November 2025

Potential School Closure/Consolidation Scenario Feedback Report

Prepared for Evanston/Skokie School District 65

EVANSTON/SKOKIE
SCHOOL DISTRICT 65

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Introduction

During Phase III of structural deficit reduction planning (SDRP), the Evanston-Skokie School District 65 (District 65; D65) administration is attempting to cut an additional $10-15M from the budget for the 2026-27 school year to address a long-standing structural deficit. A SDRP steering committee consisting of three subcommittees was created to advise the District administration during this process. Since school closure is being explored due to low school utilization rates, administration was charged with defining a process to evaluate possible schools for closure. Administration defined a process that included development of school scorecards to support decision making on which schools to model for closure. The facilities subcommittee supported administration in the development of categories and criteria with related weights to generate school scorecards. Scorecards for each K-5 and magnet school were calculated and used to inform school closure scenario modeling.

The District team was charged by the school board to bring forward eight (8) scenarios for zero to four (0-4) school closures. The administration explored more than 30 scenarios and developed scenario scorecards; the facility subcommittee reviewed and provided feedback on each scenario. Scenarios for consideration by the Board were selected by the administration and presented on September 29, 2025. Community feedback on these school closure scenarios was sought via survey (administered September 29-October 21) and community listening sessions (hosted October 14, 15, 16, and 21).

This report summarizes the thematic analysis of open-ended responses to the survey, as well as comments and questions at community listening sessions. It begins by explaining how feedback was analyzed before sharing global feedback, survey feedback, and community listening session feedback. The report closes with an appendix of unique, individual insights that may be useful during decision-making.

How Feedback was Analyzed

Five (5) coders engaged in thematic coding to analyze survey responses about school closure scenarios 2D, 2F, 3B, 3D, 3X, and 4F (with respect to King Arts); general survey responses; and comments and questions from community listening sessions. Key ideas from feedback were identified according to a codebook (see below) and emergent coding, which allows for themes to emerge as the team codes, rather than deciding on the set of codes prior to coding. The analysis is not supported by inter-rater reliability testing, so a statistical measure of agreement across coders regarding comments' meaning cannot be provided.

Codebook

The codebook for this analysis is below. It includes both parent and child codes (parent codes appear in **bold**). Parent codes represent overarching themes, while child codes represent specific aspects of their parent. Responses could be coded at the parent level only, across parent and child levels, or at one or more child levels. Responses also could be coded with multiple code families at both the parent and child levels.

- **Location**
  - Walkability & safety
  - Busing
  - Surrounding location
  - Zoning
- **Social-emotional Impacts**
  - Students
  - Community
  - Staff
- **Future Impacts**
  - Middle school feeder patterns
  - School occupancy
  - Further enrollment declines
  - Future building use
- **Programming**
  - TWI
  - Magnet
  - STEP & RISE
  - IEP
  - Other
- **Understanding**
  - Scorecards
  - Process
  - Trust
  - Incomplete information
- **Equity**
  - School demographics
- **Other**
  - Foster School

Responses Demonstrating Code Meanings

To more fully illustrate the meaning of each code family, a response coded at each child code is provided below.

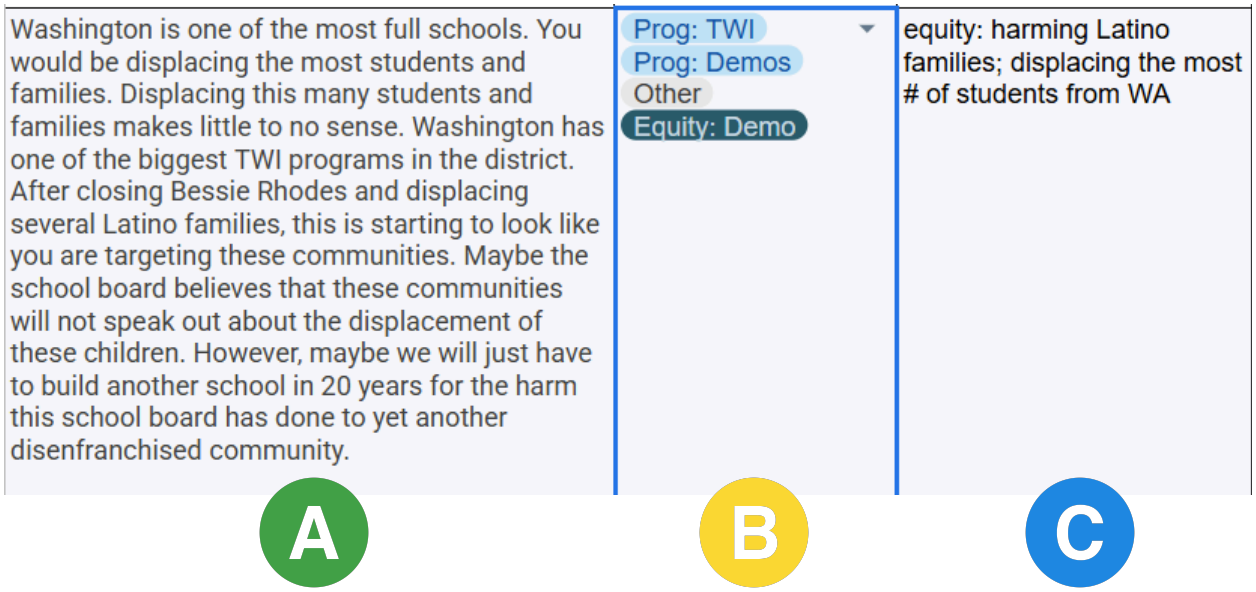
Location	
Walkability & Safety	"Closing both Lincolnwood and Kingsley is inconsiderate to all the families in this area. By taking away both these schools kids would need to cross major road/intersections."
Busing	"...Also what students will then have to be bussed if you close schools? Which ones will no longer be bussed…."
Surrounding Location	"Washington is a school that can hold way more kids.. And it's usage and proximity to Robert crown should be considered. Please include size of school in your factors."
Zoning	"Please provide zoning very soon after delivering closing as this is just as important and causing a lot of angst."
Social-emotional Impacts	
Student Impact	"Your decisions may put the school district on a path of financial health, but closing any school will do irreparable damage to many students. My daughter is already struggling with the pain of her parents divorce and now she's faced, potentially with losing her school, her classmates, and the TWI program that has created a tight knit social circle: this action will devastate her and likely put her in the same type of spiral that caused me to completely check out on education when something similar happened to me as a kid. And she is not the only one. There will be stories like hers at everyone of the schools. Whatever you do, you will damage a generation of students in Evanston."
Community	"...Having an option like this allows for ALL kinds of families to come together to learn

Impact	in a different way with the added benefits of the magnet and arts aspect that other school do not have."
Staff Impact	"The teachers and staff need to be a bigger part of the conversation. There are some teachers/staff who are excellent and need to be retained in the district. Student and family teacher evaluations should be part of the process to determine which teachers are given preference, not just seniority (or whatever else the union says). Same thing with school leadership - not all principals are equal. What will be done to ensure that we retain the best staff in D65?"
Future Impacts	
Middle School Feeder Patterns	"The changes in feeder to middle school will be tough for two years for families who want their middle schoolers in multiple grades to go to the same school. Please provide information on how many permissive transfer requests may be approved for Nichols and Chute for families who want to keep their students together…."
School Occupancy	"...The occupancy rates of each remaining school should be shown in the scenarios. It isn't clear if the utilization would be equal across the schools that remain open. It would be really terrible if some of the remaining schools had occupancy above 100% and others stayed at 60%...."
Further Enrollment Declines	"This is too many. It will make the district seem weak and failing. People will flee."
Future Building Use	"We need more information about what would be done with empty schools. If these would be rented by the city or local organizations to provide community programming, they could remain an important part of the neighborhood and help people feel connected and safe."
Programming	
TWI	"I don't understand why almost all of the scenarios involve closing the Willard TWI program…."
Magnet	"Having a magnet school feels like a luxury we don't have the right to exercise at this juncture."
STEP & RISE	"...3. Why hasn't anyone checked in with the RISE program about this potential scenarios. It seems like you are overlooking these very particular needs when you are making some unilateral assumptions about moving them?..."
IEP	"King Arts serves a lot of high needs students - low income, disabilities, students with IEPs and 504s, students who don't fit well in a traditional middle school setting, and the students displaced from Bessie Rhodes."
Other	"This building would be great for park school to move to"
Understanding	
Scorecards	"The Equity score of 1.0 x3 doesn't make sense. With Lincolnwood and Kingsley held constant, it appears Washington alone has a HIGHER Baseline Equity score than Walker, Willard and Dawes (and same as Dewey). How is scenario 3D scored with 1.0 Equity scores, far below those three other schools? It seems like an outright

	mistake. Please explain."
Process	"In all scenarios involving closing more than one school, I am curious whether schools were rescored after the first closure was chosen. In other words, was a dynamic or iterative approach used?....."
Trust	“There is concern for ALL scenarios that while the district is COLLECTING our feedback, they may not actually be using or CONSIDERING our feedback….”
Incomplete Information	"I believe you are grossly overlooking students from these neighborhoods who have opted out of D65 for one reason or another. The board continuously ignores this dynamic. Your population and enrollment data did not reflect this, despite the narrative that ‘demographics are changing.’"
Equity	
School Demographics	“...Many people chose King for their students because the K-8 model is better suited to their learning needs, they desire a more diverse school experience for their child, they need special attention that only King can provide, and they value the arts being a distinct part of their child's learning from the jump (something that has been proven to boost learning in all areas, time and time again)....”
Other	
Foster School	"It is unacceptable to build a new school while closing others."

Example of Response Coding

To demonstrate the coding process, see the example below, which contains a) a survey response to Scenario 3D, b) the parent and child codes assigned to that response from the codebook, and c) emergent coding notes to clarify or expand on the assigned codes.



