

Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools Literature Review

Summary of Research

(Numbers in parentheses refer to entries in the attached annotated bibliography)

AISD's Situation

- AISD is in a relatively unusual situation, in that its overall enrollment is steadily increasing, while certain campuses are experiencing enrollment declines. As such, the literature review did not yield many resources *directly applicable* to AISD's particular situation; however, helpful information may still be drawn from the experiences of other districts and general studies. In a large sense, this committee will be conducting groundbreaking work, and its findings and recommendations will certainly augment the available literature. (A15, A17, A18)

Closing Schools

- Closing a school can be a very difficult and emotional decision, yet many school districts across the country are finding themselves having to make such tough decisions due to significantly declining enrollments, major economic downturns, and aging facilities. Also, some schools are being closed due to continued poor academic performance. (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A8, A9, A11, A12, A16, A17, B14)

Alternatives to Closing Schools

- Alternatives to closing schools may be school repurposing/reuse, multi-purposing, consolidation, relocation, reconfiguration/restructuring, or rezoning/realignment; but, these alternatives may also be controversial, as many school districts are experiencing. (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A15, A18, B12)

Stakeholder Involvement

- Most school districts that are considering closures and other major decisions affecting schools realize the importance of stakeholder involvement. Often a variety of methods are used to gain community input and to keep stakeholders informed. (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A9, A12, A15, A16, A17, A18, B6, B12, B13, B14)

Connection to Strengthening Educational Value

- Saving money and maximizing use of resources is usually not enough to fully assuage community concerns over closing schools and other major decisions affecting schools; a direct connection to strengthening educational value must be clearly demonstrated. (A1, A5, A7, A10, A11, A12, A16, A17, B14)

Review Criteria

- Many school districts utilize specific criteria or standards for evaluating schools and considering closures and other major decisions affecting schools. These criteria usually cover a wide range of factors, some of which include: enrollment versus

capacity; academic and other program offerings; age and condition of buildings; student transportation; implications to receiving schools; estimated savings; equity concerns; and neighborhood impacts. (A2, A3, A5, A8, A9, A11, A12, A14, A16)

Neighborhoods and Schools

- Schools, particularly elementary schools, are important to the fabric of the neighborhoods they serve and lend to a sense of place. Schools often serve as community centers or neighborhood anchors. Yet, school planning and community planning rarely work in synch. Small, neighborhood schools have been identified as an integral part of sustainable neighborhoods. Schools that are walkable, successful, and well-maintained help attract middle-income families to, and keep them in, urban neighborhoods. (A6, A7, A13, A18, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, B12)

Plan Alignments

- Decisions affecting schools are guided by master education and facilities plans in some districts. (A1, A13, A16, B14)

Equity

- In decisions affecting the status of a school, some districts state the importance of demonstrating a sense of equity in both involvement and outcomes. (A5, A6, A7, A11, A15, A18)

Transition Plans

- If a decision is made to change the status of a school, some districts develop transition plans with stakeholder input. (A1, A5, A8, A9)

Other Topics

- If a school is closed, in addition to alternative district uses of the property, some districts consider cooperative use by other local governments and rental to private activities. (A1, A3, B12)
- If a school is closed for academic reasons, some districts ensure that students are reassigned to higher performing schools. (A10, A11)
- Positive alternative strategies may be considered for increasing enrollment at schools with low enrollment. (A14)

Annotated Bibliography

Note: Entries in the annotated bibliography are presented by “What Other School Districts Are Doing” (A), and “Additional Resources” (B) that are not specific to any particular school district. Due to subcategorization of the entries, the reference numbers are not listed in sequence.

A. What Other School Districts Are Doing

Closest Parallels to AISD’s Situation

A15. *School Consolidation Study*

http://www.dublin.k12.ca.us/ddo/files/School_Consolidation_Study_ver_3.pdf

Dublin Unified School District (Oakland Area) is experiencing growth in part of its district, while seeing some declining enrollment in other parts of its district. The school board formed a district optimization committee consisting of various stakeholders to make recommendations on possible consolidation of elementary schools. The committee looked at existing and optimal enrollments, facility conditions, and equity concerns and unanimously voted to recommend consolidation of two schools. The committee is continuing to look at other possible facility decisions for the district.

