



# School Closings: The Big Picture

## A Report of a Community Dialogue



**A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community  
Alliance for Public Education**  
October 2005

# A+ Schools Board of Directors

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# **School Closings: The Big Picture Summary**

*"Any school closing decisions must be made within a broader, strategic planning framework that encompasses an open, equitable process, with frequent communication."*

*- Participant notes from September 7<sup>th</sup> public meeting*

A+ Schools heard that sentiment loud and clear after hosting two public meetings and conducting a scientific survey to ask community members to comment on how they thought school closings should be handled in the Pittsburgh Public Schools and what criteria should be used to close them.

Schools must be closed in order for the District to be fiscally sound and concentrate resources in classroom instruction. All school buildings are valuable community assets and warrant the attention of all stakeholders – parents, taxpayers and the business community. It's critical that the community be confident in the process and that the decisions made are fair and objective.

A+ Schools tried to contribute to this process by giving the community an opportunity to recommend constructive, objective criteria for school closings. Our goal was to raise the level of conversation to one of how we want our city to look in the future and what experiences we want our children to have.

Ultimately, the community responded by giving us their best thinking, working together coming to consensus on some big ideas. We've transformed their thoughts into recommendations:

- \* That the Pittsburgh Public Schools welcome true community participation in the school closing process;**
- \* That the Pittsburgh Public Schools count achievement as the highest factor in keeping school buildings open;**
- \* That clear criteria created and shared before any decisions are made;**
- \* That the feeder patterns be disclosed and explained to the public;**
- and**
- \* That the Pittsburgh Public Schools create a long range facilities plan in tandem with city agencies and neighborhoods.**

## **Purpose: August 17th**

On Wednesday, August 17, 2005 from 5:30 to 8:30 PM, A+ Schools hosted a community meeting to discuss factors and values, such as student achievement, safety, cost, diversity, and convenience that should go into policy making decisions in configuring school facilities for Pittsburgh Public Schools. The meeting was held at the IBEW, Local #5 on the South Side with approximately 70 participants.

The purpose of the meeting was to gauge the community's preferences – which of a host of factors do they believe must go into making decisions about school closings.

## Meeting Summary

To bring a national perspective to school closings and reconfiguration, A+ Schools brought in two national speakers, both with extensive experience in working with communities and schools in trying to create solutions around school facilities and grade configurations.

### **How Other Communities Approach the Issue**

Mary Filardo and Jacqueline Leavy, *Closing Public Schools: Criteria, Community Engagement and Alternatives*  
*The presentation can be found at [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org).*

Mary Filardo founded the organization 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund (21CSF) in 1994 to provide the District of Columbia and other urban communities leadership, innovative financing solutions, research, and public policy analysis of school facility issues. She has written extensively on these public school facility issues and developed software to support long-range facilities master planning. Before establishing 21CSF, she worked for 25 years in the private sector in building and residential construction management. She was also an active public school parent during the sixteen years her children were in public school.

Jacqueline Leavy established the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG), a city-wide organization and research institute in Chicago, to promote increased citizen involvement in urban planning and public budgeting and increased local government investment in urban infrastructure. She is responsible for shaping NCBG's ongoing research program and advocacy efforts regarding increased investment in public transit infrastructure and citizen participation in transportation planning, public budgeting policy reforms, increased capital investment in public school facilities, and coordination of capital investment by local governments around community assets to support and stimulate community economic and transit oriented development.

Filardo and Leavy presented information about their joint project called BEST, the Building Educational Success Together project. It is a constituency building, research and communications collaboration led by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund. BEST partners are located in Washington, DC; Newark, NJ; Chicago, IL; Louisiana; New York City, NY; Cincinnati, OH; and the University of New York at Stonybrook. Together they work to bring comprehensive community-based educational facility planning to communities; they believe that schools are the natural centers of communities; they support responsible management of public school facility inventory and improvements; and support sustained and adequate funding for building maintenance and capital projects.

