

Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Hearing Testimonies

March 24, 2025

#1

Shirley Ann Hill

Retired Teacher

I have followed the public hearings regarding the **unfair treatment** of former Montessori teacher Ms. Stephanie Lapine by principal Kellie Meyer. Throughout my 41-year career with PPS, I too was subjected to toxic principals like her. In December 2023, Ms. Stephanie Lapine was removed from her classroom by Kellie Meyer. After **many attempts** by parents/guardians, Kellie Meyer did not offer an explanation for Ms. Stephanie Lapine's removal. Ms. Stephanie Lapine was cleared in February 2024 but was "conveniently transferred" to another school that does not have a Montessori program. Why was Ms. Stephanie Lapine not reinstated at Montessori where she belongs? Why is Kellie Meyer not being held accountable for her **unfair treatment** of Ms. Stephanie Lapine (the only lead black teacher)? Some Montessori teachers have filed grievances and still nothing has been done. Toxic principals like Kellie Meyer put fear in teachers who speak up by sabotaging their teacher evaluations. **Pretending** there are no problems at Montessori definitely creates an unsettling work environment. Teachers should not have to adapt to this leadership style to keep their jobs. Some principals are good for "conveniently cutting" positions when you speak up. I question how students are first when toxic principals are not held accountable.

Carrick High School has a **very small percentage of black teachers**. "Research shows that having a teacher of color can help students of color reach better outcomes; but the benefits extend to all young people, preparing them to live and work in an increasingly diverse society."

(Edutopia, June 26, 2020) **BLACK STUDENTS AT CARRICK MATTER!!**

Computer Applications should be a mandatory business elective class for all incoming freshmen. During my time at Carrick, some English teachers, CTE ITL, and CTE Director have indicated the importance of this class. Freshmen are not getting the necessary skills in middle school. When it is time to do a project, some of them are lost. While at Carrick, I have helped students many times navigate through the necessary software to complete their projects. Quite often teachers require students to do projects that utilize Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. These skills are beneficial to students beyond high school.

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#2

Donnese Tyler

Teacher / Staff

Dear Superintendent and Board Members:

I would like to share some information and concerns regarding the closing of the Student Achievement Center (SAC), which is the District's **only alternative school** for students to make up credits. Please keep in mind ERS did not recommend the closing of the only credit recovery alternative school.

- Do you know we used to take overage middle school students who were not in their correct grade for various reasons, but at the end of this year that program is cut? This means 13-16 year old students will now be in the classroom with younger students in 4th through 8th grade.
 - Do you know we take students who are behind on credits for various reasons?
 - Homelessness due to variety of reasons
 - Loss of parent(s)
 - Truancy
 - Academics
 - Moved from a different school district
 - Do you know we take students from other cities, states, and countries who are credit deficient? We give them the opportunity to gain a high school diploma in a timely manner. It is not their fault they are new to the District and lack the required credits.
 - Do you know we take students for safety reasons?
- Do you know we take students because they are unsuccessful in their home school due to the influence of their friends, large class sizes, discipline issues, etc.?
 - Do you know students who attend SAC can still participate in their home school's sports, activities and CTE programs?
 - Do you know we keep students because their home schools do not want them to return to their building for various reasons?
- Do you know students can only make up two classes in a school year if they only use period 10 to recover credits in their home schools? SAC offers Edgenuity and **four** semesters instead of two.
- Do you know students do not stay after school to participate in period 10 because they may have other after school responsibilities such as: activities, work, sibling responsibilities, childcare issues, etc.? This was also mentioned in the meeting on February 25th by the

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superintendent as to why it may be difficult to change the school start and end time for high schools due to students working after school.

- Do you know that only using period 10 for credit recovery is not enough time for many students to make up their credits because they failed more than 2 classes in a school year?
- Do you know we keep students because they do not want to return to their home school for various reasons? One of the main reasons is because they are successful at SAC.
- Do you know we take students who have stopped attending school for multiple years, only to return to finish their credits to obtain their high school diploma?
- Do you still think it's a good idea to close the **only** alternative school within the district that offers students the opportunity to make up multiple credits and be successful graduates of PPS?

NO, it is not! PPS is leaving many students with no other option but to drop out! Close the building if you must, but closing the program instead of relocating it as suggested by ERS is a BIG mistake and an even BIGGER disservice for students!

As a board member previously stated at the February 25th meeting, just because it is feasible does it mean we should? **No, you should not close SAC**, especially if PPS' motto is Students First Always in All Ways!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Donnese Tyler

A Very Concerned SAC Teacher



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#3

Katy Rank Lev

Parent



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#4

Jamie Lynn Reesh

Teacher / Staff

(2 chart printouts)

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#5

Andy Kubis

Parent

Dear School Board Members and District Leaders,

I am here today for two reasons. First, I join the chorus of voices urging you to delay the vote to close schools. There is still so much data you need to inform your votes: new attendance zones, the feasibility of transportation, the basic price tag. Why are we rushing into a vote that could have such devastating consequences for this city, especially during the week that the Department of Education has just been annihilated? Why are we talking about closing schools like Fulton or Woolslair - which by every measure are pockets of excellence. Closing schools should be the absolute last resort. To me, it feels like we are giving up on public education and surrendering to the charter schools that will circle the waters.

Instead of closing schools, why don't we fight for more state funding and work together on a campaign directed at state lawmakers to fully fund our schools. Show us you care about the futures of PPS students by demanding the money from the state that it will take to build and support the schools our students deserve.

Maybe I'm an optimist, but I'd like to see us spend this same amount of time, energy and attention to attract more families to the district. We know we are out-performing charter schools and students in charter schools are starting to come back. Where are the conversations about figuring out how to get more children - of all income brackets - into our amazing early childhood programs? I know there are policy and funding hurdles to overcome but as your head of early ed said in her presentation to the board last year, the vast majority of families whose kids attend PPS early childhood programs stick with the district through high school.

We can't close our way to equity in schools. We can't close our way to excellence. We can't even close our way to a balanced budget. Closing schools sends a message that communities are disposable, but investing in them says they matter. Please let's hit the brakes before going forward with the irreversible damage that comes with closing schools. Let's make sure we've tried everything else first.



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Switching gears, I would also like to offer into the record a request for the district to share with PPS families a flyer about safe gun storage and to adopt a Secure Storage resolution as many school districts have across the country. The flyer was created by Everytown for Gun Safety as part of their Be SMART campaign to remind people that securing guns safely can save lives. As our federal government steps away from sensible gun control measures, it's really up to us to take action and educate parents and students about the importance of secure firearm storage. Sharing this flyer through PeachJar would be such a small and easy step. I have submitted a copy of it with my testimony and hope it can be shared with families soon.

Thank you for your time.



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#6

Randi Green

Teacher / Staff



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#7

Vanessa Dagavarian

Parent



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#8

Nina Louise Dagavarian

Student



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#9

Meghan Balogh

Teacher / Staff



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#10

Dawnika Hopkins

Parent



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#11

Kathy Hartman

Parent



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#12

Martha Riecks

Parent

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#13

Mimi Welsh

Parent

(Unable to attend)

My name is Mimi Welsh, parent of student at Conroy.

I spoke in person at the November 25th hearing and I'm unable to give an in-person speech today, but I hope this message reaches you well.

My stance remains the same: for the well-being of this community and the children—babies, students, and adolescents alike—the decision-makers must take a stand and ensure that Conroy Education Center, located at 1398 Page Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15233, remains a permanent fixture in this community. This school is invaluable and should never be taken away.

The location is ideal for students to participate in functional learning—taking community walks, visiting nearby stores and restaurants, and engaging with the world around them in meaningful ways. No other location will provide these same opportunities. Additionally, the renovations made to Conroy have equipped the school with essential tools and accommodations that uphold the dignity and unique needs of its students.

As a devoted parent of a Conroy student, Mark Welsh Jr., I know my son is deeply loved at home. However, many of the students at Conroy are in the foster system and may not receive the same level of love and stability. These children rely on the decisions made by those entrusted with their well-being, and I can only hope those decisions truly reflect their best interests.

Taking this school away would send a devastating message—that those in power are prioritizing their own agendas over what is genuinely best for these students. The greater good lies in preserving Conroy Education Center for the children, their education, and their future.

I urge you to make the right choice—not just for today, but for the generations of students who will depend on this school in the years to come.