Summary of Community Feedback

This section summarizes feedback captured in the survey and community listening sessions, as well as global feedback.

Global Feedback

While feedback from the community survey and listening sessions will be summarized separately below, some themes arose across response modes. These overarching themes focused on school closure scenarios and the district's decision-making process.

Overarching School Closure Feedback

- Don't close both Lincolnwood and Kingsley because doing so eliminates walkable, neighborhood school communities on the north side
- Don't close diverse neighborhood schools (i.e., Washington and Dawes)
- Don't close schools serving vulnerable populations (e.g., Title I schools, schools with large Latine populations, schools serving a large number of students with special needs)
- Close King Arts before neighborhood schools in alignment with community preference for walkable, neighborhood schools

Overarching Process Feedback

- Slow down
- The process / scorecards / data is/are difficult to understand
- Consider step-wise / dynamic closure scenarios
- Consider other cost-saving strategies beyond closure
- Share the latest financial analyses / audits
- Provide more details around selling / leasing buildings
- Collaborate with the City on solutions
- Consider the impact of simultaneously closing multiple schools on student experience, community cohesion, public perception, and property values
- The feedback process feels inauthentic
- There is a lack of trust in the board and administration in the community

Survey Feedback

This section provides a sense of who responded to the school closure feedback survey before summarizing responses to each school closure scenario presented to the board. The survey invited community members to share with the district what it might be overlooking in each school closure scenario. It also asked for general comments about Phase III of SDRP, suggestions for supports should closure(s) occur, and respondent demographics. After the Board requested a new 3-school closure scenario (3X), it was added to the survey on October 16. The survey deadline was extended to October 21 to capture overflow comments from families engaged in the Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) feedback session.

Survey Respondent Demographics

Overall, survey respondents tended to be white (46%) women (53%) from across Evanston (although a large number of respondents did not provide their ward). Respondents with children at Washington (15%) and Dawes (13%) were most common, although a number of respondents (12%) did not share their school affiliation. Nearly a quarter of respondents have children who receive individualized education (23%), nearly a tenth (9%) have children who are considered English Language Learners, and nearly a fifth (18%) have children in a Two-Way Immersion (TWI) program (the survey did not differentiate between TWI-Spanish and TWI-English participation). The district's Black and Latinx/Hispanic communities are under-represented in these responses.

Overall Survey Responses

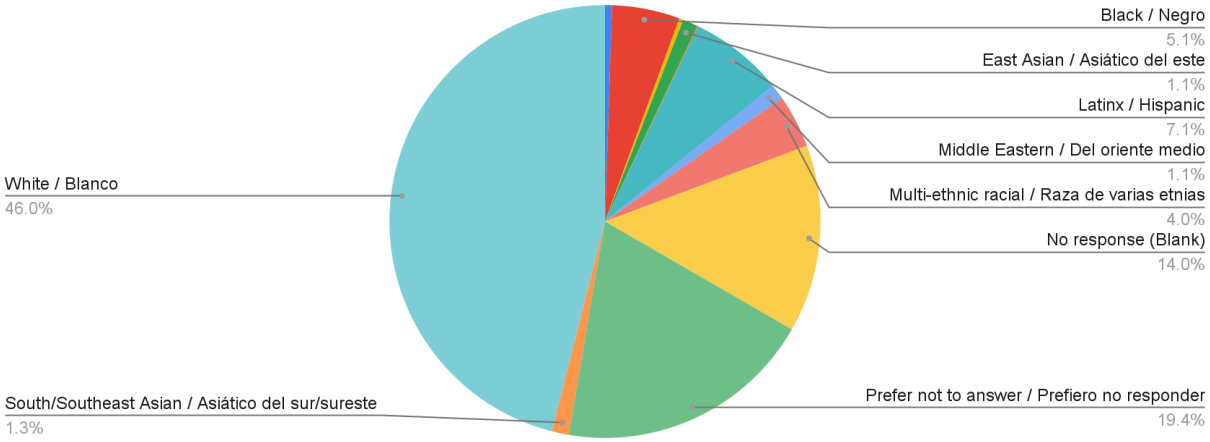
There were 1,336 total responses to the survey. Sixteen (16) of the 1,336 were Spanish-language responses. One (1) response was not coded because it contained hate speech.

The table below demonstrates how many survey responses were captured and coded per school closure scenario. Seven hundred sixty-one (761) general responses were read to capture insights that did not arise in scenario feedback; that feedback is included in Appendix A.

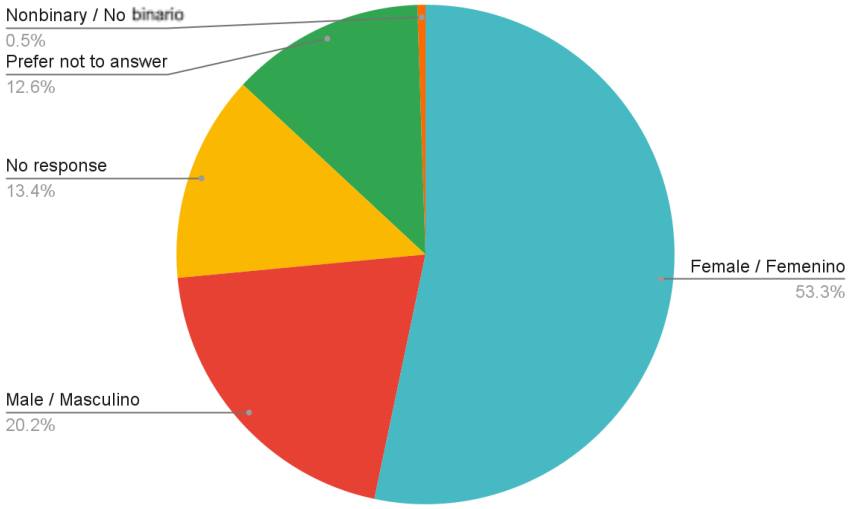
TOTAL NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONSES: 1,336							
Responses by Scenario							
1A	**1B**	**2D**	**2F**	**3B**	**3D**	**3X**	**4F**
143	152	163	272	505	526	73	470
Responses Included in this Analysis							
0	0	163	271	505	526	73	171*

*4F responses were only coded for King Arts feedback.

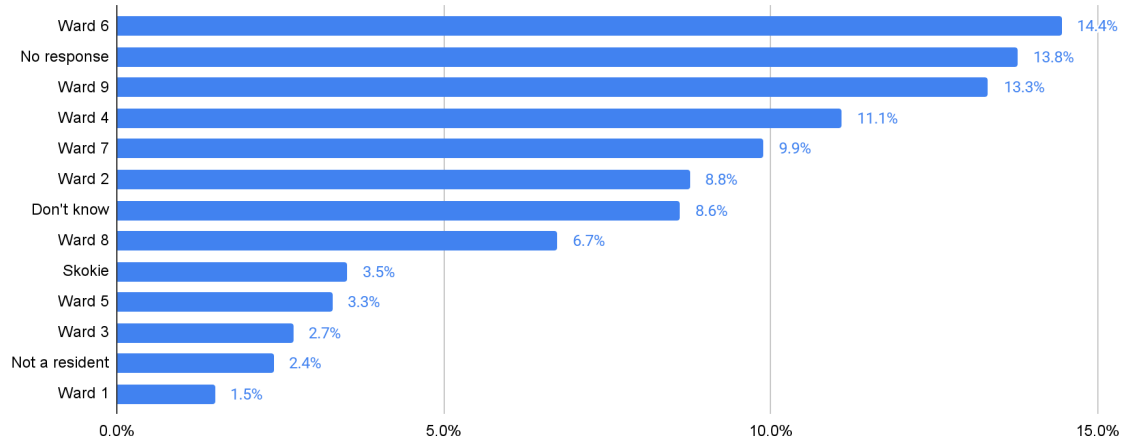
Survey Respondent Demographics by Race



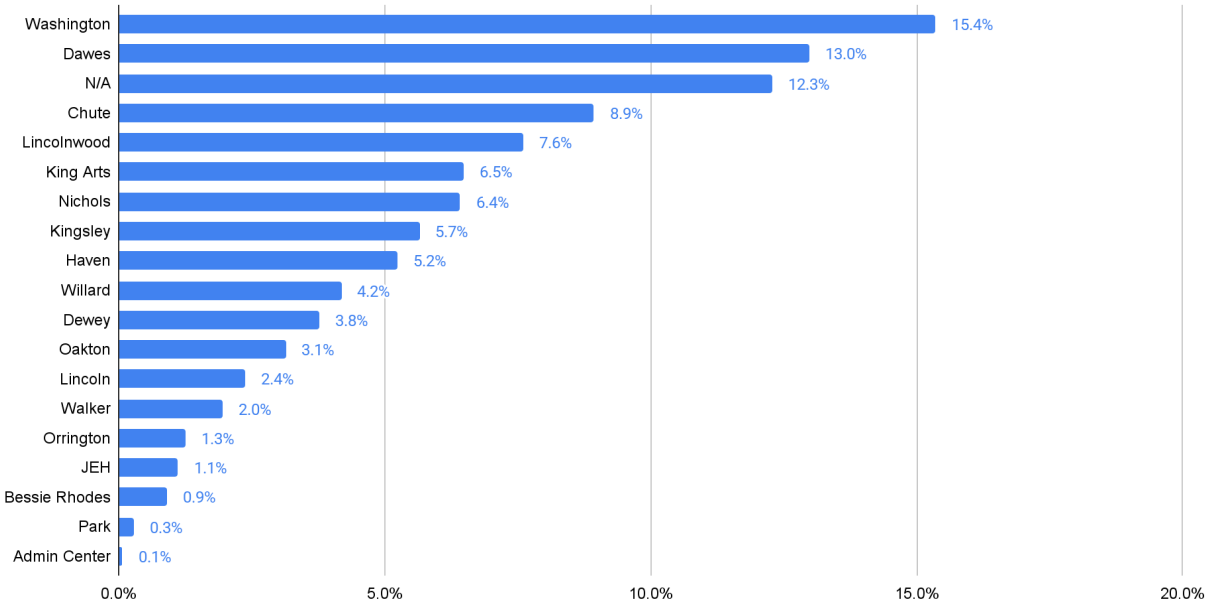
Survey Respondent Demographics by Gender



