including those we heard across stakeholder groups specific to hiring, enrollment and transitions supports, from the perspectives of both those executing the change and those impacted by it.⁵ Included are aspects that went well that the district might replicate, areas needing improvement and adjustment, and important questions and implications for the district to consider.

1. Enrollment Support Key Reflections

- **Providing dedicated 1:1 enrollment supports to families was important for families and school leaders, but not universally effective.** The district provided 1:1 support to every family to ensure families could navigate their enrollment options. ROFTS-impacted families took action in EnrollJeffco at a high rate, which supported school leaders as they set their budgets and made hiring decisions for the following school year. However, this support was not always effective or as well-received by families.

⁵ Find the list of questions we asked about enrollment, hiring and transition support [here](#).

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- 98% of families affected by school closures received at least one form of outreach (email, phone call, voicemail, or in-person meeting) from enrollment specialists between November 28-January 14.
 - Enrollment specialists reported that many families expressed gratitude for the initial outreach, though in some cases families did not respond or expressed anger at the school closure process and the enrollment specialist. A spring survey of families who were impacted by school closures indicated that 40% of the 423 respondents rated enrollment specialist support as helpful. Some family members reported receiving inaccurate information and inconsistent service during this process.
 - Enrollment specialists reported that the systems and structures, including a data dashboard, call tracking sheet and central management of them were critical to their success. Support among the specialists and relationships they built with school enrollment secretaries were called out as especially helpful. There was consensus that reaching out to families through a phone call, especially in initial communications, was essential. From their perspective, the district created many ways to make enrollment in a new school as easy as possible for ROFTS-impacted families.
 - Enrollment specialists also identified ways to improve their tools and systems. They commented that, although their process planned for multiple rounds of outreach to parents, not all parents appreciated that. For many, after the initial phone call, families were overwhelmed and the calls seemed to add to their stress. And for those parents who did want multiple interactions, it often turned into a game of phone tag. Enrollment specialists also reported that they didn't always have the information they needed, including history on the communities they were serving, especially if families were going through their second closure process.
 - It was also difficult to separate the enrollment process from the ongoing grief some families felt as a result of their child's school closing. The family survey, while focused on learning about enrollment supports, included a significant number of comments on the process and decision to close schools. This indicates ongoing frustration and anger on the part of some families about the closure of their school.
 - In addition, families reflected that they would have wanted the district to create conditions that allow students to follow necessary programming and siblings to stay together; give priority to students coming from a school with a Pre-K to enroll in a new school with a Pre-K; extend the window in which they have priority enrollment so they can make choices based on where their current teachers and principal would land; and ensure they have earlier information about transportation options to inform enrollment considerations.
-
- **Welcoming school principals emerged as the crucial figures to build families' trust in their new school as they navigated enrollment decisions.** While each closing school was paired with a designated welcoming school that absorbed the school boundary, there was no guarantee that families would enroll in the welcoming school due to Jeffco's strong culture of school choice. In fact, in the 2022-23 school year an average of 46% of families in Jeffco chose a school other than their neighborhood school.
 - Welcoming school principals listened for what closing school communities needed as they navigated enrollment decisions and responded with events and activities that met their needs. They shared that building trust in their own abilities as school leaders was the key need during this time, and reported that specific types of events and moves proved most effective. These included a switch to community-to-community conversations and family-to-family connections, principals committed to spending time with new families

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023 Published March 12, 2024

answering questions and sharing insights about the community, giving prospective families a chance to hear from the students directly is often what made the difference for parents, principal attendance at PTA SAC meetings of closing schools, and partnership between the closing school principal and welcoming school principal in building the foundation needed to work together with their communities.