Thank you



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#14

Rebecca McClean

Parent



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#15

Jessica Kwasniewski

Parent



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#16

DOUBLE REGISTRATION



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#17

Pam Harbin

Community Member



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#18

Brandon Simpson

Parent



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#19

Breyson Simpson

Student



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#20

Sarah Zangle

Parent



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#21

Jazlynn Worthy

Parent



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#22

Jaliyah Haden

Student



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#23

David Haden

Student



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#24

Elijah Mitchell

Student

#25

Mike Cummins

Parent

Good evening again, Directors and Administration. My name is Mike Cummins, PPS parent and one of the coordinators of the Community Proposal alternative to the Facilities Utilization Plan. If you hadn't noticed, the world is on fire. Many of us, myself included, would much rather be spending our time addressing the myriad of other issues facing the nation right now, than worrying about our public schools pushing forward with a massively disruptive restructuring of the district, with no real plan in place for where we are going from here. For many of us, literally - we don't even know what schools we'll be assigned to or a feeder pattern through the district. We can't move on to work on other important issues while we see an insistence upon "just do something" - when that something seems highly likely to do the same kind of damage as the last 4 rounds of similar "do somethings" that have devastated PPS. So let's work together to move forward in a positive, well thought out manner with community buy-in. While there are always some parents simply looking out for their own specific interests, you have many parents and community members who are giving countless hours towards making PPS a great school district for all kids. It is insulting and disgusting to have those efforts constantly met with our Superintendent and our board president saying we don't know what we're talking about, we're just being selfish, etc - without even making a real effort to hear out a very organized, well thought out set of ideas for ways we can make our district better. Our plan is not perfect and it needs a lot more refinement by people with more expertise than we possess on our team, but it is far more innovative and well thought out than anything this Administration has presented to the public so far. President Walker, this is I believe what Ms Taliaferro was referring to when she said that your leadership on this was poor. I thank Ms Taliaferro for her heartfelt honesty in that moment. She was expressing what we, her constituents, are feeling every day. Simply put, you have a duty to respect the PPS community: you work for US. Even if we're wrong sometimes or can be a bit selfish at points, your minimum duty is to hear us out and treat us with respect rather than dismissiveness and condescension. Obviously that doesn't mean you have to do everything we say, but dismissive disrespect is not the mark of good leadership in a public service role. Nor is telling/implying to the Community Proposal team that you would create a space for us to present our proposal as a counter to ERS's, and then going back on that when you realized we were actually serious and did all that work in good faith that you would follow through. I will say, Mr Walker, that you show up and respond to messages better than most on the board, and that is appreciated. However, when you dismiss everything people say the way you do, it really feels like it's just for show and not real engagement. Dr Walters and the administration has dismissed our proposal without ever engaging with us about it, mischaracterizing many aspects of it because they didn't bother to ask - they only watched a short presentation covering the 10,000 foot view meant primarily for the general public (where we have to explain a lot of concepts in more detail than we would with professional educators). Many of their characterizations of our proposal were incorrect, misleading, or dismissive without any basis.

The administration criticized our proposal as potentially reinforcing inequities due to families being unfamiliar with the choice process. If they had bothered to ask us, they would know that this would essentially not be possible in our proposal - they seem to be just assuming it operates like the current magnet process, which it does not. They also assume that it would be possible for a "last choice"

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school to face declining enrollment - again not possible in our model, but they didn't ask. The entire region could decline in enrollment, but one school declining on its own cannot, and there are mechanisms in place to automatically address a school not being chosen frequently enough - that school would adapt to the missing/inadequately met needs of the region and make small changes to attract more people to make it their top choice. Let the schools collaborate with the community to organically adapt to changing demographics and needs of the community, rather than try to force a one size fits all, dated approach onto people who do not want it and will often opt out to charter schools when faced with this scenario. Claiming this would lead to under-resourced schools is also a fallacy - YOU admin, choose how to resource the schools. When you take resources from a school that is struggling in whatever way it might be at that moment, you decide to seal its fate. You could forgo the new lighting designer contract at CAPA in favor of making sure that school has what it needs, but you choose this inequity of resources. With a flexible system like we propose, you can also respond to things like this without massive disruption of yet another attendance zone shakeup.

On thematic learning, the admin says they value it and want to implement it carefully where its most valuable. Thematic learning loses the majority of its beneficial qualities when it is paired with no options - if you must go to your neighborhood school and that thematic focus is something you're not interested in at all, it could actually be a detriment to your learning. When you can go to a school that offers a focus and programs that suit your skills and interests, you are more engaged. Parents are more engaged and involved because they feel like they have the school that is right for their family (theme or not). Teachers are engaged and passionate about the community they work in and the style of teaching that they buy into (also driving up morale and helping us attract more/better talent to the district). All of this will lead to better increases in outcomes than any convoluted plan the administration can come up with to drive outcomes, by miles and miles. The recent suggestions (again with no actual plan) that we can offer all of these programs in all schools is laughable. There is no possible way we could do that financially, have enough human resources for it, enough classrooms for it, or even enough time in the school day to make it work. We're better off allowing schools to be equally funded and resourced with all the basics provided well at all schools, plus have something special to offer on top of that, than the current proposal that would simply take away many of these options from everyone - there is an undertone of a very false premise here, that equity has to be equality. We absolutely can have equity as well as rich, vibrant, diverse opportunities, but we have to break from the old mold of thinking and be innovative to make it happen. After 6 months of repeatedly asking for a meeting with the admin/Dr Walters, they finally agreed to one - thank you for that - but only after I publicly criticized Dr Walters and this whole process on the PPS FB page enough to get their attention. I'm glad we finally get the opportunity to meet, but this was not the way to get there.

Since the administration has finally agreed to meet and talk about our proposal, it seems that moving forward anyway with existing closures (our suggested closures are not all the same) is putting the cart before the horse. If engaging with the team who put many thousands of hours into this is a real priority, then board, you need to give the time to ensure that we don't need to change directions on which buildings are closing before causing distress and trauma to our residents. It may seem like just a procedural vote to you, but this is real life to us. We actually have kids in PPS right now. To my knowledge, none of you directors do, nor does any of the top leadership team of the administration. Ms Piotrowski commented at the agenda meeting about not knowing what to do with her kids coming into school age - If our own board is having trouble trusting this process, and have their kids outside PPS, or had them placed in the inequitable magnets but now that they're done want to eliminate them... what does that say to the public? I can tell you one thing it's saying. I'm hearing teachers tell us that they have 3 out of 18 of their kids' families leaving PPS next year over all the uncertainty, lack of

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transparency and a real plan, etc that this is causing them. 3 out of 18 already next year, when no changes are happening. This is likely a high percentage, but if that were to hold across the district, we're looking at losing around 3000 kids before closures even start - and that's right now. How much worse will it look in a few more months, especially if we've started the closures process? Mr Walker likes to talk lately of long runways for families to adjust and create a soft landing. This is not what is happening. What is happening is mass confusion and chaos because the administration seems to be hell bent on moving forward with a plan that has very little data or real plan for how it will be equitable, efficient, or excellent for our students. It makes the district look incompetent, trust is breaking down even further and people are abandoning the sinking ship. A vote to start this "procedural" task only compounds this in people's hearts and minds. It isn't helping to make the landing softer, it's causing the pilot to pick a different runway to land on. A real plan of how this will work is how you can make it a softer landing. In creating this proposal, the team was forced to waste a massive amount of our time trying to approximate data that the district has available, but is not willing to share without filing a Right to Know and waiting a long time to get it. Cooperation with people trying to help you would go a long way toward building trust in the admin again - obviously while respecting certain privacy considerations etc. One example: this weekend I took the updated building data that the admin posted (Thank you Ms Silk for requesting more data to be publicly shared), aggregated it back into a usable spreadsheet form, and did some analysis. It was a massive amount of work that I could have avoided, but I knew there was no point in asking the district to share an interactive/usable format of the data. I'm sure others will speak more about how much PPS's own data shows that the Walters plan is in fact not feasible (15 schools short by 72 classrooms, multiple buildings over 100% capacity, many others too high, some massively underutilized, and no plans at all to address any of this). Anyway, I took this data and reallocated PPS's own numbers to reflect our proposal, and it reflected that, unlike Walters' plan, almost our entire plan is actually feasible by building utilization metrics, with a couple of minor things we now know we need to look more closely at since we have some data to work with. I'm happy to talk more with any/all of you about this in more detail. Going back to being accused of being selfish: I'd like to note that the Community Proposal recommends closing Woolslair, the school that most of our coordinators of the plan love and have kids attend there. We recognize that the building is older, small, and has other challenges that make it the best decision for the district as a whole to remove from our school system. We don't really care about getting flashy new amenities etc - though they would be nice, but we do care about the great culture, learning atmosphere, diverse student body, thematic learning opportunity, etc. This change, whichever direction it goes in, will almost certainly be a loss for us, but we see it as part of the greater good of PPS to make this shift. Similarly, 2 of the 3 coordinators that sat down to discuss the Gifted Center have kids there, and we absolutely love what they get there. It is my son's favorite school day of the week, and its not even close. It was a hard decision, but we also recognize the inequities created by separating kids out like this, barriers to accessibility to the services, etc. So, we recommended closing it and integrating it into the schools. While there is much opportunity there to create some really great programs and services, there are components of what they get now that will be a big loss and are pretty much impossible to recreate. But, it's the right thing to do for our district as a whole. So no, this isn't an act of selfishness. My family is privileged enough that we could have pulled out of PPS and paid for private school, and saved ourselves thousands of hours of time, the opportunity cost of that time would have paid for a lot of education and given us a lot of valuable time back to spend with our kids instead. That would have been the selfish move. Others in our group have that option available as well and did all this hard work instead. And those who don't have that option for financial reasons, can still choose charter schools and hurt the district even more than choosing a private school. People fighting for better schools are not inherently selfish, and that messaging and undertone is uncalled for and unbecoming of true

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leaders. The current board has been making steps to improve trust and communication with the public. We still have a long way to go, but those efforts are appreciated. Voting to move this forward into this next phase absolutely will undermine most of that progress made. I can see that a number of you feel this way in the way you spoke at the feasibility presentation and at the agenda meeting. Please, be bold. Say no to moving just for the sake of moving, and instead demand that we move in a direction with a much clearer path, transparency, and public trust. Don't walk down the foggy path before the sun rises with zero visibility just to say you're moving - there might be a cliff 5 feet in that direction. Get the information we need, wait till the light comes up and we can forecast the journey ahead at least in rough format, and then let's boldly go forward with a truly transformative plan with community buy-in. Change is hard and we must make big changes, but doing so blindly is folly that will only hurt our children more, and chase many thousands more out of the district at a time when we absolutely cannot afford that. The Community Proposal is not a status quo plan, it is much more transformative and innovative than what has been presented so far of the Dr Walters plan, and doesn't rely on old models and strategies that have failed not only PPS, but most urban school districts, over and over and over for the last several decades. These old models may have worked in the distant past.