Survey Respondent Demographics by Ward

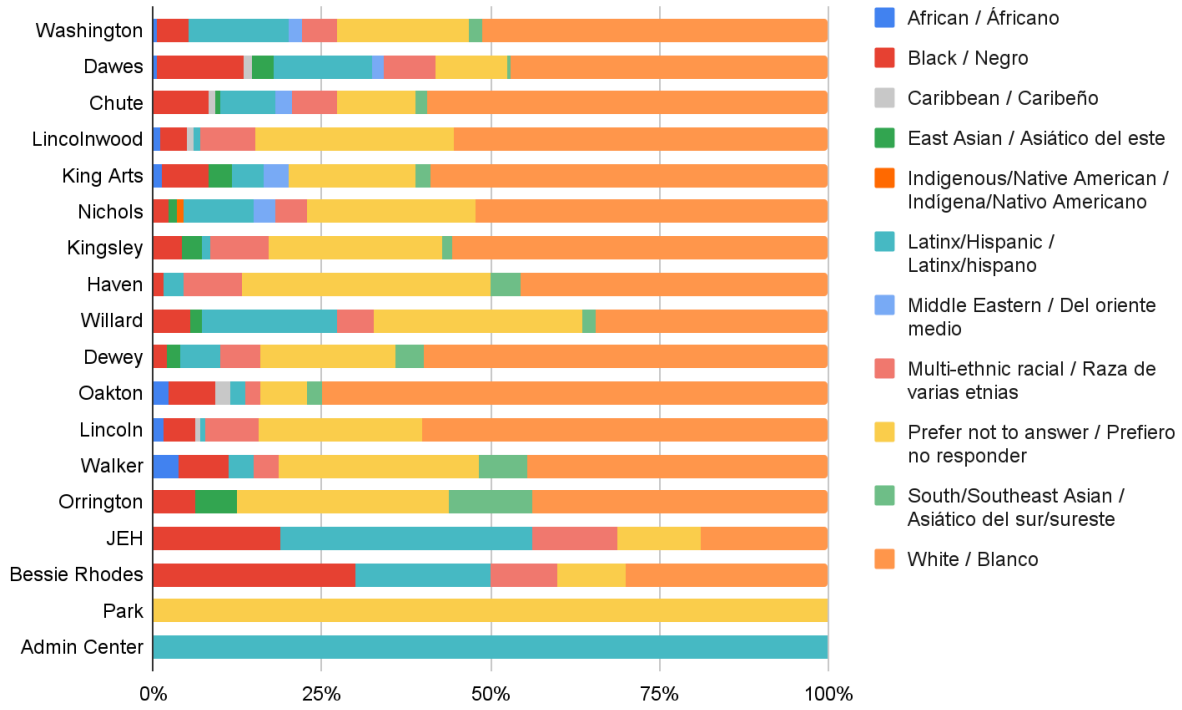


Survey Respondent Demographics by School



Important Note:
Respondents were able to select more than one school.

Survey Respondent Demographics by School and Race

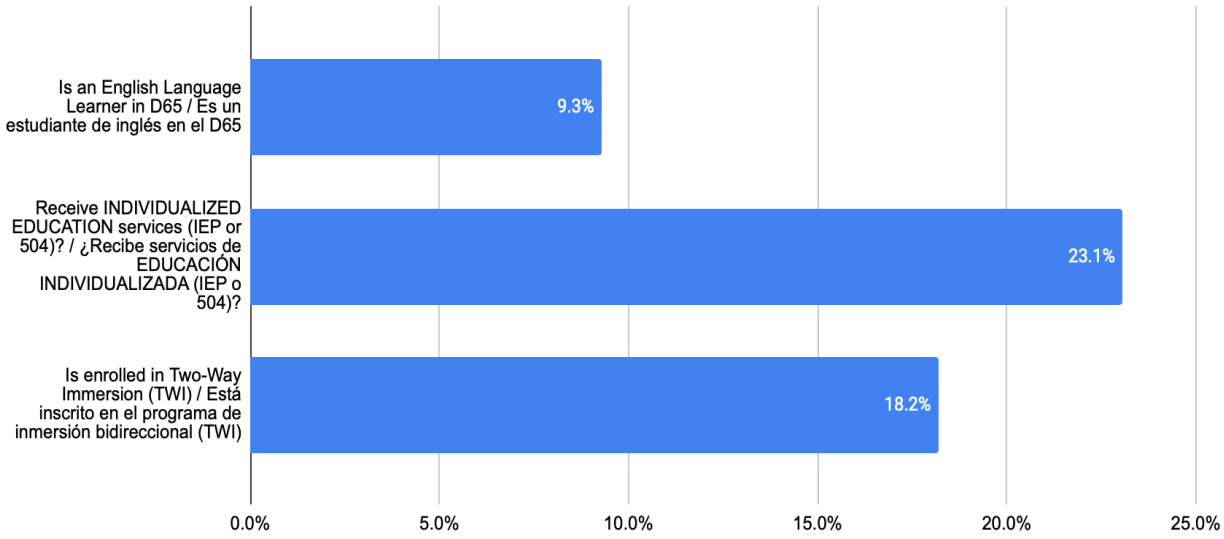


Important Note:
This counts combinations, not unique respondents. If someone selected:

- School(s): Haven, Kingsley
- Race: White

They were counted twice as (Haven+White) and (Kingsley+White).

Survey Respondent Demographics by Student EL, IEP/504 & TWI Status



Scenario Feedback

This section details the themes arising across survey responses to school closure scenarios 2D, 2F, 3B, 3D, 3X, and 4F. First, a summary table provides an overview of the most common themes for all scenarios:

Leading Themes by Scenario						
	2D	2F	3B	3D	3X	4F
Location	X	X	X	X	X	
Social-emotional	X					
Future Impacts		X	X		X	
Programming						X
Understanding						
Equity						
Other						X

Next, details of each scenario's coding and sentiments are provided in scenario-specific tables. How to interpret these tables:

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario XX
Parent Code Child Code(s)	≈XX% of codes	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet; consectetur adipiscing

Lists each code family from the codebook and identifies the most commonly assigned child code(s). Code families are listed from most to least commonly applied; families at the top of the table came up most often in survey responses.

Provides a sense of how often a code family was used to summarize responses. Calculated as # of family codes / # of total codes.

Summarizes responses coded with the row's parent and child codes.

2D: Close Kingsley & Willard

163/163 Responses Coded

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario 2D
Social-Emotional Impacts Community	≈23% of codes	Respondents described closures as tearing apart trusted community networks and eroding the sense of belonging that sustains family and student wellbeing.
Location Walkability & Safety	≈19% of codes	Families consistently stressed that closing neighborhood schools would eliminate walkable access and create unsafe, impractical routes for young children.
Programming TWI	≈17% of codes	Parents argued that removing or relocating the Two-Way Immersion program would harm bilingual students and undermine commitments to linguistic equity.
Understanding Process	≈16% of codes	Families widely felt the closure process was rushed and opaque, expressing frustration that community input and clear rationale were missing.
Future Impacts Occupancy	≈12% of codes	Many questioned the district's capacity projections, warning that some schools would become overcrowded while others sit underused.
Other Suggestions	≈8% of codes	Many saw it as contradictory to open a new Foster School while simultaneously closing established neighborhood schools elsewhere.

2F: Close Kingsley & Lincolnwood

271/272 Responses Coded

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario 2F
Location Walkability	≈33% of codes	Most common code family; concerns about walkability
Future Impacts Occupancy; Enrollment	≈20% of codes	Second most common code family; concerns about occupancy and allowing for future growth
Understanding Process; Trust	≈16% of codes	Low trust in the board & admin; questions about scorecards & process

Other Suggestions	≈11% of codes	Dismantling the north side of Evanston; comments about tradeoffs from Foster School; suggestions for other approaches beyond school closures, e.g. free shuttle program, working with city leaders, admin pay cuts
Programming TWI; STEP	≈7% of codes	Concerns about TWI and STEP; suggestions to close magnet instead
Social-Emotional Impacts Students; Community	≈7% of codes	School communities are tight knit

3B: Close Lincolnwood, Kingsley, and Dawes

505/505 Responses Coded

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario 3B
Location Walkability	≈23% of codes	Closing both Lincolnwood & Kingsley would leave a large portion of NW Evanston without a walkable K-5 option; Long walks across busy roads like Central St. and Green Bay Rd; Emphasis on walkability as essential to student well-being, safety, and community cohesion.
Future Impacts Feeder & Occupancy	≈20% of codes	Respondents living near Nichols or Chute express frustration at being reassigned to distant middle schools; Utilization imbalance between North Evanston schools like Willard and Orrington.
Programming Magnet & TWI	≈16% of codes	Respondents fear losing access to the full Spanish-English immersion program if Dawes closes; Moving TWI to Lincoln creates transportation barriers for SW Evanston; Some respondents state neighborhood schools should be preserved over magnet programs.
Equity *Demographics*	≈12% of codes	Dawes serve high percentage of low-income students and receive Title I funding; Dawes noted for its Latinx population and support for multilingual learners
Social-Emotional Impacts Community & Student	≈10% of codes	Dawes and Lincolnwood are described as the “heart” of their neighborhoods; Concerns around how instability and overcrowding will affect learning and mental health of students.
Understanding Process & Trust	≈10% of codes	Respondents question how criteria/scorecards were applied around walkability, equity, and utilization; Some cite community feedback hasn’t been meaningfully incorporated.

