

Equity Audit Evaluation of Portland Public Schools' (PPS) Southeast Enrollment and Program Balancing Initiative

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Detailed Executive Summary of Findings

Portland Public Schools, hereafter referred to as (PPS), implemented the Enrollment and Program Balancing initiative as part of a broader district effort to address enrollment imbalances, program access, and related equity concerns across Southeast Portland schools. As part of this effort, PPS partnered with and commissioned Dr. Terrance L. Green and his team to conduct an equity audit evaluation of the enrollment and program balancing initiative process and its implementation. The partnership officially began on January 20, 2026, and the final report was submitted on June 10, 2026.

Many PPS stakeholders and participants commonly referred to this effort as SEGC, which stands for Southeast Guiding Coalition. Since SEGC was frequently used by participants during interviews and conversations to describe the broader process, we use SEGC in many places throughout this report to reflect participants' language. Unless we are specifically referring to members of the Southeast Guiding Coalition itself, references to SEGC in this report should be understood as referring to the broader Enrollment and Program Balancing initiative and its related processes.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide PPS with empirical data to better understand how SEGC-related changes were experienced by students,² families, principals, educators, and staff, in schools that experienced boundary changes, program relocations, enrollment shifts, and other related transitions. The report also examines patterns in student outcomes in these impacted schools before and after SEGC implementation, while recognizing that these outcomes are shaped by multiple factors and should not be interpreted as solely caused by SEGC.

Findings from this evaluation are intended to identify areas of equity and inequity across the SEGC process, implementation, and outcomes, including how decisions were made, communicated, implemented, supported, and experienced over time. Through this report, we aim to provide useful, evidence-based, and humanizing data that can inform PPS's future decisions about enrollment balancing, boundary changes, program relocation, school consolidation and closures, and other districtwide changes in ways that are more equitable, transparent, and responsive to school communities.

Brief Data Sources for This Report (a detailed description of our data sources and methods in later in this report)

For this audit, we collected data from all 20 schools that were impacted by SEGC changes. As such, we collected data from a variety of sources to address each focus area. Our data collection sources for this report includes:

² While students' experiences are deeply important to understanding the full impact of SEGC, this evaluation did not include direct student interviews or focus groups for several reasons. This decision was shaped primarily by the compressed timeline for completing the report. The evaluation began several months later than originally anticipated, in part because the district was engaged in the Jefferson Rising conversations and related work, as well as ongoing budget concerns. Based on our prior experience, securing parent or guardian consent for student participation can require a longer timeline than was available for this phase of the evaluation. Similarly, this evaluation did not include new data collection from central office stakeholders. In consultation with the district, we understood that many of the central office leaders who led or were most directly involved in SEGC were no longer with PPS. Given the scope and timeline of this evaluation, we prioritized understanding how SEGC was experienced at the school level by educators, school leaders, families, and community members, as well as examining patterns in school-level outcomes before and after implementation.

Survey Responses

- 905 respondents to a family and caregiver survey
- 327 respondents to an administrator, teacher, and staff survey

*Administrative Data*³

- **Summary records of 51,983 students enrolled in PPS** elementary and middle schools from 2020–21 through 2024–25, and for 4,717 school-based personnel from 2020–21 through 2025–26.
- **School enrollment data:** Five years of school-level enrollment data from 2020–21 through 2024–25, including school enrollment dates and exit dates. Students who transferred into PPS after October 1 of each year were not included in the dataset. High schools were not included. For analyses, students were assigned to the school they attended for the most days during each school year.
- **Student demographic and enrollment records:** Student-level records, using masked student IDs, including grade level, gender, race and ethnicity, special education status, multilingual learner status, and home or primary language.
- **Student attendance data:** Student-level attendance records, including number of days present and absent.
- **Student discipline data:** Number and type of student-level exclusionary disciplinary incidents.
- **Student achievement data:** Student-level Oregon Statewide Assessment System (OSAS) math and English language arts (ELA) scaled scores, used to examine academic outcomes and patterns over time.
- **Dual language immersion (DLI) program access and enrollment data:** School- and student-level data on Dual Language Immersion programs, including which schools offered these programs and which students were enrolled in them.
- **Personnel data:** School staff-level data from 2020–21 through 2025–26, including position, school assignment, race and ethnicity, years of overall experience, years of experience in the district, exit dates, and exit reasons. The dataset included instructional and administrative staff (e.g., teachers, educational assistants, principals, assistant principals, librarians, instructional specialists, and office administrative assistants).
- **School-level free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligibility** in 2022–23 from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data.

³ Administrative data refers to information routinely collected and maintained by a school district or public agency for operational, compliance, or reporting purposes, such as enrollment, attendance, discipline, staffing, program participation, and student outcome records.

- PPS Board Documents related to SEGC Changes and notes prior consulting firms that helped the district through the SEGC process.

Focus Groups and Interviews with approximately 100 people

- Approximately 50 focus groups with administrators (i.e., school principals and assistant principals), staff, families, and/or SEGC members
- 10 interviews with administrators, staff, families, and/or SEGC members

Detailed Executive Summary of Findings

Domain 1: Equitable Access to Robust Middle Schools *and all SEGC-impacted schools*⁴

Guiding Questions:

1. To what extent did SEGC boundary changes improve enrollment balance across schools, especially middle schools, by race, income, and language status?
2. To what extent were opportunity gaps in achievement, attendance, and discipline reduced among students affected by enrollment shifts, especially in middle schools?
3. How do students and families from historically underserved communities describe the quality of learning environments they experienced after SEGC-related shifts in middle schools?
4. How do administrators, teachers, and staff describe the quality of learning environments after SEGC-related shifts?⁵

Key Findings:

RQ1: To what extent did SEGC boundary changes improve enrollment balance across schools, especially middle schools, by race, income, and language status?

- **Enrollment across SEGC schools became more balanced, particularly at the middle school level.** Non-SEGC schools went the other direction. The difference between the highest-and lowest-enrolled SEGC middle schools narrowed from approximately 320 students in 2020–21 to about 220 in 2024–25, including Kellogg Middle School, which opened in 2021–22 and had the highest enrollment among middle schools in 2024–25. By contrast, the range of enrollment numbers at non-SEGC middle schools increased by about 45 students. SEGC elementary school enrollment

⁴ This portion of the research question was expanded after the original proposal. The phrase “and all SEGC-impacted schools” was added to strengthen the contextual scope of the analysis and to better account for the range of school communities affected by SEGC-related changes. The expanded framing allows the study to examine middle school access while also situating those findings within the broader experiences of all SEGC-impacted schools.

⁵ The question was revised to remove the specific reference to middle schools in order to better align with the broader scope of the preliminary findings. While some findings may draw from middle school experiences, the revised question allows the analysis to examine how administrators, teachers, and staff described learning environments across SEGC-related shifts more generally. FYI, the initial question in the proposal was: How do administrators, teachers, and staff describe the quality of learning environments they experienced after SEGC-related shifts in middle schools?

also became more uniform, with the difference between the highest-and lowest-enrolled schools narrowing by over 100 students.

- **Enrollment balancing should be interpreted in the context of broader enrollment decline.** It is important to note that declining enrollment in general contributed to the balancing. SEGC elementary school enrollment declined, on average, by 20% between 2020–21 and 2024–25, compared to 14% among elementary schools outside SEGC. Middle school enrollment declined by an average of about 9% in SEGC schools and about 5% outside SEGC schools over the same period.
- **Overall, SEGC enrollment projections overestimated enrollment at 12 of 20 schools.** On October 1, 2024, 12 schools were under their projected 2025 enrollment by at least 20 students. However, when assigning students to schools based on the school they enrolled in for the most days, only seven schools were under enrollment projections by 20 or more students. This is a conservative estimate since students who transferred into PPS after October 1 are not included in the data. Nevertheless, of the 7 schools that continued to be meaningfully under their enrollment targets, three experienced intensive changes, such as a grade level reconfiguration or program relocation. The other four had boundary or feeder-school changes that did not result in the anticipated enrollment gains. These projection gaps have important implications for school planning and stability. When enrollment is lower than projected, schools may face midstream adjustments to staffing, schedules, course offerings, intervention supports, and enrichment opportunities.
- **SEGC-impacted schools have fewer students than projected, but they are more racially diverse and more often need language and special education support.** SEGC schools are serving about 11% more students who identify as Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latino/a/x,⁶ Pacific Islander, or biracial/multiracial (i.e., BIPOC or students of color) students than anticipated, on average. They also serve higher portions of multilingual learners (+4%) and students with special needs (+5%) than projected on average. The percentage of students who are low-income was predicted to be about 29% for 2025, but the data for that year are not available. In 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Education, these schools averaged 56% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2022–23. This has implications for whether staffing and resource allocations are matched to actual needs.

RQ2: To what extent were opportunity gaps in achievement, attendance, and discipline reduced among students affected by enrollment shifts, especially in middle schools?

⁶ In this report, Latino/a/x is used as an inclusive pan-ethnic term to refer broadly to students, families, and communities with Latin American heritage or ancestry. The term acknowledges gendered and gender-inclusive forms of identity, including Latino, Latina, and Latinx. We recognize that people within this group may identify in many different ways and that the term does not capture the full diversity of national origin, race, language, culture, or lived experience represented across these communities. Put simply, we recognize that no single term fully captures the diversity of people, histories, racial identities, national origins, languages, and cultural experiences represented within this category.

- **Students attending SEGC schools had similar academic and behavioral outcomes in 2023–24 and 2024–25 to their peers who attended non-SEGC schools.** We paired students attending SEGC schools in 2022–23 with peers enrolled in other schools using inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW), and, as a sensitivity analysis, coarsened exact matching (CEM). We then compared how OSAS performance, attendance rates, and exclusionary discipline rates changed during and after the SEGC changes were implemented. Overall, the analysis shows that students enrolled in SEGC schools showed similar patterns across most academic and behavioral outcomes compared to their matched peers elsewhere in PPS.
- **Several student groups showed positive associations between SEGC changes and ELA performance relative to their matched peers in non-SEGC schools.** The largest was for Black students, who gained roughly +0.13 standard deviations (SD) in 2023–24, although this estimate was not statistically significant in 2024–25 and did not hold under the CEM sensitivity check. Elementary students gained about +0.05 SD in 2023–24 and +0.06 SD in 2024–25. Students in schools where more than 50% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in the baseline year gained +0.06 SD in 2023–24. Multilingual students showed consistent ELA gains by two different measures: students classified as multilingual learners gained +0.09 SD in 2024–25, and students whose home language is not English gained +0.07 SD in 2023–24 and +0.09 SD in 2024–25. Students enrolled in DLI in the baseline year gained +0.11 SD in ELA in 2024–25. In math, the largest positive estimate was again for multilingual learners, who gained about +0.09 SD in 2024–25, though this result did not reach statistical significance. These results represent small- to medium-effect sizes (Kraft, 2020).⁷ Sensitivity analyses using CEM produced directionally consistent estimates for several subgroups, with somewhat larger magnitudes for multilingual learners in both ELA and math.

For engagement outcomes, students whose home language is not English and Asian students each showed slightly higher attendance in 2024–25 (+1.5 and +1.7 percentage points, respectively). Exclusionary discipline was modestly lower in 2024–25 for a few groups, including students with high 2022–23 math OSAS scores and students in lower-poverty schools in the baseline year, on the order of 0.03 to 0.05 fewer incidents per pupil.

- **No significant academic differences are associated with SEGC changes among middle school students.** The matched study detects no significant association between SEGC status and OSAS scores, attendance rates, or exclusionary discipline rates for middle school students. This finding is notable because families with only middle schoolers report notably lower satisfaction with their students' learning environments than families with elementary students or a mix of elementary and middle school

⁷ Kraft, M. A. (2020). Interpreting effect sizes of education interventions. *Educational Researcher*, 49(4), 241–253.

students. The perception gap⁸ is real, but their students perform comparably to matched peers in non-SEGC schools.

RQ3: How do students and families from historically underserved communities describe the quality of learning environments they experienced after SEGC-related shifts in middle schools?

- **Within the middle school perception gap, the largest differences are in school environment and learning.** Families with only elementary students rate high-quality learning environments at 61% versus 45% for families with only middle school students or with both middle school and elementary students. Regarding absence of disrespect or bias, the split is 66% versus 48% (54% for families with both middle school and elementary school students). On belonging, 78% versus 64–66% for families with middle school students. Additionally, 73% of families with only elementary students agree that their student is learning a lot vs. 57–59% of families with only middle school students or a mix of middle and elementary students. These gaps suggest that middle school families perceive qualitative differences in their children's school and learning environments.

RQ4: How do administrators, teachers, and staff describe the quality of learning environments after SEGC-related shifts?

- **Staffing reductions and enlarged class demands made learning environments more challenging and harder to sustain.**
Across multiple schools, staff described large classes, fewer adults, more students with complex needs, and less ability to differentiate instruction. In several schools, participants linked reduced staffing and larger classes to weaker support for project-based learning and middle-school grades programming. Participants also said classroom quality “varies widely,” with some high-rigor rooms and others not. Educators described classes with students with many IEPs, behavior needs, and safety concerns, while participants at other schools explicitly tied class size to declining ability to offer a comprehensive middle school or relationship-rich elementary environment. In one school, staff described teachers with multiple preps and class loads in the high 30s or low 40s. In the survey, about half of staff agree that students experience high-quality learning environments (54%) and that collaboration supports teaching (56%). However, only 16% agree that class sizes are distributed manageably, and 64% say class sizes are too large.
- **Spanish DLI consolidation from SEGC changes was described as both more coherent and more costly.**
In one school, staff said the shift to a full-school Spanish DLI model felt “much more intentional” and more equitable than the prior split structure, while also describing loss of neighborhood access and walkability for students who were part of the neighborhood

⁸ Here, “perception gap” means there is a meaningful difference between how middle school families feel about or rate their students’ school experiences and what the measured student outcome data show.

program. In other schools, staff said bringing the DLI community into one middle school was “much more helpful” and better for the program but also noted that DLI students could lose elective access because they needed to continue Spanish coursework. Other participants described the loss of Spanish immersion as a loss of racial and cultural diversity and program breadth, while staff at another school described neighborhood students losing the daily presence and connection of the DLI community after the program moved out. So DLI consolidation strengthened coherence in some places while redistributing costs elsewhere.

- **Interventions and targeted support were repeatedly described as crucial, but fragile.**

Some participants described reading and math intervention classes as transformative, helping students feel “seen and heard and helped and met where they are,” but also warned that they were “scrambling to keep them” because the same cuts that made interventions more necessary also made them precarious. Others described title-funded intervention, counseling, and climate investments as essential but vulnerable to future cuts. Across several schools, participants described significant gaps between student need and adult support, especially for students with disabilities, chronic absenteeism, or high behavioral needs. Staff said students had more access to electives and specialists, but they were concerned that fewer intervention supports made it harder to meet the needs of a student body with increasingly different learning needs. Only 31% of staff survey respondents agreed that students have equitable access to high-quality programs.

Domain 2: Linguistic Equity for Historically Underserved Students in Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Programs and Electives

Guiding Research Questions:

1. To what extent did access to DLI, electives, or advanced programs expand for historically underserved students after program relocation per SEGC changes?
2. To what extent does the relocation of programs and boundary changes displace students from their newly assigned schools?
3. To what extent is student displacement happening in DLI programs as a result of SEGC program relocation? If so, for whom?

Key Findings:

To what extent did access to DLI, electives, or advanced programs expand for historically underserved students after program relocation per SEGC changes?

- **Total SEGC DLI enrollment reached 86% of projected targets by 2024–25.** Total DLI enrollment in the SEGC region declined by 9% between 2020–21 and 2024–25. It stands about 280 students short of the 1,959-student target the district set in 2021. The aggregate decline masks variation across programs. Enrollment in Spanish DLI, the largest program, held steady. Vietnamese DLI more than tripled from a small base (17 to 57 students). Mandarin and Russian lost about 20% enrollment and Japanese DLI enrollment declined by 5%. Districtwide, total DLI enrollment held steady because non-SEGC DLI programs gained more than 100 students during the same period.
- **Spanish DLI programs are growing toward or exceeding enrollment targets, reaching 104.5% of the 2025 projection in aggregate (811 vs 776).** Three of four Spanish DLI sites exceeded their targets, and one stood at 76% of the projection as of 2024–25. Latino/a/x students discontinue DLI at only 1-2% per year, lower than most other racial groups except multiracial students (who discontinue at less than 1%). White and Asian discontinuation rates are also low (each under 3% per year). Black students discontinue at 7–17% per year, substantially higher than any other group, though small sample sizes (58-93 students per year) introduce uncertainty in single-year estimates. From 2022–23 to 2024–25, the share of Latino/a/x students enrolled in SEGC DLI programs rose by 4 percentage points (31% to 35%), slightly outpacing the 3-point increase in non-SEGC DLI programs (41% to 44%). However, non-SEGC programs continued to enroll a higher share of Latino/a/x students throughout the period, by about 9 percentage points.
- **Heritage language match in DLI programs varies by program and by SEGC status.** In 2024–25, the percentage of students whose home language matched the DLI program's language ranged from under 10% (Japanese, both SEGC and non-SEGC)

and roughly 1% (non-SEGC Mandarin) at the low end to 58% (SEGC Vietnamese) at the high end, with Spanish (around 43-44%), SEGC Mandarin (37%), and SEGC Russian (56%) in between. Two of the SEGC programs most affected by relocation gained heritage speakers over the five-year period. Spanish DLI rose about 8 percentage points alongside modest enrollment growth, and SEGC Mandarin DLI rose about 8 percentage points even as the program lost roughly a fifth of its enrollment. Two programs moved in the opposite direction. SEGC Russian DLI lost about 6 points of heritage language speaker share as Russian and Ukrainian families left the program, and non-SEGC Vietnamese DLI lost nearly 12 points.