One major thing has changed, something outside our local control, which makes these models obsolete. Charter schools. When not just the privileged, but everyone of all economic statuses, has the option to leave, the entire game changes. This is an economics problem. There are 2 opposing thought processes in economics, often referred to supply side and demand side economics. Simply put, supply side economics (low taxes/regulations on rich/businesses to encourage capital to produce more product etc) only has marginal and short lived benefits. Demand side economics (empower the public to have a strong middle class, lot of buying power, etc and let the producers respond to the increased demand for goods and services. When you have a closed market without outside forces, you can sometimes make supply side models work (as long as you keep the wealth gap from getting too wide) as there are no other options. Introduce an open market and the whole model spirals downward quickly. Enter Charter schools. This is that option that is approachable to all that makes public school systems have to rethink how they structure themselves. I wish it wasn't the case, but it is and we have to play the cards we're dealt. Now, the way for schools to keep "customers" (students/families) is to not just offer a solid baseline education, but to compete for the demand of the customer/student/family. I believe PPS has a lot of the components to do this already, especially at the High School level. But we have to keep them in the district long enough to get there and find out.

The Dr Walters proposal is very supply side thinking in a market that necessitates demand side strategies. It absolutely will cause massive attrition from the district, and we will be right back in this place again in 5 years or so, just like the last 4 or 5 times we've tried substantially similar strategies. We can and we must do better for all the kids of PPS. We have begged for this district to allow us to collaborate with you to try to make the best possible decisions. We would much, much rather collaborate with you than spend our time criticizing you, and I have a feeling that if the administration gave it a real chance, they would prefer it too. It's not fun to be constantly criticized. Real listening (from all age students and all community members) goes a long way to stave off criticism. And it shows the public that you are trustworthy and worth following through all the smaller unknown details yet to be determined - we understand that every detail can't be worked out before we move forward, but there needs to be a real guiding path to follow. What the street signs say along the road we can determine when they're close enough to actually be able to read them. Let's be frank. Nobody cares about your board 5 year goals right now when all of this is going on - and board goals will make a lot more sense when they're based on a real thought out direction the schools are moving. While people can certainly comment on these goals, I suggest you use these sessions to do some real community engagement about the future of our district. Listen more than talk, but respond to questions. Engage

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more than just 400 hand selected high schoolers who will be by far the least impacted by the Dr Walters plan and really create a space to hear from elementary and middle school students and their families, as they are much more dramatically impacted. Right now, let's have a serious discussion about what it means to lead. Specifically, make changes that impact YOU, the leaders, first. There's one glaringly obvious way to do that right now... close the Administration building in Oakland this summer and move your offices into the extra space in the schools. Lease out space in Bellefield to CMU/Pitt (they'd be all over that in a second) and save a ton of money to bridge the gap while we figure out a clearer, smarter path forward for our students. It's 2025, we don't all have to be in the same building to do this work. We don't even need to have office spaces for a lot of it. Administrators being in the heart of the action of what they're administering is the best way for them to remain in touch. Admin sitting in the marble palace in Oakland hurts students. Let's change adult behavior first and lead by example. More leadership: Dr Walters, stop posting Op Eds that insultingly compare drastically affecting the lives of our students, to a stupid NFL draft - it's unconscionable that you would make such a flippant comparison. No, we don't need to scrutinize every detail of the NFL's plans... why? They have a long history of doing a good job, and even if they don't, what's the damage? Lower than expected ratings for one event? C'mon now. PPS, however, has a long track record of botching this exact situation, and this proposal doesn't have any substantial differences to what we've done over and over, and what has failed, over and over. Stop demeaning the people in this district, assuming nobody knows anything and we're all just selfish. You're supposed to be a role model to our kids, educators, and the community. This is not how you do that. Oh, and in case you didn't notice, this is (mostly) a progressive union town. Stop putting Op Eds in the PG when they are on strike. This is important, directors. What you choose here has massive ramifications on public perception and morale. When everyone is screaming that there isn't enough information to base this on, moving forward anyway, even just on a procedural thing, is gravely damaging. We are not making these changes next school year. We have time to do this right. Dr Walters finally agreed to meet with our team after 6 months of repeatedly asking for it, and we're having that meeting a few hours before your vote. If this meeting is genuine, not just a "see, we met with them," for optics, then you need to give time for the administration to consider our total proposal, and if these 10 buildings are even the right ones to be considering closing. Our proposal closes different buildings in some cases and there are good reasons for why. We are absolutely not advocating doing nothing - this is another common mischaracterization of our efforts. We propose a more bold, more innovative, more major change in the way we think about educating our kids than Dr Walters has presented to date. We know we have to do something and we can't keep pushing this off - but doing something without a solid structure of a plan is far more likely to end in disaster than in success. Let us be part of creating a successful plan forward. All the kids of Pittsburgh deserve no less. Please vote no to start the closures process until a more complete directional framework is available, and you have truly engaged the community.

Thank You for your consideration, Mike Cummins



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#26

Elizabeth Cummins

Parent



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#27

Bernard Mohan

Parent



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#28

Trey Cummins

Student



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#29

Emily Alder

Parent



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#30

Nyota Robinson

Parent



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#31

Erin Childs

Parent



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#32

Dyllan Childs

Student



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#33

Abby Foulds

Parent



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#34

Erika Gidley

Parent

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#35

Valerie Web Allman

Parent

Hello! My name is Valerie Allman and I thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Once again, I need to start with the lack of virtual testimony and concerns over some changes to the policy. First, I am deeply concerned that the virtual testimonies were not returned before the vote to start the school closures process. This is enormously problematic. You are all well aware of the need

for the public to raise their voices in this prior to your vote and most of you have expressed understanding that the removal of the virtual testimony restricts that access. Why would the resolution to begin school closures be considered before reinstating full access to the community? In

addition, I am also concerned about a couple things not already addressed but need fixed. If someone needs to change from in person to virtual (or vice versa), is that allowed? If you aren't available when you're called to testify, will you be called at the end? Why aren't you expanding

access to people that show up to testify, but don't know to sign up in advance?

Now, as for the resolution to start the school closure process. After seeing the data and presentation,

we were given even LESS information, without timeline or other vital info, and they told us that this plan wasn't feasible without information from a demographer and other sources. Dr. Walters did what my kids do sometimes. I tell them to clean their rooms but they don't finish the job. They shove the stuff they don't want to clean up properly in their closet and then show me a clean room. They say that they did the job they were told to do. However, as soon as that door opens, I find that the mess

is still there and it is often worse. The Board has the obligation to check his closet before

greenlighting any plans.

Some major concerns revolve around the demographer and must be completed before we choose

which schools we can close, which we need to expand and/or re-open. Feeder patterns and attendance zones are deeply concerning district wide when closing these 10 schools. If you look at it, the numbers don't make sense. We don't have enough dedicated classrooms for this to work even if we pack every remaining school to 100% capacity. This not only leads us to eliminate the spaces for dedicated learning, certain special education services, gifted, music, art, thematic learning, etc, but it eliminates the options for families to return to the district. It restricts our ability to grow and it sets up all students, but especially students that are the most vulnerable, for failure. Passing this will

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start a domino effect that is far more complex than what Mr. Walker has been saying. Get the necessary info from the demographer, THEN figure out what makes sense for the new footprint. Leading with a plan and then trying to force the data to fit never works. Do not put the cart before the horse.

Furthermore, what teacher wants to work in a district like that and what parent would choose that for their child? Just because you eliminate choices through PPS, doesn't mean you eliminate choices for parents. Families will leave the district, PPS will be forced to pay more to charters and private schools and we will return to this same problem in a few years. If you think that this won't happen, be a student of our own history at PPS before you vote to revisit the same mistakes we have made over and over. Thank you.

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#36

Lily Allman

Student

My name is Lily Allman. Thank you for this opportunity to speak...even though it still isn't virtual. Please fix that.

I once saw a quote that said, "We mature by damage and not by age." This process is making me far more mature than I need to be at 11 years old. That is not a compliment.

