Summary of Key Themes from Town Halls on School Consolidations

Introduction

The following is a summary of the notes captured throughout Superintendent Cerda's Town Halls at sites to be impacted by school closures based on the Superintendent's recommendations. These notes cover the Town Halls of November of 2024 after the announcement of schools being closed.

The key themes are as follows:

1. General Impacts of School Closures and Consolidation

- Parents, teachers, and students at each school visited opposed school closures, citing impacts on their school communities and personal lives.
- Questions were brought about the criteria used to select schools for closure, including enrollment numbers, deferred maintenance costs, and proximity to charter schools.
- Fears about the safety in the neighborhoods of receiving schools and the mental and academic well-being of students transitioning were also often discussed.

2. Keeping Special Programs and Electives

- Parents, teachers, and students at each school had questions about how the district was going to navigate VAPA and Special Education students.
- Among the questions asked were on VAPA and afterschool programs for students at the new schools and whether the programs would follow them.
- Also for Special Education Students - questions were asked about whether they still get IEP services at their new school.

3. Class Sizes and Teacher Quality

- Attendees shared that the closing of schools would impact the quality of educators as they did not know the new school teachers and worry children will find it challenging to develop new relationships.
- Parents and teachers worried about increasing class sizes to the contractual limits (32:1 for grades 4–8, 24:1 for K–3), fearing negative impacts on student learning and teacher effectiveness.
- Some shared issues with multi-grade classrooms where teaching two standards at once was described as challenging.

4. Impact on Students

- Concerns were brought up about the emotional and academic disruptions due to transferring to new schools.

- Special attention was brought on Special Education (SPED) students and English learners, particularly concerns about maintaining individualized services and programs.
- Many shared concerns over the loss of community bonds and trust built in the existing schools.

5. Walking Safety and Transportation

- Across the schools being closed parents shared concern about safety of students walking longer distances or crossing dangerous areas like Capitol Expressway.
- Many expressed concerns about safety of the neighborhoods students would be walking through.
- Many were interested in seeing transportation plans for families without reliable access to vehicles.

6. Charter Schools and Enrollment Decline

- Charter schools were viewed as a contributing factor to declining enrollment and district budget issues.
- Parents questioned why closures were not targeted near charter schools.
- Parents also questioned why the district was not working to compete against charter schools for enrollment with targeted campaigns or community outreach.

6. Community Feedback and Transparency from District

- Some shared there was insufficient community involvement and a lack of clarity about the decision-making process - citing the committee being unable to reach full agreement for a recommendation to the Superintendent as troubling.
- Concerns were shared that the Town Hall process was futile as the decisions and announcements were made without community input.
- Many attendees to Town Halls had questions about the district's previous financial management and district accountability asking why the district did not close schools sooner or why it did not plan for the expiration of COVID funds.

7. Historical and Emotional Ties

- Emotional appeals were often shared from alumni, students, teachers, and families about the historical significance of schools in their communities.
- Often they worried that closures would erase decades of cultural and educational heritage.