Both Filardo and Leavy have experience in building collaborations between communities and schools in their respective cities. In Washington, DC, the student population is declining and the school district has closed schools in 1993, 1995 and 1997. The Chicago Public Schools has been closing and rebuilding schools since 2000.

Filardo and Leavy also came to challenge and question our beliefs. They suggested that the community ask, "Are school closings really necessary and how do we know that they are?" In order to answer that question, the community needs more information about the pressures on the operating budget, future capital projects, enrollment decline or shifts, the education program and the demand for school land and school buildings.

They also challenged assumptions about the number of schools by saying "too much space is different than too many schools." Some buildings may need to be down-sized, others may be able to be kept open if paying non-school tenants were to occupy the excess space.

They also asked a very important question that the Pittsburgh community needs to answer: What is Pittsburgh's vision? As two examples, is it a system of small, neighborhood based, high quality public schools? Is it a system of high quality schools located to minimize transportation challenges and support student diversity?

Those are the questions that need to be answered, the information that needs to be gathered and the assumptions that need to be challenged to help the school district advance a successful plan.

Our next speaker was Ken Sochats who brought demographic information about the city and school district.

### **Information about Pittsburgh**

Ken Sochats, A Demographic View of the Pittsburgh Public Schools

*The presentation can be found in the Appendix.*

Ken Sochats is the Director of the Visual Information Systems Center at the University of Pittsburgh. He has over thirty years of experience in the Computer and Telecommunications industries. He holds advanced degrees in Electrical Engineering and Business Administration. After spending several years at Westinghouse Electric Corporation where his work resulted in several inventions and patents, he accepted a faculty position at the University of Pittsburgh. He has taught over twenty-five different courses in telecommunications, computing, systems and business.

Sochats showed a slide of the enrollment by grade in the Pittsburgh Public Schools showing a steep drop out rate from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades that continues to decline to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Sochats garnered applause with his comment that if we could find a way to keep these students in school and graduate them from PPS, there would be no need to close any high schools.

Sochats' slides included maps of the density by neighborhood of the PPS student population, maps of where the African American students are, where the children receiving free and reduced lunches are, and even where students living with single mothers are.

Sochats also presented analysis of the PPS' Feeder Patterns and showed some of the anomalies in them. For instance, children living right across the street from each other, attending the same elementary and middle schools, may be directed to different high schools. Similarly, children living within two blocks of each other in Homewood on Kelley Street will go to four different elementary schools, two different middle schools and yet all arrive at the same high school. In one zip code alone, 15206, there are 10 elementary feeder schools.

### **Break Outs – What You Thought**

Our break out groups had much to discuss when given the charge to work on several questions provided by A+ Schools. The groups worked for an hour.

#### *Question 1*

*A+ Schools is trying to understand what the community values in terms of school buildings and student assignments to those buildings. These factors or values could be translated into criteria for PPS to utilize in making facilities decisions. We're going to ask you to respond to a list of factors and tell us if you think these are the right factors, if they should be restated and/if there are any we are missing –*

- a. Racial and economic diversity*
- b. Student safety in traveling to school*
- c. Student safety while at school*
- d. Minimizing the disruption of students by being re-assigned to new schools because of closures and reconfigurations*
- e. Planning for future population growth and decline among different sections of the City.*
- f. Students attending a school in their neighborhood at each level of education (elementary, middle, and high school)*
- g. Cost savings achieved by using buildings that require less investment to maintain or update to provide a full range of services*
- h. Richness of curricular offerings that are available at individual schools*
- i. Richness of extracurricular offerings that are available at individual schools.*

Participants added **student achievement data** as a criteria. Most felt that high achieving schools should be kept open. There was also agreement that every school in the district offer academic excellence and that every school be a high achieving school.

**Cost savings** and the **minimization of disrupting students** by re-assigning them to schools were very highly agreed upon by our participants as was asking for a definition of proper **building capacity**.