- Parent respondents in the spring survey appreciated the open houses and community nights at welcoming schools, as well as field trips to welcoming schools. Other parents stated that they wanted more engagement opportunities for families at the new schools to learn about programs, meet administrators and teachers and engage in planning for the new school year. While these events often happened, the fact that a number of parents were still asking for them indicates an opportunity to better communicate the events being offered.
- Principals reflected that while school-based scheduled group opportunities to learn about a welcoming school were deemed valuable, they were not always well attended and they require a lot of planning and effort. In addition to the effort expended for a relatively small turnout, this also sometimes meant that principals spent a lot of time doing individual tours. One reported that she did 80 tours herself. While these 1:1 tours frequently were the deciding factor for a family to enroll, time spent this way meant the principals were unable to attend to other instructional leadership responsibilities and also contributed to potential burnout. It is important to note that Jeffco's small elementary schools often do not have assistant principals and therefore supporting these efforts fell to the schools' one administrator, the principal.
- Principals also noted the tension of balancing the need to entice those who are new to a school community with staying true to what the existing community values. Principals at welcoming schools paid close attention to honoring the current school community as they responded to what potential new families desired. They aimed to be transparent and honest, providing information to help families identify the right fit for themselves and their child.
- **District and school leader partnership on proactively managing student enrollment at welcoming schools was a crucial process point.** While all students affected by school closures had guaranteed enrollment at their designated welcoming school, it was uncertain how many students would actually choose to enroll. As a result, the district recognized the importance of closely monitoring enrollment numbers after the first round of the school choice process came to a close. At this time, welcoming schools would see how many ROFTS students from the closing school confirmed their intent to enroll, how many took no action and how many choice applications it received from students not impacted by school closures. School leaders needed to make assumptions about how many students they would serve in August 2023 and make decisions about accepting choice enrollment applications.
 - When the district announced recommendations for school closures on August 25, 2022, it estimated how many students at closing schools would enroll at designated welcoming schools. High-end projections estimated that 80% of students at the closing school (boundary and choice) would attend the welcoming school. Low-end projections estimated that 35% of the choice-in students and 50% of the boundary students from the closing school would attend the welcoming school. At the conclusion of the first round of EnrollJeffco, all welcoming schools fell into this range.⁶

⁶ As of October 2023, student enrollment at all ROFTS welcoming schools were within these projected ranges. An average of 54% of ROFTS-impacted students attended their designated welcoming school. At the high end were Ryan (76%), Lukas (74%), and Prospect Valley (71%) elementaries. At the low end were Stober (31%), Secrest (32%), and Thomson (33%).

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- To help manage enrollment, district staff identified several welcoming schools where they anticipated that enrollment might come close to the calculated building capacity, meaning that space would have to be monitored carefully. Staff set up enrollment management working sessions to meet with each principal and community superintendent to review the amount of students they expected after Round 1 of EnrollJeffco closed. Members of the student enrollment services team, facilities and strategic initiatives were present. The goal of the sessions was to ensure that as many ROFTS-impacted families got their first choice, and to do so in a way that would align with the schools' capacity and support staying within the class size guidelines.
- This process was often tense. In many cases, principals fundamentally disagreed with the calculated capacity of their buildings, leading to differing viewpoints of how many students could fit in a building. School leaders, used to operating in underutilized buildings, emphasized the need for space whether it was for pull-out interventions, teachers conducting professional learning, or storing materials as crucial components of their ability to successfully run a school. Members of district staff often pushed for more efficient use of space. This tension surfaced an important change management challenge, whereas space became an issue of school culture. Space wasn't just physical; its use was seen as a reflection of values. We distribute space for things we value most. Once again, principals were in a place of having to change mindsets about what, in a fully utilized building, is a nice-to-have versus a must-have.

Implications of the reflections and questions for Jeffco Schools to consider:

- How can the district build on the initial success of the enrollment specialists' support? How can relationship-building and information sharing at the school level (including connecting with secretaries ahead of time to allow specialists to be more informed about school context, parents' communication mode preferences, etc.) become more central to how they prepare themselves to be a resource for parents?
- How might the district think differently about the workload of principals and staff when it comes to welcoming and recruiting new families while also providing an extraordinary experience to their current students?
- Which current relationships with community organizations can Jeffco Schools look to as model partners in the work of spreading accurate, useful information that aids families in making enrollment choices? How can the district partner with more community organizations who can serve as positive influencers in the community? These organizations could help parents recognize the positive aspects of welcoming school communities. How might such partnerships lighten the recruitment load for principals?
- How can the district partner with principals on the calculated capacity of their building and the most efficient use of physical space? How can we help our staff separate where they do their work from the value the district or school places on that work?