To what extent does the relocation of programs and boundary changes displace students from their newly assigned schools?

- **DLI-enrolled students whose program moved to another school largely stayed in PPS, whether or not they followed their DLI program to the new school.** The percentage of DLI-enrolled students leaving the district in SEGC schools is not notably different from that in DLI programs outside SEGC. On average, DLI students leave PPS at roughly half the rate of non-DLI students. At SEGC schools, the exit rate for DLI-enrolled students is about 6% compared to 11% for students not enrolled in DLI in 2023–24. The gap is similar (about 7% vs. 10%) at non-SEGC schools.

To what extent is student displacement happening in DLI programs as a result of SEGC program relocation? If so, for whom?

- **Students enrolled in DLI programs that moved generally followed their program to the school it relocated to when they stayed in PPS.** Among students left their programs upon relocation, they more often identified as white and more often speak a language other than English at home. For programs that stayed in place, on average across years, students who speak English at home again had higher retention rates than students speaking other languages at home.
- **Mandarin DLI enrollment for elementary students held steady when their program moved. Middle school enrollment declined with relocation but now serves a higher share of Chinese speakers.** One strand of elementary Mandarin DLI maintained its pre-SEGC enrollment level after relocating. The Mandarin middle school DLI program is enrolled about 80% of its peak pre-relocation size (97 vs. 121 students) in 2024–25 but is 43% below the SEGC plan's enrollment forecast of 168. The relocation reshaped the program's composition more than its size: heritage language speakers now make up 38% of enrollment, up from 12% before the move, an increase of 26 percentage points.
- **One school converted to whole-school DLI, displacing non-DLI neighborhood families along racial lines.** Almost 60% of students left the school after 2022–23, primarily to their newly assigned elementary and middle schools. Black students were almost entirely displaced. The school's share of Black students dropped from 10% to

2%. The Latino/a/x share rose dramatically, from 49% to 69%, reflecting the conversion to a whole-Spanish DLI school.

Domain 3: Leaders, Educator, and Staff Experiences

Guiding Research Questions:

1. To what extent did the SEGC process affect administrator, educator and staff morale and retention, especially among personnel of color?
2. To what extent did administrators, educators and staff feel equipped to support students and families during and after SEGC-related changes?
3. How do administrators, educators, and staff, particularly those of color, experience the SEGC changes in terms of emotional well-being and professional support?
4. How did administrators, educators, and staff describe the experiences of students and families from historically underserved communities after SEGC-related shifts?

Key Findings:

RQ1: To what extent did the SEGC process affect administrator, educator and staff morale and retention, especially among personnel of color?

- **Staff morale was most negatively affected where SEGC-related change overlapped with repeated staffing loss, turnover, or role instability.**

Across schools, staff described morale not as a single dip tied to SEGC changes alone, but as a sustained response to annual cuts, un-assignment of staff, role reassignment, or ongoing instability. For example, at one school, staff described the merged years post SEGC as so taxing that one participant said they “wanted to quit, like, every day.” At another school, school-based staff described morale as “poor” and one participant reported taking a five-week mental health leave. Participants also described annual reductions of “three to four FTE per year,” sometimes even seven or eight at a time, while some participants at several schools described living in a “doing more with less” environment that eroded job security and left burnout feeling “imminent.”

- **Strong internal culture and leadership buffered morale but did not eliminate strain.**

Several SEGC-impacted schools held two realities at once, that is, they were internally strong and externally strained. Participants at one school described the school as having a “bright future” with strong relationships and calm classrooms, even while staff talked about what they called “trauma bonding” around looming district cuts. Participants at another school described the school as both “a good place to be” and a place where “burnout felt ‘imminent for everybody.’” Participants at two schools described long-term leadership and strong internal culture as major stabilizers, while participants at one school described a shift from low staff confidence to a more “people-centered” climate, and participants at another school repeatedly contrasted positive day-to-day morale with deep anxiety about district-level cuts. In other words, morale was buffered where leadership and peer culture were strong, but that buffering often looked more like preventing collapse than producing ease.

- **Administrator and principal turnover preceded the major changes.** In 2021–22, 55% of principals at SEGC schools left, compared to 26% at non-SEGC schools. Districtwide, schools with the highest staff retention were more likely to have kept the same principal across all six years (7 of 19 districtwide) and the bottom quartile of retention almost always had principal turnover (15 of 19 schools districtwide). Ten SEGC schools appear in the bottom quartile of staff retention in PPS, and the district pattern holds among them: 8 of the 10 had principal turnover. Principal turnover is notably associated with lower staff retention, fewer long-tenured staff, and higher rates of new hires.
- **Evidence about personnel of color suggests distinct burdens and, in some places, distinct forms of affirmation. However, the cross-school data is not strong enough for broad generalization because of the small sample size of personnel of color.** One school provides the clearest evidence that SEGC and school context intersected with staff racial and linguistic identities. One bilingual educator described the current school as a place where they no longer had to “explain who I am” or overthink their language, while another recounted being told by a colleague, “don’t speak in Spanish in front of me,” while working at another PPS campus. A participant at another school explicitly described seeing “an exodus of administrators of color, of staff of color” because systems to support them were not in place, before and after SEGC changes. Participants also highlighted the emotional and symbolic harm of district layoffs that heavily impacted colleagues of color in the central office. These examples matter, but because our school-by-school data does not explicitly state that staff race was not consistently identified, the data support a suggestive but not comprehensive cross-school claim.
- **The SEGC implementation year produced a dramatic one-year staffing disruption.** After the 2022–23 school year, 32% of staff at SEGC schools left their school, compared to 19% at non-SEGC schools. By 2024–25, the gap had closed to 2 points (20% vs. 18%). The disruption was acute but temporary in the aggregate. Assistant principals were hardest hit as more than 50% (7 of 13) left their school vs. 26% in the rest of the district.
- **Staff of Color bore the sharpest impact.** In 2022–23, 39% of Staff of Color at SEGC schools left their schools, compared with 21% at non-SEGC schools, an 18-point gap. The gap for white staff was about 10 points (29% vs. 19%). Part of this is driven by DLI program relocation in which sending schools lost bilingual/multilingual and Staff of Color and receiving schools gained them. Nevertheless, Staff of Color at SEGC schools also left the district at elevated rates: 18% compared to 10% for Staff of Color elsewhere in the district. By 2024–25, Staff of Color turnover at SEGC schools had returned to roughly the non-SEGC rate (19% vs. 17%), but the implementation year produced a real loss of Staff of Color.
- **The three largest racial groups experienced SEGC changes differently.** Black staff at SEGC schools (n=12–16 per year) show persistently elevated turnover and the

highest involuntary termination rate, nearly 5 times the rate for white staff (though numbers are small). Latino/a/x staff experienced the sharpest 2022–23 school departure spike, driven by DLI program relocation (41% left their schools, vs. 25% at non-SEGC schools). Asian staff left at 36% (vs. 18% at non-SEGC) but mostly moved within PPS rather than leaving the district.

RQ2: To what extent did administrators, educators and staff feel equipped to support students and families during and after SEGC-related changes?

- **Staff frequently reported that district communication and planning were insufficient for the scale of change they were expected to manage from SEGC.**
At one school, staff described supporting families while “flying blind” and said there was no deliberate, intentional merger planning. At another school, one participant answered the question about feeling equipped with “Not at all, I would say as close to zero,” after inheriting a severely unsafe elementary environment with little groundwork laid. Participants at another school recalled answering family questions with unreadable maps and incomplete information, while staff at a nearby school said much of the transition planning was ultimately left to individual schools. Participants also described feeling under-informed and left to absorb parent frustration after the central SEGC lead disappeared.
- **Schools felt most equipped when local leadership, not district systems, built the support structures to navigate SEGC changes.**
At one SEGC-impacted school, staff generally felt able to support students and families because of the school’s strong trauma-informed routines, relational culture, and internal support teams, even while broader district conditions felt precarious. In other schools, staff described extensive school-led outreach, family game nights, social work, and translation work. Additionally, according to participants, they described essentially inventing the middle school transition themselves because there was no clear district “guidebook” on how to navigate SEGC changes. Participants noted that much of what they could offer families was empathy and school-level encouragement rather than a district-supported solution. Across these schools, the practical capacity to support families came more from school-level initiative than from a robust, coherent district transition infrastructure.
- **Being “equipped” to navigate SEGC changes was especially fragile where support depended on unstable staffing or discretionary choices.**
Participants described choosing between climate supports and reading and math intervention because there were not enough adults to do both. This was underscored as a participant indicated that intervention classes were “what’s making the difference overall” but the school was “having to scramble to keep them.” Other participants described district “tier three” supports as help that was “not helpful,” because what the school needed was a more cohesive building, not just curricular add-ons. Post SEGC changes, other participants described trying to implement an inclusive neighborhood model without enough paraeducator and special education support, and in other

schools, participants repeatedly said they could not offer families much beyond transfers or encouragement because real options were limited.

- **Staff felt unequipped during the process and remain feeling unequipped today.** During implementation, only 6-10% of survey respondents reported adequate information, support, or input. Four years later, only 5% reported they have written guidance for responding to family questions about their school model, and only 4% know who to contact for SEGC-related information. Limited access to information and support among staff echoed across family survey respondents: only 22% agreed they understood the changes happening at their school during the SEGC process.

Nuance, Tensions, and Variations within the qualitative findings

- During our analysis, we identified important variations around the findings to the research question. Some schools suggested that strong school-level systems can create a sense of practical efficacy even when district support is weak (and these schools were impacted with few and lots of changes as a result of SEGC changes). By contrast, our analysis suggests that in other schools when the district's planning and follow-through are especially thin, schools can spend years in reactive support mode. Another tension is that staff often felt equipped in a moral sense in that they knew what students and families needed, but not in a structural sense because they lacked staffing, time, information, or district backing to deliver it.

RQ3: How do administrators, educators, and staff, particularly those of color, experience the SEGC changes in terms of emotional well-being and professional support?

- **Emotional well-being was strained by cumulative, not single-event (SEGC-changes), disruption.** Participants across schools described stress, grief, anger, dread, sleeplessness, mental-health leave, and emotional exhaustion as layered effects of SEGC changes along with repeated changes. Some participants said they “wanted to quit, like, every day,” while other participants recalled “a lot of tears during the [SEGC] transition.” Participants also described feeling on a “tightrope,” and other participants reported not sleeping and taking several weeks of mental-health leave, and other educators described that SEGC changes brought a constant crisis of “putting out fires.” Some participants framed their SEGC experience as a “multi-year erosion” rather than a one-time shock.
- **Professional support during SEGC was often strongest inside the school and weakest at the district level.** This was a recurring theme across several of our research questions. Some participants described their current principal as highly supportive and “people-centered,” and staff in another school said their principal’s long tenure and internal culture helped the school make it through enormous change. Again, participants repeatedly contrasted excellent internal support with low trust in district decisions, and while other participants said day-to-day morale stayed relatively high because of strong local culture even while district conditions drove anxiety. Staff also described stable internal leadership and cohesion as a major protective factor. The emerging pattern is that

school-based leaders buffered emotional harm, but that buffering often had to compensate for the absence of reliable district support.

- **Among survey respondents, 25% considered leaving PPS due to SEGC changes.** Personnel data validate this: 15% left the district in 2022–23, compared with 10% at other PPS schools. Trust collapsed. Only 3% of staff survey respondents mostly or completely trust the district to handle rightsizing fairly. More than 50% responded that they do not trust the district at all (mean 1.7/5).
- **SEGC-period well-being ratings are sharply negative.** On average, 8% of respondents agreed with items related to wellbeing during the SEGC process, including perceptions about worsening morale, not feeling emotionally supported at work, and unmanageable workloads. Administrators had neutral or negative perceptions of wellbeing during the SEGC process, often perceiving a need for more support and better communication. Staff have more positive perceptions of their wellbeing today, with BIPOC staff reporting somewhat more positive experiences than white staff both during SEGC changes and now, though the small sample (n=32) limits confidence.
- **The limited available evidence suggests that staff of color and bilingual staff sometimes experienced both sharper harm and sharper affirmation.** While the data are too limited to support broad claims across all SEGC-impacted schools, several accounts suggest that staff of color, bilingual staff, and staff working in DLI settings sometimes experienced questions of belonging, professional value, burnout, and support in distinct ways during SEGC-related change.

Race, language, and role shaped how some staff experienced SEGC-related change. While the evidence is limited and should not be overstated, participant accounts suggest that SEGC-related changes did not land evenly across all staff. Some staff described their experiences through the lens of racial identity, cultural identity, language status, and professional role.

School context mattered. Some staff described environments where racial, cultural, and multilingual identities were affirmed as assets, while others described contexts where those identities or roles felt undervalued. This suggests that leadership, school culture, and implementation support shaped whether staff experienced SEGC-related change as harmful, affirming, or both.

Some staff experienced sharper harm when their identities or roles were not fully valued or supported. Participants described how broader system conditions, including rapid change, limited support, and inequitable organizational cultures, could intensify feelings of burnout, marginalization, or professional devaluation for staff of color and linguistically positioned staff.

Nuance, Tensions, and Variations within the qualitative findings

- One school in particular complicates any simple “SEGC harmed staff well-being” story because it is simultaneously one of the sites of greatest grief and one of the clearest

sites of professional affirmation for bilingual/Latino/a/x staff. Another school that was less impacted also complicates the pattern because staff describe the school as calm and relationally strong even while naming broader uncertainty. So, across the data, the emotional story is not uniform despair. We'd argue that it could probably be more accurately described as cumulative strain that was mediated by several factors, such as school-community context, school leadership, and identity of the school.

RQ4: How did administrators, educators, and staff describe the experiences of students and families from historically underserved communities after SEGC-related shifts?

- **Staff across multiple schools perceived that low-income communities and communities of color bore disproportionate disruption as a result of SEGC-related changes.**

Staff at one school described the school as becoming “smaller and whiter,” and said lower-income students felt more isolated as the school lost racially and socioeconomically diverse boundary areas. A participant remarked that SEGC once again meant “mostly BIPOC students” being bused out of a multicultural working-class neighborhood into a more affluent one. Similarly, staff said affluent families had more power to avoid the changes and that what parents were often not saying aloud was that they did not want to send their children to school with “our students of color.” Staff similarly had a perception of a district pattern in which “communities of color... and lowest socio-economic” communities were most affected by the SEGC changes.

- **Some participants described gains in cultural affirmation or developmental fit for particular underserved communities.**

Participants in a few schools described their school as a “sanctuary” for Latino/a/x families and a more intentional, affirming full-school Spanish DLI model. Additionally, participants said families at another campus were “very excited and happy” to have elementary students back in a neighborhood K–5 instead of sharing space with middle schoolers, at one site. Other staff described DLI consolidation as strengthening opportunities for Latino/a/x students, and other participants described the new comprehensive middle school model as giving students a more developmentally appropriate and richer middle school experience. Some schools also became more coherent or affirming for specific student groups, especially students of color and students who are emerging bilingual students.

- **Transportation, language access, chronic absenteeism, and specialized support capacity were recurring mechanisms through which inequity was experienced.**

Participants at some schools described long bus rides, difficult access to pick up locations, and the burden of travel falling hardest on families with the least means (this also came up in some of our family and SEGC member conversations). Staff at one school emphasized high chronic absenteeism, newcomer needs, and the difficulty of educating students who simply could not get to school consistently. However, at one school, participants described the school as essential for immigrant, refugee, multilingual, and low-income families, even as program contraction and future uncertainty threatened those conditions. Some staff described lower-income students as

bearing disproportionate burdens of feeder isolation and less ability to navigate transfer loopholes. Other staff described intervention support as critical for historically underserved students but increasingly fragile under staffing loss.

Nuance, Tensions, and Variations within the qualitative findings

- A major tension in this finding is that the same school can appear both as a site of loss and a site of affirmation, culturally and linguistically. One school is the clearest example of this. On one hand, staff describe the loss of a diverse, walkable neighborhood K–8 and the concentration of burden on other communities, but they also describe the current DLI model as more affirming and intentional for Latino/a/x students and families.

Domain 4: Family and Community Voice, Engagement, and Equitable Decision-Making

Guiding Research Questions:

1. In what ways did SEGC members feel their input was heard, valued, and reflected in final decisions?
2. How can future district efforts, especially those related to enrollment and program changes, better build trust and support meaningful engagement with families and communities?

Key Findings

RQ1: In what ways did SEGC members feel their input was heard, valued, and reflected in final decisions?