3D: Close Washington, Kingsley, and Lincolnwood

526/526 Responses Coded

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario 3D
Location Walkability & Surrounding Location	≈25% of codes	Most common code family; adjacent to Robert Crown; walkability & safety for vulnerable population; leaving north end without walkable school
Programming TWI, STEP, & RISE	≈18% of codes	Second most common code family; Washington has the most diverse student body; WA has the highest utilization rate; closing established TWI/STEP if closing WA; closing a Title 1 school
Future Impacts Feeder & Future Building Usage	≈15% of codes	Closing Lincolnwood & Kingsley does not allow for future growth; breaking up Washington families into 4 schools; concerns for future use of WA as a historic building; concerns for closing 2 schools inHaven feeder pattern; future use of school buildings
Understanding *Process & Trust*	≈15% of codes	Slow down the process; low trust in the board; alternatives to school closing
Social-Emotional Impacts Student & Community	≈12% of codes	Closing WA further harms an already vulnerable community; setting up TWI & STEP in another community; need to consider the qualitative impact
Equity Community Demographics	≈8% of codes	Dismantling the south side of Evanston; further harming an already vulnerable population; lack of representation of Latine families in the process

3X: Close Kingsley, Lincolnwood, King Arts, & Dewey; Open King Arts K-5

73/73 Responses Coded (added to survey on 10/16)

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario 3X
Future Impacts Occupancy & Enrollment	≈30% of codes	Most common code family; Concerns about moving multiple feeder patterns, occupancy & enrollment
Location Walkability	≈22% of codes	Second most common code family; concerns about shifting so many locations
Understanding Process & Trust	≈14% of codes	Questions about the addition of this scenario and the logic of the King Arts shift from magnet to K-5 neighborhood

Social-Emotional Impacts *Students & Community*	≈12% of codes	Too many disruptions all at once
Equity Community Demographics	≈8% of codes	Concerns about closing Dewey as a diverse school

4F: Close Lincolnwood, Kingsley, King Arts, & Washington

470 Responses; 171 Coded for King Arts Feedback

Code Families + Leading Child Code(s)	% of Overall Codes	Summary of Feedback on Scenario 4F
Programming Magnet Programs; RISE	≈38% of codes	Most common code family; King Arts should remain open because it is a magnet school of choice; King Arts should close because it is a magnet school/is not a neighborhood school; King Arts should remain open because it houses the RISE program and is uniquely suited to that task (e.g., facilities, K-8 continuity, employee expertise)
Other	≈34% of codes	Second most common code family; King Arts is the last remaining K-8 school in the district; King Arts has unique curriculum rooted in arts and social justice; King Arts has a unique, inclusive culture
Equity	≈7% of codes	Closing King Arts impacts a diverse and vulnerable population
Social-Emotional Impacts Students	≈6% of codes	Students will suffer by losing diverse, long-term relationships if King Arts closes
Future Impacts Further enrollment declines	≈6% of codes	Enrollment at King Arts is likely to remain steady/increase as families seek out magnet program; enrollment is likely to decline when Foster opens;
Location Walkability & Safety	≈5% of codes	King Arts isn't a neighborhood or walkable school given nearby hazards
Understanding Scorecards	≈4% of codes	Scorecard does not indicate King Arts for closure

Community Listening Session Feedback

There were four (4) in-person community listening sessions and one (1) virtual session where D65 leaders joined the standing Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) video call. All listening sessions began with an introductory presentation from D65 administrators, including general information about SDRP and details of the 3-school closure scenarios. A QR code was then shared which linked attendees to a platform for submitting questions. The D65 team began reading and answering questions from the top of the queue after five (5) minutes of submission time. All received questions were compiled and the District provided a FAQ document to respond to questions not covered in real time. The first listening session had two (2) rounds of Q&A focused on different 3-school closure scenarios. Based on feedback from this session's exit slips, D65 leaders adjusted the format so that remaining sessions featured one (1) Q&A portion and a comment period. District leaders listened to comments without responding.

Overall, feedback from community listening sessions largely mirrored survey responses. A brief overview of themes identified in questions and comments follows.

Listening Session Question Themes

Nine hundred sixty (960) questions were submitted across five community listening sessions. Questions were coded using the same parent code categories as the survey responses; however, community listening session questions were only coded with one family code to communicate their main themes.

Percentage of Questions Focused on Each Coding Family						
Location	**Social-emotional**	**Future**	**Programming**	**Understanding**	**Equity**	**Other**
5%	1%	27%	9%	47%	3%	8%

Questions about *location* mentioned specific boundaries and hazards. Questions in the *social-emotional* category centered on student well being. In the *future* category, questions were asked about next steps after closures are announced. Community members wondered about the downstream effects of closures on staffing, occupancy, feeder patterns, costs, savings, etc. *Programming* questions were about special education and dual-language programs. The largest category of questions focused on *understanding* the process, inquiring about how/why the district is in this position, data, scorecards, and specific scenarios. There also were questions about why the 3X scenario was added at the later date and concerns expressed about perceived shifts in process goals. Questions coded in the *equity* category surfaced worries about Evanston's Latinx/Hispanic community amid ICE operations and the potential for disproportionate effects of closures across groups. The *other* category of questions addressed revenue streams, potential City collaboration, and gratitude for Board members and District leadership.

Listening Session Comment Themes

One hundred forty-two (142) comments were shared across five community listening sessions (verbal and chat comments were coded for the BPAC video call). Like listening session questions, public comments were coded using the same parent code categories as the survey responses, but assigned only one family code. Comment sentiments aligned with those of survey responses and questions in that many addressed process, data, scorecards, and trust. Comments also focused on King Arts' magnet program, TWI, RISE and STEP. The BPAC meeting had the largest percentage of comments related to TWI and equity issues specific to the Latinx/Hispanic community. Public comments contained more mentions of community resilience and a shared commitment to making changes necessary for district wellbeing than submitted questions and survey responses. Some examples of these sentiments are below:

- "It's clear we all love our schools. Wherever my kid ends up, I'm going to love that community. I'm involved. When you have such underutilized buildings, that labor falls on a few families. I'm looking forward to having some help."
- "What is the plan for supporting a community the day after the decision is made? How can we support each other?"

Percentage of Comments Focused on Each Coding Family						
	10/14 Chute	10/15 Fleetwood	10/15 Nichols	10/16 Haven	10/21 BPAC	Overall
# Comments	N/A	25	20	21	76	142
Location	N/A	4%	15%	5%	3%	5%
Social-emotional	N/A	12%	10%	10%	5%	8%
Future	N/A	24%	20%	24%	5%	13%
Programming	N/A	16%	10%	10%	17%	15%
Understanding	N/A	32%	5%	38%	47%	37%
Other	N/A	12%	25%	10%	5%	10%
Equity	N/A	4%	12%	5%	17%	13%

Appendix A: Individual Insights

This report primarily elevates themes arising across large numbers of responses to District 65's SDRP Phase III school closure scenarios. However, unique perspectives shared in survey responses by one or a small number of community member(s) also could inform decision making. A sample of those insights is included below. Main ideas are **bolded**.

- (**student perspective**) "I go to Chute Middle School and all though none of these scenarios close Chute, some of my friends who live across the street will now have to go to a school that is farther away and harder to get to. This makes no sense, and I urge you to reconsider and look at the effect that these new rules would have on students. Some of these students do not have readily available transportation that would be necessary to get to that school. For this reason, I ask you to please look at the overall effect that these new rules could have on the students who live in this district."

- "I'm sure every school faces their challenges gas, and I hope the review committee considers how functional the administration and staff are when assessing school closures. Reorganizing staff capacity will be difficult regardless, and create future problems if not done thoughtfully. Bringing new people into a positive culture and **functional administration** will result in better success for the students and their families, who will already be resistant and shaken from change."

- "I wanted to flag for attention that the **McKibben Demography Report** likely does not accurately capture demographics of the Lincolnwood Attendance Zone, as Three Crowns Park and Westminster Place are both located within these attendance zones, and would not be considered turnover housing and likely to turn into future D65 residents… not sure if that's factored in but that nuance of 23% of the 2020 census residents of this zone are over 75+ and the demographics study assumes these units to be "turnover housing" within the next decade shouldn't be overlooked."

- "1. Include the **financial** impact of the closure of Bessie Rhodes on the deficit

  2. Conduct the revenue-generating opportunities analysis BEFORE you vote on any school closures. Seeing the financial impact of revenues will give us more data to see a more accurate picture of the deficit that needs to be addressed. A group of parents is going to share a list of at least 15 realistic ideas that the district should analyze to see their impact. With that data in hand, the district will be better equipped to make a decision on whether and how many schools may need to be closed.

  3. For the deferred maintenance costs, the district should go to the step that typically follows after getting a Facilities Condition Index. With FCI in hand, facility managers typically identify priority levels of repairs needed and plan accordingly, since the FCI does not differentiate between say $100K in carpet repairs vs $100K in structural repairs. The district should do this prioritization, which will show how maintenance costs will vary year by year and allow for more accurate planning over the next 5+ years."

- "Another unforeseen impact is already developing - **gentrification** of the 5th Ward and maxing out capacity of the Foster School. If you are a family moving to Evanston to raise your kids, would you choose to move to the Kingsley/Lincolnwood neighborhood where there is no walkable

neighborhood school? Or do you buy one of the new houses going up near the walkable brand new Foster School? Developers are already building these new houses in the 5th Ward, and more will certainly come. This gentrification will fundamentally change the 5th Ward community and price out many 5th ward residents. And if the Foster School hits maximum capacity as a result, there will be no Kingsley or Lincolnwood school to absorb these students. No walkable neighborhood school for the Kingsley/Lincolnwood neighborhood will also result in the cost of houses in this neighborhood stagnating, thus lowering the **property tax revenue** from this community that the District is counting on."

- "I've been an architect for commercial properties for over 25 years. **I am not convinced that the closed schools can easily be leased or sold anytime soon.** The schools are zoned in R districts which significantly limit the use of these buildings per the current zoning. Has there been any engagement with the Land Use commission to discuss Zoning changes for these properties? That would be subject to community hearings and City Council approval.