Three strongly agreed upon criteria that A+ Schools did not list as options were expressed. The insistence that the Pittsburgh Public Schools create a **transparent community process with clearly stated criteria**, that the Public Schools work closely and **coordinate planning with the City and the community**, and that the Public Schools **create a long range comprehensive or master plan** for their facilities.

Participants generally agreed with the list of points that A+ Schools presented and added some of their own. **Racial and economic diversity** was the criteria most agreed upon, and also the most questioned criteria. Some asked that the trade off between neighborhood schools and racial diversity be recognized, citing Pittsburgh's segregated neighborhoods, while another participant asked if racial and economic diversity can even be achieved by reconfiguring the schools. Still another participant thought that racial and economic diversity be a low priority of the school district when considering a plan for closing schools.

#### *Question 2*

*What information is needed for the public to participate fully in discussions and decisions about school facilities and school closings? What questions would you like answers to for the next meeting?*

Participants called for **demographic data**, wishing to understand how many students live in Pittsburgh, how many of them attend private and parochial schools and how they might be attracted to attend the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Studying the city's population growth and decline was suggested as well as comparative information for the entire city.

Similarly, participants thought that having **achievement data** would be helpful in determining how to close schools. They called for PSSA and other achievement data, class size, the number of empty seats, safety records and transportation routes.

**Per pupil spending, capacity** and **cost savings** were also data thought to be most important to have access to, as well as feeling that the School District should disclose its **feeder patterns**.

(A break down of everything noted on individual flip charts is included in the Appendix.)

### **Survey**

At the close of the meeting, people were directed to an on-line survey asking more detailed questions about their priorities and thoughts around school closings. A+ Schools released the survey with the intention of fine tuning what was said in the community meeting on August 17<sup>th</sup>.

### **Purpose: September 7th**

"We have raised many important issues, considered a broad range of new ideas, and heard from many different voices during this dialogue," said Esther Bush, chair-elect of the Board of A+ Schools, on the evening of the September 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. "Now we will gather our collective learning and craft recommendations for how the School District should engage the community and proceed with a process and criteria for moving forward with school closings and other facilities decisions."

The findings from the on-line survey as well as findings from a deliberative democracy research project at Carnegie Mellon University that took place last summer were presented for community consideration at this meeting. Participants

at the meeting had the opportunity to recommend constructive, objective processes, policies, and criteria for school closings.

## **Survey Results and Follow Up**

Ken Sochats: Review of the A+ Schools Survey

*The full presentation can be found at [www.apluschools.org](http://www.apluschools.org).*

The meeting started with Ken Sochats reviewing the survey data collected between the August 17<sup>th</sup> and September 7<sup>th</sup> meetings. At that time, 308 respondents were counted. 246 were white and 33 were African American. A+ Schools, in seeking a greater number and diversity of respondents, choose to keep the survey open for an additional three weeks and to aggressively seek responses through the wide distribution of a paper version of the survey. The final survey results are reported here.

### **Who Responded**

A total of 495 people responded to the survey. 453 of those live in the City of Pittsburgh and 42 do not. 348 out of the 453 respondents were women, only 129 were men. 213 of the respondents had a child in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, while 261 did not have children in school at all. 39 had children in private school and 18 had children in both private and public school.

Of the respondents, 262 were parents of children. 178 considered themselves “concerned citizens.” The rest were family members or guardians.

The average age of the respondents was 43. In terms of race, 350 of the 453 respondents were white. 88 were African American. 34 did not report their race.

### **The Responses**

The first question, “Which grade configuration do you prefer for children in grades 6 to 8?” had the following options:

1. Two schools: Kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, then 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Middle Schools)
2. One school: Kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (K-8)
3. Both Kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and Kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade with available
4. No Preference

Here, there was almost equal preference for Middle Schools as there was for K-8 schools. 187 respondents preferred the Middle School option. 144 preferred the K-8 option outright. 95 people liked having both choices while 61 people had no preference.

Over half of the respondents answered yes to the second question, “Do you believe we should close schools?” 136 people were not sure and 89 respondents answered no.