- **Most SEGC members that we talked with felt they had very limited influence over final decisions.**
While SEGC members invested substantial time, expertise, and energy, most came away believing their input did not meaningfully shape district outcomes.
- **SEGC Members experienced a sharp disconnect between the promise of participation and the reality of advisory-only power.**
Many SEGC members entered the process expecting to help shape major decisions, but over time concluded that their recommendations were symbolic, constrained, or easily overridden.
- **Perceptions of predetermined outcomes deeply undermined trust in the process.**
SEGC Members repeatedly described key decisions as effectively pre-set (from their perceptions), especially around which schools could be included in the process, program relocations, school configurations, and the narrowing of what was “on the table,” which made the process feel less authentic and less equitable.
- **Control over data and scenario modeling shaped whether members felt valued.**
Delayed, uneven (meaning some people had access and others did not), or limited access to requested data made it difficult for members to test alternatives and contributed to the sense that district-preferred outcomes were being advanced regardless of coalition input.
- **Feeling heard among other SEGC members did not translate into feeling heard by district leadership.**
SEGC members often described the coalition itself as respectful, collaborative, and mutually supportive (meaning mostly the non-district members of the coalition), but sharply distinguished that internal experience from their sense that PPS district leadership and the board did not meaningfully act on SEGC’s collective input.

- **SEGC members reported low trust and limited confidence in the procedural fairness of the rightsizing process.** Among 22 SEGC members who responded to the family survey, only 23% agree that decision rules were clear and applied consistently, 23% agree criteria stayed stable, and 23% agree PPS considered family input. All three items have a median of 2.0 (disagree). The typical member endorsed fewer than one of these three procedural integrity statements. Only 5% of SEGC members trust the district on rightsizing (mean 1.8, median 1.5), the lowest trust rating among all groups in either the staff or family survey, including groups defined by race/ethnicity, gender, school, and other characteristics (e.g., staff role in school, staff years of experience, programs students are enrolled in).
- **SEGC members who participated in the process are among the harshest critics of its equity outcomes.** On the survey item “benefits and burdens were distributed equitably,” SEGC members report a median of 1.0 (strongly disagree), meaning more than half selected the lowest possible rating. The people who participated directly in designing the distribution of changes believe it was inequitable. This finding converges with the quantitative evidence: the schools selected for SEGC changes served student populations with 2022–23 free and reduced-price lunch rates averaging 54%, compared to 25% at Southeast (SE) Portland schools excluded from the process.
- **Despite deep dissatisfaction with the process, SEGC members report comparable student experiences to other families.** SEGC members were positive about many aspects of their students’ learning experiences (they responded positively to 70% of questions in this domain, on average). This matches the overall family survey results (67%). It suggests their dissatisfaction is not driven by enduring personal harm but instead reflects informed judgment about a process they observed from the inside and concluded failed on its own terms.

Key Findings:

RQ2: How can future district efforts, especially those related to enrollment and program changes, better build trust and support meaningful engagement with families and communities?

- **Future district rebalancing (e.g., school closures and/or consolidations) efforts need clearer goals, firmer scope, and more honest discussion of tradeoffs from the start.**
Participants felt trust was damaged when the purpose of the process was unclear, the scope narrowed midstream, and major constraints were introduced without transparent rationale.
- **Rebuilding trust depends on direct, concrete, and internally consistent communication.**

SEGC members who participated argued that district communication was often too abstract, overly wordy, and at times inconsistent with the data SEGC members had been using, which undermined credibility.

- **Community Engagement must be accessible, early, and genuinely influential, not reactive to pre-developed plans.**

Participants emphasized that families and committee members need understandable data, earlier listening opportunities, multilingual and lower-barrier engagement formats, and real evidence that their input shaped proposals.

- **The district must apply its racial equity and social justice lens through actual decisions, not just symbolic language.**

Participating SEGC members felt trust eroded when equity rhetoric was repeated but the process excluded certain schools that were more affluent and whiter, protected some communities, and placed greater burdens on already under-resourced schools and families.

- **Rebuilding trust requires follow-through, accountability, and visible support for affected schools and communities.**

SEGC members who participated in our data collection stressed that the district should only make promises it can keep, publicly track commitments, support schools before, during, and after major changes, and begin future efforts by acknowledging past harms and creating clear guardrails for a different process.

- **The district should begin future school change and enrollment balancing efforts by publicly acknowledging past harms, broken trust, and specific process failures, especially with SEGC changes.**

Participants' recommendations suggest that rebuilding trust will require more than improved communication or better community engagement processes. Future rebalancing and rightsizing efforts should begin with clear acknowledgment of prior harms, including ignored dissent of some SEGC members, broken promises, unbalanced outcomes, and perceived inequities in who was included and protected because of race and class and who was burdened. Participants' comments point to the need for something more substantive than symbolic regret such as public acknowledgment paired with visible guardrails, accountability, and changed behavior.

Domain 5: Factors that Shaped School Experiences with SEGC Changes

Guiding Research Questions:

1. How did SEGC-related changes play out across the schools, and what factors shaped how schools experienced, absorbed, and responded to those changes?

Key Findings:

How did SEGC-related changes play out across the schools, and what factors shaped how schools experienced, absorbed, and responded to those changes?

- SEGC was experienced as cumulative and layered rather than as a single transition.**
 Across schools, participants described SEGC as one strand in a larger web of stacked change, including school mergers, program relocations, feeder loss, boundary shifts, grade reconfiguration, construction, pandemic disruption, labor actions, budget cuts, and leadership turnover at both the central office and school-level. One participant describes this most clearly as a “multi-year erosion,” while others call the process a “dense web of transitions.” For one school, SEGC arrived after their fire recovery, K–8 to K–5 change, and SES program shifts, and another describes being asked to absorb major reconfiguration without enough planning, communication, staffing, or emotional repair.
- Change was easier to absorb where leadership and internal culture were stable.**
 Participants from several schools all describe strong internal leadership or school culture as a protective factor that helps to mitigate the impacts of SEGC changes. A school’s more recent story also suggests improvement where relationships with leadership became more coherent and supportive. It is important to note that these schools were not “unaffected.” Rather, their leaders and adult cultures absorbed strain more effectively. Schools with stable and supportive principals and stronger staff culture buffered SEGC strain more effectively, while unstable schools were more destabilized.
- Program relocation and identity change generated more relational disruption than boundary change alone, but even single boundary changes could produce deep forms of loss.**
 Two schools offered the strongest cases of school identity disruption. In one school, participants described a merger that “tore apart” a close community, the other described grief, neighborhood loss, and a remade school identity. Another school’s consolidation similarly produced both stronger coherence and new tradeoffs. But other schools showed that boundary and feeder pattern related changes alone could still trigger deep loss by shrinking enrollment, reducing racial and socioeconomic diversity, or

undermining the possibility of a “robust” comprehensive school. So SEGC change type mattered (e.g., reconfiguration, program relocation, boundary change etc.), but school context shaped intensity.

- **Schools repeatedly portrayed district support as late, partial, or mismatched to the SEGC realities they were facing.**

Whether the issue was missing planning documents, late data, weak transition infrastructure, promises not honored (e.g., more FTEs, additional rebalancing, etc.), or supports that arrived after the moment had passed, staff often described the district as giving them too little, too late, or the wrong kind of help. The result was that schools improvised, schools held family distress, and SEGC’s burden was effectively downloaded onto people inside buildings.

Nuance, Tensions, and Variations within the qualitative findings

- A major tension is that SEGC changes, according to participants, could produce both gains and harms in the same site. For example, one school gained facilities, electives, and a more developmentally appropriate middle school structure even while becoming less racially and socioeconomically diverse. Another school became more culturally affirming for many Latino/a/x families even while losing neighborhood access, diversity, and parts of its earlier identity. Yet, another school shows how a school with limited direct SEGC change could still live under its shadow through downstream instability and future consolidation fears. So “how SEGC played out” cannot be reduced to one story, it might be best understood as challenging change filtered through local, school capacity, history, and politics.

Section 1:

SEGC Context, Audit Purpose, and Detailed Methods

SEGC Context

PPS' Effort to Balance Enrollment in Southeast Schools⁹

Portland Public Schools' (PPS) Enrollment and Program Balancing initiative was a Board-authorized effort created to address how the district's physical footprint, school configurations, boundaries, and program locations shaped students' access to high-quality learning environments. The work was framed as part of PPS's reImagined¹⁰ strategic vision that was adopted in June 2019, and then formally launched through Board Resolution 6059 in February 2020. That resolution recognized that PPS faced facility use and system design challenges that affected student success. The Enrollment and Program Balancing effort was intended to produce short-and long-term recommendations, informed by community input, with a clear emphasis on improving access and opportunity for historically underserved students.

For Southeast schools, PPS implemented this work in phases. Phase 1 focused on improving access to comprehensive middle schools by establishing the attendance area and programs for Kellogg Middle School, which was intended to be a community-guided process that informed the recommendation that was ultimately adopted by the Board in January 2021. Phase 2 was then initiated through Board Resolution 6315 in May 2021, which directed the district to bring forward recommendations on three concrete outcomes. The outcomes included (a) setting attendance area and special program assignments for Harrison Park Middle School, (b) developing a plan to relocate the kindergarten through fifth grade students and programs currently served at Harrison Park, and (c) increasing enrollment at Lane Middle School.

To support Phase 2 in Southeast, PPS convened the Southeast Guiding Coalition (SEGC) as a volunteer advisory coalition responsible for reviewing options, considering community feedback, and advising district leadership rather than making final decisions. Throughout this process, the coalition reviewed multiple proposals and weighed tradeoffs connected to boundary changes, feeder pattern adjustments, and program relocations intended to stabilize enrollment, strengthen access to robust middle school programming, and improve program coherence. While the coalition did not reach full consensus, it forwarded the plan that received the most votes to district leadership in spring 2022, and PPS moved toward adoption and implementation planning for changes beginning in the 2023–24 school year, with boundary changes phased in for new students and major program relocations implemented more comprehensively at once, alongside identified transition supports.

Purpose of the Equity Audit Evaluation

In 2026, PPS commissioned Dr. Terrance L. Green (a tenured professor and national expert on school closures and equity audits) and his team to conduct this equity audit evaluation to better

⁹ Throughout this report, we refer to this effort in southeast PPS as SEGC because that is how it was communicated in district documents and conversations.

¹⁰ PPS reImagined was the long-term strategic vision for PPS, aimed at transforming the district into a premier system by 2030.

understand the implementation and outcomes of SEGC-related changes across impacted schools. The purpose of this evaluation is to examine whether SEGC advanced its stated goals, such as improving enrollment balance or expanding access to robust school programming, but also to understand how the process and its implementation were experienced by those most directly affected. This includes students, families, educators, school leaders, staff, and community members in schools that experienced boundary changes, program relocations, enrollment shifts, feeder pattern changes, and other SEGC-related transitions.

In this report, we examine both experiences *and* outcomes in SEGC-impacted schools. We consider how decisions were communicated, how school stakeholders and families experienced opportunities for voice and engagement, how schools were supported during implementation, and how SEGC-related changes were experienced across different school contexts. The report also examines patterns in student, school, and community outcomes before and after SEGC implementation. However, school outcomes are shaped by many factors such as broader enrollment trends, housing patterns, state education funding conditions, leadership and teacher turnover, staffing constraints, and family mobility, to name a few. As such, this evaluation does not attribute all observed changes solely to SEGC. Rather, it examines patterns associated with SEGC implementation and uses those patterns, alongside qualitative data, to identify lessons for future district decision-making.

At its core, this evaluation is guided by an equity-centered question of not simply whether PPS made changes to boundaries, programs, and enrollment patterns, but whether those changes were communicated, implemented, and supported in ways that were experienced as equitable, socially just, transparent, and humanizing. Equity, especially racial equity, in districtwide change requires more than technical decision-making. It requires attention to who benefits, who bears the burden of change, whose voices shape the process, what supports are provided during implementation, and whether impacted schools are strengthened rather than destabilized over time.^{11 12}

To this end, the findings from this evaluation are intended to help PPS learn from SEGC as it considers future decisions related to enrollment balancing, school consolidation, boundary changes, program relocation, school size, and access to robust educational experiences and learning environments. Thus, this report is designed to provide evidence-based guidance for district leaders, Board members, school communities, and other stakeholders as PPS works to make future districtwide changes more equitable, humanizing, transparent, well-supported, and responsive to the lived experiences of students, families, educators, and communities, especially those who have been historically marginalized in schools systems because of their race, ethnicity, native language, documentation status and any other marker of difference.

¹¹ Hahnel, C., & Marchitello, M. (2023, September). Centering equity in the school-closure process in California [Report]. Policy Analysis for California Education.

¹² Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024, June). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders. Research for Action.

Our Approach to Equity Audit Evaluations

This SEGC Equity Audit Evaluation is grounded in Dr. Terrance L. Green’s more than decade-long body of research on community-based equity audits. Dr. Green introduced community-based equity audits as a practical approach for educational leaders to examine inequities across schools and communities while working toward more equitable outcomes.¹³

Building on existing equity audit research, our approach is designed to further racial and educational justice. As such, we understand equity audits not simply as technical reviews of data, policy, or practice, but as opportunities to examine how systems are experienced by the students, families, educators, staff, and communities most affected by district decisions. For this reason, our approach is customized to each district we partner with, grounded in research, comprehensive, collaborative, and transparent.

Additionally, our approach is also strengths-based, rooted in culturally responsive evaluation, informed by Paulo Freire’s notion of dialogue,¹⁴ and attentive to race, racism, and their intersections with social class, language, gender, gender identity, perceived ability, sexual orientation, religion, and other markers of difference that have been used to marginalize children, youth, families, and communities in schools. We also anchor our work in culturally responsive evaluation¹⁵ and emphasize the importance of culture, context, and stakeholder experience in evaluation design and practice, while intersectionality¹⁶ reminds us to attend to how multiple systems of power shape people’s lived experiences and identities.

In conducting equity audits, our goal is not to “catch” districts doing something wrong or to assign blame. Instead, we aim to serve as an external, critical, and collaborative partner. Our role is to provide empirical data, elevate the experiences of those most directly affected, identify systemic patterns of equity and inequity, and offer actionable recommendations that can help districts better serve children, youth, families, educators, staff, and communities. This stance is consistent with professional evaluation principles that emphasize systematic inquiry, competence, integrity, respect for people, and attention to the common good and equity.

As a result, meaningful collaboration with district leaders, school leaders, educators, staff, families, caregivers, and community members is central to the process. Their participation is

¹³ Green, T. L. (2017). Community-based equity audits: A practical approach for educational leaders to support equitable community-school improvements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 53(1), 3–39.

¹⁴ Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.; M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Continuum. Original work published 1970.

¹⁵ Hood, S., Hopson, R. K., & Kirkhart, K. E. (2015). Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In K. E. Newcomer, H. P. Hatry, & J. S. Wholey (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (4th ed., pp. 281–317). Jossey-Bass.

¹⁶ Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

essential for producing findings and recommendations that are credible, contextually grounded, and useful for district learning and improvement.

In the context of this SEGC Equity Audit Evaluation, we sought to maintain fidelity to these principles while working within the project's timeline, data access, and implementation realities. Again, the resulting report is intended to support PPS in learning from SEGC and strengthening future districtwide decisions related to enrollment balancing, program access, boundary changes, school transitions, and equitable educational opportunity.

Research Methods for this Equity Audit Evaluation¹⁷

Data Sources

For this audit, we collected and analyzed data from all 20 schools impacted by SEGC changes. The evaluation drew on a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources, including survey responses, student administrative data, personnel records, interviews, and focus groups. The combination of these data sources allowed the evaluation team to address each of the audit's major focus areas/domains and to triangulate patterns across different forms of evidence.

Survey Responses

- 905 respondents to a family and caregiver survey
- 327 respondents to an administrator, teacher, and staff survey

These survey data helped illuminate how families and school-based staff experienced communication, implementation, learning environments, school climate, trust, support, and the broader SEGC process.

Administrative Data

The evaluation also drew on administrative records for students enrolled in PPS elementary and middle schools from 2020–21 through 2024–25, as well as records for 4,717 school-based personnel from 2020–21 through 2025–26. These administrative data included:

- **Summary records of 51,983 students enrolled in PPS** elementary and middle schools from 2020–21 through 2024–25, and for 4,717 school-based personnel from 2020–21 through 2025–26.
- **School enrollment data:** Five years of school-level enrollment data from 2020–21 through 2024–25, including school enrollment dates and exit dates. Students who transferred into PPS after October 1 of each year were not included in the dataset. High schools were not included. For analyses, students were assigned to the school they attended for the most days during each school year. Assigning students to the school they attended for the most days during the time they were enrolled in PPS within a given year presents a more realistic picture of what schools experience day-to-day than a single October 1 count. Thus, enrollment numbers are not consistent with other reports that rely on the October 1 count but are representative of where students receive the majority of their instruction.

¹⁷ For a more detailed explanation of our methods, please contact the lead author, Dr. Terrance Green.

- **Student demographic and enrollment records:** Student-level records, using masked student IDs, including grade level, gender, race and ethnicity, special education status, multilingual learner status, and home or primary language.
- **Student attendance data:** Student-level attendance records, including number of days present and absent.
- **Student discipline data:** Number and type of student-level exclusionary disciplinary incidents, including out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, and expulsions. The average per-pupil number of exclusionary discipline incidents is calculated for each school within school year
- **Student achievement data:** Student-level OSAS math and ELA scaled scores, used to examine academic outcomes and patterns over time. Scores are standardized within grade level and school year to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Therefore, each student's score is relative to the district average for a given grade level and school year.
- **Dual language immersion (DLI) program access and enrollment data:** School- and student-level data on Dual Language Immersion programs, including which schools offered these programs and which students were enrolled in them.
- **Personnel data:** School staff-level data, including position, school assignment, race and ethnicity, years of overall experience, years of experience in the district, exit dates, and exit reasons. The dataset included instructional and administrative staff (e.g., teachers, educational assistants, principals, assistant principals, librarians, instructional specialists, and office administrative assistants).