  The properties will still require maintenance while vacant. Unfortunately even with best intentions and regular checkups, vacant properties are prone to missed repairs and accelerated damage.

  Additionally, the construction of schools is to a higher standard than common commercial properties. Many if not most of the interior partitions are masonry. This is considerably more expensive to modify room layouts than typical metal framing with drywall. Most of that expense would be born by the tenant but significant capital expenses will still be necessary to maintain these properties. Any significant construction may require additional measures to meet accessibility requirements."

- "Specific to any scenario with two North Evanston schools, can you consider closing one and modifying the other for **alternate or joint use** like a library? As long as you set the long term expectation of closure, a 3 year transition seems much wiser and kinder."

- "**STEP** having to move to Willard & Bilingual Step moving to Dawes should have all the attention in this transition and the success of those students must be paramount. The Special Education Audit should especially focus on this school's transition if selected."

- "...## 3: The **Envision** 2045 Disconnect
  The City plans to add 5,000-20,000 residents and attract middle-income families with children. But you're:

    - Closing three schools permanently
    - Selling or leasing the buildings (projected lease revenue: $725,000)
    - Potentially making those properties unavailable if enrollment rebounds

  What if Envision 2045 actually works? Where do those kids go to school in 5-10 years?...."

- "The wide range of needs of the **STEP** program. Any planning for what the long term design for the STEP program will be (K-8, increasing number of K-5 classrooms, no change in 6-8 classrooms, Spanish language STEP (what does that mean? no English, bilingual, TWI) Space requirements for the STEP program, multiple RSP re-located to individual schools (STEP and Gen Ed). When the District does not have a stated vision for a program (or does not follow through with a stated plan) then how can a community feel confident that the District has

reasonably thought through the near future needs of the program to be moved? Based on workload numbers, the number of RSP assigned to each school has the potential to increase to upwards of 3 of each of RSP (OT, Speech, SW). The number of students with IEPs is not changing. Have sufficient rooms been allocated to support this number of staff and therapy rooms? District 65 has a history of moving specialized services programs at a high rate that was criticized for being insensitive and destabilizing for already vulnerable groups in the recent past. Closing multiple schools within close geographic locations (Lincolnwood and Kingsley), how does that make logical sense? Dr. Murphy said that we could save $500,000/year by having busses run 2 routes (early start schools and late start schools), then we moved to a uniform start time and the idea of "walkable school neighborhoods" emerged to reduce the bussing costs. Nothing seems to hold or work as planned. Romy DeCristofaro wanted to move us to "full inclusion." In the first year of this plan we started with co-taught classrooms to support this effort. The next year we had 1/2 day co-taught classrooms, (money saving) and now we do not have co-taught classrooms or the support structures for the full range of student needs. One result is increasing demand for our STEP classrooms. We are now at 8, K-5 classrooms, ONE 6-8 classroom, no plan, and about to be moved with very little thought or consideration for what these students require to access and engage in the educational environment."

- "Based on the data I see presented for capacity and **utilization**s, I don't see anything mentioned regarding number of office spaces. I am wondering where psychologists, interventionists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and special education teachers are going to go when they increase in number at each building? Many of the students' IEPS which are legal documents state that the students require services outside of the classroom setting. We cannot change IEPs until annual review dates and their placements are based on the data we collect regarding goals. Additionally, we have to complete many evaluations many days of the school year and we need quiet places to test the students."

- "I think that to close three schools in addition to Bessie Rhodes will impact so many families district wide - many of whom have children that have been impacted by the pandemic. We saw our older children miss in person learning in their kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade years - returning with our younger children to spit in test tubes, wear masks, and distance. To be clear, I was a proponent of those plans to keep the community and teachers safe. However, to **further disrupt** this same group of students by closing so many schools and redistricting some of these kids in their 5th and 8th grade years (I have both and would be impacted personally) seems cruel….

  It was concerning to see the newly elected **board** seem to lack cohesiveness or even real understanding of numbers and impact in the conversation during last night's meeting. It felt chaotic with new schools being proposed in a three school cut mid meeting, and the camera panning to board members clearly in disagreement with their colleagues input. At times, it was difficult to follow what several members were talking about, their comments being convoluted in scorecard jargon that does not hold meaning to impacted members of the community. One board member stated that she was focused on a certain area because 'she lived there'....seriously? We all live here. There should be a plan to impact the least amount of students possible first - especially given what many of them have already experienced."

- "...ALT SCENARIO -- with the ongoing improvements to Green Bay Road and the proximity to Central Street Metra Station, has the Board considered **selling the Kingsley and Haven properties to developers** who would build apartment buildings, shops and restaurants that

would bring in new revenue and new students to D65's north Evanston area and using those proceeds to plug the budget gap AND invest in transforming Lincolnwood into a walkable K-8 school here in north Evanston?

Finally, I'd urge the Board to think outside the box on how to **raise revenues** (not just close schools) -- there were several ideas given by parents to the deputy superintendent and CFO earlier this year. What happened with those ideas? What revenues have been raised since then? And secondly, please consider factors not in the closure criteria and possible **negative knock-on effects** that could occur in the event of a closure of Lincolnwood + other north Evanston schools at the same time. If there are no walkable schools in this community, families with financial wherewithal will leave north Evanston for Wilmette or send their kids to private school -- this would further harm D65 attendance. At the same time, negative press and social media sentiment, pressure campaigns, or worse, class action lawsuits due to the destruction of home values in north Evanston while increasing taxes in support of D65 could be detrimental to this entire turnaround process and our shared goal of strengthening D65 finances."

- "As a dedicated District 65 parent and community member, I am writing to share my significant concerns regarding the current school closure proposal. While I appreciate the immense challenges the Board faces in ensuring the district's long-term financial health, I believe the current plan is based on an incomplete analysis and risks profound, negative consequences for our students. I urge you to pause this process to allow for a more thorough and strategic re-evaluation.

  My primary concerns are as follows:

  The Rationale for Immediate Closures is Based on **Outdated Financials**
  The proposal's foundation is the narrative of a severe financial crisis from 2024. However, the district's more recent financial reports from 2025 paint a much more stable picture, showing that previous budget cuts have resulted in a year-to-date balanced budget. This positive development significantly reduces the urgency for such drastic and irreversible actions. We should not make permanent decisions about our children's schools based on a temporary crisis that has largely been averted.

  The Evaluation **Process and Data Are Incomplete**
  A decision of this magnitude must be guided by a clear, consistent, and comprehensive methodology. The current evaluation framework has several critical flaws:

  It Overlooks Student Safety: The "scorecard" claims to value walkability, but the resulting scenarios produce deeply concerning outcomes. The district's own data reveals that some scenarios would cause a staggering 140% increase in the number of elementary students forced to cross known traffic hazards daily. Student safety must be a non-negotiable priority, not an unintended casualty of a flawed metric.

  The Financial Analysis is Too Simplistic: The current plan focuses on the total savings from closing a building, which naturally targets larger schools and displaces the most students. A more insightful metric would be "net savings per displaced student." This would help the Board and community understand the true trade-off between financial gain and student disruption, potentially highlighting more efficient solutions that don't place the heaviest burden on the largest school communities.

  Key Metrics Are Applied Inconsistently: The "Equity Score" is used as a reason to close schools in more affluent areas but is completely ignored when it would protect a more diverse title

1 schools. This selective use of data undermines the process's objectivity and making it difficult to trust the final recommendations.

The Plan Risks Severe **Long-Term Consequences**
The proposal's narrow focus on elementary schools ignores the significant ripple effects across the entire K-8 system.

It Destabilizes Our Middle Schools: Several closure scenarios would dismantle carefully constructed feeder patterns, creating a new and predictable crisis of under-enrollment at the middle school level. We would be solving one utilization problem today only to create a new one for the near future, perpetuating a cycle of disruption.

It Harms Our Most Vulnerable Learners: Uprooting vital and successful district-wide programs, such as Two-Way Immersion (TWI) and the Structured Teaching Education Program (STEP), violates expert recommendations to minimize movement for these students. The stability of these essential programs should be a primary consideration, not an afterthought….."

- "The **RISE** program at King Arts is the only program like it for special ed kids K-8 in the district! It is crucial for the success of these kids that have similar special needs, and that are able to be in a school with their peers. This program- RISE, feeds seamlessly into ETHS for these kids. It's crucial to have it at a K-8 school so that the students with special needs have stability and routine. The middle school Rise students benefit from being role models for the younger students. It's proximity to ETHS is also valuable. Kids with these special needs also benefit from a magnet school that thrives in the arts. Many of these kids communicate and blossom because of the arts."

- "When **space utilization** was calculated, it only focused on classroom spaces. Office spaces is also extremely important. At Walker, we are using closets as offices, and my office is under the stairs in a closet with no outside window and this is where I meet with my intervention students. Until we had two classroom sections close this year, all staff who work with students in separate areas (EB teachers, IES teachers, social workers, speech pathologists) shared spaces or worked in places like mine. Our assistant principal is in a storage room. Our music and drama classes were on the stage in the auditorium, which is very difficult for class management. Our drama class would be in the library when it was available since drama and music couldn't be taught at the same time in the auditorium. We are lucky that we have a cafeteria AND a gymnasium. In Foster, they are the same space. This means PE classes cannot happen at the same time as lunch classes. This also means that students have PE on a wet floor when it is right after lunch. Another factor that has not been considered is the **logistics of moving** items from multiple (or even one) school. All the teachers' boxes, student materials, desks, chairs, bookshelves, etc will have to be moved. This will overwhelm the custodians. The logistics of moving every teacher to a new place (not all will be going to the same school) AND all of their classroom belongings is a logistical nightmare. Will the buildings gaining the students and staff from schools closing have enough space for staff to work with students outside of the classroom? A space for interventionists to work with students? A space for EB teachers to work with their students? A space for speech pathologists to work with their students? A place for social workers to work with their students? A space for IES teachers to work with their students? A place for psychologists to work with students? A space for OT to work with students? A place for music, drama, PE, library, and art classes that is NOT shared? What about student iPads? Will they be going home over the summer and returned to a different school and building tech? What about all of the projectors, Apple TVs, document cameras in the schools that may be closing? What will happen to those items? Trying to get all of this figured out in less than 12 months is a LOT."