2. Hiring Support Key Reflections

- 1. Centrally organized educator hiring event to match impacted teachers and staff with new positions.** The Educator Staffing Event was positive, productive, well-run and well-received. Schools showed up in force and brought joy and excitement to the event in the form of balloons, cookies and general enthusiasm. Many volunteers, including members of the superintendent's cabinet, were on hand to lend a hand and show their support for educators impacted by the school closures. Participants, including teachers and school leaders, provided positive feedback and expressed surprise at the level of detail and support provided during the event.

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- While teacher participants appreciated the staffing event, they did express concerns about inconsistent communication specifically related to guidance on how to approach and prepare for the event. HR encouraged a casual approach, while some closing school principals encouraged significant preparation. In the end, those who had not spent a lot of time and effort preparing expressed feeling they were at a disadvantage.
- Participants expressed unease about the shifting list of job postings (which was due to the compressed timeline for finalizing school budgets for the forthcoming school year) and lack of time for meaningful discussions at the staffing event. Interview experiences varied greatly by school, with some principals asking a small number of simple, accessible questions, while others had more complex, multi-part questions that were challenging to cover in a 15-minute window.
- After-action participants from the HR team reported that pulling off these events was incredibly taxing, dependent on the heroic efforts of some, and that running these events while also running the day-to-day business of HR stretched the capacity of the department.

2. Efforts at the school or department level to support impacted teachers and staff as they looked for new positions. Impacted teachers reported that what made them feel most supported in the hiring process was school level support with resume and interview preparation. Principals also played a crucial role in preparing staff for finding new positions by providing references, coaching and sharing information about schools of interest. Teachers’ attitudes toward support from HR varied. Principals reported that it was more comfortable for teachers to work directly with those they knew best.

3. Timing and content of the JCEA and JESPA MOUs. While MOU negotiations began at the same time for JCEA and JESPA, it took significantly longer for JESPA and the district to come to an agreement. Because of this delay, HR was able to begin supporting and communicating with greater clarity to JCEA members first, making support staff feel like there was not a plan for them. However, due to a lagging MOU process with JESPA, support staff started to make their own moves when they perceived there wasn’t a plan for them. This often meant that closing schools lost office staff, paraprofessionals, health aides mid-year and had vacant roles for weeks on end. Pulling teachers, paraprofessionals, instructional coaches or even principals to cover these positions sometimes resulted in less instruction time for students.

4. Responsiveness of district staff and HR support for school-based hiring. This was the first time the district was engaging in a hiring process related to a large-scale school consolidation effort. There was no hiring playbook from which to work. Welcoming school principals reported that they appreciated the regular meetings that were held to share data, get updates and problem solve; these were, in their words, “well-managed and critical.” Hiring principals called out tensions that existed in the hiring process in the spring including:

- All interviews taking place after 4 p.m. This was seen as inflexible and inconvenient, but it was essential to meeting the needs of closing school staff and the operation of closing schools. Had staff had to interview during the day, they would have had to find coverage for their classrooms or role.
- A prescriptive process meant to create consistency for the many staff impacted by a school closure, but that deviated from a school’s typical process and was, in some cases, in conflict with the culture the school leader had built around hiring.
- Hiring also stretched the capacity of school leaders who had to conduct numerous interviews, manage multiple openings and attend job fairs on Saturdays.

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

Implications of the reflections and questions for Jeffco Schools to consider:

- Would the district have benefited from outsourcing the logistics of the staffing event or adding capacity to the HR department as it prepared for an event serving hundreds of staff?
- Given the many policies and agreements that govern employment in Jeffco Schools, how could the district have better timed the MOU process? Could the district have begun to collaborate with its associations as early as when the Board passed a resolution directing the superintendent to bring forward a comprehensive school consolidation plan? Would employees have felt more certain and assured had these MOUs been completed and available to them at the time a recommendation was made?
- What is the right balance between autonomy for hiring managers and creating universal expectations about structure, process, consistent interview questions and practices when such an outsized number of current staff are seeking new positions and a large amount of hiring is concentrated in several schools where student enrollment is expected to increase significantly?
- Many individuals showed up to support teachers in obtaining jobs. How can the district coordinate and create clear, appropriate and right-sized roles for schools, HR and others in supporting hiring? How can it avoid duplicative efforts (e.g., interview and resume prep) while creating more consistency in the experience?
 - For example: What would it have looked like to enlist closing school principals in a process to design hiring preparation guidelines and activities for all impacted staff? Could the district have fostered a greater sense of community by organizing preparation activities in familiar spaces with familiar people in pairs or trios?
- Should the district have invested more in preparing schools with significant hiring needs (e.g., Title I schools) to attract candidates for their positions? Could the district have done more to promote the stipend for Title I teachers? Would interviewer preparation and strategies benefited schools that had an outsized number of roles to fill?