In addition, we gathered school-level free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligibility in 2022–23 from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data. This was used as a baseline measure of low-income (e.g., economic disadvantage) before the majority of SEGC changes were implemented in 2023–24. Data for subsequent school years are unreliable and not used.

Focus Groups and Interviews with approximately 100 people

Our evaluation team also conducted qualitative data collection with approximately 100 participants. This included approximately 50 focus groups with educators, staff, families, and/or SEGC members, as well as 10 interviews with administrators, staff, families, and/or SEGC members. These conversations provided insight into how SEGC-related changes were experienced before, during, and after implementation. They also helped the evaluation team

understand the human, relational, organizational, and equity dimensions of the SEGC process. Here is a recap of the qualitative data collection:

- Approximately 50 focus groups with educators, staff, families, and/or SEGC members
- 10 interviews with administrators (e.g., principals)

District-Informed Intensity Scoring and Sampling Process

To support a transparent and credible qualitative sampling process, PPS staff with direct institutional knowledge of the SEGC work completed an intensity scoring exercise for all SEGC-impacted schools.¹⁸ Several PPS district leaders and staff categorized schools into high-, medium-, and low-intensity based on their overall level of SEGC-related change and implementation demands. Our evaluation team¹⁹ then held two working meetings with PPS on January 9, 2026, and January 13, 2026, to review the scoring, discuss the rationale for ratings, surface questions and differences in interpretation, and confirm final school categories.

These calibration conversations strengthened the clarity and consistency of the intensity categories and helped to support that the sampling frame reflected both district data and lived implementation knowledge. This process was important because SEGC did not affect all schools in the same way. Some schools experienced multiple overlapping changes, including program relocation, boundary shifts, grade reconfiguration, feeder pattern changes, and/or changes in school identity. Other schools experienced more limited changes, such as boundary adjustments or downstream enrollment effects.

The final qualitative sample prioritized high-intensity schools while also including a smaller number of medium- and low-intensity schools. This allowed the evaluation team to examine schools that were identified for having experienced the greatest implementation demands while also making meaningful comparisons across different levels of SEGC impact. From this process, our team identified schools to visit for qualitative data collection.

Qualitative Sampling and Case Selection

The qualitative portion of the evaluation drew on in-depth case data from 9 of the 20 schools impacted by SEGC changes, representing 45% of SEGC-impacted schools.²⁰ Our evaluation team used purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases that could provide deep insight into how SEGC-related changes were experienced, interpreted, and implemented in particular school communities. Purposeful sampling is especially appropriate for qualitative inquiry

¹⁸ We created this index specifically for PPS to help identify the degree to which schools were impacted by SEGC changes.

¹⁹ Specifically, Dr. Green and Dr. Hanson met with the PPS district leadership regarding this. We met with them regarding this before we started collecting data at schools because this process heavily informed the schools we visited.

²⁰ Our original goal was to visit 10/20 impacted schools but were unable to visit or collect data from the final school because of scheduling conflicts. However, based on our data collection and analysis, we believe that we had enough information power from the nine schools that we visited and collected data from.

because it allows researchers to select cases that are especially relevant to the research questions rather than seeking statistical representativeness alone.²¹

The purpose of the school-level case data was not to claim that the perspectives from these 9 schools represent every experience across all 20 SEGC-impacted schools (or even every perspective within each school that we visited). Rather, the purpose was to develop a deeper understanding of how SEGC-related shifts unfolded in particular school contexts and to identify patterns, tensions, and variations across cases. The strength of the qualitative sample lies in the relevance of the cases to the research questions, the depth and specificity of the data, and the extent to which the data support meaningful interpretation. This is sometimes referred to as information power in qualitative research.²²

Since qualitative findings are not intended to generalize in the same way as survey or administrative data, the report attends to transferability.²³ In other words, in another report, we present the school-level findings with enough contextual detail for readers to understand the conditions, meanings, and circumstances surrounding the findings and to consider how those findings may apply to other SEGC-impacted schools or future district decision-making processes.²⁴

Quantitative Analytic Approach

The quantitative analyses examined changes in enrollment, student outcomes, DLI participation, displacement, and staff retention before and after SEGC implementation. For enrollment analyses, the evaluation team examined school-level enrollment patterns from 2020–21 through 2024–25, including whether enrollment became more balanced across SEGC schools and how actual enrollment compared with district projections.

For student outcome analyses, the evaluation team examined OSAS ELA and math scores, attendance rates, and exclusionary discipline rates. These analyses compared students in SEGC schools with similar students in non-SEGC schools using matching approaches, including inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW) and coarsened exact matching (CEM) as a sensitivity analysis.²⁵ These methods allowed the evaluation team to compare patterns in student outcomes after the SEGC transitions in 2023–24 and beyond in comparison to students in

²¹ Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544.

²² Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760.

²³ Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.

²⁴ Stalmeijer, R. E., Brown, M. E. L., & O'Brien, B. C. (2024). How to discuss transferability of qualitative research in health professions education. *The Clinical Teacher*, 21(6), e13762.

²⁵ Iacus, S. M., King, G., & Porro, G. (2012). Causal inference without balance checking: Coarsened exact matching. *Political Analysis*, 20(1), 1–24.

schools that were not included in the SEGC process while accounting for observable differences between students and schools.

Baseline (2022–23) measures included math and ELA OSAS scores, attendance rates, exclusionary discipline rates, race and ethnicity, gender, multilingual learner status, eligibility for special education services, whether students spoke English as a home language, and the percentage of students in their school who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The processes resulted in no significant differences across these observable characteristics. Joint F-tests showed F-statistics of 0.379 ($p = 0.538$) for the IPTW matching method and 0.800 ($p = 0.371$) for CEM. This means that no significant differences were detected across all characteristics combined and that differences in outcomes between students in SEGC schools and other PPS students cannot be explained only by differences in where they started out and their demographic backgrounds. After matching, the IPTW sample size included 14,736 students for 2023–24 outcomes and 10,901 students for 2024–25 outcomes. The CEM sample included 10,822 students for 2023–24 outcomes and 7,885 students for 2024–25 outcomes. Group-level effects were estimated using marginal effects.

For DLI and program access analyses, the evaluation team examined enrollment patterns by program, race and ethnicity, home language, school location, and student movement. These analyses helped assess whether DLI access expanded, whether students followed relocated programs, whether students left programs or PPS, and whether displacement patterns differed by race, language background, or program type.

For personnel analyses, the evaluation team examined school-based staff records to identify patterns in retention, school departure, district exit, role changes, and turnover before, during, and after SEGC implementation. These analyses paid particular attention to differences by role and race or ethnicity where data were available, including patterns for staff of color and staff in directly impacted schools.

The quantitative analyses should be interpreted as evidence of patterns and associations rather than simple proof that SEGC caused every observed change. SEGC occurred alongside other major conditions, including COVID-19, enrollment decline, district budget pressures, staffing shifts, labor unrest, leadership transitions, and broader demographic and housing changes. For this reason, quantitative findings are interpreted alongside qualitative evidence to better understand how SEGC interacted with other forces shaping school experiences.

Survey Analysis

Survey data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns in how families, caregivers, administrators, teachers, and staff experienced SEGC-related changes. These surveys asked questions that covered the domains and central research questions for this evaluation. The family

and caregiver survey helped illuminate perceptions of communication, learning environments, school climate, belonging, access, and trust. The administrator, teacher, and staff survey helped illuminate perceptions of morale, workload, class size, district support, implementation conditions, and confidence in future district decision-making.

Survey findings were used to complement, rather than replace, administrative and qualitative data. For our team, we viewed the multiple data sources working together as follows. Administrative data helped identify measurable changes in enrollment, outcomes, program access, and staffing. Qualitative data helped explain how those changes were experienced. Survey data helped identify broader perception patterns across larger groups of respondents.

Addition of Domain 5: Factors That Shaped School Experiences with SEGC Changes

During our data collection and analysis, our evaluation team added a fifth analytic domain, which was *Factors That Shaped School Experiences with SEGC Changes*. This domain was added because the findings suggested that SEGC-related changes did not unfold in the same way across all schools in the sample. While the broader analysis identified common patterns across the study, the school-level data showed that schools experienced, absorbed, and responded to SEGC differently (based on a number of factors that emerged, which we discuss later in the report).

We added this fifth domain because it moves the analysis beyond describing what changed to examining the conditions that shaped how those changes were felt, experienced, and implemented within school communities. These conditions included leadership capacity, professional relationships, staffing stability, school climate, prior school history, communication, alignment between district decisions and school-level needs, and the availability of implementation support. Again, we discuss this in detail later in the report.

This domain is especially important because research on educational change and policy implementation suggests that schools and districts interpret and enact reforms through existing organizational conditions.²⁶ Educational change is not linear. As a result, it is shaped by a number of factors, such as district-school coordination, local fit, flexibility, preparation for implementation, and capacity-building or capacity for change.²⁷ For this reason, Domain 5 helps the report address a critical implementation question. This was something that PPS voiced wanting to know more about: *how much change can a school or system absorb before its capacity to support students, sustain staff, and maintain coherent learning environments becomes strained?*

²⁶ Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 387–431.

²⁷ Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence

The evaluation was designed to integrate quantitative, qualitative, and survey data so that the report could answer both outcome-oriented and experience-oriented questions. For example, enrollment data can show whether SEGC schools became more balanced numerically, while qualitative data can show whether school communities experienced those changes as stable, equitable, adequately supported, or in other ways. Similarly, student outcome data can show whether achievement, attendance, or discipline patterns changed, while family and staff data can show whether students experienced belonging, safety, cultural affirmation, and access to strong learning environments.

This integration was especially important because SEGC was not a single intervention with a single effect. It was a set of related changes that unfolded differently across schools. For that reason, the report uses multiple forms of evidence to examine both system-level patterns and school-level variation.

Limitations and Interpretive Cautions

Like every research audit, this evaluation has limitations. As such, we suggest that several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the qualitative findings reflect the perspectives of participants who took part in interviews and focus groups. These perspectives provide important insight into how SEGC-related shifts were experienced within particular school communities. However, they should not be interpreted as representing every perspective within a given school. Schools are complex communities, and individuals within the same school may have experienced these shifts in different ways.

Second, the qualitative school sample was purposefully selected to generate deep insight from information-rich cases rather than to produce a statistically representative sample of all SEGC-impacted schools. The sample included 9 of the 20 impacted schools and was designed to support transferability, not population-level generalization.

Third, the report attends to nuance, tension, and variation because SEGC-related changes were complex and uneven. That said, the findings should not be read with broad strokes. Thus, the findings should not be read as suggesting that SEGC was experienced in the same way by every school, family, staff member, or student group. Instead, the report identifies recurring patterns while also preserving important differences, contradictions, and context-specific experiences.

Fourth, as previously mentioned, SEGC occurred during a period of broader instability and change. COVID-19, a global racial uprising, enrollment decline, budget reductions, staffing changes, district leadership transitions, construction projects, housing pressures, and broader demographic changes all shaped school experiences. For this reason, we, in this report, avoid

attributing every post-SEGC change solely to SEGC. Instead, this report examines how SEGC-related changes interacted with other conditions.

Fifth, the available data did not allow every minoritized²⁸ group or experience to be examined with equal precision. For example, some qualitative conversations did not consistently identify staff race or ethnicity, which limited the ability to make strong systemwide claims about the experiences of personnel of color based solely on qualitative data. Similarly, some quantitative analyses of people of color should be interpreted cautiously when sample sizes are small.

There were also limitations to the administrative data. Administrative data was not comprehensive of all PPS students and staff. First, personnel data were limited to instructional and front-office staff. It did not include employees in roles such as nutrition and custodial services. Second, student enrollment records exclude students who enrolled in PPS after October 1st of each school year. It records students who leave the district during the year and mid-year movement across schools. However, total school enrollment is likely to be slightly underestimated. Third, the data do not include high school students. This means that we do not observe high school outcomes for students in grade 8, such as whether they remained in a DLI program in high school and whether they transferred out of the district (unless their families reported a transfer before the end of the previous school year).

Finally, this report should be read as an equity-centered evaluation intended to support learning, accountability, and improvement. Again, its purpose is not to assign blame to individual people or schools, but to help PPS understand what SEGC changed, how those changes were experienced, where equity goals were advanced or constrained, and what future districtwide change efforts should do differently.

²⁸ We often use “minoritized” rather than minority or subgroup (although that may appear in some quantitative analysis) to emphasize that marginalization is produced through social, institutional, political, and historical processes, not simply by numerical size. In this report, the term refers primarily to students, families, and staff historically marginalized in educational systems, including students and families of color, multilingual learners, students from low-income backgrounds, students receiving special education services, and communities marginalized by race, ethnicity, language, culture, disability, or other intersecting identities. See Wingrove-Haugland and McLeod (2022) for details.

Section 2: Findings Across SEGC-Impacted Schools

Integrated Findings Across SEGC-Impacted Schools

This section presents the integrated findings from the Equity Audit Evaluation across the 20 PPS schools impacted by SEGC-related changes. Rather than organizing the findings as a separate summary of each data source, this section brings together quantitative analyses, survey results, interviews and focus group data, and school-level case data to answer the audit’s guiding research questions. Importantly, we conducted an extensive analysis of nine of the twenty impacted SEGC schools, which is part of a separate school-by-school analysis report (which is approximately 115 pages).

The goal, in this section, is to tell a coherent story about what changed, how those changes were experienced, and what patterns emerged across students, families, staff, programs, and school communities. Since SEGC impacted schools in different ways, the findings also describe variation across school contexts, including differences in enrollment shifts, program relocation, grade reconfiguration, leadership stability, staffing capacity, school culture, and cumulative implementation demands.

Importantly, as stated earlier in this report, we added Domain 5, which was not part of the original proposal. We refer to this domain as *Factors that Shaped School Experiences with SEGC Changes*. Our team added this domain for two reasons. First, we added it because the preliminary findings suggest that SEGC-related changes did not unfold in the same way across all schools in our sample. Second, we added it because the district was curious about this area of inquiry. As such, Domain 5 helps to explain why schools may have experienced, absorbed, and responded to SEGC changes differently. In other words, Domain 5 unearths the conditions that shaped how those changes were felt, experienced, and implemented within school communities.

Additionally, research on educational change and implementation suggests that schools and districts interpret and enact changes through existing organizational conditions, including leadership capacity, professional relationships, staffing stability, school climate, and alignment between district decisions and school-level needs.^{29 30 31} More recent research also emphasizes that educational change is not linear and is shaped by coordination, local fit, flexibility, preparation for implementation, and capacity-building.^{32 33} For this reason, Domain 5 helps extend the analysis beyond what shifted to examine the organizational and contextual factors that

²⁹ Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.

³⁰ Honig, M. I., & Hatch, T. C. (2004). Crafting coherence: How schools strategically manage multiple, external demands. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 16–30.

³¹ Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 387–431.

³² Aldridge, J. M., & McLure, F. I. (2024). Preparing schools for educational change: Barriers and supports—A systematic literature review. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 23(3), 486–511.

³³ McLure, F. I., & Aldridge, J. M. (2022). A systematic literature review of barriers and supports: Initiating educational change at the system level. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(4), 402–431.

shaped how schools experienced SEGC-related changes. Finally, this domain also helps us get closer to a critical implementation question that PPS is currently holding, which is *how much change can a school or system absorb before its capacity to support students, sustain staff, and maintain coherent learning environments becomes strained?*

In what follows, we synthesized findings across each domain into five integrated finding areas. Each area includes an overall finding, the guiding questions for the domain, key quantitative and qualitative evidence/findings, important nuance, and implications for future PPS decisions.

Domain 1: Equitable Access to Robust Middle Schools and all SEGC-impacted schools

Overall Finding:

After SEGC-related changes, enrollment across impacted schools became more balanced, particularly at the middle school level. However, this greater balance occurred alongside continued enrollment decline across SEGC schools. Many SEGC schools also enrolled fewer students than projected while serving higher-than-anticipated numbers of students of color, multilingual learners, and students receiving special education services. In the matched comparison analyses, student outcomes in SEGC schools were broadly comparable to those of similar peers in non-SEGC schools. At the same time, middle school families reported less positive learning-environment experiences than elementary families.

Guiding Questions:

1. To what extent did SEGC boundary changes improve enrollment balance across schools, especially middle schools, by race, income, and language status?
2. To what extent were opportunity gaps in achievement, attendance, and discipline reduced among students affected by enrollment shifts, especially in middle schools?
3. How do students and families from historically underserved communities describe the quality of learning environments they experienced after SEGC-related shifts in middle schools?
4. How do administrators, teachers, and staff describe the quality of learning environments after SEGC-related shifts?³⁴

³⁴ The question was revised to remove the specific reference to middle schools in order to better align with the broader scope of the preliminary findings. While some findings may draw from middle school experiences, the revised question allows the analysis to examine how administrators, teachers, and staff described learning environments across SEGC-related shifts more generally. The initial question in the proposal was: How do administrators, teachers, and staff describe the quality of learning environments they experienced after SEGC-related shifts in middle schools?