- "...Making Orrington and/or Kingsley a **magnet cluster school** could help to increase enrollment and utilize the space at the school while keeping the option of a magnet program available to D65 families. Moving RISE and the magnet option to Kingsley specifically would increase enrollment.

  You could also utilize the magnet cluster model for a south Evanston school on the closure list (Dawes/Washington) if location is a concern for a magnet program at Orrington/Kingsley. Having two Evanston schools following a magnet cluster model seems very reasonable and could also help bolster enrollment at two neighborhood schools with fewer students…."

- (**process**) "D65 has proven to be untrustworthy. This isn't about information access: it's about confidence in the Board's financial assumptions and ability to deliver for the students.

  Rushed timeline and unclear rationale: The district released closure scenarios on 9/29 with a possible vote by 11/17, a six-week window that leaves no time for meaningful engagement or independent analysis.

  Financial inconsistencies: District 65's finished the 2025 fiscal year with a $710,000 budget deficit, beating the projected $13.1 million deficit. The FY26 forecast has already improved from $5 million to under $400,000, showing unstable modeling, not fiscal crisis.

  Unverified savings claims: There is no external validation of savings estimates or clear accounting for transition, transportation and facility costs.

  Broken process: Families describe community meetings as performative; key parent advisory committees were ignored when proposing non-closure alternatives.

  Accountability gap: After years of poor execution - from Bessie Rhodes to Foster - the public's trust must be earned, not assumed. Families aren't denying the district's financial pressures. They're demanding smarter, fairer and verifiable solutions.

  Phase, don't rush: If necessary, close one or two schools that are the smallest, least diverse, and most under-utilized.

  Wait and recalculate: Defer any additional closures until the new Fifth Ward school opens in 2026, Bessie Rhodes closes (2026-2027), and actual enrollment and transportation impacts are known.

  Build trust through execution: Complete and stabilize the Foster project before considering further closures; use this as a test of district competence and transparency.

  Reinvest, don't retreat: Explore community-backed solutions to invest in assets like Washington with high utilization and student capacity, strategically located next to Robert Crown Community Center in the heart of Evanston."

- "...Losing [the King Arts magnet program] eliminates one of your few **competitive advantages** over Wilmette, Glenview, and Skokie…"

- "...- **TWI** families chose specific schools for language immersion
  - The program requires continuity and specialized teachers

- Parents have already dealt with “uncertainty for about 4 years”
- TWI is supposed to be your recruitment advantage - you’re destroying it….”

- “...I understand that the decision to close both [Lincolnwood and Kingsley] is on the table for QUANTITATIVE reasons, but that completely removes the **QUALITATIVE** aspect of the neighborhood school experience for these children and families. This quality of life is a large part of why so many families chose to raise our children in Evanston. It did not make quantitative sense to build Foster (declining enrollment and no budget), but it made qualitative sense for the lives of the Foster neighborhood children - so we believed in it and supported it as a city and as a community. That exact same argument should apply to keeping one of these schools open for the children of the Kingsley/Lincolnwood neighborhood….

  If Lincolnwood is not ADA compliant, let us explore what can be done to bring it into compliance without simply tossing it out the window and doing irreparable harm to our community. Or help us understand how there is no possible way that changes to the building could EVER be made to bring it into compliance. If truly nothing could be done, please compromise with our community by keeping Kingsley open instead since it IS ADA compliant. We deserve to have ONE of these two schools.

  The City of Evanston invested significant resources into the development of Central Street shops and restaurants. Is the **business development** segment of our City aware that the neighborhoods around Central Street may lose both of their schools, making the neighborhood far less desirable for families? And what families will want to buy housing that is developed on Lincolnwood's property with no walkable schools in the neighborhood?

  I understand that **capacity** is a problem. I truly believe we can find creative ways of bringing those numbers up. Add preschool aged classrooms. Recruit back the families in our neighborhood who left D65 for private schools because they lost faith in D65. Restore their faith. I'm sure they would rather not pay thousands and thousands of dollars per year to private schools if they didn't have to….”

- “…In 4f, the STEP program from Lincoln is being taken from the building it has operated in for decades to be put into a building that’s never had a specialized program so RISE can be put in. Bilingual STEP will be placed moved to a school that has never had STEP. Now there is discussion of placing a STEP program in a building that has a rating of 1.0 for ADA compliance (Orrington). This frantic placement of students based upon numbers and metrics is telling this seasoned special education teacher of 19 years that you are not creating the scenario with **special education** students in mind.

  As a special education teacher who transitions students to other buildings on a yearly basis, I can tell you that transitioning each student takes hours. I can also tell you that building an inclusive community around specialized programs takes years. It is not acceptable to say that “educators and staff members will be trained for these students before the year starts”. Anybody that has worked in a public school can tell you that phrase essentially tells us that they will sit in a 1-2 hour PD at the beginning of the school year, which isn’t really adequate when you consider that the RISE and STEP program have been in their respective buildings for decades with respect to King Arts and Lincoln, 3 years for Lincolnwood and 2 for Washington.

  The students in these programs, and many with IEPs in general, struggle with social pragmatics.

The relationships that they formed with their typical peers are hard to replace and losing their community will have lasting effects on their social emotional development, which will cause further regression. It took 3 years for my son in STEP to feel comfortable enough in the routine of school to happily enter Lincoln and he is finally thriving. It's finally his time. He is finally learning to read. He finally talks about the kids on the playground. He finally plays with kids on the playground. Taking him out of Lincoln to move him to Dewey because you want to put Rise at Lincoln instead starts it all over.

Meanwhile, the students who aren't in these programs are being uprooted as well. In the 10/15 community meeting, Dr. Beardsley admitted that they have not looked at the geographic locations of students that are not in specialized programs. What is the plan to assure the students with IEPs will be redistributed equitably?...

By leaving Washington, he won't be able to walk to school, I will have to start paying for **childcare** that I can't afford (both before and after school), and I will lose the parenting community that has helped me weather a storm of five years that I myself have barely gotten through…

There is being objective, but then there is just being cruel to the students who are most **vulnerable** in our district. Neighborhood schools are the bedrocks of communities that aren't wealthy. Our children are more than data points. Your treatment of them as data that has to be sacrificed for the finances is not why you went into education. Please just slow down. Our immigrant community is under siege from the government, and now the places that are supposed to protect them are uprooting them as well. You are supposed to protect these children. Remember that."

- (**school closure impacts**) "When multiple elementary schools close at once, the disruption goes far beyond buildings- it tears at the emotional fabric of our children's daily lives. Class sizes rise, teacher attention shrinks, and individual relationships—the very thing that makes learning feel safe—are weakened. For young children, especially those still building trust in school, this kind of loss feels like starting over without the people and places that made them feel seen.

  Longer commutes and unsafe walking routes increase anxiety and fatigue before the day even begins. For many families, this means earlier mornings, longer separations, and added stress that trickles down to the classroom. The sense of community that grounds children in stability disappears overnight, replaced by unfamiliar faces, new rules, and new hierarchies that can take years to rebuild.

  The mental-health toll is profound: higher rates of school avoidance, emotional outbursts, and withdrawal are well-documented after closures. Students in special-education or IEP programs face even steeper challenges—service interruptions, loss of trusted aides, and overwhelming sensory or behavioral stress in larger classrooms. Those with trauma histories or developmental differences will be especially vulnerable to regression and anxiety.

  Teachers and staff feel this too. They absorb larger caseloads and emotional labor while grieving their own sense of home and connection. Morale drops, burnout rises, and turnover increases—further destabilizing children who need consistency most.

  The harm is not short-term. When stability, belonging, and safety are fractured, it affects

attendance, learning, and behavior for years. Closing these schools without comprehensive transition supports—mental-health counselors, transportation safety, IEP continuity, and small-group instruction—risks creating lasting trauma in a generation of children. Our schools are more than buildings; they are ecosystems of trust and care. When we dismantle that, the consequences ripple far beyond test scores. We urge the board to pause and protect our children's well-being before making an irreversible decision."

- "...Why were **Middle School closures** not looked at? Couldn't we save more than we need by closing Chute, making Haven and Nichols 7-8, and keeping 6th grade at their current grade schools?..."

- "As teacher and case manager of the middle school **RISE** class, I am deeply concerned about the possibility of our program being removed from the unique school setting that has allowed it to exist and operate successfully. In order for all students in the district to receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, it is essential for RISE to continue to exist within the context of the K-8 magnet fine arts setting, specifically at King Arts. It was stated in the board meeting by multiple board members that respecting the needs of the RISE program and our most marginalized students is a priority, so I hope that the board will earnestly consider the following in their decisions regarding school closures.

  I am concerned that moving RISE to neighborhood schools would decrease my students' IEP minutes in general education with their same-age peers, putting them in a more restrictive placement. Over the years I've welcomed many 6th grade transfer students who graduated from their neighborhood elementary schools into my class. One of the main reasons for this trend is the fact that as students with intellectual disabilities age out of elementary school, the gap between their academic abilities and those of their peers widens significantly. This means scheduling truly inclusive class time with general education peers becomes exponentially harder after the transition to middle school. How do we solve this? King Arts offers the perfect solution: daily fine arts classes led by teachers who adapt and modify their instruction to meet the needs of all students and include them meaningfully. The King Arts middle school schedule contains ten periods per day. The majority of middle schoolers in RISE are in my class six periods per day and attend the other four periods (lunch/recess, fine arts, PE, and science/social studies) with the rest of the students in their grade level. Without that 10% of their day in fine arts, my students would be in general education less than 40% of the day. That number, 40%, is important, because it is the cutoff point in our IEP system for placement option number two, which states that students spend 40-79% of their day in general education. If Chute or Haven cannot offer middle school RISE students a daily schedule where at least 40% of their day is in general education classes, moving them there would constitute forced removal from the least restrictive environment (placement in which is mandated by IDEA) to a more restrictive placement. Parents would have to be contacted and give permission for their child's IEP to be amended to placement code three, "inside general education classroom less than 40% of the day". This placement change would have nothing to do with my students' capability to be educated with their non-disabled peers and everything to do with being moved to a school that is not set up for their inclusion and success.