Dr. Walters, a couple weeks ago, you told students to use their voices. You claimed students' voices are first always. But, whenever we have tried to use them, you don't listen to us. You claim to be the one that is lifting up student voices, yet students have been fighting to have our voices heard for years. My peers and I have begged you to talk to us but you still haven't. I think it's time for you to stop gaslighting us and claiming that you have been the one elevating our voices when it has been us that has been elevating our own voices this entire time.

The only thing I've learned from Dr. Walter's information is that if you close those 10 schools, we are short at least 76 classrooms district wide. If you don't reopen Northview, you will be short at least 100 classrooms. What do you plan to do with us? There's going to be 100 classrooms worth of kids that you don't have a plan for but you are still saying that closing all those schools is feasible. Even if you manage to tetrise us around to fill extra rooms in the other schools, we are still between 3 to 27 classrooms short with all schools at 100% capacity. Let's not ignore how bad it is to cram all of our schools to 100% or more capacity either. You will not have room for us, much less all the classes you claim we will have access to or for any new students.

On October 21st, I asked several questions that we needed to know from Dr. Walters. Unfortunately, Dr. Walters gave us even less information than ERS did, so I still have all those questions. Is this closure plan really feasible or are you just sacrificing our education to make change for change's sake? I don't have time to ask all of those questions now, but we deserve answers to all of them. I listed them in my written testimony.

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- Is moving students five times in five years feasible for our educational outcomes?

No timeline was given by Dr. Walters so we have no idea how many times we will be moved around.

- Are we guaranteed to keep STEAM or will the program be cut?
- What about our teachers? Will we be able to keep our teachers and trusted adults?
- What are the chances that we will be able to get into another program of our choice for 7th or 8th grade with even fewer options?
- How many years will we be behind our peers in a new program?
- How many years of my education are you willing to steal from me? And, can you tell me to my face?
- How many years of education will be lost by students with disabilities? Students that already don't have stability at home? Students that don't have the same privilege as me?

To vote to start any school closures would be reckless because we need the information from the demographer to see if these building closures make sense. If you wanted to vote on this now, you should have hired the demographer in November like ERS told you to. Voting to start the closure process without all this information is like driving blindfolded. Can you do it? Sure! But, it isn't safe and I don't want to be anywhere near you when you do it. Vote no on starting school closures until you can see the road clearly. Just some advice from an 11 year old that has only driven a golf cart and a side by side. Thank you.

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#37

Anne Farris

Parent

Hi, I'm Anne Farris, a North Side parent with a third grader at Dilworth.

I want to echo Ms. Silk from last week's agenda review, "It is ok to pause."

First, I urge you, Mr. Barker, as my representative to vote no on resolution 17.03, and not vote to open up the process for public commentary on any school closures until the superintendent provides the following information:

- Demographer report
- Complete feeder patterns
 - Budgets related to transportation costs
 - Estimated cost savings or cost increases
- Continued maintenance costs for the closed schools
- Additional capital costs for school renovations
 - How we will resource ELL
 - Disposition plans for old schools
- More information on community schools - how will we continue to invest and how the closures enable the district to continue to invest and expand the community schools program

Last week, Mr. Walker said, "We need to put ourselves in a position to be able to act when the time is right to act on any and all school closures, and so to delay the authorization of public hearings puts us in a position where when we are able to act and want to based off of whatever timeline is presented by the superintendent we're not able to do that in a timely fashion which delays our ability to implement the plan to impact student outcomes and to give our parents and families the appropriate runway to get ready for the changes."

Also per Mr. Walker, the Board controls this process. When the superintendent provides the information outlined by Ms. Yourd, the Board can proceed expeditiously, as Dr. Reed said was critical to move forward with a plan informed by the information I previously outlined as part of a transparent, responsible, and fiscally responsible plan.

I want to echo Jamie's concern that, "as stewards of the school district and taxpayer dollars I think it's irresponsible that the board would be voting on this item this month without any new information on the fiscal impact on the district. We are being asked to vote without any kind of estimated timeline, of when and how long improvements will take, or when schools would actually be scheduled to close."

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Emma pointed out that opening the process to derail April community listening sessions focused on board goals and board guardrails per coaching with Council for Great City Schools.

The district's priorities around excellence are extraordinarily unclear. I am here to sound the alarm - passing this resolution to open up the public commentary on the closure of these ten schools signals work on the superintendent's Facilities Utilization plan has begun. There of course are an infinite amount of theoreticals, but the fact is the clock will have started on the vote(s) to close each of these ten schools.

Mr. Walker, if you are not comfortable putting this plan in the hands of the next five board member who will be sworn in in December, this shows a tremendous lack of confidence in this plan in its current state.

Yes, we can do hard things. Yes, children are resilient. The people who are showing up here and on the PPS Facebook comments thread are showing concern about the students of our district. It is not selfish, as Dr. Walters has said publicly, to expect the same from all of you down there. I am asking the nine of you to use the power you promised your communities you were not giving up by adopting SOFG by voting no on resolution 17.03. Show us the work.

Thank you,

Anne Farris

#38

Mark Weaver

Parent

I speak tonight with the knowledge that I am taking a relatively unpopular position in that I think that the facilities utilization plan is overall a good one and will be beneficial for the school district. I have a couple reasons for thinking this way and also some concerns.

First, why I support the utilization plan. The current system is far too complicated with way too many different types of schools. I think it makes a lot of sense to condense the structure into elementary, middle and high schools. I also think that the district became overreliant on magnet schools at the elementary level in order to compete with charter schools. On just my street, children attend five different elementary schools, all within the PPS system. I think keeping Neighbourhood schools makes a whole lot more sense for the city and for communities, especially at the elementary level. I do think it makes sense to have speciality magnet programs for some middle and high schools.

I also believe it is important for the district to begin divesting itself of some of the facilities that will be too expensive to renovate or are no longer needed because of declining enrollment and young population within the city. It is never going to be easy to close schools, but I believe that is your job to make the best decision for the school district and for the city as a whole. Whether it is this plan, or even in the parent proposal that I have seen, some schools are going to need to be closed in order for the district to move forward and have the funds to put in place needed updates in different buildings. You will have a difficult choice to make and many people will be unhappy.

I do think that some additional information is needed to make sure that parents can plan for the future. Before the plan is voted for we should know where students from different neighborhoods are going to be going. As another parent previously brought up, hiring a demographer should've already happened to help this along the way. I know there are also some concerns about areas that will not have an elementary school nearby.

The district should also prepare a plan for what they're actually going to do with the buildings that are going to be shut down. I believe the old school in Garfield is still sitting vacant. For whatever schools close, there needs to be a plan to sell or repurpose those properties.

Thank you for your consideration of community feedback.



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#39

Holly Munson

Parent



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#40

Lars Munson

Student

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#41

Kathleen Michelotti

Teacher / Staff

My name is Kathy Michelotti. I am a first grade teacher at Pittsburgh Woolslair and a proud product of Pittsburgh Public Schools (John Morrow, Columbus, and Oliver high School, class of 1984). I am here to express my deep concern about the lack of planning for the proposed facilities utilization plan. I urge you to vote against beginning the process to close any schools.

First, I want to express my outrage at the characterization of the parents, students, and community members who have been attending these hearings. They are anything but selfish. If they are loud and repetitive, it's because you are not listening. Parent and community members worked hard to submit their ideas for an alternative plan. You ignored it. Students come here every month to speak, and they are not acknowledged. The families of our elementary students in particular want options, and if the district does not provide that opportunity, they will go elsewhere.

Aside from a survey filled with leading questions to support your own ideas, no teachers have been asked for their input about the plan. Dr. Walters has expressed his desire to be innovative, but the details are lacking. Teachers use innovation daily, working, researching, planning, forming relationships – doing all that we can to meet the needs of our students and providing opportunities for them to thrive. Have you asked any teachers what our ideas are for the future of our district, or do you assume that we are all selfish too? Remember that we, along with students, are the ones who will deal with the aftermath of your decisions every day.

The consequences of this plan for our elementary students are being overlooked. For example, Sunnyside is at an estimated 93% capacity under this plan. According to your own data, Woolslair is around 72% capacity, but art and music are on a cart. The speech therapist is in a converted closet, there is no designated space for a therapist, OT, ELL teacher or other service providers. There is a shortage of classroom space under this proposal.

What opportunities will our elementary students lose under this plan?

- Will all elementary schools have a foreign language teacher, or a STEAM teacher, or the opportunities that are now available through our other magnet programs?
- Will our class sizes become so large that we cannot give our students the attention they need and deserve for the sake of cutting costs?
- Will the teaching and learning environment be safe and conducive to learning? Will it include supports to help our most vulnerable children, such as those with disabilities, English language learners, those who have experienced trauma, and who have mental health needs. Will there be space for service providers to service these students?



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None of us know. We deserve to have the answers to these questions before you consider beginning the process to close schools.



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#42

Alonna Mitchell

Parent



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#43

Jordon Williams

Parent



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#44

Rachel Milliron

Teacher / Staff, Community Member



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#45

Regan Konesky

Teacher / Staff

(unable to attend)

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#46

Joshua Zelesnick

Teacher / Staff

My name is Joshua Zelesnick, and I'm the Librarian and PFT building rep at the Student Achievement Center.