Enrollment Balance Improved, but Within a Context of Declining Enrollment and Enrollment Projection Gaps

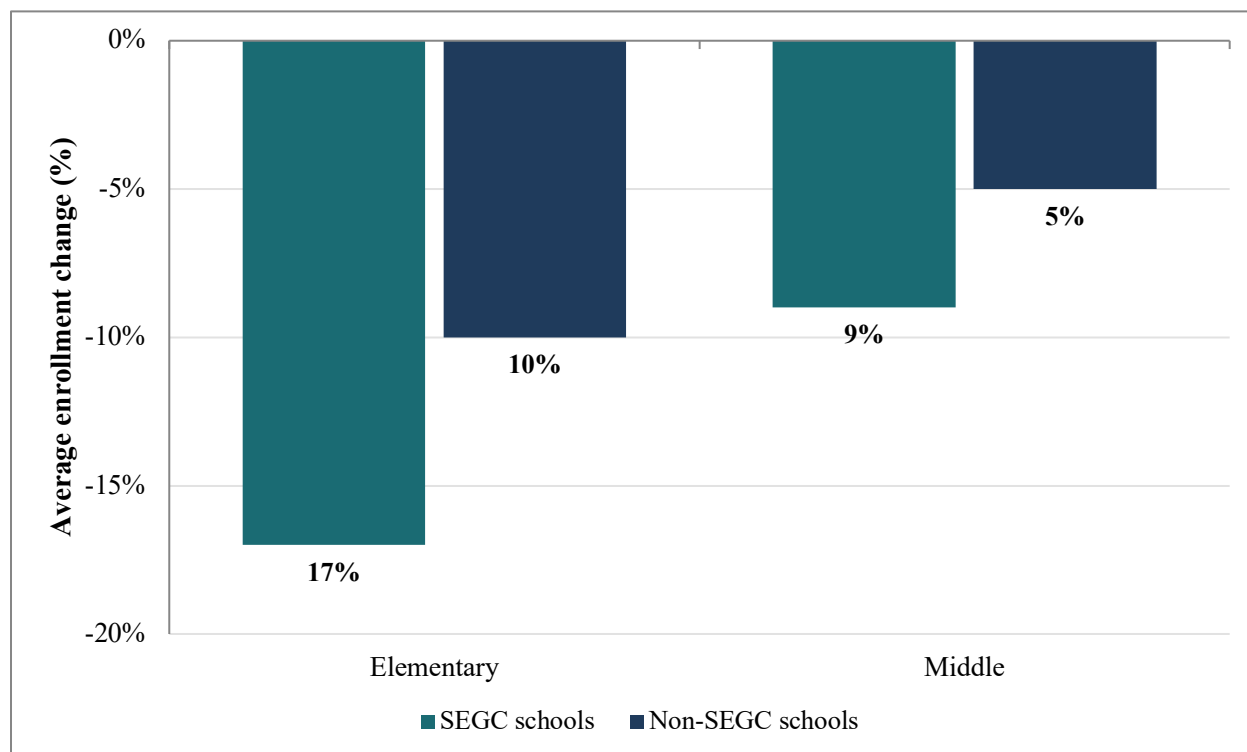
Enrollment across SEGC schools became more balanced, especially at the middle school level. The difference between the highest- and lowest-enrolled SEGC middle schools narrowed from approximately 320 students in 2020–21 to about 220 students in 2024–25, as Kellogg Middle School opened and Harrison Park converted from a K–8 to a middle school. SEGC elementary school enrollment also became more uniform, with the difference between the highest and lowest enrolled elementary schools narrowing by more than 100 students.

However, these fluctuations should be interpreted within the broader context of enrollment decline. SEGC elementary school enrollment declined, on average, by 17% between the 2020–21 and 2024–25 school years, compared with a 10% decline among non-SEGC schools. Middle school enrollment declined by an average of 9% in SEGC schools and 5% outside SEGC schools over the same period.

This means that some of the apparent balancing occurred within a shrinking enrollment context rather than through growth or stabilization across all schools. It is important to note that enrollment projections were overestimated by 20 or more students at seven of 20 SEGC schools (35%) and underestimated by at least 20 students at four schools.³⁵ These projection gaps have important implications for school planning, resources, and stability. When enrollment is meaningfully lower or higher than projected, schools may face midstream adjustments to staffing, schedules, course offerings, intervention supports, and enrichment opportunities.

³⁵ Students are assigned to the school they attended for the most days in the school year. If measuring enrollment by October 1 counts, 12 schools enrolled at least 20 students under the predicted count and three schools enrolled at least 20 students more than predicted.

Figure 2.1 Average Enrollment Decline in SEGC and Non-SEGC Schools, by School Level, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Another finding is that SEGC-impacted schools served fewer students than projected but served higher-than-anticipated numbers of students of color. On average, SEGC schools served about 11% more students who identify as Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latino/a/x, Pacific Islander, or biracial/multiracial than projected. They also served higher percentages of multilingual learners and students receiving special education services than projected. This finding raises an important equity implication. When schools enroll fewer students than projected but serve higher shares of students with additional support needs, staffing and resource decisions must account for actual student needs and not just enrollment numbers alone.

Student Academic and Discipline Outcomes in SEGC-Impacted Schools Were Broadly Comparable to Matched Peers, with Some Positive Associations for Specific Student Groups

Using a matched comparison approach,³⁶ we compared students in SEGC schools with similar students in non-SEGC schools rather than comparing the two groups as a whole. Overall, students attending SEGC schools had similar academic and behavioral outcomes in 2023–24 and 2024–25 compared with matched peers in non-SEGC schools. Moreover, the evidence does not

³⁶ A matched comparison means that students in SEGC schools were compared with similar students in non-SEGC schools based on observable characteristics, rather than being compared with all students outside SEGC. This approach helps create a more appropriate comparison group, though it does not prove that SEGC caused the observed outcomes.

suggest broad measurable academic or behavioral harm associated with SEGC-impacted schools. However, several student groups in SEGC-impacted schools showed small- to medium-sized positive associations with changes in ELA performance (between +0.05 and +0.13 SD), including Black students, elementary students, students in schools where more than 50% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, multilingual learners, students enrolled in DLI, and students whose home language is not English.

In math, the clearest positive association was for multilingual learners in SEGC-impacted schools. Students whose home language is not English and Asian students also showed higher attendance in 2024–25. These findings are encouraging, but they should be interpreted as small to medium-sized associations rather than evidence that SEGC produced large systemwide gains. Among middle school students specifically, there were no significant or noteworthy associations between SEGC status and OSAS scores, attendance rates, or exclusionary discipline rates. This finding is important because SEGC’s rationale included improving access to robust middle school experiences. The evidence suggests that middle school students in SEGC schools performed comparably to matched peers in non-SEGC schools, but not that middle school outcomes were substantially transformed.

Families With Middle School Students Reported Less Positive Learning Environment Experiences Than Elementary-Only Families

Family and caregiver survey responses suggest that SEGC-impacted middle school families perceived learning environments less positively than elementary families. Families with only elementary students rated their children’s learning environments more positively than families with middle school students. Specifically, 61% of elementary-only families rated learning environments as high quality, compared with 45% of families with only middle school students or with both middle and elementary students. Similar gaps appeared in families’ ratings of whether students experienced disrespect or bias, felt a sense of belonging, and were learning a lot.

Figure 2.2 Families with Middle School Students Rated Learning Environments Less Positively Than Elementary-Only Families

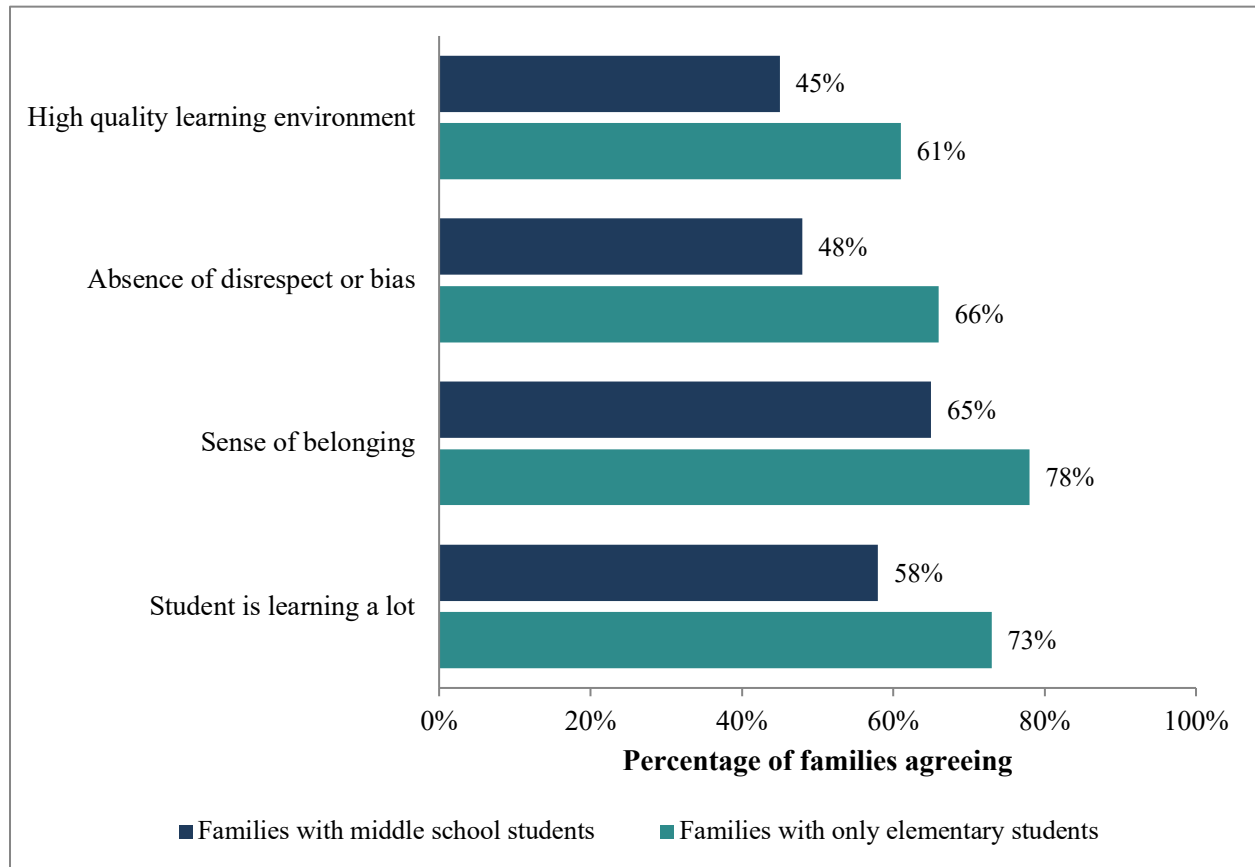
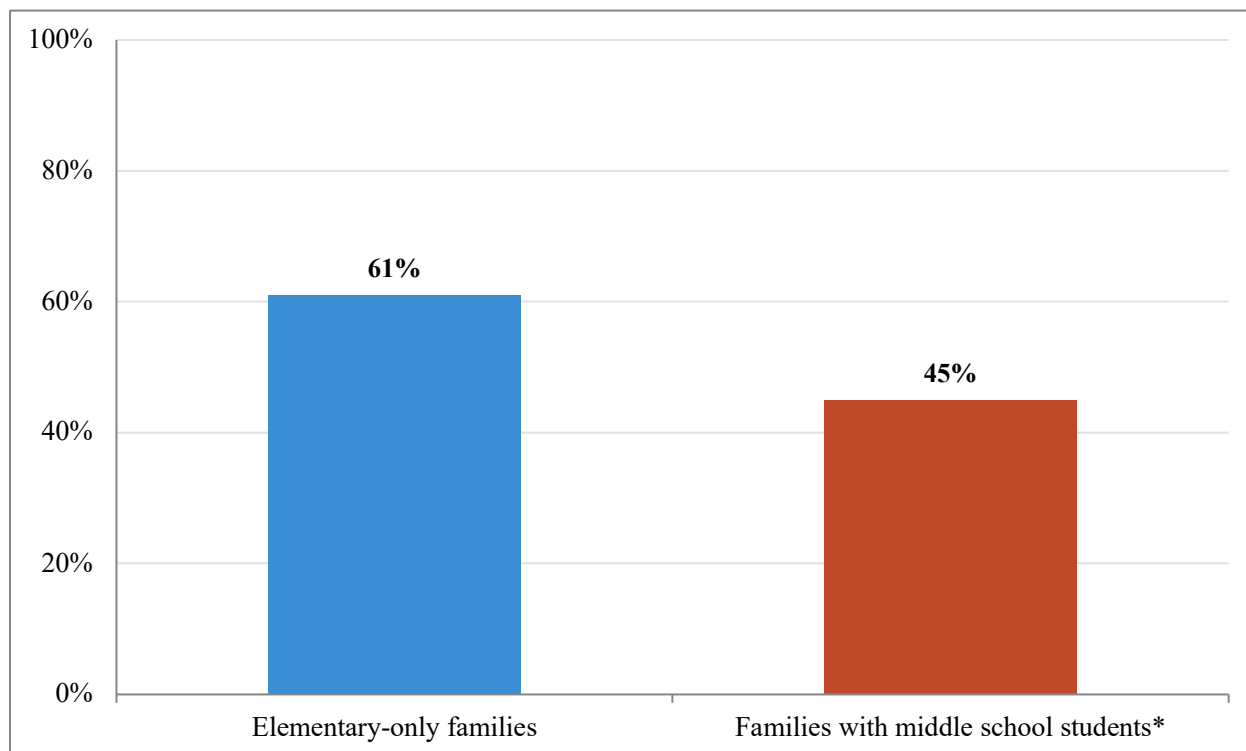


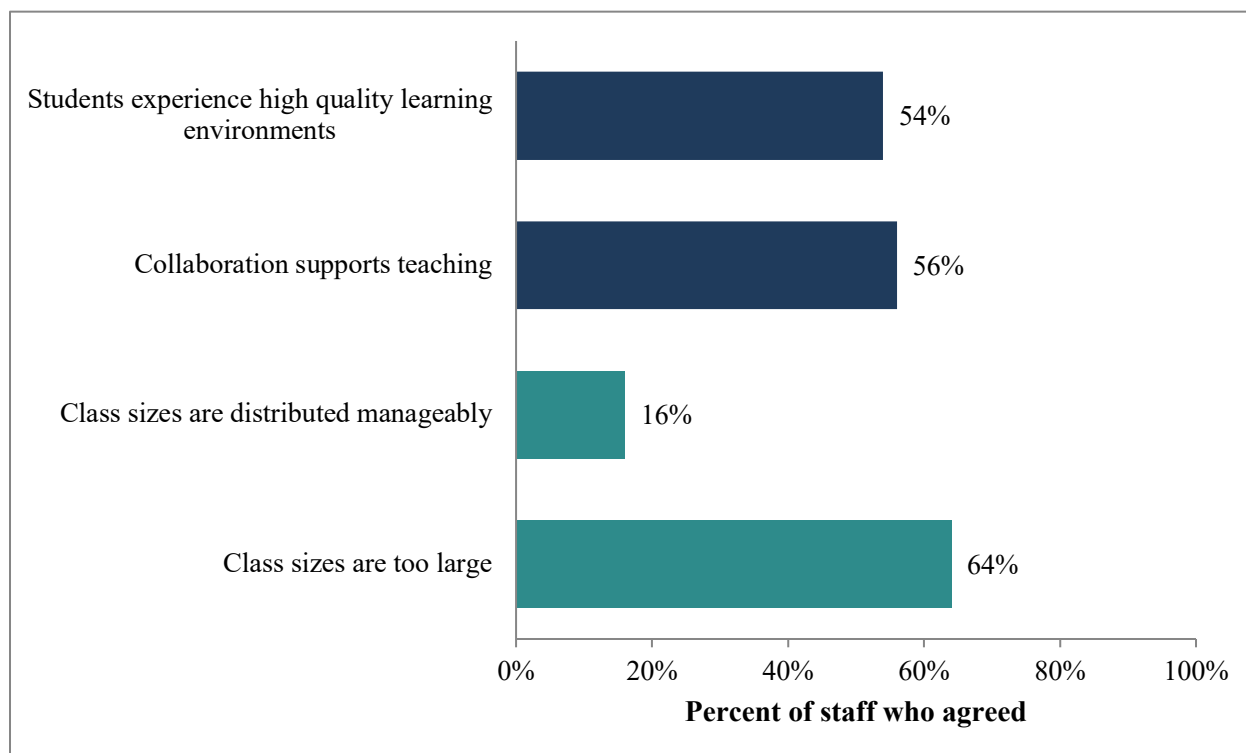
Figure 2.3 Share of SEGC-impacted families rating their children’s learning environments as high quality, by student grade level.



This perception gap matters because it highlights a difference between measured outcomes and lived experience. The quantitative data show comparable academic and behavioral outcomes for middle school students in SEGC-impacted schools, but families reported meaningful differences in how they experienced their students’ learning environments. This suggests that PPS should not rely only on test scores, attendance, or discipline data when assessing the quality of middle school experiences. Perceptions and experiences of school climate, belonging, bias, program access, electives, intervention, and family trust also matter.