Over 80% of the respondents answered yes to the question, “Should PPS publicly disclose the feeder patterns (student assignment locations) for schools?” 24 of the 453 respondents said no and 45 had no preference.

To the fourth question, “Should PPS have a published 10 year plan for schools?” again over 80% said yes.

The fifth question, “Which of the following data do you need to fully participate in a school closing discussion?” the following options were given:

1. Square footage of each school building
2. Age of each school building
3. Physical condition of each school building
4. How functional capacity is determined
5. Percent of students attending a school outside their feeder pattern

6. Cost of actual instruction per student
7. Other

Respondents most wanted to know more about the Building Condition (72.84%) and the how Functional Capacity is determined (73.05%). The Percent of students attending a school outside of their feeder pattern was next in popularity at 67.08%. Understanding the Instruction Cost came next at 60.70%. Building footage and Building Age were the least requested information at 33.74% and 35.60% respectively.

The last question asked respondents to rank the following options for criteria for closing schools from 1 to 9, with 1 being the highest priority. When looking at the aggregate numbers, the following results were found:

1. Safe School Environment
2. Curricular Offerings
3. Safe Travel to School
4. Diversity of Student Population
5. Minimize the Disruption of Students
6. Future Stability
7. Students Attending Neighborhood Schools
8. Extracurricular Offerings
9. Cost Savings

It should be noted that A+ Schools believes that improving student achievement and shrinking the racial achievement gap are the most important factors in making school facilities decisions and so were not listed as choices. They were considered to be a given which was confirmed in the responses from the two public meetings.

When the responses are disaggregated, the following responses were found:

	All	City Residents	Non City Residents	African Americans
Safe School Environment	1	1	1	2
Curricular Offerings	2	2	3	1
Safe Travel to School	3	3	2	4
Diversity of Student Population	4	4	4	3
Minimize the Disruption of Students	5	5	5	5
Future Stability	6	6	7	7
Students Attending Neighborhood Schools	7	8	6	8
Extracurricular Offerings	8	7	8	6
Cost Savings	9	9	9	9

## **Deliberative Democracy Research**

Ron Gdovic and Peter Muhlberger: Review of the InSites Project Findings

*The full presentation can be found at [www.apluschools.org](http://www.apluschools.org).*

Ronald Gdovic, the Executive Director of InSITEs, the Institute for the Study of Information Technology and Society and Dr. Peter Muhlberger, a professor at the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University who's research interests include deliberative democracy and ways to facilitate the democratic process via various information and communications technologies, spoke next. They reported on the findings of a deliberative democracy study undertaken in July 2004. The project brought a representative sample of 568 Pittsburgh city residents to Carnegie Mellon University to participate in a day-long learning and discussion experience concerning school consolidation and educational improvements in Pittsburgh city schools.

All of the participants were given two 40 minute periods to examine information about five policies: closing schools in the future generally, eliminating 4500 seats over three years specifically, eliminating middle schools by going to a K-8

system, adding small learning communities to the high schools, and choice of schools within larger geographical regions. Two thirds of participants deliberated in groups of 12 or fewer about the policy issues. One third were placed in a no-discussion control group for purposes of social science research.

Four of the five policies examined received support from majorities of participants. The four policies were: closing schools in general, eliminating 4500 seats, eliminating middle schools and adding small learning communities to the high schools. Participants views were mixed on regional choice.

### **Break Outs – What You Thought**

Again the participants of the community meeting were broken out into small discussion groups to talk over questions prepared by A+ Schools. The groups worked for an hour. Their responses follow:

#### *Question 1*

*What recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about the **process** for making school closings and other facilities decisions?*

Overwhelmingly our participants asked that there be **community involvement** in the school closing process. They asked for **clear criteria** and **access to data** and information. They believed there should be **long term planning** and that **data should drive the decision making**. They also felt strongly that **student achievement** should be a factor in making decisions.