I just want to make sure the board knows how essential a school like the Student Achievement Center (SAC) is for Pittsburgh Public Schools. My school helps some of the most vulnerable kids in middle school and high school stay on course and graduate. Almost 100% of the students at my school are people of color. Some students have failed some or almost all of their middle school and high school courses. Most of these students failed not because they're not bright, but because of truancy, which we know can happen for multiple reasons: some students have deep trauma they are dealing with; some have ADHD and/or other mental health issues; some were set back by the online covid years; some may lack an inspiring role model that can convince them how important school is. Many times, students who come to SAC find this inspiring person in a teacher or staff person at the school who helps them believe in themselves and put the work in to graduate or move to the next grade level.

I've mentored students who worked so hard on their Edgenuity courses that they completed 10 or more in a semester. The teachers and staff at SAC are a special group. We get to know our students and create bonds with them. One of the reasons we can do this is because the class sizes are smaller than at other PPS schools, and this is essential in order to best educate these students who at other schools could get left behind. Just having a program like Period 10 is not enough for many of the kids in this district that have double digit credits to make up. Plus, it is often a very good thing to separate these students from their peers at their homeschools because many times it is exactly their "friends" who are distracting them and holding them back from flourishing. Many students who come to SAC initially hate being separated from their friends at their homeschool, but they adjust, make new friends or new old friends, and they don't care anymore about the urge to leave because they know the shift was necessary for them to get their school work done. And they find they actually like it at SAC. In fact, when students come to SAC, they often want to stay even after they are given the green light to return back to their home schools.

What happens to these students if a school like the Student Achievement closes? Is this equitable? Will these students just get left behind? We know enrollment would be higher if school buses were provided for students. We encourage an analysis of SAC enrollment data from when we had school busses compared to when we lost school busses. Also, when you look at the data across the district right now, many more students should be signed up to attend SAC instead of their homeschools. Current district data for just 9th grade, excluding CAPA and Sci-Tech, show that 7 students have failed 13 classes. 15 have failed 8. 17 have failed 6. These students could be at SAC making up these classes. Is period 10 enough for these students? Could some of them ultimately drop out?

My argument here is that an alternative school for credit recovery and middle school overage is needed for equity reasons and to meet PPS's mission to "put students first." The middle school team has taken some kids in the overage program from barely reading or writing to winning essay contests (like "Your Ideal Community" contest from the Pittsburgh Chapter of Noble). We've had 3 Carson



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Scholars 3 years in a row. We've been a STAR school numerous times. I think it would be a mistake to close us, and I ask that the board urge the district to reinstate the middle school overage program and keep SAC as a program going for the sake of putting students first.

Sincerely,

Joshua Zelesnick



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#47

Noel Webb

Organization, Grandparent



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#48

Monica Johnson

Parent, Former Student



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#49

Kara Britanik

Parent



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#50

Charlie Britanik

Student



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#51

April Clisura

Parent, School Bus Driver

#52

JoAnna Taylor

Parent, Organization

I'm Mayor of Mt. Oliver, PAC parent, PTO officer, and parent at Arlington.

I'm gonna switch gears with my comment - a parent sending my kids to my neighborhood school. Because it's in my neighborhood. And because if it isn't good enough for my kid, it isn't good enough for any kid. And I'm here to speak up and work with you to make that happen.

Pittsburgh Public Schools's motto is "Students first. Always, in all ways." This is not happening at Arlington K-8. Arlington has been categorized as a community school. I know that all the schools at PPS have needs in one way or another. But only a few match the extreme needs of the students at Arlington. Where is equity for Arlington students?

To keep it short, I won't spend time on the consistent lack of teachers, fighting to get a counselor, being threatened to not have a vice principal next year, minimal support staff, unsafe routes to school, no crossing guards (a student was hit at our big 5-intersection a couple weeks ago) – all things that you need to provide if you say you have a school; we attend our neighborhood school and no matter how many students attend, if you say a school is there, you must supply a basic amount of staff to make it run, and that absolutely includes a vice principal and a counselor (again, among other things). Where is the equity for Arlington students?

But tonight I will share one example: there were two second grade teachers to start the year, one left on medical leave, came back for a short time, and then left permanently. The students in that class were put in other classes in grades K, 1, and 3. A long-term sub was secured, but after a few weeks they were moved to a fill a gym position that we also didn't have. Those students were again sent to grades K, 1, and 3. They were not given second grade curriculum material to access. IEPs were not being met. Parents were not informed even once during the entire year. This is currently still the case at our school.

I have met with our principal. She met with parents. She apologized where she fell short and made errors with her communication to us.

Putting students first at Arlington would not look like punitive action to the first principal we have had in at least four years who has stayed and cares and tries. What putting students first at Arlington, a community school, would look like is getting us more staff. Stop telling us you can't, and figure out a way that you can. What administrators need to spend their days at our school to fill gaps? How many have even seen what we need? How far removed is the district administration that they didn't even know this was happening? Who from the district is overseeing our community schools and ensuring that our students are getting what they need? Why are parents of students who are achieving well constantly talking about leaving Arlington for another (better)

school? Where is the equity for Arlington.

Our students need enough staff. Some don't have a class at all. Some cannot have classes because there is no support staff to manage extreme behavior issues, so teachers cannot teach and don't hold class. Where is the equity for Arlington?

We demand enough staff for a school to run at expected levels, same as the other schools in the district. We demand that the district know what is happening at our school and where you need to send support.

You can't wait until you make district changes with the schools. It's easy to sweep us under the rug another year (or two). Our students need this now. Our students need this yesterday. We have a myriad of other problems. Problems that I see most other schools in the district either do not face, or do not face to the same degree. Start treating our students the same way you treat every other student at Pittsburgh Public Schools. Our students deserve a safe learning environment, even if they didn't get lucky enough to make it into a magnet school, or don't have enough money nor resources to move somewhere else. I'm here speaking for parents and students of our school and all our neighborhood schools who could speak tonight. Use our schools to prove your points.

Prove you can make all schools more equitable.

We are here and we matter. Where is the equity for Arlington? You may not have heard from Arlington before, but you will be hearing from us again.

#53

Stephanie Montgomery

Parent

Good evening,

As a PPS parent of 2 gifted children at Pittsburgh Dilworth, the decision to remove gifted programming and implement it into a neighborhood school's curriculum is not the answer. Just as students with IEPs by law must have individualized learning agreements, the same is true for students with GIEPs.

What is the purpose for removing gifted from Dilworth? So we can no longer have a transportation issue? Dilworth needs to remain a gifted only school as it requires children to maintain good attendance, PSSA scores, and no behavioral issues. Now I'm forced to remove my child from a school he is comfortable in, to a school that is not equipped to challenge him academically just because it's closer to my house? That may fix the board's transportation issue but at what cost to my children? They'd need to make new friends, establish new relationships with teachers, all while still not being challenged?

My children should not be penalized for being intelligent. It reminds me of the pandemic and how gifted students didn't need to return until late in the year while other students returned sooner due to the negative impact of the pandemic on their learning, and mental health. Well what about my children? Just because they aren't learning at a below average level doesn't mean that their individualized plan should be placed on the back burner.

There are specialized teachers at Dilworth that formed a bond with my children. Know how to challenge them, and meet their gifted needs. By taking the gifted program away, and placing all students of different learning levels in one classroom, will only make my children less mentally present, bored, and potentially start to decline with their work.

I do not believe that PPS will be able to properly implement gifted learning into its classrooms efficiently. This change to remove gifted programming makes me feel that my child's skills are overlooked just because they are not struggling.



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#54

Trinia Strong

Parent



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#55

Takieva Ferguson

Parent



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#56

Taran Alford

Parent



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#57

James Fogarty

Parent, Organization

(Printouts)



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#58

Kari Thompson

Parent



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#59

Shareena Johnson

Parent



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#60

Dennis Boyce

Teacher / Staff



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#61

Allyce Pinchback-Johnson

Organization, Community Member



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#62

LaKesha Silver

Community Member

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#63

Lynda Wrenn

Community Member

For years, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) has struggled with deep inequities in educational access. Past school closures—primarily in Black neighborhoods—were meant to save money, yet we now spend more per student with little return on investment. Too many students, especially Black and lower-income students, attend under-resourced schools with limited access to advanced coursework, enrichment programs, and experienced educators. As PPS considers another round of restructuring, we must shift the focus from just closing buildings to creating a stronger, more equitable school system. The reality is, our resources are spread too thin across too many schools. Instead of maintaining half-empty buildings, we need a district where every student—no matter where they live—has access to rigorous academics, high-quality programming, and top-tier educators. With thoughtful consolidation, we can:

- Expand access to AP, honors, and advanced courses by bringing students together in schools that offer a full range of challenging academics.
- Strengthen Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs by creating hubs with modern equipment and industry-aligned training.
- Ensure every student has access to enrichment opportunities in STEM, the arts, and athletics—not just those in well-resourced schools.
- Attract and retain highly effective teachers by offering better supported schools with robust programming.
- Upgrade school facilities so students learn in safe, modern environments built for success.