A17. *Possible School Closures*

<http://www.9news.com/news/education/article.aspx?storyid=62887>

Denver Public Schools is experiencing growth in part of its district, while seeing some declining enrollment in other parts of its district. Looking at efficiencies and budgetary demands, the superintendent recently announced that he is considering closing some schools, but he pointed out that closures may create opportunities for enriched smaller classroom learning experiences. The announcement is causing concerns to be raised in the community, and the superintendent has assured that he wants the community to have a conversation about closing schools and what to do with struggling schools.

A18. *Educational Opportunity Proposal*

<http://www.iowa-city.k12.ia.us/board/01-02/0219/boundary.htm>

Iowa City Community School District is experiencing growth in part of its district, while seeing some declining enrollment in other parts of its district. The school board considered closing some underutilized schools, but after numerous, well-attended meetings, the board clearly heard from citizens a strong desire to maintain neighborhood schools and school communities. As a result, the Board is combining the construction of new schools with renovations and additions to existing neighborhood schools. The board will also rely on long-term boundary adjustments to minimize disruptions.

Closing Schools

A10. *Closing of Schools*

http://policy.cps.k12.il.us/documents/index_to_policies.pdf

Chicago Public Schools adopted a policy on the closing of schools. The policy distinguishes between closures based on academic and non-academic reasons, the latter including space utilization, physical condition, alternative use, and conversion to charter school. The policy also includes provisions for impact analyses and public input prior to any final decisions being made. If a school is closed for academic reasons, students will be reassigned to higher performing schools.

School Rightsizing

A1. *Delivering More Effective Education through School Rightsizing*

<http://www.k12.dc.us/DCPS/rightsizing/rightsizehome.html>

District of Columbia Public Schools, experiencing declining enrollment and underutilized schools, is undergoing a “rightsizing” initiative. Transition plans for consolidations and collocations focus on optimum school size for education and space utilization. Transition plans look at expanding and strengthening educational value, enhancing resources, providing a safe and healthy physical environment, and creating new school communities.

A11. *Rightsizing Plan*

<http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/rightsizingplan.asp>

Pittsburgh Public Schools has developed a “rightsizing” plan. After conducting an in-depth consultant study and extensive public input, the district approved the plan, which includes the closure, moving, or reconfiguration of several schools. The plan also states several criteria of rightsizing decisions, including moving students from closed schools to higher-performing schools.

School Repurposing/Reuse

A2. *Closing Schools/Repurposing Buildings*

<http://www.moundviewschools.org/news.asp?DocID=618>

Mounds View Public Schools (St. Paul area) is facing declining enrollment, declining revenue, and available space. The district’s current strategy includes developing facility review criteria and scenarios, analyzing the effects of closing/ repurposing, and gaining community input.

A3. *Facility Reuse Plan*

http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/Facility_Reuse_Plan_Information.html

Facing declining enrollment, **Minneapolis Public Schools** initiated a reuse planning process, resulting in the proposed reuse of several school facilities as identified by a facilities utilization planning team. The team developed several criteria for targeting specific facilities. The district also conducted a broad community engagement process based on “listening and learning.”

School Consolidation

A4. School Consolidation

<http://www.tacoma.k12.wa.us/consolidation/index.asp>

Facing a continuing decline in enrollment, **Tacoma Public Schools** established a school consolidation advisory committee to examine current school conditions and to make consolidation recommendations. The district is currently considering the consolidation of certain schools.

A5. School Consolidation

<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/06consolidation/index.dxml>

Facing a continuing decline in enrollment, **Seattle Public Schools** established a community advisory committee on school facilities and programs guided by three principles: improving and sustaining academic effectiveness; equity; and minimizing disruption to students, families, and staff. The committee assessed data on current conditions, developed facility review criteria, and gained public input in making consolidation/closure recommendations.

Neighborhoods and Schools

A6. Neighborhood Vitality and Holland's Elementary Schools

http://holland.portfoliocms.com/cihollandmius/assets/CNS_NISC9-19-03.pdf

After the **Holland Public Schools** decided to restructure or repurpose several elementary schools, the City of Holland, Michigan formed a neighborhood impact study committee that reviewed a considerable amount of related literature and made recommendations on strategies to deal with possible neighborhood impacts, including physical, desirability, social, and neighborhood priority impacts.

A7. Neighborhood Schools Initiative

http://www2.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/supt/temp/NeighborhoodSchoolsInitiative/NSI_Background.html

Milwaukee Public Schools has launched a Neighborhood Schools Initiative (INS), a state-funded effort to reduce over-crowding and create more neighborhood school choices for parents and children. The district conducted an extensive parent and community outreach program to gain input in developing a detailed neighborhood schools plan. Through new buildings, renovations, school relocations, and community partnerships, more capacity has been added so that students may go to schools closer to where they live.