  Because RISE has been a part of King Arts for decades, the district has invested in accessibility features in our building that are not present in neighborhood schools. These features include a fully accessible bathroom that is connected to the k-2nd grade RISE classroom, where many students are able to work on toileting skills with dignity with assistance from adults in the privacy of their classroom. The designated spaces for PT, OT, and Speech services are also essential to

maintaining consistency for our students, many of whom need predictability and routine to avoid significant emotional distress and behavioral outbursts related to their disabilities. There is also a padded sensory room at the back of my middle school RISE classroom (to be clear, it is only used voluntarily, never as a means of seclusion or restraint), which allows students who experience emotional and sensory-seeking impulses to cope safely. In the sensory room, a student can relieve their impulse to throw things by doing so at the padded wall without hurting people or property. They can throw themselves down on a crash pad as many times as they want instead of throwing themselves down on a hard tile floor and getting hurt. They can punch or kick the punching bag in the sensory room instead of kicking over a chair or punching a person. This safe space to work through emotions and behaviors has become a safe haven for RISE students who thrive in inclusive settings and are also learning to handle their impulses safely and responsibly.

Even if the district were to approve significant changes to school buildings and schedules to better accommodate RISE students at other schools, no amount of money, building materials, or re-scheduling could rebuild the inclusive school culture that is unique to King Arts. Our culture of inclusion has been built primarily by the incredible teachers at our school, many of whom have been building and maintaining it for decades. Losing access to a school full of teachers who have worked with students in RISE for years and consider their inclusion to be a core tenant of their teaching practices would be a devastating loss for our students. New teachers at King Arts can expect to be held to a high standard in including RISE students and can tap into support from the rest of our teaching community to learn how to meet this standard. Most King Arts students have been in classes with students in the RISE program since kindergarten, and it shows. They are incredibly understanding, respectful, and genuinely enjoy connecting with their peers with disabilities. They welcome them into their friend groups, attend each other's birthday parties, hang out in their free time, and do extracurricular activities together. Most importantly, they look out for my students and stand up for them.There is a stark difference in attitudes towards RISE students between lifelong King Arts students and new transfer students who have never gone to school with kids with intellectual disabilities, but the inclusion culture among students is so strong that transfer students quickly learn that ableism is unacceptable here.

The impact of in-person inclusion and lack there-of was also felt in the wake of the 2020 lockdown, when middle schoolers re-entered school having missed out on formative interactions with their RISE classmates during 2020 and 2021. Every teacher I spoke with in 2022-2023 agreed that the way students were treating their RISE classmates after virtual learning ended was unlike anything they had ever seen at King Arts. Some kids were bullying their RISE peers while others laughed at them to their faces and behind their backs. Even the kids without a mean bone in their body tended to simply ignore their RISE peers because they didn't know how to interact with them. Thankfully, with each graduation I have witnessed a gradual return to the inclusive culture King Arts is known for, since the current middle schoolers have had plenty of uninterrupted formative years with their RISE peers. When I think about the transfer students and "covid-kids" who treated my students badly after lacking exposure to people with disabilities and teachers to model and facilitate inclusion, I can only assume that that's what my students will be met with if forced to transfer to Haven or Chute. While I'm sure both of those middle schools are filled with great teachers and kids, I fear that they lack the exposure and experience with disability to warmly welcome my students and fully include them in the way they deserve.

Both of these schools have over three times the number of middle school students that King Arts does, making my students an even smaller minority group and easier for other students to avoid

or target. Those numbers also present significant challenges in safely facilitating inclusion as it will be very challenging for paraprofessionals to balance giving students space to interact freely with their peers during unstructured times like recess while also maintaining adequate supervision. As I picture my students trying their best to make new friends at a new school, I think about all the lifelong friends that would be separated by this move. Several of my students have attended King Arts since kindergarten and have formed many friendships with non-RISE students over the years and they would go to separate schools if King Arts were to close or move the RISE program out of the building. Another type of connection that will be lost is the friendship and mentorship between elementary and middle school RISE students. My students generally grow up seeing zero media representation of people with their disabilities who are older than them. It is essential to our development to be able to picture ourselves older, to see the path forward as we watch people just like us in later stages of life. Additionally, separating RISE staff into different buildings makes it all the more challenging for us to coordinate services and work together to advocate for our students.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts about these school closure scenarios as a teacher in the RISE program. I hope that the board will take the time to learn more about the RISE program, King Arts, and the essential roles we play in our district's ecosystem as you consider the many factors involved in this decision. Years before I applied here, I dreamed of working in this district because of its commitment to social justice, including disability justice. Upon being hired for this specific position, I was elated to be placed in such an inclusive program and school. I hope that the district remains steadfast in its commitment to social justice when considering the implications of removing the RISE program from King Arts."

- "KA is the only **K-8** school and the only one with an **earlier start time**. Having one school in D65 with those options (with BR closing) is a great benefit to families - using my own as an example , as a single working parent, not having to pay for both before and after school care was a large factor in my decision to send my child to KA . We loved the K-8 option as well - large middle schools are not optimal for every student and keeping my child in the same school for 9 years was an enormous benefit."

- "If the entire goal of the Envision Evanston 2045 plan is to increase **property tax revenue**, then damaging one of the most revenue-producing neighborhoods by closing its local elementary school is clearly counter-productive."

- "My comments focus on the school **boundaries** drawn by the Northwestern data team without community input. I appreciate the technical skill and effort that went into that analysis. But while the data modeling may achieve numerical balance, it doesn't fully reflect the lived experience of our neighborhoods. The boundaries as currently drawn cut across long-standing communities, friendships, and social ties that define who we are as Evanston residents. I would rather have sacrifice enrollment percentages to save our kid's community connections.

  The schools with communities being significantly affected are not necessarily just those that are closing, but those in the middle of Evanston whose boundaries are being redrawn most dramatically. For example, at Dewey, children who've grown up together over the last five years will now be split across four different schools under all the 3-school closure scenarios being considered. That kind of fragmentation disrupts community bonds and continuity for both kids and families. This is also true for the Washington community. I would ask the district to revisit the boundaries with three goals in mind:

1. Better align them with natural neighborhoods and community connections.

2. Limit how many different schools each existing elementary school is divided into.

3. Where changes can't be avoided, allow currently enrolled students to remain in their existing schools through a transition period to preserve stability and friendships."

- "I am writing to propose a simple, fiscally responsible adjustment to the consolidation plan that will significantly reduce the social and emotional harm caused by redrawing our middle school feeder patterns.

  The Problem: Breaking Established Community Pathways: The current proposals ask our children and families to absorb two profound disruptions simultaneously: the potential closure of their neighborhood schools and a fundamental change to their middle school feeder patterns. This is simply too much change to force upon our students at one time. The proposals to change these established feeder patterns is a profound disruption that breaks this long-standing promise, severing the neighborhood bonds that are crucial for students as they transition to middle school.

  A Simple, Fiscally Responsible Solution: I propose that the Board implement a three-year **"grandfathering" policy for all current elementary students whose middle school feeder pattern is being changed**. This would mean they attend their originally designated middle school as a cohort, preserving their community.

  Rationale and Benefits:
  • Virtually No Financial Impact: This solution is about student assignment policy, not a line-item in the budget. It costs the district next to nothing to honor its existing pathways for current students.
  • Simple and Predictable for the District: The district will know exactly how many students are going to which middle school, making planning for staffing and resources straightforward.
  • Provides Critical Stability: It gives children like my daughter and her friends a promise that their community will not be arbitrarily broken apart. It allows them to navigate the transition to middle school with the peer group they have always counted on…."

- "There should be **aggressive outreach to families that are at schools that are closing**. I hope there are calls from a school board member to each family explaining their reasoning and offering to help them transition to their new school. It is important we don't lose too many students to due to this upheaval and the families that are affected should be considered first and foremost."

- "Have **student into sessions** at the schools so students can feel heard."

- "It would be a great idea to **place the teachers along with their students**. Familiar faces can create a sense of belonging"

- "You should be taking **polls** to see if people will stay in the district or would prefer a different neighborhood school than what they'll be districted in"

- "If **King Arts** is not closed it should get a **TWI** strand. The native Spanish speaking population deserves access to a k-8 school just as much as anyone else. It can be argued that they need it more than most others since the parents are often immigrants. K-8 schools offer more stability for the family, let the native Spanish speakers have access."

- “Although we will probably close more schools, the district should **model out the actual programs, services and administration cuts** would be if we didn't close any schools….”

- “I'm concerned that incremental **transportation costs** aren't being accurately accounted for (again! but in the opposite direction). A slide showed fairly low assumed incremental costs for new busing needed. But given fewer schools and bigger boundaries, I'd be interested to see the # of students in each boundary who would now qualify for free busing to their newly assigned school, and what the assumed busing cost per student is….”

- “We live across the street from Willard. A major concern that I have is the safety of students during drop off and pickup. Already the **traffic patterns** surrounding the school are chaotic and dangerous. Should Willard remain open, with an increase in the number of students in attendance and more cars to facilitate drop offs given the distance from home, the existing patterns would be dangerous and frustrating for parents and homeowners near by. This is an example of a consideration I hope our school board/transition team is considering as they look ahead.”