The last time PPS restructured, families left the district in droves. We cannot afford another exodus. If we make these changes **with a focus on expanding opportunity—not restricting it**—**Pittsburgh can build a school system where every student, in every neighborhood, has the resources to thrive. I know the work ahead is difficult but thank you for your commitment children and leadership on this important issue.



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#64

Kara Dempsey

Organization



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#65

Ms. Paulette Foster

Parent, Organization, Community Member

#66

Dorothy Sherman

Community Member

Hello; My name is Dorothy Sherman. I am a resident in Manchester and am here to request that the Board vote against the closures of our schools, especially the Conroy School.

The PPS Leadership Position, based on findings from Boston- based Education Resource Strategies, is that

“The relocation greatly benefits students by utilizing an unused facility that offers a safe, accessible environment with the necessary supports to meet their needs.”

I disagree with these assumptions. Research conducted by the Brookings Institute in 2022 consistently [shows](#) that a neighborhood’s overall well-being and localized school performance go hand in hand.

With all this talk of wanting to expand Manchester and the Northside, I think the first step is to look inwards at the community first. 6.8% of families live below the poverty level here, and the median income of Black Families is \$30,000- the schools are EXTREMELY important to the well-being of the neighborhood.

“ data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that the pandemic [erased more than two decades of progress](#) in reading and math for 9-year-old students. The effect was most profound for students from low-income communities—exacerbating the pre-pandemic achievement gap between those students and their higher-income peers.

The Conroy School is in my neighborhood, and it is critical to the cohesive learning of these kids that they can attend a neighborhood school. The school provides youth and young adults with an environment where they learn academic and independent living skills in a place where they feel safe and comfortable. The neighborhood provides families a variety of amenities and things to do - parks, restaurants, bus routes, museums- that promote success for our our staff and students **because of the community that surrounds the school.**

I oppose the proposed move to South Brook facilities; I don’t see the benefit in putting kids on a bus, across a bridge, to go to a school in the suburbs where they have less access to these important resources.

Closing the neighborhood schools does NOT support families. In fact, it makes the logistics of their children attending school more difficult. I do not see how it is good for families who now have to sit in standstill traffic to pick up or drop off their kids, or how it supports families who don’t have the ability to get across town if, God forbid, something happens. I do not see how this supports the kids and adults who go there, who have a place they can WALK to and people they know and see every day.

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The economic impact on families vs. money saved has got to be considered.

Why are you taking away valuable community support? In the name of saving money? In the name of growth and development? What are the plans for Conroy's building once it's gone? More unused space for a developer to buy?

I believe that closing Manchester K-8 and closing Conroy will have a significant negative impact on Manchester. Please consider keeping these schools open to support the students, their families, and the neighborhood. Thank you.



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#67

Muriel Fox Alim

Community Member



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#68

Dr. Cheryl Hall-Russell

Organization



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#69

Shirlynn Reddy

Teacher / Staff



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#70

Lauren Stuparitz

Teacher / Staff, Parent, Organization



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#71

Kaitlyn Colbert

Teacher / Staff

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#72

Syerra Hopkins

Family Member

KEEP CONROY

Hello all,

My name is Syerra Hopkins and I'm the sister of Jayda Hopkins and she goes to Conroy Education Center. Since a young age I knew my sister was different, but in her own way. Being at Conroy she's found her place, her friends and new connections. She became who she is because of Conroy. Without Conroy staying where it is these children won't have room to grow. My sister and her friends have a place where they can run, talk, and hangout like regular children. My sister has grown into a different person over the years. She knows her way around a kitchen, how to ride public transportation, she has a job she goes to twice a week and that's because of Conroy!

Last year there was a grant for Conroy to get new flooring and ONLY half of the floors were redone. This summer the other half was supposed to be done but that's not happening anymore because of the move. I'm confused as to why these children can't get their new floors if its "too much" to pay to get the roof completed. The roof is steadily getting fixed in sections but you can't finish it all the way? If there was a grant for flooring but instead of doing all floors you only fixed half plus some hallways. If the roof is the thing that needs to be fixed, then why can't you use the rest of the grant money for the floors and hall for the roof? This building is these children's home! And you guys know that's wrong to take these children from where they feel safe.

Thank You



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#73

Anitha Reddy

Future Parents

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March 24, 2025

#74

Sarah Grubb

Parent

Good evening Dr. Walters and members of the board.

I am a parent of four children in PPS Colfax. We proudly support our schools and community and as such urge you to:

1. vote NO to beginning the process for building closures at this time and to
2. NOT green light moving forward with the current Facilities Utilization Plan until further details are provided.

There are too many important pieces to this puzzle that are still missing before any aspect of the plan is voted on.

1. The demographer has not been hired to complete attendance zones and feeder patterns
2. Transportation has not been considered at all in a time when there is much upheaval with PRT
3. Budgetary concerns have not been addressed - where will the money come from for the necessary improvements to schools? (This is before even considering updates such as central air conditioning)

The data used to suggest that the Facilities Utilization changes were “feasible” was released and showed that there are not enough classrooms in the remaining buildings to hold all students.

- Middle school students who attend King/ Morrow/ Schiller would move to Manchester. Manchester is **9 classrooms short**.
- Miller students would move to Weil. Weil is **5 classrooms short**.
- Spring Hill would move to Northview. However, in his Facilities Feasibility presentation Dr. Walters raised financial concerns about Northview reopening and wants to explore alternative existing facilities instead of constructing a new school. There is **no plan for Spring Hill students**.

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- Woolslair students would move to Sunnyside or Liberty. Sunnyside is **3 classrooms short**.
Liberty is **3 classrooms short**.

When the redesign of the district was initially presented by Dr. Walters, we were tasked with imagining ALL schools having access to art, music, languages, algebra, advanced placement classes. If there is not enough space in buildings to house all students the very first things to be eliminated are art, music, etc. Having access to art and music on mobile carts is not fair to students or teachers.

How will we provide Languages and advanced math and science to all students when currently our few language magnets are not even fully staffed with teachers able to provide language access to students? If the answer is that closing these schools and consolidating buildings will provide enough staff then that should be communicated.

- For example: Building consolidations will displace 8 Spanish teachers and there will be 15 openings for Spanish teachers with the redesign so we will need to hire 7 more

Without presenting any of this information with regards to feasibility it makes it seem as if these things have not been considered in any way and makes it impossible to trust that these wide sweeping changes to the district really will benefit all students and not be massively disruptive to the entire city without any real benefit. Sure it's feasible to continue adding kids into classrooms because they technically can fit, but it's definitely not best practice.

Thank you,

Sarah Grubb



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#75

Meredith Knight

Parent



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#76

Maria Panian

Parent



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#77

Iris Swann

Teacher / Staff, Parent



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#78

Diana Leichlitee

Teacher / Staff



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#79

Amy McGinley

Teacher / Staff



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#80

T Rankin

Community Member

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#81

Eric Williams

Parent, Community Member

Good evening, members of the board. My name is Eric Williams, and I am a parent of students at Obama, CAPA, and Linden. I am concerned, because I perceive a worrying lack of data-driven decision-making in the proposed Facilities Utilization Plan. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu wrote, “If [you are] ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”¹ I believe PPS is in grave peril. All of the information I have found in presentations, public statements, journalism, and social media has given me the strong impression that a plan was conceived before data collection, that anything resembling data analysis has been heavily skewed by cherry picking and confirmation bias, and that ERS was contracted to tell administrators what they wanted to hear and to present a veneer of due diligence to the board and the public². PPS does not know itself, because it

hasn’t calculated the cost of closing and repurposing schools. How much would necessary renovations cost, and how long would it take break even? How many teachers would a reconfigured district need? Fewer? More? At what cost? How many more qualified teachers would need to be hired, and how many duplicated resources would need to be purchased to ensure equitable gifted support in every school, especially accounting for greater inclusion of underrepresented minorities? When a board member suggested that reasonable cost and benefit calculations are necessary before a vote can be held, the response was that financial analysis wouldn’t be feasible until an approved plan was in place. That’s absurd. How in the world can the board be expected to evaluate the feasibility of a particular plan if there aren’t even estimates of costs and savings from other plans for comparison?!

PPS does not know itself, because it hasn’t prioritized sensible feeder patterns. A demographer should have been hired before even considering how to downsize the district. ERS tried their hand at coming up with attendance zones based on proximities to schools, but I get the impression they only did so after considering which schools to close or repurpose, and that they were in over their heads. In

Pittsburgh, distance is a poor proxy for travel time. Here, we have hills, valleys, convoluted traffic patterns, endless construction, and tunnel monsters that often make travel times to and from a location vastly different. How long it takes to get to and from a school is more important than how far a student lives from it. PPS doesn’t know its enemies, because it hasn’t accounted for its dependence on PRT. Bus routes should be a crucial component to logical feeder pattern design, and PRT’s budget uncertainty can’t be ignored. Potentially severe state budget cuts have forced PRT to propose service reductions that would cut back or eliminate buses students need. How can PPS suggest changing where students attend if we don’t even know if they’ll be able to get there? PPS doesn’t know its enemies, because it hasn’t accounted for the potential chaos and lost funding resulting from the dismantling of the federal Department of Education. Granted, there’s too much uncertainty to reach any conclusions or make informed decisions, but there should at least be contingency considerations that account for possible trickle down effects from budget budget disruptions. Look, I’m not saying that I oppose any closing or reorganizing of schools. I know the district is hemorrhaging money and students, and the status quo is unsustainable. Change is inevitable, but let’s be intelligent and responsible about it. Panicked and rushed reactions to cries of “The sky is falling! Somebody do something!!!” usually do more harm than good. If PPS wants the children they educate to be the thinkers, leaders, and dreamers of tomorrow, the board and administration need to lead by example, lest they lose credibility. ¹“Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning and losing are



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equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”
2Furthermore, I have been told that a Right to Know request revealed that the superintendent and ERS were in email contact prior to the request for proposals was announced and that the latter helped with the wording of that request, which strikes me as a subversion of the RFP process and a clear conflict of interest.