A13. Neighborhood Schools

http://www.ci.richland.wa.us/RICHLAND/planning/docs/11/docs/CF_Section_3_Schools.pdf?CFID=2532721&CFTOKEN=62080152

The City of Richland, Washington works closely with the **Richland School District** to make investments in improving schools, as evidenced in the city's comprehensive land use plan. The city and school district recognize and support the importance of neighborhood schools, which are also neighborhood centers and provide a sense of community to the families they serve. Students who attend these schools acquire a

sense of belonging and stability, and their educational progress is enhanced. In support of neighborhood schools, the district has defined attendance zones based on following existing neighborhood and natural boundaries, maximizing safe walking and minimizing busing, increasing the ability to provide diversity and equity in education, and maximizing the potential for students within a neighborhood to progress together from elementary to middle and high school.

Multiple or Other Topics

A8. *School Closures, Mergers, and Relocations*

<http://portal.sfusd.edu/template/default.cfm?page=home.Consolidations>

After developing facility review criteria and gaining public input, **San Francisco Unified School District** recently announced that it would close, merge, or relocate several schools. The district is continuing to experience declining enrollment and financial demands.

A9. *School Restructuring*

<http://www.rapidscc.com/artman/publish/index.shtml>

Facing declining enrollment and financial challenges, **Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools** established a district restructuring task force to assess current conditions and to make recommendations on possible school reconfigurations and school closures. The task force conducted several “listening sessions” to gain public input, and developed a set of criteria for closing schools.

A12. *Realigning Schools*

<http://www.detroit.k12.mi.us/admin/bs/bss/fm/realignment.htm>

Detroit Public Schools, like many large urban districts, is experiencing declines in enrollment based on economic downturns. The district established a facilities realignment committee that looked at considerable data on current conditions and developed facility review criteria. The committee produced a preliminary facilities realignment plan, involving the closing, reconfiguration, repurposing, or relocation of several schools. Goals include keeping students close to home, managing transportation costs, increasing operational efficiency, and maximizing resources. The district is currently seeking extensive public input.

A14. *Adequate Educational Facilities*

<http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/sbbcpolicies/docs/P5000.000.pdf>

Broward County Public Schools has established policies on adequate school facilities that include providing positive alternative strategies to be implemented within a designated timeframe for under-enrolled schools to increase their enrollment, and providing for the elimination of school centers and for the repurposing or consolidation of schools whenever the needs of pupils can better and more economically be served. These policies also include standards for overcrowded schools, standards for closing schools, and guidelines for the use of closed schools.

A16. *School Closure, Consolidation, and Replacement*

<http://web4j1.lane.edu/superintendent/closure/closureinfo.html>

Eugene School District 4J, facing declining enrollment and inadequate funding, is looking at the closure or consolidation of several schools over the next ten years. The school board formed a broad-based stakeholder committee to look not at the option of closing or consolidating schools, but which schools to close or consolidate. The committee looked at factors such as transportation, community impact, enrollment projections, program and facility considerations, and fiscal impact and savings. The work of the committee was often emotional and difficult, but after many meetings and consideration of input from a number of parents and community members, recommendations were made impacting several schools.

B. Additional Resources

Schools and Community and Economic Development

B1. *Public Schools as Community and Economic Development Tools*

http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/communitydevelopment/W02-9_Chung.pdf

As an integral part of the community fabric, neighborhood schools can have a profound impact on the social, economic, and physical character of a neighborhood. Reinforcing the link between public schools and neighborhoods is not only good educational policy, but also good community development policy. Specific strategies include: coordinating the development of affordable housing and public schools; building capacity of public schools to support community functions, particularly in disinvested urban areas; and supporting economic development efforts through relationships with local businesses and improving transitions for school to college or work.

B8. *Schools as Catalysts for Community Development*

http://www.aia.org/cae_a_20050622_catalysts

“Smart Growth” schools significantly enhance quality of life and economic opportunity in America’s cities and promote environmental and social sustainability. Population trends show more and more people preferring to live in urban rather than suburban communities, with shorter commute times being a major factor. Areas with lively downtowns and neighborhoods attract growth and jobs. But many urban neighborhoods have lost their schools, removing an important source of neighborhood cohesiveness and pride. There is a definite need to bring more schools into urban neighborhoods and to keep the remaining ones. There is no public or private building type as important to a community as a school. School district and municipal planners need to work more in unison to ensure that schools are both educational infrastructure and community infrastructure.