3. Key Transition Support Reflections (not related to hiring or enrollment or budget)

1. **Guidance, support and management of welcoming school principals.** The work of consolidating schools is foundational to the district’s success, and consolidation at this scale was unprecedented and required almost overwhelming levels of effort (on top of continuing to run the school well). Principals are asked to play many roles, including principal and instructional leader of the current school, sales and marketing to new parents, and leader of the effort to welcome new students into the current school. Additionally, principals’ jobs were sometimes made more difficult by district departments’ inflexibility when it came to annual processes or a lack of process support during this unprecedented and challenging time. What welcoming school principals cited as valuable support through the persistent challenges included:
 - Intentional support provided by the district’s two Administrators on Special Assignment, the ROFTS team and supports they self-organized for one another
 - Specific structures in place including regular communications, bi-weekly meetings and a weekly update document (that included links to agendas, notes, relevant policy documents, data updates and ongoing tracking of next steps).

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- Communication, responsiveness and presence of community superintendents (principal managers) at community events.
 - Emotional support provided to teachers through the Employee Assistance Program staff.
- 2. Support for students making the transition to a new school.** The district anticipated the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and mental health supports students and families would need and supported those in several ways. The approach was to provide resources and toolkits for universal needs then tailor other supports to the specific needs of each school. Sometimes this looked like SEL specialists or coaches helping school staff translate a toolkit into action, other times it looked like supporting a specific classroom or student.
- Early 2023-24 enrollment data (available starting in February 2023) allowed the Student Services team to be strategic about where to send staff as they work to navigate the different impact of, for example, 20 new students moving into a large school vs. a small impacted school or experiencing a substantively different culture and climate. They developed profiles for each school that affected support decisions, and shared those in writing so schools could see how those decisions were made.
 - A streamlined partnership between Student Success and the Office of School Leadership which involved having a community superintendent with trusted SEL and special education expertise provide feedback loops to and from SEL coaches and specialists in the schools. This hybrid role allowed for sharing at the community superintendent meetings about the needs SELs were seeing in buildings and any misinformation causing unease that needed to be disrupted.
- 3. Disruptive Partners support.** For some principals, closing their school was the hardest thing they had ever been through, and responses from the media and community, and their staff members experiencing change, took an emotional toll. The district anticipated that coaching support would be needed and contracted with an external vendor, Disruptive Partners, to design innovative professional learning, a hybrid group and 1:1 coach model to meet the unique needs of school leaders who felt a responsibility to be everything to everybody in their school community.
- Participants noted how valuable this third-party coaching support was, both as a place to vent and also as a place to move beyond venting frustrations and set goals and aspirations for their schools and themselves as leaders. These conversations allowed school leaders to reflect on that identity and focus on their own mental resilience.
 - A critical foundation of this work with principals was establishing what it would look like if the school consolidation went well. Principals needed support to articulate what they would see, feel, hear and what parents and teachers would say and experience. And naming the clear and measurable vision for success, grounded in the business of teaching and learning and the health of the school community, and then how to ground efforts and tune mindsets to that picture.

Implications of the reflections and questions for Jeffco to consider:

- Given the unique challenges and additional workload of being a ROFTS principal, how might the district differentiate its expectations, management and support so principals can truly prioritize ROFTS while also serving as instructional leaders in their schools? How does this look the same or different for closing school principals and welcoming school principals? Could anything come off their plates or would extra resources alleviate the burden in meaningful ways?

