Middle School Consolidation
Community Survey Results

The District received over 300 responses to its community survey regarding the potential consolidation of three middle schools into two. Four main findings are identified.

1. **Educational quality is most important.** The highest importance ratings are high-quality academic programs (4.85/5), appropriate class sizes (4.81), school culture and belonging (4.69), and consistent access to programs (4.68).
2. **Capacity and classroom conditions dominate concerns.** Class-size changes (4.58/5), classroom/common-space capacity (4.54), and larger enrollments (4.46) rank highest.
3. **Participation differs by role.** Parents/guardians account for 236 of 317 respondents (74.4%), including several write-in or mixed-role descriptions. Teacher responses (n=26) show especially high concern about class sizes, capacity, and staffing.
4. **Written feedback adds context.** In total, 212 respondents entered text in at least one open-ended field. Comments range from explicit opposition and questions about the financial rationale to conditional support, proposed educational benefits, and practical transition suggestions.

1. Description of Respondents

Respondent type	Count	Share
Parents / guardians (including mixed and future-parent descriptions)	236	74.4%
Community members, alumni, grandparents, and other	41	12.9%
Teachers / instructors (including retired and substitute)	26	8.2%
Support or transportation staff	10	3.2%
Students	4	1.3%

Closest school connection	Count	Share
Multiple Pennridge schools	80	25.2%
South Middle School	76	24.0%
Pennridge elementary school(s)	74	23.3%
Central Middle School	30	9.5%
North Middle School	24	7.6%
Pennridge High School	23	7.3%
No direct school connection	10	3.2%

2. Understanding of the District's rationale

Average understanding is 3.47/5. A total of 171 respondents (53.9%) selected 4 or 5; 75 (23.7%) selected 3; and 71 (22.4%) selected 1 or 2. Parents/guardians averaged 3.36, teachers/instructors 3.73, and community/other respondents 4.02.

Understanding rating (1 = low; 5 = high)	Responses	Share
1	27	8.5%
2	44	13.9%
3	75	23.7%
4	95	30.0%
5	76	24.0%

3. Importance of planning factors

Each rating is on a 1–5 scale. Academics and class sizes are highly rated. Areas of least concern are staffing, logistics, and finance.

Factor	Mean / 5	Rated 4–5
High-quality academic programs	4.85	95.9%
Appropriate class sizes	4.81	94.6%
School culture / sense of belonging	4.69	92.2%
Consistent access to programs	4.68	91.7%
Special education and student supports	4.60	88.4%
Classrooms and common-area capacity	4.59	89.6%
Student transitions	4.36	82.7%
Enrollment sustainability	4.30	78.4%
Staff transitions and transfers	4.23	78.8%
Balanced attendance boundaries	4.19	76.6%
Transportation times and logistics	4.15	76.1%
Short- and long-term finances	4.09	73.7%

4. Concern about possible impacts

The same five-point analysis was applied to the concern questions. Class size, space and programing were areas of most concern. Staff, logistics, and identity were areas of least concern.

Potential impact	Mean / 5	Rated 4–5
Potential class-size changes	4.58	87.0%
Classroom and common-space capacity	4.54	86.3%
Increased enrollment at remaining schools	4.46	84.0%
Academic programs and course offerings	4.33	81.9%
Special education / support services	4.18	75.9%
Student adjustment and belonging	4.04	72.7%
Long-term District financial impact	4.01	67.9%
Renovation / implementation costs	3.96	67.9%
Staff transfers / staffing changes	3.87	65.4%
School identity and traditions	3.71	61.1%
Attendance boundaries	3.69	58.6%
Transportation time changes	3.55	53.5%

5. Differences among respondent types

Among responding teachers, concern about class-size changes averaged 5.00/5, classroom/common-space capacity 4.96, and staffing changes 4.85. Community/other respondents rated financial importance higher (4.37) than teachers (3.72); parents rated it 4.08.

Selected 1–5 rating	Parents	Teachers	Community
Importance: academic quality	4.90	4.77	4.83
Importance: class sizes	4.84	4.88	4.67
Importance: school belonging	4.75	4.85	4.44
Importance: financial impact	4.08	3.72	4.37
Concern: class-size changes	4.59	5.00	4.33
Concern: classroom capacity	4.54	4.96	4.22
Concern: staffing changes	3.75	4.85	3.83
Concern: school identity	3.57	4.50	3.85
Concern: long-term finances	3.99	3.65	4.18

6. Potential opportunities

A total of 273 respondents answered the multiple-selection opportunity question. The highest selections relate to academic consistency, extracurricular activities, and elective courses. Free responses caution that a program can be offered without every interested student having an opportunity to participate, particularly in athletics or performing arts.