Staff Described Learning Environments as Caring but Structurally Strained

Across schools, administrators, teachers, and staff often described learning environments as relationally committed but structurally compromised. Staff described larger classes, fewer adults, more students with complex needs, and less ability to differentiate instruction. In some schools, participants linked reduced staffing and larger classes to weaker support for project-based learning or middle grades programming. In other schools, participants described varied instructional conditions. Some classrooms maintained high levels of rigor, while others struggled to sustain strong instruction because of safety concerns, behavioral needs, high numbers of students with IEPs, and staffing shortages.

Figure 2.4 Staff Survey Perceptions of Learning Environment and Class Sizes

Survey data reinforced these concerns. About half of staff respondents agreed that students experience high-quality learning environments and that collaboration supports teaching. However, only 16% agreed that class sizes are distributed manageably, while 64% said class sizes are too large. Staff also repeatedly described interventions and targeted support as essential but fragile. Participants described reading and math intervention classes as transformative for students, while also warning that schools were “scrambling to keep them” under continued staffing reductions.

DLI consolidation was also described as both more coherent and more costly. Some staff described Spanish DLI consolidation as more intentional and equitable than prior split structures. Others described the loss of neighborhood access, reduced walkability, fewer elective opportunities for DLI students, loss of racial and cultural diversity, and/or weakened connection between neighborhood students and DLI communities. This finding illustrates a recurring pattern across SEGC, which is that a change could improve coherence in one respect while redistributing costs elsewhere.

Domain 2: Linguistic Equity for Historically Underserved Students in Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Programs and Electives

Overall Finding:

Following SEGC-related program relocations, participants described some DLI programs as more coherent and easier to navigate, especially Spanish DLI. However, the data also show that these changes resulted in differentiated challenges and impacts across language programs and involved tradeoffs related to race, neighborhood access, transportation, and students' ability to take electives. While most DLI students remained in PPS after programs moved, relocation still shaped patterns of program participation, including who stayed, who followed the program, who left, and who absorbed more of the disruption.

Guiding Research Questions:

1. To what extent did access to DLI, electives, or advanced programs expand for historically underserved students after program relocation per SEGC changes?
2. To what extent does the relocation of programs and boundary changes displace students from their newly assigned schools?
3. To what extent is student displacement happening in DLI programs as a result of SEGC program relocation? If so, for whom?

DLI Access Improved in Some Areas but Fell Short of Overall Enrollment Targets

Total DLI enrollment in SEGC-impacted schools reached 86% of projected targets by 2024–25 and remained approximately 280 students short of the 1,959-student target established in the 2021 SEGC plan (Table 1.1). Total SEGC DLI enrollment declined by 9% between 2020–21 and 2024–25, even as districtwide DLI enrollment held steady because non-SEGC DLI programs gained more than 100 students during the same period.

However, the aggregate trend masks substantial variation by language program type. Spanish DLI, the largest program, reached 104.5% of its 2025 projection in aggregate. Vietnamese DLI, though much smaller than the Spanish program, more than tripled in enrollment. By contrast, Mandarin and Russian DLI programs lost about 20% of enrollment and Japanese declined by about 5%. These findings suggest that SEGC-related DLI changes did not produce a uniform pattern across language programs. Some programs showed enrollment growth or moved closer to projected enrollment targets, while others experienced enrollment contraction. In some cases, participants also described program relocation as creating greater coherence, but that coherence was not evenly experienced across all DLI programs.

Table 1.1. Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Program Projected and Actual Enrollment in SEGC Schools

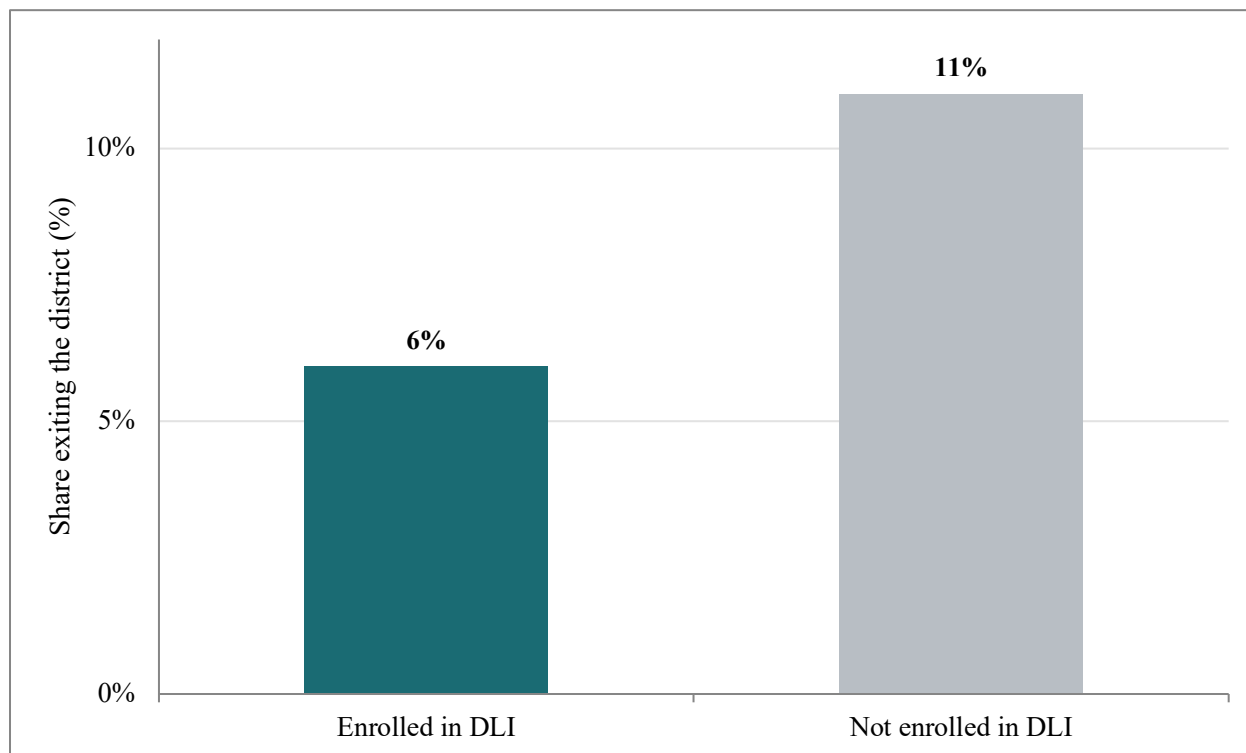
DLI Program	Enrollment 2020–21	Enrollment 2024–25	2025–26 projection	Percent of projection	Percent change 2020–21 to 2024–25
Spanish	845	811	776	104.5%	-4.0%
Mandarin	493	386	560	68.9%	-21.7%
Russian	227	181	269	67.3%	-20.3%
Japanese	253	241	273	88.3%	-4.7%
Vietnamese	17	57	81	70.4%	235.3%
All Programs	1,835	1,676	1,959	85.6%	-8.7%

Latino/a/x participation in SEGC DLI programs increased from 30% to 35%, rising at about the same pace as non-SEGC DLI programs. However, non-SEGC DLI programs continued to enroll a higher share of Latino/a/x students throughout the period. Heritage language match also varied widely by program, with some SEGC programs increasing the share of students whose home language matched the program language (Mandarin +8 percentage points, Spanish + 8 percentage points), and others remaining about the same (Vietnamese, Japanese) and Russian moving in the opposite direction (–6 percentage points).

DLI Students Largely Stayed in PPS, but Relocation Still Shaped Program-Level Sorting

One of the clearest quantitative findings is that DLI-enrolled students whose programs moved largely stayed in PPS, whether or not they followed their DLI program to the new school. The percentage of DLI-enrolled students leaving the district in SEGC schools was not notably different from DLI students outside SEGC-impacted schools. On average, DLI students left PPS at roughly half the rate of non-DLI students. At SEGC-impacted schools, the exit rate for DLI students was about 6%, compared with 11% for non-DLI students in 2023–24.

Figure 2.5 (DLI) Students Left PPS at About Half the Rate of their Peers
Annual exit rate from the district at SEGC-impacted schools, 2023–24



This suggests that DLI participation may have functioned as a retention factor for many students and families. However, retention should not be confused with an absence of displacement. When DLI programs moved, students who remained in PPS generally followed their program to the new school. Yet among students who left relocated DLI programs, families who left were disproportionately English-speaking. This pattern suggests that families' decisions to stay, follow, or leave were shaped by language background, racial identity, transportation, family resources, program attachment, and access to alternative schooling options.

Taken together, these findings suggest that SEGC-related DLI program relocations did not appear to result in widespread district exit among DLI students. Most DLI-enrolled students whose programs moved locations stayed in PPS, and DLI students left the district at lower rates than non-DLI students in both SEGC and non-SEGC schools. This suggests that DLI participation may be associated with stronger retention in PPS, even when programs are relocated. Thus, DLI might be a protective factor for both students and staff.

At the same time, the findings show that relocation still matters for who stays, who follows the program, and who leaves the program. Again, when DLI programs moved, students who remained in PPS generally followed their program to the new school. However, among students who left DLI programs after relocation, leavers more often spoke a language other than English at home. This pattern suggests that program relocation may be experienced differently across

student groups and that families' decisions to stay, follow, or leave may be shaped by language background, racial identity, access, family resources and preference, transportation, or perceived program fit.

This finding is consistent with national research on dual language and school choice which indicates that DLI programs can operate as specialized choice programs, where participation is shaped by race, class, language background, transportation, information, and family capacity. Prior research has found that DLI programs may attract white, English-dominant, and more affluent families, and can sometimes shift program priorities away from the language-minoritized communities that these programs were originally designed to serve (Valdez et al., 2016;³⁷ Chaparro, 2021;³⁸ Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017).³⁹ In this context, the overrepresentation of speakers of languages other than English among DLI leavers may reflect a form of program self-sorting in which families with greater flexibility may be more able or willing to commit when a program relocates, while families with stronger linguistic, cultural, or programmatic ties may be more likely to leave.

Moreover, the Mandarin DLI findings illustrate how relocation can reshape program composition even when enrollment remains relatively stable. One elementary Mandarin DLI strand maintained its pre-SEGC enrollment level after relocating, while middle school Mandarin DLI enrollment declined and remained below the SEGC forecast. At the same time, the share of heritage language speakers increased substantially, indicating that relocation may have changed not only the size but also the composition of the program.

Whole-School DLI Conversion Advanced One Equity Goal While Creating Another Equity Burden

The conversion of one school to whole-school Spanish DLI produced one of the strongest examples of simultaneous benefit and burden. On one hand, participants described the full-school Spanish DLI model as more intentional, coherent, and culturally affirming for Latino/a/x students and families. On the other hand, nearly 60% of students left the school after 2022–23, primarily to newly assigned elementary and middle schools. Black students were almost entirely displaced from the school, with the Black student enrollment dropping from 10% to 2%, while the Latino/a/x share increased from 49% to 69%.

This finding illustrates why programmatic equity, and racial equity must be examined together. A program change can strengthen access and affirmation for one historically underserved community while creating displacement, reduced neighborhood access, or loss of belonging for

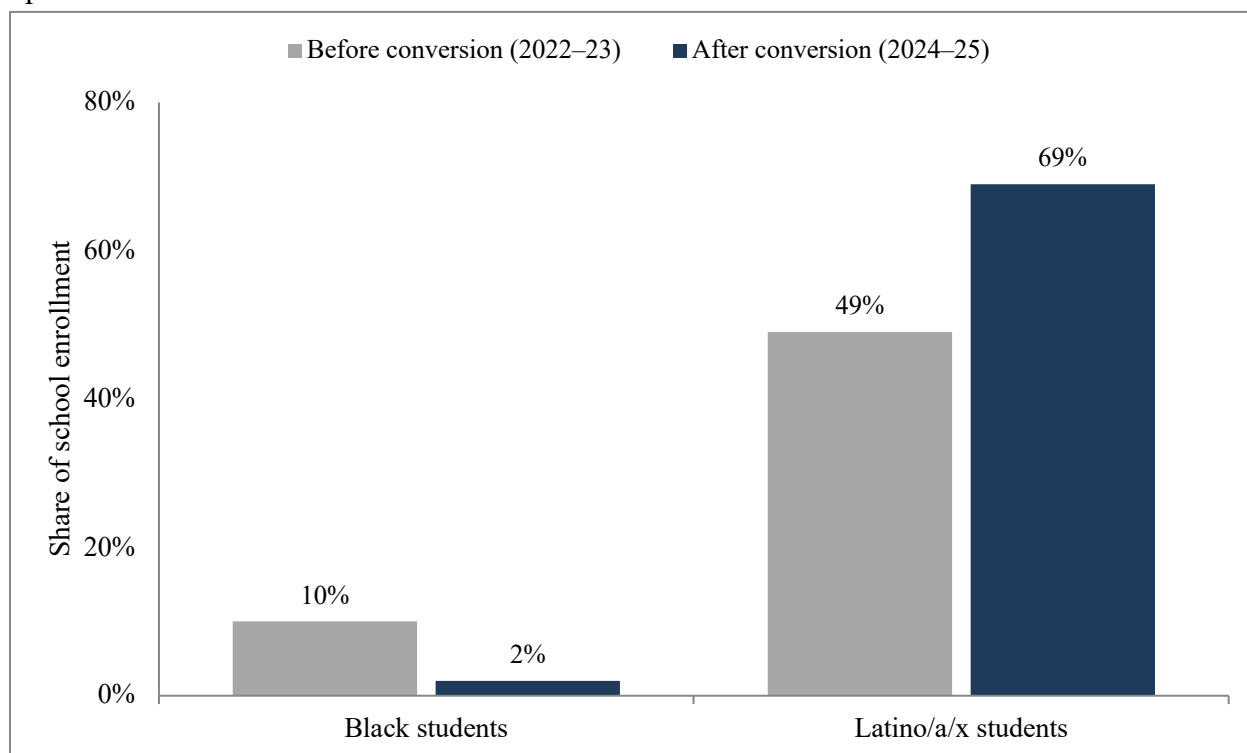
³⁷ Valdez, V. E., Freire, J. A., & Delavan, M. G. (2016). The gentrification of dual language education. *The Urban Review*, 48, 601–627.

³⁸ Chaparro, S. E. (2021). Creating fertile grounds for two-way immersion: Gentrification, immigration, & neoliberal school reforms. *Language Policy*, 20, 435–461.

³⁹ Cervantes-Soon, C. G., Dorner, L., Palmer, D., Heiman, D., Schwerdtfeger, R., & Choi, J. (2017). Combating inequalities in two-way language immersion programs: Toward critical consciousness in bilingual education spaces. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 403–427.

another. In this case, SEGC changes appear to have strengthened the coherence of a Spanish DLI model while also redistributing costs to non-DLI neighborhood families and Black students.

Figure 2.6 Changes in Student Racial Demographics After Conversion to a Whole-School Spanish DLI Model



Overall, these findings are especially important for current and future rightsizing conversations because they distinguish between districtwide exit, program-level sorting, and uneven family capacity to absorb change. Some families may have a greater ability to navigate choice systems, absorb transportation burdens, advocate for preferred options, or leave programs when changes do not meet their needs, which may or may not increase with the closing or consolidating of schools or programs. Other families may have fewer viable alternatives and may bear more disruption.

Domain 3: School Leaders, Educator, and Staff Experiences

Overall Finding:

During the SEGC implementation year, school-based staff were asked to manage substantial transition responsibilities. The data show short-term staffing disruption during that period, with staff of color experiencing the most pronounced measurable impact. Across schools, staff described a gap between their commitment to supporting students and families and the resources available to do so. Many understood what students and families needed, but did not consistently have the time, staffing, information, district guidance, or transition infrastructure necessary to provide that support.

Guiding Research Questions:

1. To what extent did the SEGC process affect administrator, educator and staff morale and retention, especially among personnel of color?
2. To what extent did administrators, educators and staff feel equipped to support students and families during and after SEGC-related changes?
3. How do administrators, educators, and staff, particularly those of color, experience the SEGC changes in terms of emotional well-being and professional support?
4. How did administrators, educators, and staff describe the experiences of students and families from historically underserved communities after SEGC-related shifts?

Staff Morale Was Most Strained Where SEGC Overlapped with Staffing Loss, Turnover, and Role Instability

Across schools, participants often described morale not as a single dip tied only to SEGC changes, but as a sustained response to annual cuts, un-assignment of staff, role reassignment, and ongoing instability. Some participants described wanting to quit, taking mental-health leave, or working in a “doing more with less” environment that eroded job security and made burnout feel imminent.

At some schools, strong internal culture and perceptions of leadership effectiveness and tenure buffered these effects but did not eliminate strain. Participants at some schools described them as calm, relationally strong, and internally coherent, even while staff worried about future cuts. In those schools, leadership and peer culture were essential, but they did not remove the stress created by what participants’ described as district instability, budget uncertainty, or the demands of implementing SEGC-changes.