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- In recognition of the emotional toll and different priorities of ROFTS schools, what is the role of a principals' manager under these circumstances? Who is best positioned to differentiate management and support to impacted principals who need help re-prioritizing and navigating annual district priorities and consolidation-related demands, while ensuring that instruction and learning remain a priority?
- How can the district best leverage the fact that school leaders, by and large, know their communities best and are well positioned to meet their needs in challenging times, while also ensuring more consistency in the experiences for ROFTS impacted staff, students and families?
- Are there more opportunities to leverage a liaison role similar to what was created to support SEL services and supports to schools (a staff member from Student Success working with a staff member from the Office of School Leadership) that would help expedite and streamline services to closing and welcoming school communities?
- Would creating a transition team that involves dedicated experts from across the school-level student and staff experience help alleviate the workloads of staff members who are running the day to day of their departments while also working to transition programs in school buildings?
- What lessons can the district learn from how Student Success staff who specialize in SEL coordinated, collaborated or duplicated supports provided to impacted staff by Employee Assistance Program staff. What were the similar and unique needs that these teams supported and how can they be most efficiently and effectively deployed in the future?
- How will the district distribute responsibility for meeting the needs of teachers, staff, students and families in a transition? What must be done by a school leader (closing and welcoming) and what can effectively be done, especially the individualized support that's needed, by others?

**Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024**

Appendix

Media

Memorandum of Understanding with Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA)

Memorandum of Understanding with Jeffco Education Support Professionals Association (JESPA)

February 24, 2023 Board Session Materials

November 11, 2022 Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools Board Resolution

ROFTS After Action Review Round 2 Scope and Process

High-level Timeline for Hiring, Enrollment Support, and Planning for Student and Staff Transitions:

- November 9, 2022: The district completes a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA). This MOU is intended to guide how the district supports employees in the JCEA bargaining unit in finding new mutual consent positions if the Board votes to close the 16 elementary schools.
- November 10, 2022: The Board of Education unanimously approves the package of 16 school consolidations.
- November 11, 2022: A hiring freeze for Elementary (K-6) JCEA employees begins.
- November 14, 2022 – January 14, 2023: Welcoming schools host informational nights, open houses, and tours for ROFTS-impacted families and students.
- November 28, 2022 – January 14, 2023: Enrollment Specialists provide 1:1 support to families affected by the closures, helping them navigate their options for enrollment in the 2023-24 school year. This includes attending the designated welcoming school or submitting choice applications to other schools.
- November 29, 2022 – January 31, 2023: Human Resources (HR) facilitates resume writing and Mini Conference Workshops for the staff of closing schools.
- December 6, 2022 – January 13, 2023: Round 1 of Enroll Jeffco, the district’s choice-enrollment process, takes place. ROFTS-impacted students receive a priority when submitting choice applications.
- December 2022 – January 2023: Welcoming school principals and staff host open houses for staff from closing schools.
- January 18 – 25, 2023: HR hosts Resume Writing and Interview Workshops for support staff.
- February 2023 – May 2023: Schools conduct transition activities for students moving between closing and welcoming schools. Activities include pen pals, shadow events, joint field trips, and family tours and events.
- February 25, 2023: HR hosts a 2023-24 Educator staffing event for licensed educators impacted by ROFTS, as per the JCEA MOU.
- March 1, 2023: School budgets for the 2023-24 school year are finalized.
- March 9, 2023: The district completes a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Jeffco Education Support Professionals Association (JESPA). This MOU is intended to guide how the district supports employees in the JESPA bargaining unit in finding new mutual consent positions for the 2023-24 school year.

Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools
After-Action Review Part Two: January–May 2023
Published March 12, 2024

- March 15, 2023: HR hosts a 2023-24 JESPA Meet and Greet for classified staff impacted by ROFTS, as per the JESPA MOU.
- March/April 2023: Meetings occur between welcoming schools and their community superintendents to review achievement data for the projected 2023-24 student body, as well as data on READ plans, ALPS, IEPs, and students' social emotional needs.
- March - April 2023: Closing and welcoming schools collaborate to create class lists based on name, strength, and need.
- April 15, 2023: The Elementary (K-6) hiring freeze ends.
- April 28, 2023 - May 24, 2023: Closing schools hold end-of-year community celebrations and send-offs to honor their students, families, alumni, and community members.
- May 2023: SPED Transition meetings take place between both closing and welcoming schools.