#### *Question 2*

*What recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about **student assignment** and **feeder patterns**?*

Participants felt that **geography** and **topography** should be taken into consideration when making changes. **Transportation costs** and **driving distances** should also be taken into account. In terms of the feeder patterns, there was a general consensus that they be disclosed to the public, based on accurate data and “rational.” Some felt that the feeder patterns should be “scrapped” while other felt they just needed to be “cleaned up.”

#### *Question 3*

*What recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about **criteria** for closing schools?*

The most strongly supported criteria was **student achievement** data. Most believed that high academic achievement, quality teaching and leadership and closing the achievement was the most important criteria to keep when closing schools.

#### *Question 4*

*What other recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about **facilities** and school closing decisions?*

The three most mentioned recommendations from the community were considering the **building condition** in school closings, **matching re-use options with community needs** and considering the **cost of renovations**.

Participants across the room also had one other concern, the School Board. Although not specifically asked, many expressed a **lack of trust in the School Board**. They recognized the politics around school closings in the past and believed that the Board should be held accountable for their decisions.

## **What it All Means – Recommendations from the Community**

Overall, there was consensus in both meetings about the following themes. These themes constitute A+ Schools recommendations to the Pittsburgh Public Schools School Board and administration.

### **Community Participation**

There must be more effort made to garner true community participation in the process of closing schools. This should include parents, non-parents, community leaders, the business community, school principals, school administrators and others. School closings should be a community process.

### **Achievement is a factor/Performance should count**

The focus of the school closing conversation should not be the utilization and business of facilities but on achievement, teacher quality and administrative continuance. Student achievement should be analyzed not just by test score, but by looking at the school as a whole including extracurricular offerings, and staff and principal performance. The school closing/reconfiguration strategy should be constructed to impact learning.

### **Transparency in the decision making process**

#### **Clear criteria/guiding principals/rationale**

#### **Use clear quantifiable data to remove politics**

The school board and administration should have clear and quantifiable measures for closing schools that are communicated to the public BEFORE any decisions are made. The process for closing schools should be clearly communicated. The rationale for school closings should be easy to understand, clear and non-political.

### **Revist/Revamp the feeder patterns**

The feeder patterns should be disclosed, in an understandable way, to the public. The school reconfiguration study might also be an opportunity to “clean up” the feeder patterns, and base them on geography, or to “scrap them” altogether.

### **Strategic/Long range plan**

Develop a plan that incorporates all of the above comments and also looks at student demographic data, neighborhood data, housing trends and general city-wide demographic.

## Question 1

# Appendix 1

## Responses at the August 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting

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- a. Racial and economic diversity
- b. Student safety in traveling to school
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- d. Minimizing the disruption of students by being re-assigned to new schools because of closures and reconfigurations
- e. Planning for future population growth and decline among different sections of the City.
- f. Students attending a school in their neighborhood at each level of education (elementary, middle, and high school)
- g. Cost savings achieved by using buildings that require less investment to maintain or update to provide a full range of services
- h. Richness of curricular offerings that are available at individual schools
- i. Richness of extracurricular offerings that are available at individual schools.

### Responses

#### Student Achievement

Student achievement ++++++

Every school should offer the basics and offer academic excellence

Keep high achieving schools open +

Keep good teachers teaching

Academic performance values of each school

Every school can be a high achieving school

#### Transparent, Clear Community Process

Community and parental process in decision making ++++++

Community hearings +

Public review of preliminary plan

Transparent process

Pre-agreed to criteria

Clear criteria

Data driven decision making for school alignment

#### Racial and Economic Diversity

Racial and economic diversity ++++++

Recognize the trade off between diversity and neighborhood

Can racial and economic diversity be achieved by reconfiguring schools?

