

## Strategies for reorganizing and repurposing schools

### Community input:

- Communities often [feel excluded](#) from closure decisions. Opportunities for community input on closure should be multiple and real, and community input should have a meaningful impact on decisions about whether and how to close.
- These opportunities can include public forums where school board members listen to concerns, document them, respond, reshape plans, and return with more information, as well as surveys and other opportunities for input.
- Public meetings should be well-advertised, with plenty of notice, and they should be held a variety of times in places that people frequent (e.g., churches, mosques, libraries, the school, community centers), with childcare and food provided.
- Once a closure decision is made, school board members should be transparent about the decision: how it was arrived at, what evidence was considered, how community input shaped the decision, and what was done to avoid closure.

### Planning:

- The closure process should be [inclusive and transparent](#). See California's [guide](#).
- Form a closure committee to investigate how to close in a way to minimize disruption to students and the community and maximize educational opportunity and community resources. The committee should represent a variety of stakeholders, including families and, as appropriate, students.
- Develop a draft plan, seek feedback, and then revise the plan. Provide opportunities (e.g., surveys, listening sessions) to hear concerns and then work to address those concerns. Make sure to reach out to groups that might be especially concerned with the closure, such as families living particularly far from the new school site or families whose home language isn't English, to ensure their concerns are heard and addressed.
- Know the demographics of the closed schools and affected neighborhoods; seek to make the burden of closure something that is shared across race and class lines and keep schools in places that need them the most. Conduct an [equity analysis](#).
- Consider how to honor the closed school with closing rituals, such as creating a time capsule, and how to prepare students for the transition, with opportunities like tours of the new facility.
- Give special consideration to [students on IEPs and 504s](#). Make sure that records are not lost and that services are maintained during the transition.
- Have a conversation about "success": how will you know that the closure has gone well? Identify targets around indicators like student learning, closure cost, extracurricular involvement, student travel time, student behavior, student absenteeism, graduation rates, local awareness and engagement with feedback mechanisms, family involvement, turnout at closure-related events, and teacher turnover. Then think backwards from those indicators to lay out a plan to reach them.

### Communication:

- Make the data that's informing the decision to close accessible to communities. Communities should have the opportunity to discuss it with district leaders before decisions are reached.
- Throughout the process, communication should come from the same source, and it should be through modes that families use (e.g., social media, email, notes home).
- To reach families that don't speak English, use translated materials, in-person outreach with translators, and community ambassadors.

### Students' experiences:

- Administrators and teachers need to work to [integrate the students](#) and, especially, to ensure that students from the closed school receive an equitable and inclusive education at the new school site.
- Think of the receiving school as a “new school”; students can vote on school colors and a mascot. Give students and families the opportunity to vision the new school together.
- Before the first day of school, hold a picnic or community festival that brings families together from all of the communities that will be attending the new school. Continue these kinds of opportunities throughout the year, so that students and families are not just interacting during the school day, but outside of it, too.
- Track students’ academic progress from the closed school, and ensure they are equitably represented in honors and advanced courses, career and tech ed programs, or other special opportunities.
- Make sure that sports teams, clubs, honors/advanced courses, student government associations, and other extracurricular groups have strong representation from students from the closed site. Also consider representation on bodies like student government and prom courts or the selection of valedictorian and salutatorian; it might be useful to expand these bodies or deliberately designate seats for students from the closed school.
- Finally, ask teachers and counselors to listen carefully for bullying and respond quickly; students need to understand that place-based exclusion is not tolerated in the new school, and all school adults are supportive of them and this merger.

#### Teachers’ experiences:

- Involve teachers from the closed school in decisions about where they will go, and make sure that union representatives are also a part of these conversations so that contract provisions are followed.
- Create a coalition of teachers, representing a variety of grade levels and/or subjects, at each of the sites (closed and new schools) to figure out the logistics of closure and address concerns, including how supplies will arrive at new classrooms. They can also bring concerns back to school leadership.
- Continue to monitor teachers’ comfort throughout the first year.

#### Repurposing the old school site:

- Repurpose the closed school site. Possible uses include community centers, day care centers, local museums, and afterschool program sites.
- When repurposing school buildings, prioritize community needs and resources. Survey local community members and hold community meetings to collaboratively decide the use of the building.
- The community can also seek to retain control of the buildings, whether through a local nonprofit, an alumni association, or some other community organization.
- Retaining community control or dedicating the space to community use can be a part of closure negotiations.
- Also consider maintaining small school programs (e.g., tech programs, preKs, kindergartens) in the school building, but [co-locating](#) other community programs/uses, like a community performing arts space, library, or nursing home.
- Ask the [city government](#) to set aside resources or provide tax breaks to support the repurposing of buildings.

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