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#82

Torra Harper

Parent



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#83

Dr. Daniel Holland
Community Member
(2 printouts)



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#84

Terrance Turk

Community Member



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#85

Roberta Bowra

Community Member



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#86

Liz Ivey

Community Member



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#87

Evelyn Mitchell

Community Member



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#88

Tracey Turner

Community Member



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#89

Darlene Wiggins

Community Member



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#90

Pam Pryor

Community Member



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#91

Rebecca Sweeney

Organization



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#92

Kahlid Raheem

Community Member



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#93

Dee Gowder

Community Member



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94

Tyra Caldwell

Community Member



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#95

Debra Banks

Community Member



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#96

Renee Marshal

Community Member



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#97

Paul Scott

Community Member



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#98

Irish Rudolph

Community Member



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#99

Stanley Lowe

Community Member



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#100

Lauren Abt

Parent

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#101

Kathleen O'Brien

Parent

We have all been asking for a plan regarding how bussing will be handled, transportation, how the schools will get better with the mergers, how arts, science will become better. How much this will all cost. How students will fit into some of these schools, and answers have not been provided. Many parents have asked you to wait on voting to proceed, and our very real concerns have not been addressed.

The reorganization of PPS are huge changes that are disruptive in their own, combining this with the elimination of the DOEd, loss of title X, being fired from federal jobs, fear of losing green cards, potential loss of 40 bus PRT routes, 12 neighborhoods potentially without PRT services, Medicaid cuts, social services cuts, cuts to federally funded food programs, block grants, fear of every thing everywhere imploding all at once..... Going forward without a clear plan of how much stuff will cost, how programs will be improved, how the education of students will improve, specifics on how services for student with disabilities will be improved, how many folks will loose their jobs and what will happen to the vacant building left in communities is irresponsible right now.

Everyone is in a state of instability, but students and families need stability from their schools. The huge changes proposed will cause pps families to seek out stability, and in this current era, I don't think PPS will survive these disruption's.

What I would like to see is real cola station between PPS, families and the board. I'd like to see surveys re sent out that are not set up t give the answers the district are fishing for. I'd like to see PPS create bridges instead of walling them selves off, and I want to see public school survive.



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#102

Karen Cornell

Parent



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#103

April Williams

Teacher/Staff



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#104

Deborah Blackwell-Battle

Community member



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#105

Phyllis Bacon

Community Member



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#106

Reverend Article Coleman

Community Member



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#107

English Burton

Community Member



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108

Carol Green

Community Member



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#109

Mattie Williams

Community Member



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#110

Anthony Williams

Community Member



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111

Norma Tatem

Community Member



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#112

Norma Jean Barnes

Community Member

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#113

Emily Sawyer

Parent

Good evening. My name is Emily Sawyer. I am a parent of 4 PPS students.

Vote no on agenda items 12.02, 17.03, 17.04, and 17.05.

I don't know about anyone else, but it gets harder and harder to hear about all the tax breaks being given to corporations and private developers, while the people of this city worry if we are going to get taxed out of our living situations. Why don't we give people who move here to work jobs in the city, who buy or rent in this city, who send their kids to our public schools, and buy things and use services in our city and communities – in other words the actual drivers of our economy – any tax break incentives? Since the school district basically took me to court when I moved back to Pittsburgh 2 years ago to squeeze every little drop of property taxes out of the value of the home I borrow from the bank, maybe this sounds like too much of a “personalized grievance” for some of you. So maybe some context will help:

The dismantling and destabilizing of Black families and neighborhoods has many throughlines, only some of which include redlining, restrictive covenants, white flight, highway construction, urban renewal (or negro removal, as James Baldwin rightly called it), the wars on drugs and poverty (which always have been really wars on certain addicted people and the poor), mass incarceration, charter expansion, real estate development, and gentrification. That's just to name a few. Add to that the fact that private interests have been profiting off of public education while politicians drain schools of resources, and we can start to see a full picture of this as an ongoing project rooted in racial capitalism (Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us that all capitalism is racial, so I would be remiss not mention that here). One result of all of this is that neighborhood schools – particularly in those Black and brown neighborhoods which are underfunded, starved of resources, subjected to the persistent and purposeful destabilization of their families and communities by the government and other power structures in our society – are left to struggle with larger class sizes and meager resources, while we blame them for our failures and threaten to close them.

To bring it back to the local and immediate, there is real doubt and disagreement about whether public funding of private developments like the ones in 12.02, 17.04, and 17.05 actually benefit communities and cities as a whole. For example, Pittsburghers have publicly funded the private development of two new stadiums on the North Side and the new hockey arena. As the city has been in a low- to no-growth

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trajectory for a while now, I think it's reasonable to question whether the promises of the return on investment have actually been realized. Besides that, companies and developers that want to move to and develop in Pittsburgh should want to become part of the community they are moving into like residents are expected to, not avoid taking responsibility by skipping out on their taxes. With federal education funding in limbo, the next thing this district will be doing is telling us we need to raise property taxes while we are using our kids' education money to do site development for a private profit-making project for a multi-million dollar development company. It doesn't have to be this way. I'm tired of hearing that this is just the way it is done. I'm tired of people telling me that I just don't understand when the truth is that I understand perfectly well, and I just don't accept the premise that so many of you have decided is inevitable. We can create a world where businesses and developers are expected to be part of the community they are moving into and see their taxes as an investment in the common project of our city, instead of stealing education dollars from our children in the name of their profit projections. If you don't want us to feel like being taxed is a punishment, then stop using not being taxed as a reward. Our kids can't wait 30 years for these dollars. We can keep doing things the way we always have or we can insist on things being done differently. Let the city and county divert their dollars, which are already supposed to go to infrastructure and the like, but don't bargain away our kids' education money for 30 years.

Beyond the general lack of promise that programs like this will benefit our economy, there has been no independent impact study done so that Manchester residents can weigh costs and benefits of the TRID or of the Esplanade development as a whole. The projected affordability of the few "affordable" units planned is not actually affordable for a vast majority of our neighborhood residents. And affordable units are often not realized once these kinds of projects get greenlighted, as developers decide buying themselves out of these requirements makes better sense than actually building the "affordable" units. There are no agreements about what kinds of jobs, benefits, or salaries the promised jobs will deliver, or how the jobs are planned to actually employ Manchester residents. There is no plan for right-to-stay or right-to-return programs to protect the community's long-time residents or those long-time residents that have already been displaced. As for the TRID, it's a little bit offensive that all these "infrastructure" and "safety" improvements are being prioritized and touted as a benefit to residents when big developers come knocking and white gentrifiers start to show up, when the city and the business community have spent the last number of decades NOT making these "important investments" for the people who actually already and historically live in this neighborhood. And we are being asked to approve this all while our schools face closure.

The closure of Conroy and the loss of our neighborhood public elementary school would be sharp blows for this community that has been weathering these kinds of blows for decades, and suffering the indignity of unkept promises.

“When the so-called ‘reformers’ use our ‘failing schools’ as justification for closing them, or privatizing them, they claim that the primary failings exist within those schools. They act as if there were no underlying cause for the often-unsound educational practices, or frequently uneven teaching capacity, that exist within our schools. They confuse these symptoms of the problem with the problem itself, which is that our public schools have been persistently under-resourced, under-supported, and undermined for decades, including by many of the same people that now purport to ‘fix’ them.”

Closing schools is not radical or innovative. Closing schools *is* the STATUS QUO. If we asked folks about the 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 PPS school closures, would they agree that the closures had disrupted the status quo and resulted in increased positive outcomes and experiences for Pittsburgh students overall? Have we asked? Why are we considering more closures if we haven’t analyzed the results of prior school closures in our own city, not to mention across the country? The truth is that there is no evidence, objective or anecdotal, to support that school closures improve educational outcomes, opportunities, or experience for students or improve the state of the school district overall. We might decide that closing schools is necessary, but let’s not fool ourselves into seeing school closures as anything but what it is, a failure, or a set of failures over time. If you want to talk about hard choices, I have about 15 I’d like for you to make. This isn’t about an aversion to hard choices, this is about the fact that we don’t even know if or why school closures IS THE “hard choice” we need to make. Ask anyone who knows me and they will tell you I am the least sentimental person they know, so this is not about soft feelings, or tenderness, or wanting to take the easy way out so people aren’t upset. This is about what will be effective and radical to truly generate change! I agree that we will not be able to avoid disruption and I completely agree that disruption is already happening in our district (two of my kids finally have a music teacher and it’s March), but being willing to accept these realities is not the same as insisting that school closures is the disruption we need to fix everything else. Doing something just to say we didn’t do nothing isn’t a good plan either.