Segregated neighborhoods are an issue

Racial and economic diversity should be a low priority

Minimize Disruptions/Effect on Students

Continuity of experience

Minimize disruption +

Stability +

Minimize disruptions ++

Consistency

The effect on students

Cost

Costs of keeping a school with low enrollment open

Building is managed in a cost-efficient way

Cost savings

Cost – what will it take to bring buildings up to standards

Better ways to utilize school facilities

How much money to remodel schools

Budget transparency

Cost efficient

Determine the “right-size” of each school

Analysis of facility-conditions

Cost to operate

Cost to renovate

Cost per sq ft

Coordination with City and Community

Change in local housing – coordinate with Housing Authority +

Keep schools that have working school-community partnerships

Coordinated city/community/school planning +++

Look at neighborhood plans and strategies

Look at schools in a larger context

Economic development

School should be community partner

Measure community uses of schools

Demographics

Where do students currently live

Demographics

Birth rates

Would closing schools accelerate student population loss?

Long Term Planning

Long term plan +

Parents need to know plan in order to make decisions

Plan on an on-going basis

Comprehensive plan

Master plan for facilities planning

Long range plan ++

Building ReUse

Consider alternative uses for schools

Plan for reuse of buildings

Co-location as a means for income and operating

Consider importance of historic structures

Capacity  
Capacity for educational use  
Functional capacity +  
Discrepancies in school capacity should be addressed  
    Every student should have the same square footage  
Determine effective class size – that should drive “capacity”  
Define terms like “Excess Capacity”

Safety  
Student safety +  
Student safety ++  
    Safety within a school  
    Safety getting to school

Impact on the neighborhood  
Proximity to other schools  
Look at impact the change makes on each other and on neighborhood +  
Impact on the community/neighborhood

Impact on Schools  
Impact on receiving schools

Feeder Patterns  
Adjust the feeder patterns  
Neighborhood based Feeder Patterns  
Feeder pattern

Neighborhood Schools  
Is attending a neighborhood school at each grade level important?  
Goal of racial/eco diversity may be at odds with attending schools in neighborhoods  
Deep rooted connection between neighborhood and school

Transportation/Travel  
Travel time to school  
Distance of schools from students to travel

Quality Leadership  
Teacher quality  
Quality leadership  
    Principals are leaders of schools

Curriculum  
Enhanced theme-based curriculum  
Curricular offerings ++

Extracurricular Offerings  
Richness of extracurricular programs ++  
Extended day programs

School Configurations  
Create K-8 system  
Merge schools  
Close buildings without closing schools

Choice is good  
Choice should be between excellent schools of varying emphasis/method/neighborhood  
Plan for Pre-K  
Are smaller schools better?  
Class size should change – become Effective class size  
School day hours

Miscellaneous  
Fair and quality education at every school  
Disparity between schools  
No decisions should be made based on performance  
Need for specialized school programs  
Reduce the drop out rate  
Cooperative environment  
Respectful culture  
Sufficient wrap around services  
Attract and maintain mid-income folks with options  
Market to kids NOT already in the PPS System +  
Based on best practices

## Question 2

**Are there other factors or values that should be articulated and incorporated into school closing decisions? What are they?**

Responses  
Condition of school buildings  
All schools should have rich curricular and extracurricular activities and offerings  
Safe schools  
Safe routes to schools  
Need a viable alternative for students attending closing schools  
    Not too far away  
    Need capacity in new school  
Consider the needs of new, younger families  
How to attract high school dropouts  
District should make a plan they can stick to  
Quality education  
Understand how the decisions are made  
Accurate and trustworthy data  
Create learning environments that support students through teachers  
Parent involvement is important  
Enhanced curriculum (magnets) draw more motivated students  
Student-centered learning  
Leadership – need excellent principals and teachers  
College prep courses and job skills offered

## Question 3

**What information is needed for the public to participate fully in discussions and decisions about school facilities and school closings? What questions would you like answers to for the next meeting?**

Examples -

j. Feeder patters/student assignments

**k. District facilities plans**  
**I. Capital Budget**

Responses

Demographics

Student population data ++

How many students are in the region and can be attracted back to PPS

How many students leave for the Middle School years and come back to HS

What % of students assigned to a school actually attend that school

Longitudinal studies showing what population growth and decline will be +

Data on all children in the city

Data about falling enrollment

% of students in private/parochial schools

Need comparative information for whole city

Performance Measures/Data

How does the district get data

Performance measures

    PSSA as well as other standards

    Achievement scores

    HS Drop out rate

Size of classrooms

Number of empty seats

Achievement data

Safety records

Magnet effect

Transportation/bus routes

Long Range Planning

Long range strategic plan

Look at neighborhood/community assets

Facility plans for all schools

Need a ten year plan

Per Pupil Spending

Per pupil spending +

    How is that determined?