- “I did not hear any consideration about **JEH** as a building. I would like to hear options surrounding closure of this building. Integrating preK into another building, spreading administrative office amongst school buildings are a couple considerations….”

- “What if we put the closures to a **referendum**? One measure to close specified schools and another to approve property tax hikes that would permit us to keep them open?”

- “...I’m urging you to **pause** any school closure decisions **until we have clear data and community understanding of the reopening of Foster School and the closure of Bessie Rhodes**. Both of these are already going to be extremely taxing and disruptive to the children and educators involved. Both transitions will significantly affect enrollment, equity, transportation, and neighborhood dynamics. Making further closure decisions before evaluating those outcomes would be premature and potentially damaging to the very communities we aim to strengthen….”

- “I think **more education on** exactly what is happening with the **finances** needs to be reinforced and broken down from where the trouble started to ensure that this doesn’t happen again.”

- “...It is so reassuring that you have already managed to cut so much in operating costs. Keep that going and **don’t pull the nuclear option** of devastating neighborhoods when you don’t have to.”

- “... I urge you to **prioritize and protect time for educators, paraprofessionals, and building-based admin to create, plan, and practice community-building**, because this is the actual fabric of our new District. More voices can feel messy and time-consuming, but it is also the only way to benefit from the incredible experience and creativity of the staff we entrust our children to every day. Please empower them to shape the way forward together.”

- “A clear "**cost to achieve**" for each scenario is needed. At present, the closure scenarios only present anticipated savings, but not the costs required to enact the scenarios. When the cost to achieve is added, then each scenario will not look as big on the total savings front.”

- “I don't see any mention of **alternative funding strategies** e.g. facility rental, corporate engagement, local business engagement, grant writing, fundraising on the School Closures Hub. I hope that this has been considered!”

- "...And please, please, please allow for community comments to be incorporated to allow for better and natural school **boundaries**. Many of your boundaries appear to be drawn by people who have never lived in our community and don't understand our neighborhoods."

- "**Dawes** is only one of three schools in the district to earn a "well-organized for improvement" in the 5Essentials survey. We score strong in effective leaders, collaborative teachers, and involved families. According to the most recent preliminary IAR scores, Dawes is the highest performing Title 1 elementary school in both math and reading. Additionally, our reading scores are comparable to Orrington and Dewey. All academic achievement and growth data has been on an upward trajectory and that speaks to our commitment to strong, equitable, grade-level instruction."

- "...the plans being share with the board (and community) for approval need to include how you will **support students and staff during this change**. We need to know how you are keeping the education of our kids at the forefront of your decision making. We also deserve to know your plans (including timelines) on how you make all these moves before the start of next year. Saying "trust us" is not enough."

- "To some of the community comments, it would be good to have the overall **vision** on how D65 will transform over the next 10 years to improve the quality of education for the students. While the current cost savings measures are being done for things like avoiding state takeover, i can't say what the overall goal is right now other than "save money". Financial stability is needed, but we need to reinforce with the families what the overall goals are and that there is a plan past the "save money" point."

- (**transition**) "...Grieve with the families that lose their school. Be as transparent as possible. Focus on shared values moving forward. Do what you can so that everyone feels heard. We're all in this together. Help everyone feel that way."

- "1. Introduction

  School closures disrupt more than buildings—they impact student identity, family stability, staff morale, and community trust. For children, especially those with IEPs, disabilities, or social-emotional needs, the sudden change can lead to anxiety, academic regression, and emotional distress.

  This proposal outlines actionable strategies to minimize harm, support equitable transitions, and foster belonging for all stakeholders.

  2. Goals and Guiding Principles
  Safety: Guarantee safe travel routes, adequate supervision, and transportation equity.
  Continuity: Ensure uninterrupted academic instruction and special services.
  Connection: Maintain meaningful relationships between students, families, and staff.
  Community: Create a shared identity that honors legacy schools and embraces inclusion.
  Accountability: Establish systems to track progress, satisfaction, and well-being throughout the transition.

  3. Transition Task Force
  Purpose: Oversee all transition activities and serve as a bridge between the district, families, and staff.

Composition:
District leadership representative
Principals (sending and receiving schools)
Teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialists
Two parent representatives from each closing school
One to three student representatives (grades 4–5)
Community and faith-based partners

Responsibilities:
Develop and monitor the transition timeline
Approve communication plans and safety measures
Address family and staff concerns
Report monthly to the board during the first post-closure year

4. Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Support

A. Student Support
Assign Transition Counselors to provide emotional support and adjustment workshops.
Offer small-group counseling for anxiety, grief, and adjustment challenges.
Implement classroom-based SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) activities during the first 6–9 weeks.
Provide safe spaces or “calming corners” in each receiving school for overwhelmed students.

B. Staff & Family Support
Conduct wellness circles for teachers and support staff.
Offer parent workshops on coping with change and supporting children through transitions.
Maintain open communication through family liaisons from each closed school.

5. Academic & Service Continuity
Instructional Stability
Keep teacher teams and grade-level partners together where possible.
Maintain current curriculum and pacing guides to avoid abrupt instructional changes.
Provide targeted small-group instruction for 6–8 weeks post-transition.
Special Education & IEP Services
Conduct IEP/504 amendment meetings before transition to confirm service continuity.
Assign transition case managers to track minutes and service delivery for the first semester.
Offer professional development for receiving staff on student-specific supports.

6. Safety & Transportation
Update and publish Safe Routes to School maps with crossing guards and signage in place before reopening.
Provide supervised walking groups or “walking school buses.”
Reassess bus routes to minimize commute times and ensure ADA accessibility.
Increase staff presence during arrival/dismissal for traffic management and safety oversight.

7. Culture, Identity, and Belonging
Integration Strategies
Host “Meet & Merge” events—open houses, buddy classroom visits, and team-building activities.

Develop a new shared school identity (mascot, motto, colors) that represents all merging communities.
Display murals or memory walls honoring the legacy of each closed school.
Launch a student ambassador program to welcome new peers and foster inclusion.

8. Communication and Transparency
Publish monthly transition updates (newsletters, social media, robocalls).
Host quarterly town halls for families to share feedback.
Maintain a dedicated webpage with FAQs, transportation maps, and contact information.
Assign Family Transition Liaisons to assist families during the first full year.

9. Data Tracking & Accountability
Monitor the following indicators and report quarterly to the board:

Category	Metrics	Frequency
Attendance-	Chronic absenteeism, tardiness	Monthly
Behavior-	Office referrals, suspensions	Monthly
Academic Progress-	Benchmark test growth	Quarterly
IEP Services-	Service delivery compliance	Monthly
Family Satisfaction-	Surveys, open forums	Quarterly
Staff Retention-	Teacher turnover, exit data	Biannually

10. Timeline Overview

Phase	Timeline	Key Actions
Planning	3–6 months pre-closure	Create task force, hold IEP meetings, finalize maps
Pre-Transition	1–2 months before move	Host family tours, pair buddy classes, SEL prep
Implementation	First semester	Deploy counselors, monitor data, hold events
Stabilization	Months 6–12	Evaluate outcomes, refine supports, build culture

11. Long-Term Community Investment
Even after closure, former school sites can serve vital purposes:
Community learning centers (after-school tutoring, adult education, childcare)
Family resource hubs (food assistance, health clinics, workshops)
Heritage installations preserving the school's history through art and storytelling

12. Conclusion
While school closures are often driven by necessity, the human impact cannot be ignored. With careful planning, empathy, and accountability, the district can turn a disruptive moment into an opportunity to build a stronger, more unified community—one that values safety, belonging, and student well-being above all else."

- "Do not slow down. This needs to happen expeditiously and we need to **rip off the bandaid**. Slowing down only magnifies the harm in the community and increases distrust. Make a decision, stick by it, and move into the future unified, knowing that you have made the right choice that will enhance our district and community giving it a future for years to come."

- "This is a general comment on the **methodology**. But now that I have dug into the 1-5 scoring methodology, I think it might be causing the impact of some metrics to be over-inflated. For example, on the cost component, one of the metrics is "Building Operating Cost" and is based on the monthly cost of operating each building. Orrington is the lowest among the K-5 schools, but

that seems to be more a factor of building square-footage. There is also not a huge range across schools, and it is basically proportional to its square-footage, so it favors keeping small buildings open. But the methodology forces a score of 1-5, assigning 1 to the most expensive school and 5 to the least expensive, and allocating the others proportionally within it. But what if the cost difference between the top and the bottom is not meaningful? It still makes the lowest cost building 5x more attractive on the weighting scale than the highest cost building. How about instead, setting an objective best and worst value, and then determining the 1-5 score based on that? An analogy is if I am trying to determine where to go on vacation, and my criteria is the average temp (the higher the better) and the length of the flight to travel (shorter is better). Let's say I'm evaluating 2 places to travel to, , and the average temps are 77 and 78 degrees, but the time to travel varies from one hour flight away and 12 hour flight away. When weighting criteria before looking at the data or knowing what metrics I would use, I gave them both 50% as I care both about having warm weather and reducing travel time. Well, the fact that one is 77 and one is 78 shouldn't really impact my decision as both are considered good and close. But in this weighting methodology, the 78 degree one would get a 5 (best) and the 77 one gets a 1 (worst), making it seem 5x more attractive. And then if the 77 degree one is only 1 hour flight away, and the 78 degree one is 12 hours away, then the 1 hour gets a score of 5 (the best) and the 12 hour away one gets a score of 1 (the worst). So both destinations now have an average score of 3.0. But do you think they really are equally good choices (77 degrees 1 hour away vs. 78 degrees 12 hours away)? I suggest you have to re-scale the 1-5 weightings based on an objective scale of good and bad min/max levels. So for metrics that have greater variance relative to what's considered ideal and unacceptable will have more differentiation than ones where the metric doesn't vary much (relative to an objective standard) by school.”