B11. *Relationship between Schools and Neighborhood Revitalization*

http://www.abtassoc.com/reports/Schools_and_Neighborhoods.pdf

Simultaneous investment in mixed-income housing and school reform may have more potential to reverse declining urban neighborhoods than investment in either housing or schools alone. Creating an excellent public elementary school can be a powerful

marketing tool to attract families to a neighborhood or persuade those already living there to stay. Having a good school in the neighborhood is a source of neighborhood pride and can help to foster a culture of excellence that has spillover effects into other aspects of family and neighborhood health. Not having to bus or transport children long distances is also an important factor. In fostering a relationship between schools and neighborhood revitalization, consulting with the community is important, particularly in developing an integrated vision for the neighborhood and the school and in building diverse, strong partnerships. In creating an effective urban school, selecting the right principal and developing a structure for local control is essential. It is also important to carry over strong expectations for children to the home, and encourage parents to get involved in the school and neighborhood.

Neighborhoods and Schools

B2. *Small Neighborhood Schools: A Community Asset Worth Keeping*

http://www.lgc.org/freepub/land_use/cv_liv_places_news/2001fall/index.html

We are gradually losing our small, walkable, neighborhood schools. Policies today encourage or even require that schools be big because of economies of scale. Unfortunately, these larger schools are often more dangerous, have lower performance and parent participation rates, and contribute to urban sprawl. A particular model can be found in Bakersfield, California, where the school superintendent resisted building a large, new school on the growing edge of the city and established a new, smaller school in a declining area of downtown that was within walking distance of older neighborhoods. As a result, downtown businesses have adopted classrooms, parents are more involved, and student achievement levels outpace those of any other school in the city.

B3. *Don't Destroy Neighborhoods to Educate Them*

<http://www.planetizen.com/node/39>

It is becoming more difficult to build, or retain, schools that people love – small schools, schools that kids can walk to, schools that tie neighborhoods together, and well-designed schools that inspire community pride. Specific problems include: acreage standards applied to schools; policies restricting the amount of money school districts may invest in the renovation of older schools; and a sharp disconnect between local land use planning and school facility planning. A particular model can be found in Maine, where the state's planning and education offices have teamed up to encourage local planning agencies and school districts to work together.

B5. *Good Schools, Good Neighborhoods*

<http://www.mrsc.org/ArtDocMisc/goodschoolsreport2.pdf>

Not long ago, schools were found at the cornerstones of communities; today, many schools are located far from the neighborhoods they serve. Newer schools also tend to be larger, not like smaller, older schools that were built for a less auto-dependent age. The modernization of schools has come at a price – the loss of walkable, neighborhood-scale schools, in favor of larger, more remote campuses accessible primarily by school bus or chauffeuring parents. Forty years ago, half of all students walked or biked to

school; today, only one in ten students walk or bike to school. But a stronger connection between school planning and neighborhood planning is necessary to ensure walkable schools. Finding ways to save existing schools and integrating new schools into neighborhoods has payoffs for both students and the community.

B6. *Great Schools by Design*

<http://www.archfoundation.org/aaf/documents/nssd.report.pdf>

It is important to seek strategies to preserve neighborhood schools whenever possible. Neighborhood schools allow many students to walk to school; smaller schools reinforce student achievement; and strong neighborhood schools bolster property values. Preserving neighborhood schools provides the basis for nurturing the link between the school and the larger community. Successful schools often are ones with great support and involvement from the community and ones that serve as centers for a variety of community services as well. Decisions affecting schools should be made with the full input of the community. Public processes need to start early, allowing for community input long before final decisions are made, and involving all school and community stakeholders.

B9. *Schools Cycle Back into the Heart of the Neighborhood*

<http://www.osba.org/hotopics/imprmnt/neighborhoodschools/cineighborhood.pdf>

The Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative is seeing signs of schools returning to the hearts of communities. Countering decades of urban sprawl and schools more and more distant from the populations they serve, some school boards and communities are pushing back. They're challenging "big box" designs for new schools and moving toward more sustainable facilities, and they're upgrading existing neighborhood schools and making them parts of walkable communities. A major component of success is building community support. School boards are encouraged to bring all stakeholders to the table, give planning committees adequate time, question "rules" that don't make sense, push for good design, and build, maintain, or rehabilitate community centered schools. Schools are great examples of interconnected systems to which the principles of sustainability can be applied with wide ranging benefits.