Closing Best Practices

Research the pros and cons of doing closings all at once or in phases

Capacity

Functional capacity +

    How is this determined? +

Cost

Cost to maintain the buildings

Transportation costs

Real savings

Quality and Equity

Equity Plan

Definitions of quality

Community Involvement/Transparent Process

Community must be involved +

Transparent process

Explain decisions in plain English

Disclose the Feeder Patterns

Feeder patterns ++

    How are these determined

    Need to be re-evaluated

Capital Budget

Capital budget

    Make the capital budget planning transparent, public process +

Community

City-wide focus, not just neighborhood

Impact on community +

Miscellaneous

Further discussion on diversity

Teachers' education

Cross-City campaign for urban reform

National research on best practices

School scheduling

Sharing staff – pros and cons

## Appendix 2

### Responses at September 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting

#### What recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about the *process* for making school closings and other facilities decisions?

##### Responses

Public Involvement  
Public vote  
Parent participation  
Respect citizen opinion  
Create a community advisory board to gather facts  
Legitimate community input ++  
Diversity in process +  
Clear communication to all stakeholders +  
Include community forums as critical data for decision making  
Door to door campaign to reach out to those not usually included in the political process  
Public forums  
Panel with broader representation than the central administration that make recommendations with following public process  
Seek feedback from school professionals  
Stakeholder feedback  
Process should be clearly communicated  
Feedback from community  
Open channels of communication  
Value of listening to all voices  
Access to process and information is so important  
Visibility of process and criteria  
People should feel like they are part of the process +  
Public involvement in critical  
True dialogue  
Open forums

Clear Criteria and Transparent Process  
Decisions should be quantifiable and transparent +  
Outline guiding principles  
Open and transparent  
Abide by stated criteria  
Clear criteria  
Establish values, principles for all decisions to be made and live by them  
Criteria should be applied systematically to see how the *plan* addresses student achievement, not individual schools  
Objective process  
Transparency  
Consistent approach to evaluation  
Rubric developed with weighted rankings based on criteria

Public Access to Information/Data

Public should be given all information about how decision was made, not hidden  
Full disclosure of documents and data ++  
Eliminate rumor, speculation and public anxiety  
Gesture of trust and goodwill

Student Achievement/Quality  
How will the closings impact student achievement  
The quality of education should be the driver  
School quality must not be an assumption  
Focus on student achievement and teacher quality  
Holistic view of quality education

Long Term Planning  
Long range facility plan +  
Develop specific measurements of success and update  
Long term planning +  
Develop long term alignment

Data Driven  
Data driven  
Data driven decision making  
Research driven decision making  
Best practices from outside of Pittsburgh

Coordinate with other government agencies

Transition  
Build in a transition process  
Phase in the closings

#### What recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about *student assignment and feeder patterns*?

##### Responses

Geography  
How to blend geography, student needs and offerings  
Need to be familiar with topography/geography  
Balance distance and disruption equitably  
Should be geographical

Transportation  
Transportation – how do parent get child to new school  
Transit needs to be taken into account  
Transportation costs +

Student Achievement  
Assignment should be based on academic achievement and closing the racial gap

Feeder Patterns  
Feeder patterns should be transparent  
Full disclosure of feeder patterns  
Clean up feeder patterns

Public needs to know the current feeder patterns and what triggers exceptions

Patterns should be rational

“Scrap it”