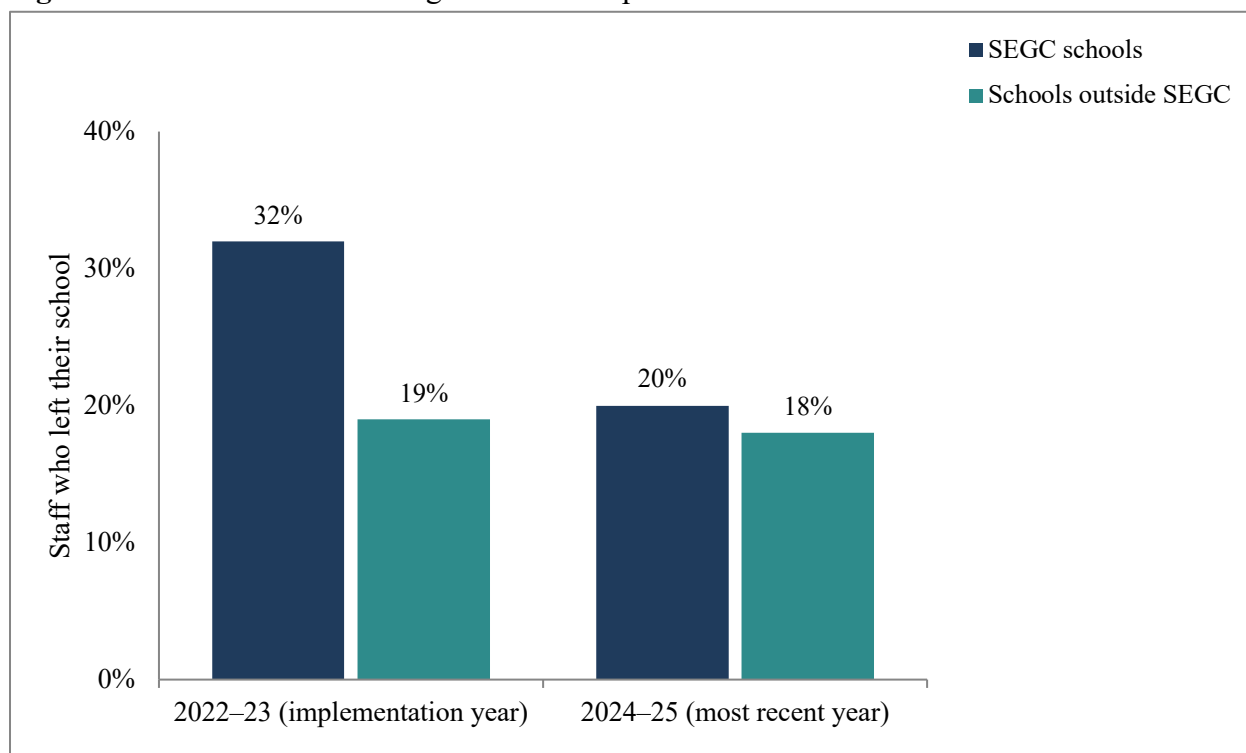
Principal and administrator turnover also mattered. In 2021–22, 55% of principals at SEGC-impacted schools left their schools, compared with 26% at non-SEGC schools. Districtwide, schools with the highest staff retention were more likely to have had stable principal leadership,

while schools in the bottom quartile of staff retention almost always experienced principal turnover. This suggests that leadership stability was a key condition shaping staff retention and school capacity during SEGC implementation.

The Implementation Year Produced an Acute and Racially Uneven Staffing Disruption

After the 2022–23 school year, 32% of staff at SEGC schools left their school, compared with only 19% at non-SEGC schools. By 2024–25, the gap had narrowed to two percentage points, suggesting that the disruption was acute but temporary in the aggregate. Assistant principals were especially affected, with more than 50% (7 of 13) leaving their school in SEGC-impacted schools compared with 26% in the rest of the district.

Figure 2.7 Staff Turnover During the SEGC Implementation Year and Most Recent School Year



Staff of Color bore the sharpest measurable impact. In 2022–23, 39% of Staff of Color at SEGC schools left their schools, compared with 21% at non-SEGC schools. Staff of Color at SEGC schools also left the district at elevated rates, 18% compared with 10% for Staff of Color elsewhere in the district. By 2024–25, turnover rates for Staff of Color at SEGC schools returned to roughly non-SEGC levels, but the implementation year produced a real loss of Staff of Color.

The three largest racial groups experienced SEGC changes differently. Black staff at SEGC schools showed persistently elevated turnover and the highest involuntary termination rate. Latino/a/x staff experienced the sharpest 2022–23 school departure spike, partly driven by DLI

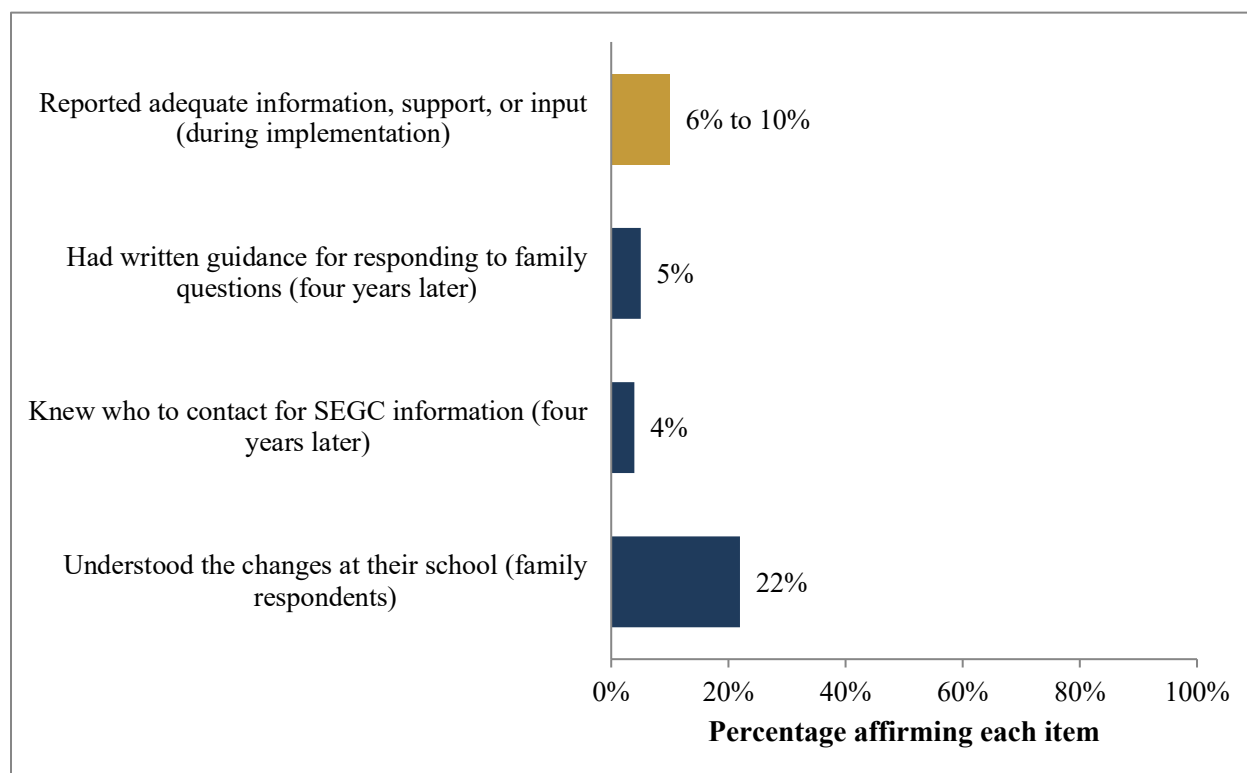
relocation. Asian staff also left SEGC schools at higher rates than Asian staff in non-SEGC schools, though most moved within PPS rather than leaving the district.

Staff Felt Unequipped During Implementation and Many Still Feel Unequipped Today

Staff frequently reported that district communication and planning were insufficient for the scale of change they were expected to manage. Participants described supporting families while “flying blind,” answering family questions with unreadable maps or incomplete information, and inheriting unsafe or unsettled conditions without adequate groundwork. In several schools, participants said transition planning was ultimately left to individual schools rather than guided by a coherent district transition infrastructure.

Survey findings reinforce this pattern. During implementation, only 6% to 10% of survey respondents reported adequate information, support, or input. Four years later, only 5% reported that they had written guidance for responding to family questions about their school model, and only 4% knew who to contact for SEGC-related information. Among family survey respondents, only 22% agreed that they understood the changes happening at their school during the SEGC process.

Figure 2.8 Survey Respondents Reporting Adequate Information, Support, and Understanding During the SEGC Process (X-Axis is Percentage of respondents)



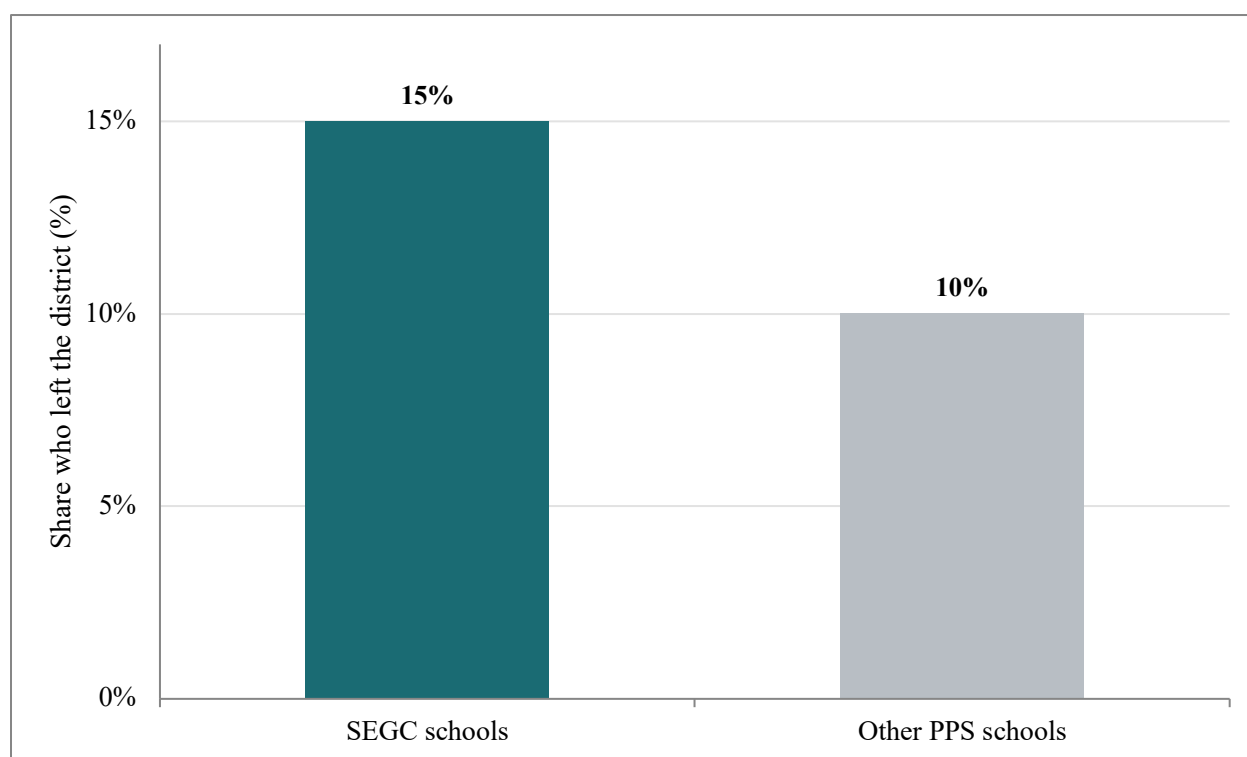
Schools felt most equipped when local leadership built the support structures to navigate SEGC changes. Participants described school-led outreach, family game nights, social work, translation work, trauma-informed routines, and internal support teams. These school-based efforts mattered, but they also reveal a central implementation gap in which much of the practical capacity to support families came from school-level initiative rather than district-level infrastructure.

Emotional Well-Being Was Shaped by Cumulative Strain

Participants described emotional well-being as strained by cumulative disruption rather than by SEGC changes alone. Across schools, participants described stress, grief, anger, dread, sleeplessness, mental-health leave, and emotional exhaustion. Some described SEGC as part of a multi-year erosion, a constant crisis of putting out fires, or a tightrope of trying to sustain students and staff through repeated change.

Figure 2.9 Staff Attrition at SEGC Schools vs Non-SEGC Schools

Share of staff who left the district after 2022–23



Our qualitative findings suggest that professional support was often strongest inside schools and weakest at the district level. Staff described supportive principals, stable internal leadership, and strong peer cultures as protective factors. However, they also repeatedly contrasted these internal supports with low trust in district decisions, insufficient communication, and a lack of reliable district support. Among survey respondents, 25% considered leaving PPS due to SEGC changes.

Personnel data validate this concern. 15% of staff at SEGC schools left the district in the 2022–23 school year, compared with 10% at other PPS schools.

Trust in future rightsizing was especially low. Only 3% of staff survey respondents mostly or completely trusted the district to handle rightsizing fairly, and more than half reported no trust at all. This finding suggests that future districtwide change efforts will begin from a context of damaged trust unless PPS actively acknowledges prior harms, clarifies decision rules, and demonstrates changed behavior.

Staff Perceived That Historically Underserved Communities Bore Disproportionate Disruption

Across multiple schools, staff perceived that low-income communities and communities of color bore disproportionate disruption. Participants described some schools becoming smaller, whiter, or less socioeconomically diverse; students being bused out of multicultural working-class neighborhoods; and affluent families having more power to avoid changes. Staff also described transportation, language access, chronic absenteeism, and specialized support capacity as mechanisms through which inequity was experienced.

At the same time, some participants described gains in cultural affirmation or developmental fit for particular underserved communities. Some schools were described as more affirming for Latino/a/x families, more developmentally appropriate after returning to a K–5 model, or richer as comprehensive middle school environments. This means the staff findings do not support a simple harm-only story. They suggest challenging, uneven and simultaneous effects. In that, some students and families gained access to more coherent or affirming environments, while others experienced loss, disruption, or reduced access.

***Domain 4: Family and Community Voice, Engagement, and Equitable Decision-Making**

Overall Finding:

Participants described SEGC as a process that created opportunities for participation, but not always meaningful influence. SEGC members often described feelings heard by one another within the coalition, while also reporting that they did not see their input meaningfully reflected in district decisions or final outcomes. Across these accounts, several concerns emerged repeatedly, including low trust, perceptions that some outcomes had already been determined, limited access to data, and concerns that the burdens of change were not distributed equitably.

*This finding is discussed more fully in Section 3 of the report.

Guiding Research Questions:

1. In what ways did SEGC members feel their input was heard, valued, and reflected in final decisions?
2. How can future district efforts, especially those related to enrollment and program changes, better build trust and support meaningful engagement with families and communities?

SEGC Members Experienced a Gap Between Participation and Influence

Most SEGC members who participated in the evaluation felt they had very limited influence over final decisions. Many invested substantial time, expertise, and energy into the process, but came away believing their input did not meaningfully shape district outcomes. Participants described a sharp disconnect between the promise of participation and the reality of advisory-only power. This distinction matters. SEGC members often described the coalition itself as respectful, collaborative, and mutually supportive. However, they distinguished that experience from their sense that PPS district leadership and the board did not meaningfully act on SEGC's collective input. In other words, members could feel heard by one another while still feeling unheard by the decision-makers who controlled final outcomes.

Perceptions of Predetermined Outcomes Undermined Trust

SEGC members repeatedly described key decisions as effectively pre-set from their perspective, especially around which schools could be included in the process, which program relocations were considered, which school configurations were possible, and what was "on the table."⁴⁰ From their perspective, these constraints made the process feel less authentic, less transparent, and less equitable.

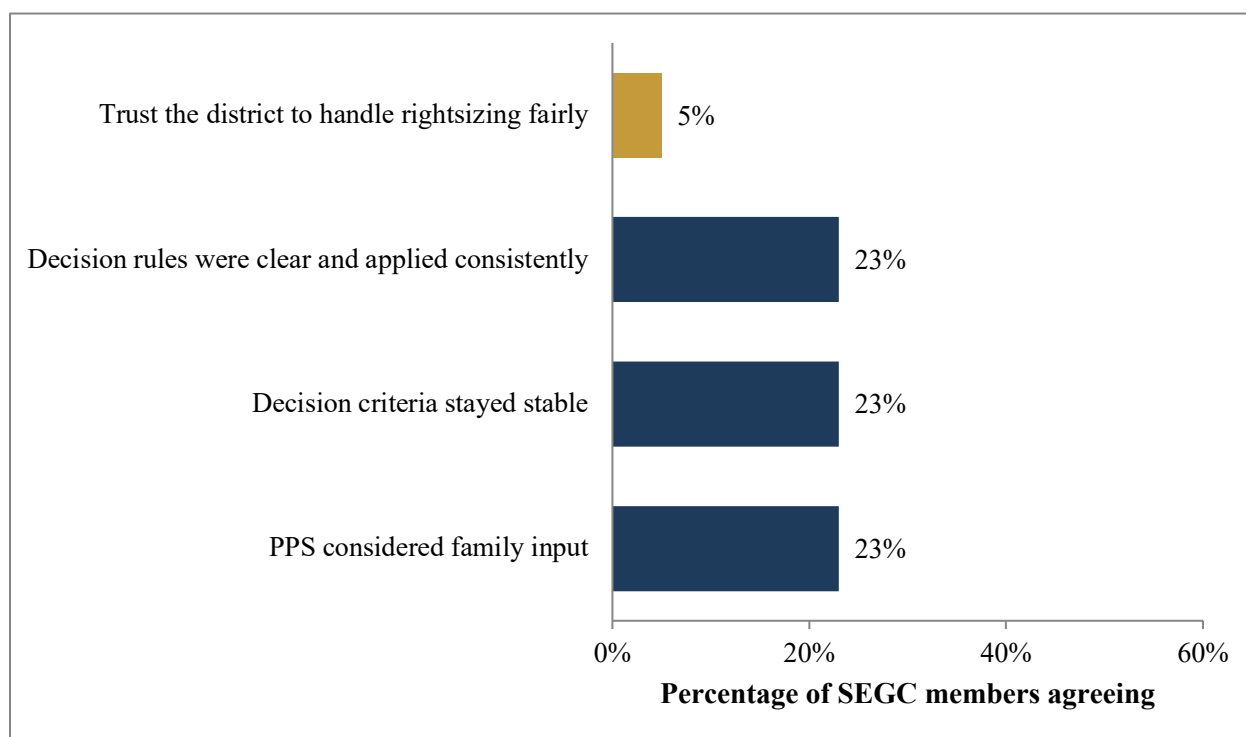
⁴⁰ We did not find administrative or outcome data that could independently confirm this pattern. However, we name it here because it emerged as meaningful in participants lived experiences and shaped how they understood the consequences of SEGC-related changes.