Potential opportunity	Selections	% of 273
More consistent academic programs	148	54.2%
Expanded extracurricular activities	109	39.9%
Expanded or improved electives	105	38.5%
More efficient staffing / resources	97	35.5%
More consistent student supports	92	33.7%
Potential operating-cost reductions	79	28.9%
Improved middle school schedules	77	28.2%
Improved intervention / enrichment / MTSS	73	26.7%
More efficient use of facilities	59	21.6%

7. Student transition supports

Information and preparation are recurring priorities. Communication (4.55), visits, orientation, and early boundary notice (all approximately 4.41) stand out.

Transition support	Mean / 5	Rated 4–5
Regular District communication	4.55	89.2%
Student visits to new school	4.41	83.1%
Orientation before school year	4.41	83.7%
Early boundary-change notification	4.41	84.2%
Meet teachers and staff	4.34	83.0%
Parent / guardian information sessions	4.25	78.7%
Early transportation information	4.21	77.1%
Meet students from other schools	4.09	72.2%
Student input in transition	4.07	71.1%
Shared school identity activities	4.03	72.6%
Counseling / transition supports	3.92	67.3%

8. Themes of open-ended responses

A. Classroom conditions, building capacity, and student opportunity

Respondents asked how schedules, classroom assignments, hallways, lockers, lunch spaces, and staffing would function at two larger schools. Some also noted that school consolidation might reduce places on teams, in music programs, or in other activities even if program offerings are maintained.

"How does this impact class sizes? Are there classrooms now being utilized at central and north; if so how many?"

Responder 54 | Question for committee

"Student opportunities- ie, fewer schools = fewer sports teams = higher competition for participation. Same with extracurricular music programs"

Responder 9 | Other factors

B. Enrollment forecasts and future residential growth

Written responses question whether birth trends, housing development, neighborhood turnover, and migration could result in higher future enrollment than projected. Some ask what options the District would retain if a third middle school were needed later.

"We continue to build residential homes within the area - are the studies including that factor into their planning?"

Responder 62 | Other factors

C. Financial rationale, alternatives, and South Middle School

Some respondents sought explicit comparisons of costs, savings, renovations, and the implications of maintaining three schools. Others asked why South was identified, whether alternatives had been examined, or what could happen to its building. Written opinions ranged from opposition to closure to acknowledgment of potential operational efficiencies.

"What would it take to keep South Middle School operating as a middle school for the next 5-10 years?"

Responder 31 | Question for committee

"What is the goal of consolidating schools? Will achieving this goal have a positive impact on our kids and community? Can you use data to prove that consolidating schools will achieve this goal?"

Responder 29 | Question for committee

D. Student continuity, school belonging, and boundaries

Respondents described the importance of friendships and school identity, especially for children who experienced recent elementary-school redistricting. Suggestions include limiting repeated school changes, allowing students already enrolled to finish in a familiar setting, and establishing boundaries early.

"You should give serious consideration to the children who were just redistricted in the elementary school boundary changes. These kids should not have to switch schools a second time in such a short period of time."

Responder 22 | Other factors

"The opportunity to transition over time, i.e. students already enrolled may finish their final year while new 6th graders enter the new boundaries"

Responder 92 | Other supports

E. Special education, staffing, and instructional supports

Comments call for attention to IEP/504 continuity, manageable class sizes, teacher workload, and staffing and program organization. Some urge the District to use any efficiencies to improve the student experience rather than simply reduce expenditures.

"Rough estimates on class sizes and the effects on special education."

Responder42 | Question for committee

"Although I am not sure what staffing would look like in the end, rather than simply trying to continue to reduce costs by possibly eliminating staff (if that is the decision), it would be great to look at more opportunities for co-taught classes or reassignment/reallocation of staff in creative ways to support intervention, etc."

Responder 83 | Additional comments

F. Communication and participation

Respondents requested accessible, frequent updates, specific answers about assumptions and timelines, and meaningful ways to hear student and family perspectives. Several comments suggest outreach beyond families who routinely follow District communications.

"Greater outreach to families that don't have as a strong a connection (working parents, non-natives speakers of English)"

Responder 68 | Other supports

"These children are smart. They have a voice and want to feel heard. Even if we do need to close South, they deserve to feel listened to."

Responder 84 | Other supports

G. Views on potential benefits are mixed

The open-ended opportunity field includes both positive or conditional ideas and many comments expressing skepticism that consolidation would produce the listed benefits. Some view program consistency, broader peer connections, or reduced operating costs as possible advantages. Others argue that any savings must translate to meaningful student supports.

"Greater efficiencies and consistency between 2 middle schools vs 3"

Responder 9 | Other opportunities

"One benefit may be that elementary schools would not have to be split to different middle schools. Guth for example."

Responder 132 | Other opportunities

"If the district actually staffs classrooms better than previous year's maybe it could work. If consolidating helps the budget provide better support and resources to all students, it could be beneficial. But if savings are not given back to support kids, its a bad idea all around."

Responder 76 | Other opportunities

"If the consolidation occurs, students have the opportunity to potentially make more peer connections prior to their transition to PHS."

Responder 318 | Other opportunities