Start over

No rhyme or reason to the feeder patterns

Should be logical

Should be based on accurate data

Homebuyers look at feeder patterns

Don't change the feeder patterns but fix the glitches

Eliminate the feeder patterns – require racial balance in all schools, keep sibling preference

Variety of configuration options

Keep existing open enrollment policy

Keep magnet programs

Neighborhoods

Must consider neighborhood rivalries

Diversity

Diversity

Diversity should not be a factor, goal should be quality education

### **What recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about *criteria* for closing schools?**

Responses

Options

Explain options and effects to community

Determine school configurations ex: K8 vs Middle Schools, Mixes,

Magnets

Variety of choice/Configuration options +

Link to Communities

Role in community renewal

Link keeping schools open to community renewal or revival & property value increases

Student Achievement

Achievement

High academic achievement +++++++

Closing the racial gap

Closing the racial achievement gap

Excellence

Maximize each child's potential

Academic performance of schools

Quality schools

Establish achievement goals

Keep balance between fiscal obligation and obligation to provide quality education

Transportation

Transportation considerations

Public transportation

Data

Consider quantifiable and qualitative data

Use ALL data and connect inputs to the decision (rationale)

Share all data

System-wide

System-wide

Look systematically

Integration/Diversity

Integration

Keep schools open in distressed communities

Diversity

Miscellaneous

Fair

Geography

Topography

Feeder patterns

Safety ++

Values and standards based

Budget

Population +

Teacher/staff quality ++

Equity ++

Not homogenous

Minimize bus time

Should reflect population and housing trends

Consider progress over a period of time

Consider complete context of what/who you have

Need complete and accurate data

Process lacks integrity because there is no verification of data

Cost/Benefit by school

Use maps and graphs to present to the community

Resource equity

Minimize the disruption of students

Apply a data driven ranking

Parental involvement

What is the optimal size of schools?

Keep middle school and K8 options – variety of options

Consider the needs of the children

What other recommendations should be made to the Pittsburgh Public Schools about **facilities and school closing decisions?**

Responses

Building Size and Condition

Building conditions ++

Up to date equipment

Define a workable size – not too big or too small

Complete inventory of all characteristics of each facility

Building condition

Costs

Cost and time for renovations ++  
Efficiency  
Building performance – cost, future cost for new construction  
Reduced costs

Re-Use Options and Community Needs  
Create a public disposition and reuse process  
Consider shared uses with community partners +  
Consider co-location +  
Analyze facilities for identified community needs  
Ability of community utilize excess capacity

Data  
Analyze student achievement data especially in terms of race,  
gender and economic factors by facility

Capacity  
Leave some excess capacity  
Prove that school has a certain number of excess seats  
Are facilities large enough to handle incoming students?

Safety  
Safety issues of mixing children from different neighborhoods  
Safety issue of new route to school

Transportation  
Bus stops and the requirement that they be 1.5 miles from  
someone's home before they can stop need to be reconsidered

#### Miscellaneous/Other Recommendations

School Board Issues  
The School Board should be held accountable  
Board shouldn't cater to their own neighborhoods  
Schools should stay closed  
There is a huge trust issue with the school board  
No more lobbying by board members  
Closing shouldn't be swayed by a public outcry

Miscellaneous  
A+ Schools should empower communities to hold public  
officials accountable  
Safe is subjective – safe school? Safe neighborhood? Principals  
leadership. Perception.  
Do not dis-invest in middle schools that remain  
PPS should convey its mission and purpose and directly link its  
activities to that purpose  
Look outside the district to see what others are doing and how  
Paradigm shift from crisis management to planning for optimal  
school district  
Can all schools start at the same time?  
Schools should accommodate the needs of working parents with  
better before and after school programs  
The public process contributes to the development of data  
categories then the school board is mandated to implement and  
explain the deviations

How do you get parent participation?  
Redefine what a neighborhood school is  
Neighborhood schools don't necessarily increase parent  
engagement or mean quality  
Raise the issue of desegregation – deserves it's own  
conversation

(The + sign indicates how many separate and individual times  
the comment was made.)