

Pittsburgh Public Schools Spring Hill PreK-5 Special Public Hearing Testimonies Submitted Not Read  
July 30, 2025

Andrew Poerschke

Hello, I am a parent representing two students at Pittsburgh's Spring Hill K-5. My two children have attended this neighborhood school for the last three years. Our experience has been that of a wonderful small neighborhood school where the teachers and staff know every student. We have great pride in our neighborhood public school. This school has an environment where all students feel welcome and safe, and where parents know the kids and can keep a friendly eye on things as well.

A year ago we first learned of a plan from an out of town consultant to reduce the number of schools in the district primarily as a means to reduce operating costs. This plan emphasized maximizing school size as a means to improve student achievement. However I disagree with this claim and rise in support of community and neighborhood schools which can better foster a welcoming and friendly environment, which is especially important to younger children in elementary school who may be nervous about starting school. Spring Hill has a lot of residents who are in transition and may only be in the school a year or two. A smaller neighborhood school is the ideal setting for them to quickly gain a sense of place without the intimidation of a large school. Frankly I think the emphasis on creating larger schools is mis-guided, especially for elementary age students who do not need significant technology resources, but mostly need a friendly welcoming environment with teachers who care about them and are hands on with their education.

Spring Hill is a unique neighborhood in the city with no commercial district and few natural meeting areas. The public school is one of these few meeting areas and often hosts community events. These events represent a rare opportunity for neighbors to get out and get to know each other and make new connections. If the school goes away there is a hole that nothing else will fill in the same way. Other neighborhoods have many other facilities and community spaces which can fill the gap created by closing schools, while Spring Hill will be disproportionately hurt. Spring Hill has a population from wide socio-economic backgrounds and the school provides an opportunity to make friendships and build connections between people who might not otherwise have opportunities to connect. Knowing that someone is from your neighborhood is important to establish these connections, and pooling students and families from across many neighborhoods will make it harder to connect with others in our immediate neighborhood. Providing for the community may not be the core objective of the public school system, but as a taxpayer funded organization, it inherently needs to meet the needs of tax payers and our community

My 8 year old daughter is very concerned about many of her friends who walk to school every day. Today they can easily walk from their homes in the neighborhood, many of them without adequate transportation. Their parents can easily attend school events and the beloved spring and holiday concerts. If Spring Hill is closed, many of these parents will struggle with transportation to these

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events and may choose to not attend altogether. Will the district provide bussing or transportation for parents to the new school so that they can attend?

Another key element missing from the proposed plan is that there is no emphasis on growing enrollment in schools. Any good business should look at both sides of the budget, and in the case of the PPS plan, there is no emphasis on growing attendance which would help to grow the budget. There are many families in Pittsburgh which have the means and opportunity to send their children to private schools or charter schools, that could instead keep their children within the public school system, helping to raise achievement for all students. I would like to see the district present data on the relative enrollment rates of the total school age population in the city to see if making the district more attractive to these families could be a means to grow enrollment and better utilize the existing facilities. The current trend appears to be a race to continually shrink the district footprint, and make public schools less appealing to the families who may have a choice in where to send their children. Will the district be consolidating again in 10 years?

In the initial plan submitted by the consultant, the proposal was to shut down Spring Hill immediately with no plan on where to school the children for a number of years until the Northview school could be renovated. Frankly, this plan was a slap in the face to many PPS families, and insulating that a paid consultant submitted it as a complete work. However, I am encouraged that the district recognizes this is entirely not feasible and will keep Spring Hill open at least until Northview can be renovated.

While I would ask the district to look at more options to keep smaller neighborhood schools open, especially at the elementary age, I recognize that difficult decisions must be made regarding schools and facilities. Where buildings must be closed, I would ask the district to think of the greater harm that is being done to communities, especially constrained communities like Spring Hill, and consider alternative options for these facilities.

Respectfully,

Andrew Poerschke