B10. *Why Johnny Can't Walk to School*

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/downloads/schools_why_johnny.pdf

Although this report focuses on the preservation and renovation of historic school buildings, it also speaks to the general implications of losing neighborhood schools. Smaller, neighborhood schools serve as the centers of communities and tend to provide anchorage to neighborhoods. They also provide a greater sense of independence for young people, allowing them options to walk or bike to school and to be more identifiable in a more cordial environment. Several factors tend to undermine the sustainability of neighborhood schools, including acreage standards, standards requiring facility replacement over renovation, and disconnects between community planning and school planning. However, more and more communities are speaking out to keep smaller, neighborhood schools vital.

Schools and Smart Growth

B4. *Education and Smart Growth*

http://www.fundersnetwork.org/usr_doc/education_paper.pdf

The trend toward building new schools on large sites far from centers of population – called “school sprawl” or “school giantism” – can have far reaching impacts on school children, school districts, and the larger community. Large schools reduce educational outcomes, particularly for at-risk youth. Schools that are more distant diminish student participation in extracurricular activities, walking to school, parental involvement, and taxpayer support. Many suggest that the growing physical disconnect between schools and community helps create a level of student anonymity and social alienation that sets the stage for tragic events like Columbine. Smart Growth advocates encourage the continued use of existing schools and the construction of new schools on infill sites within existing neighborhoods. This interest dovetails with education reform interested in smaller schools.

B7. *Smart Growth Schools*

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/downloads/schools_smartgrowth_facts.pdf

The trend toward abandoning smaller, neighborhood schools in favor of larger campuses farther away from the communities they serve has resulted in fewer children walking or biking to school, increased vehicular traffic, fewer schools serving as community centers, and fewer children feeling a sense of belonging in their schools. “Smart Growth” schools have several benefits, including: involving the community in school planning; making good use of existing resources; locating schools within neighborhoods and fitting them into the scale and design of the neighborhood; and acting as a neighborhood anchor. In addition, Smart Growth schools inspire community involvement, improve academic achievement, save money, improve student health, and improve environmental quality. One of the biggest barriers to Smart Growth Schools is the lack of cooperation and understanding between local planning and development authorities and school districts.

Closing Schools

B12. *Closing Public Schools: Criteria, Community Engagement, and Alternatives*

<http://visc.sis.pitt.edu/aplus/slides/BESTPresentation.pdf>

School closures may be triggered by economics, declining enrollment, and other demands for school land and/or buildings. Closing schools can create a number of concerns, including ability of other schools to receive displaced students, student transportation, and neighborhood impacts. Community criteria include relation to land use, transportation, and housing plans, safety, parental involvement and connection to schools, and potential for facility reuse. In terms of excess capacity, having too much space is not the same as having too many schools. Buildings may need to be down-sized, or space can be shared with non-school, paying tenants. Also, schools can have more than one campus (i.e., they can be multi-purposed). Decisions affecting schools must be made with community engagement, including comprehensive and current information, transparent processes, and sufficient time.

B13. *School Closures in Ontario: Who Has the Final Say?*

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/pdf%20files/kwarteng.pdf>

Since 1999, over 300 schools have been closed in Ontario, primarily based on the economics of keeping them open. The provincial government established new guidelines on school closure. Each school board, with the assistance of a public committee, must develop a valuation tool for considering school closure, including the school's value to students, the community, the school system, and the local economy. If a school is marked for closure, at least one year's notice must be given to the community. A task force with broad representation must gain community input. If a school board decides to close a school, its decision can be appealed through petition, triggering a review by an independent party. But these new guidelines do not diminish the fact that school boards still have considerable authority to make school closure decisions. Unfortunately, public participation is often used to create the impression that school closure decisions are community business; consequently, when community members feel their voices have been marginalized, they may construe school closure decisions to be unfair.

B14. *The Hardest Choice*

<http://www.asbj.com/specialreports/1206SpecialReports/S1.html>

Closing schools is one of the most difficult, but sometimes necessary, decisions a district can face. Schools hold more than learning opportunities; shutting one down can snuff out the vitality of a neighborhood. Yet scores of districts across the country are forging ahead into one of the least desirable territories of school management. This is often related to declining enrollment and falling revenues, but may also be related to decrepit building conditions and history of academic performance. Deciding that school closures are necessary is only half the battle; choosing which schools to close, determining the criteria, and involving all the right people are land mines that districts must navigate carefully. Sufficient time must be allowed to public discussion. The public must be convinced that closing a school is more than about saving money – the connection to improved academics must be proven.