ERS recommended the District hire a demographer in October 2024, and the RFP didn’t go out until this month (March 2025). What if the demographer’s data contradicts the schools named for closure on the resolution? We don’t know how proposed building closures or school closures will affect transportation, programming, ESL education, community schools, feeder patterns, or attendance zones. Already, according to the District’s own numbers, the remaining schools can’t hold the students slated to attend them. We don’t know how staff will be redistributed or what class sizes we can expect. We don’t know the cost savings or expenditures, or what additional capital costs there might be for renovations or improvements to remaining buildings. And we have yet to hear how any of the proposed changes are expected to positively impact the academic goals we have for our students. How can we schedule hearings if the public doesn’t have info to make informed comments during them?

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It is extremely important to vote no on resolution 17.03 on Wednesday. Get the demographer's data and the information the district has spent the last 4 months not giving you, and then create a resolution based on facts and a vision for the future, not on a lick and promise, as my mother would say. We should be planning for growth, not managing decline.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the blatant strike-breaking behavior of the District to publish in and then post a link on the District's homepage for an article in a news outlet that is being produced by scabs. Added to that is an alarming condescension for the public in the article itself. Alarming but not surprising given the passive aggressive and disdainful attitude toward parents, caregivers, and community members that some on the Board and in this administration have repeatedly communicated over many months. Using your bully pulpits to "dunk" on community members is pretty fantastically immature, not to mention the offensive assertions being made by some board members that any opposition to this closure plan is just based on emotionality or acquiescence to the status quo in order to justify your stance without actually engaging with the issues raised by the opposition. Nothing is more status quo than an urban school district closing schools. I have spent the last 8 + years attending school board meetings and the disdain which some of you communicate for the people you work for should be disqualifying for you to hold the positions you hold. On second thought, I have seen it before, in how some members of the Texas legislature treat their constituents. So congratulations on tripping over that low bar.

Vote no on 12.02, 17.03, 17.04, and 17.05. Thank you



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#114

Marisa F

Parent

#115

Christine Porter

On behalf of Education Law Center – PA

I'm Christine Porter, an attorney with the Education Law Center's Pittsburgh office. We are a statewide nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education, particularly the most underserved students. I'm urging you tonight to continue to center equity and the voices of students and families while considering whether to close any schools, including the ten schools on the current list, and to share some specific concerns raised with ELC about the potential closing of Conroy.

As we have testified in the past, the District must focus on the potential impact on underserved students, including Black and Brown students, students with disabilities and multilingual learners at each step, with racial equity as an explicit and fundamental component of the decision-making process. We ask the District and the Board to engage meaningfully with the community, including by gathering and presenting answers to the community's questions before moving forward to the public hearing process.

We run a Helpline at Education Law Center, and we are hearing from a significant number of families concerned about potential school closures. Specifically, we have received a high number of calls from parents of students at Conroy, a school where 100% of students have an IEP. As you have heard tonight, these parents are concerned about the proposed move to the South Brook building and whether such a move could meet their students' educational needs.

A closure of Conroy and a move of those students to South Brook would presumably require extensive renovations. Conroy has features not present at South Brook, such as the classrooms with bathrooms inside them for students who need support with toileting skills and community partnerships set up to promote inclusion and transition skills. Many of the students at Conroy have difficulty transitioning to new settings. Moreover, as many students at Conroy receive specialized transportation as a related service funded by the District, there may be increased transportation costs associated with the move.

Even if closing and moving Conroy would save money, which we don't know at this point, moving hundreds of educationally vulnerable children without a solid protective plan during a time of diminished federal enforcement is not the way to balance a District's budget.

Research from past school closures does demonstrate that closing schools without taking appropriate protective measures can have long-term negative impacts on student academic outcomes. School closures can have especially negative effects for Black and Brown students and students from under-resourced families without sufficient planning.

I recognize that the District must make difficult financial decisions. But as is clear from the community voices, Pittsburgh's neighborhood schools are more than just buildings. They are critical community institutions. We at ELC share concerns raised by other speakers tonight about the potential impact of school closures on the District's most underserved students. Please ensure that the students, families, and communities are centered in the decision-making process and are a critical part of co-constructing solutions.

Thank you for listening.



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Who we are: *Education Law Center (ELC) is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all of Pennsylvania’s children have access to a quality public education, in particular the most underserved students: children living in poverty, children of color, children with disabilities, children in the foster and juvenile justice systems, children experiencing homelessness, multilingual learners, LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming students, and students at the intersection of those identities. For 50 years, ELC has provided legal advice, consultation, and technical assistance to thousands of parents, advocates, and other professionals on issues of public education.*



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#116

John Cooper

Parent

#117

Evelyn Ulysse

Parent

Evelyn Ulysse – Mother of a first grader boy at Woolslair PreK-5

Today i want to give my testimony about the negative impact of closing PPS schools on
mental health, social skills, and transportation.

Mental Health: We will have a high % of children between the ages of 5 and 9 experiencing
anxiety, fear, adjustment difficulties, behavioral changes, sleep and eating issues.

I am aware of this because In February 2024, my son and I went through the bad
experience of leaving home to live in a shelter. As a mother, facing the reality of the
negative impact on his mental health simply by having to change schools was
heartbreaking, and while all children react differently, it would be foolish to ignore the
chaos this change can create in a child's mind.

Social Skills

Children between the ages of 5 and 9 develop skills to make friends, understand, respect,
and follow social rules and express their emotions. We would be interrupting a natural
process, giving the child an opportunity for increased anxiety levels, emotional repression,
and violation of social rules due to ignorance or simple disrespect.

Finally, for two years, my son and I had to Walkin 25 minutes to get to school, regardless of
weather conditions, or having to spend \$25 for the weekly pass or \$7 for the daily pass. A
low-income single mother, the challenge, the frustration, and helplessness many parents
and children face in complying with mandatory attendance is indescribable.

Woolslair PreK-5 was God's answer to all my prayers: a school where my son receives an
education, discipline, in a nice environment. He learns rules, follows directions, makes
new friends, loves his teacher and principal very much, and has made the honor roll twice
this year. We are only a two-minute walk away, this is the stability we need in our lives.

Stop to close PPS..



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#118

Soraya Bey

On behalf of Black Women for a Better Education



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#119

Emily Kane

Teacher/Staff, Parent, Community Member



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#120

Melinda Mix

Teacher/Staff



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#122

Billy Hileman

On behalf of Pittsburgh Federations of Teachers



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#122

Annette Hall

Parent



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#123

Virginia Jaramillo

Parent



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#124

Angel Gober

On behalf of 412 Justice



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#125

Amy Williams

Parent, Community Member



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#126

Shannon Stringer

Parent



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#127

Emily Wiggins

Parent



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#128

Timothy Caldwell

Community Member

#129

Rachel Schlosser

Parent

My name is Rachel Schlosser. I am a parent in the district. I am speaking tonight to urge you all to vote no on the resolution to close schools. The process you are being asked to vote on is the LAST step in the planning process. This facilities utilization plan has elements that are like dominos. Closing one school impacts the population and student needs of another school, which impacts the feeder pattern for that school, which impacts the population and student needs of the next school in the feeder. You don't know the financial implications of this plan. You don't know how much it will cost to renovate the receiving schools or how much it will cost to maintain a closed building. Have you considered the future impacts of selling one or more of the buildings? Will they be turned into Charter Schools, Private Schools, or luxury housing that prices out many families living in our neighborhoods? You don't know the transportation impacts this plan will have. You don't know if the attendance zones will make sense without the work of a demographer. You don't know where students in the east end will be going. You don't know what the grey box means or the fate of Sci Tech, Obama, or Westinghouse. You don't know the timeline for the plan. You don't know that we have enough teachers with the needed certifications to staff the plan. You don't know that we have enough art, music, or world language teachers to staff this plan. Did you know that, you, the board, approved an update to the Graduation Requirements for students graduating in 2028 and beyond that now requires ALL STUDENTS to take TWO FULL credits of FINE ART (narrowly defined as visual and performing art) AND TWO FULL Credits of a World Language to meet graduation requirements. Did you know that the teacher certifications in PA for world languages are PreK-12 certifications. This means that if we want to staff elementary and middle schools, many of our high school teachers will be spread out across all of our buildings, leaving our high schoolers either unable to graduate due to lack of available courses or elementary and middle schoolers without world language as is currently being promised. Our art and music teachers - same thing. Music education certificates and art certificates are also PreK-12 (and would be the only two types of teacher certification that can deliver all of those now required high school credits) Last time I checked we didn't have art, music, and world language teachers growing on trees. Of course having art, music, and world language in all of our elementary, middle, and high schools is a wonderful plan. But don't sell us a lie. We need the administration to show their work. Show us that it's a feasible plan before we start dismantling our schools.



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