Control over data and scenario modeling also shaped whether members felt valued. Participants described delayed, inequitable, or limited access to requested data, which made it difficult to test alternatives and contributed to the sense that district-preferred outcomes were being advanced regardless of coalition input. For many members, data access was not a technical issue alone, it was connected to power, trust, and whether the process allowed meaningful participation.

Survey Findings Confirm Low Trust and Procedural Equity Concerns

Among 22 SEGC members who responded to the family survey, only 23% agreed that decision rules were clear and applied consistently, 23% agreed that criteria stayed stable, and 23% agreed that PPS considered family input. The typical member endorsed fewer than one of these three procedural integrity statements. Only 5% of SEGC members trusted the district on rightsizing, which is one of the lowest trust ratings among all groups in either the staff or family survey.

Figure 2.10 SEGC Coalition Members' Perspectives on the SEGC Process and Future Rightsizing



SEGC members were also among the harshest critics of the equity outcomes of the process. On the survey item asking whether benefits and burdens were distributed equitably, SEGC members reported a median of 1.0, meaning more than half selected the lowest possible rating. This finding is notable because these were people who participated directly in the process and were positioned to observe how decisions were made and how burdens were distributed.

At the same time, SEGC members reported student experiences that were comparable to other families. This suggests their dissatisfaction was not simply driven by personal dissatisfaction with their own students' schools. Rather, it reflected their judgment about a process they observed from the inside and concluded failed on its own terms.

Future Engagement Must Be Earlier, Clearer, and More Influential

Participants emphasized that future district rebalancing, closure, consolidation, boundary, or program-change efforts need clearer goals, firmer scope, and more honest discussion of tradeoffs from the start. Trust was damaged when the purpose of the process was unclear, the scope narrowed midstream, or constraints appeared without transparent rationale.

Participants also stressed that rebuilding trust depends on direct, concrete, and internally consistent communication. They described prior communication as too abstract, overly wordy, or inconsistent with the data SEGC members had been using. Future engagement should provide easy-to-understand data, earlier listening opportunities, multilingual and lower-barrier engagement formats, and visible evidence that community input shaped proposals.

Finally, participants argued that the district must apply its racial equity and social justice lens through actual decisions, not only through symbolic language. Trust eroded when participants perceived that more affluent and whiter communities were protected from participating in SEGC while more under-resourced schools and families were not. Participants also called for the district to begin any future efforts by publicly acknowledging past harms, broken trust, and specific process failures, paired with visible guardrails and accountability.

Domain 5: Factors that Shaped School Experiences with SEGC Changes

Overall Finding:

SEGC-impacted schools did not unfold as a single, uniform experience across schools. The data suggest that schools experienced and responded to SEGC-related changes differently in relation to several contextual conditions, including the type, number, and intensity of change, leadership stability, staffing capacity, school culture, prior history, program identity, district support, and accumulated strain. This finding helps explain variation in how school communities made sense of, absorbed, and experienced the same district initiative.

Guiding Research Question:

1. How did SEGC-related changes play out across the schools, and what factors shaped how schools experienced, absorbed, and responded to those changes?

SEGC Was Experienced as Cumulative and Layered, not as a Single Transition

Across the qualitative data, participants described SEGC-related changes as cumulative and layered rather than as one isolated transition. Schools were not only responding to boundary changes or program relocations, but they were also navigating school mergers, feeder pattern changes, grade reconfiguration, construction, pandemic recovery, labor actions, budget reductions, staffing instability, and leadership turnover at both the central office and school levels. Participants described this as a dense web of transitions and, in some cases, as a multi-year erosion.

This finding is important because districts often evaluate changes one at a time, while schools experience them cumulatively. A single boundary change may seem manageable on paper, but it can feel very different when layered on top of prior program loss, staffing reductions, leadership turnover, construction disruption, declining enrollment, or weakened family trust.

As mentioned previously, research on educational change and policy implementation helps explain this pattern. Schools do not simply receive and implement district decisions in a uniform way, they interpret and enact reforms through existing organizational conditions, including leadership capacity, professional relationships, staffing stability, school climate, and alignment between district decisions and school-level needs.⁴¹ More recent research similarly emphasizes that educational change is shaped by preparation, local fit, coordination, flexibility, and capacity-building.⁴²

⁴¹ Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.

⁴² Aldridge, J. M., & McLure, F. I. (2024). Preparing schools for educational change: Barriers and supports: A systematic literature review. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 23(3), 486-511.

Change Stress Emerged When Change Load Exceeded Organizational Capacity

To make sense of these patterns, we have developed an organizational strain framework. The framework can be summarized simply: change stress increases when the amount, intensity, or pace of change exceeds a school's capacity to absorb, implement, and recover from that change. Put differently, organizational strain emerges in the gap between what a school is asked to carry and what it has available to carry it.

Figure 2.11 School-Level Change Stress Emerging Framework

Change Stress = Change Load ÷ Organizational Capacity	
CHANGE LOAD	ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY
Quantity Number of changes Intensity Type: low to high identity disruption Simultaneity Compounding simultaneous changes	Principal leadership Staff stability & turnover Role mix: SPED, counselors, EAs Class size Staff morale Overall school climate Shared identity & mission

When Change Load > Organizational Capacity = Stress

FRAGILE	STRESSED	STRAINED	ADAPTIVE	STABLE
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This diagram illustrates how school-level change strain and stress can emerge when the amount, intensity, or pace of change exceeds a school's organizational capacity. The continuum is intended as an implementation-readiness tool, not a rating of school quality.

This is a type of conceptual model with a continuum, not a mathematical score. It is intended to help PPS identify implementation risk and necessary support before future changes are finalized. In this report, strain does not mean a school has failed. Many schools remained caring, functional, and deeply committed to students while also showing signs of strain. Strain refers to the condition that emerges when schools keep functioning while the demands placed on them exceed the time, staffing, leadership stability, role depth, trust, and support available to absorb, implement, and recover from change.

Type of Change Mattered as Much as the Number of Changes

The findings suggest that the type of change mattered as much as the number of changes. Program relocation, school mergers, whole-school conversion, and identity changes often

generated deeper relational disruption than boundary change alone because they affected how schools understood who they were, whom they served, which programs defined them, and how families experienced belonging. Participants described grief, neighborhood loss, disrupted relationships, and remade school identities in schools where SEGC-related changes altered school identity or program identity.

At the same time, even boundary and feeder pattern changes could produce deep forms of loss when they reduced enrollment, weakened feeder stability, reduced racial or socioeconomic diversity of students, or made it harder to sustain a comprehensive school model. This means that future PPS planning should examine both the formal type of change and the local school context in which that change will land.

Stable Leadership and Strong Internal Culture Helped Schools Absorb Change

As mentioned previously, participants across several schools described supportive principals, strong staff relationships, coherent routines, and shared school identity as protective factors. These schools were not unaffected by SEGC-related changes. Rather, their leaders and adult cultures helped them maintain school climate, support families, and keep daily routines functioning.

However, the findings also caution against over-relying on school-level resilience. Strong leadership and staff culture often buffered harm that district systems did not adequately prevent. Where district support was late, partial, unclear, or mismatched to school realities, schools improvised. They held family distress, solved communication problems, interpreted unclear information, and built local supports. This suggests that school-level resilience helped schools survive change, but it should not substitute for stronger district planning, staffing, communication, and transition infrastructure.

District Support Was Often Experienced as Late, Partial, or Mismatched

Across schools, participants repeatedly described district support as too little, too late, or not well aligned with the realities schools were facing. Examples included missing planning documents, late or confusing data, limited transition infrastructure, unclear guidance, expectations that were not met, support that arrived after the moment had passed, and assistance that did not address the core organizational challenges schools were experiencing.

These accounts connect directly to the broader implementation question that Domain 5 was added to address: how much change can a school or system absorb before its capacity to support students, sustain staff, and maintain coherent learning environments becomes strained? The SEGC findings suggest that capacity to absorb change depends on more than the formal policy decision. They further suggest that it depends on timing, prior school history, leadership stability, staffing depth, class size, staff morale, school climate, shared identity, student need, the quality

of district support, and whether families and staff experience the process as fair and well-resourced.

To be clear, the continuum below should not be read as a school ranking, performance rating, or judgment of school quality. It is more of an implementation-readiness tool. Its purpose is to help PPS identify how much change a school may be able to absorb, where additional support may be needed, and where proposed changes may require deeper planning before implementation.

Table 2. The Continuum Should Be Used as an Implementation-Readiness Tool, not a School Rating

Continuum position	Meaning	Evidence pattern in SEGC
Stable	The school has enough leadership stability, staff capacity, trust, routines, and shared identity to absorb change without major disruption.	Few schools in the qualitative sample fit this category cleanly because even lower-impact schools still faced budget, enrollment, and potential consolidation pressures.
Adaptive	The school experiences strain but has enough internal capacity, leadership, culture, and routines to adjust while maintaining coherence.	Some schools showed stronger internal culture, program coherence, or stable leadership that helped them navigate change.
Strained	The school is functioning but change demands are pressing against available capacity.	Schools often described enrollment loss, staff reductions, feeder disruption, program changes, or reduced ability to sustain comprehensive support.
Stressed	The school remains committed to students but is overextended and showing significant strain.	Schools described high change load, staffing instability, large classes, unclear guidance, emotional strain, and stretched support systems.
Fragile	Change load may be exceeding the school's capacity to absorb,	Some schools approached fragile indicators, but the current data do not support labeling any school as fully

	implement, and recover without substantial support.	fragile without additional outcome and implementation data.
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Implications for Future PPS Reconfiguration Decisions

Future PPS reconfiguration decisions should include an implementation burden assessment before final decisions are made. This assessment could ask what each school has already absorbed, what type of change is being proposed, how much relational or identity disruption the change may create, what staff and leadership capacity currently exists, what student needs must be supported, and what transition infrastructure the district will provide.

The strongest cross-school finding is not that SEGC affected every school in the same way. It did not. Some schools experienced SEGC-related changes as a pathway to stronger coherence,⁴³ better facilities, more developmentally appropriate grade configurations, or more culturally affirming programs. Other schools experienced the changes as loss, instability, staffing strain, inequity, weakened trust, and diminished neighborhood connection. In several schools, both were true at once.

Overall, SEGC is best understood as challenging district change filtered through local school capacity, history, identity, leadership, staffing, and community politics. Future PPS decisions should therefore avoid assuming that a district-level policy will land evenly across schools. The same decision can create different experiences depending on the conditions into which it is introduced.

⁴³ Forman, M. L., Stosich, E. L., & Bocala, C. (2021). The internal coherence framework: Creating the conditions for continuous improvement in schools. Harvard Education Press.

Section 2A: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Lessons Learned

The findings above point to several lessons for PPS as it considers future enrollment balancing, rightsizing, boundary, program relocation, or school reconfiguration decisions. These lessons are not intended to relitigate SEGC, but to help the district learn from how SEGC-related changes were planned, implemented, experienced, and absorbed across schools. We share a few lessons learned and, in doing so, offer some recommendations for PPS.

SEGC changes did improve enrollment balancing at the middle school level. However, overall, SEGC schools continued to experience declining enrollment.

These changes did not *reverse* enrollment declines but more so *redistributed* it. SEGC changes made some middle schools more balanced in their enrollment, but it arguably did so by moving students around within a context of continued overall decline in SE Portland and across the district. In that sense, SEGC functioned more as a redistribution strategy than as an enrollment recovery strategy.

PPS should be cautious and honest about making promises and providing support it might not actually deliver, and it must publicly track follow-through.

Broken promises or even the perceptions of them were among the most trust-damaging elements in the preliminary findings. Participants repeatedly described promised staffing, small class sizes, transition support, and follow-up structures that were later reduced, delayed, or denied. This turned SEGC implementation strain into a trust problem. A major lesson is that PPS should not make promises during contentious transitions unless they are budgeted, operationalized, feasible and protected. In addition, several SEGC schools were below the anticipated enrollment projections for 2025–26.

SEGC type changes require staff support and culture-building in impacted schools, not just student and program reassignment.

Where schools were merged, reconfigured, or asked to absorb new communities, our findings suggest that the hardest work was often cultural, relational, and instructional. Staff had to navigate different norms, expectations, reputations, and community assumptions. Without explicit support, these tensions could linger for years. In some places, they did. Thus, for future closures and/or consolidations, PPS might consider providing supports for staff such as co-planning time for new staff to get to know each other, work discuss student supports, shared norm-setting convenings, conflict mediation, community-building activities and routines, orientation for incoming families and students, deliberate identity work for newly configured schools.

Anchored directly in the data from this analysis, participants identified nine different categorical types of supports they need or what benefited from during SEGC changes. However, we realize

that given the budget challenges that PPS is experiencing that they will not be able to provide all of these. Nonetheless, participants discussed having the following supports:

Communication and Transparency: Participants said they needed clearer, earlier, and more consistent communication throughout the transition process. This included timely explanations of decisions, honest descriptions of trade-offs, and direct acknowledgment of potential negative impacts rather than only emphasizing the benefits. For example, people wanted principals and staff to receive information early enough to plan, and they wanted families and community members to have real two-way channels to ask questions, give feedback, and understand how their input would be used.

Staffing and Workload: Many participants emphasized the need for additional staffing support during transitions (as perceived to be promised), rather than reductions in staff. This included more teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, counselors, social workers, behavior support staff, restorative justice staff, special education staff, and multilingual learner staff. For example, participants described the need for stable staff assignments to reduce churn and turnover, protected mental health and behavior roles, and additional adults in buildings to help schools manage the increased workload that comes with mergers, boundary changes, and program shifts.

Class Size and Time: Participants also identified smaller class sizes and more time as critical supports. They wanted class sizes to be capped or reduced, especially in schools serving students with greater needs. They also called for additional planning and collaboration time, including release time, stipends, substitutes, or temporary staffing. For example, staff needed time to redesign schedules, align instruction, prepare for new grade configurations, and work through the practical demands of transition without adding more unpaid labor.

Mental Health, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and Trauma-Informed Support: Participants said schools needed concrete mental health, social-emotional, and trauma-informed supports, not just promises that such supports would be available. This included counselors, social workers, SEL programs, trauma-informed training for staff, and intentional community-building spaces. For example, participants named the need for healing circles, school events, rituals, and other practices that would help students, families, and staff process loss, uncertainty, and change.

Equity, Language, and Program Supports: Participants emphasized that equity-focused supports were essential, particularly for students and families most likely to be affected by school changes. This included protecting and properly resourcing DLI programs, providing translation and interpretation for meetings and written materials, and offering family navigators or liaisons to help families understand their options. For example, participants wanted schools receiving more students or students with greater needs to receive additional resources, not simply be expected to absorb those changes with the same staffing and budget.

Support for SEGC Members and the Process: SEGC members said they needed stronger support to participate meaningfully in the process. This included clear orientation and training on their role, scope, and equity lens. As well, they needed access to complete and understandable data and transparent facilitation and decision-making processes. For example, members wanted clear information about enrollment, building capacity, demographics, and program impacts, as well as honesty about which decisions they could actually influence, and which decisions may have already been made.

Leadership and Culture: Participants wanted visible and responsive district leadership throughout the transition process. This meant leaders showing up in schools, listening to concerns, helping solve problems, and supporting school culture and safety, not only managing logistics. For example, principals wanted earlier involvement and real decision-making power, while staff wanted district leaders to help with behavior systems, culture-building, and the relational work needed to bring school communities together.

Collaboration and Relationship and Culture-Building Time: Participants said merged or reconfigured school communities needed dedicated time to build relationships and align around shared expectations. This included time for staff to co-create school vision, develop common routines, align instructional practices, and build trust across teams. For example, participants wanted structured processes for staff from different schools to come together before the transition, rather than being expected to form a shared culture after the school year had already begun.

Operational and Logistical Supports: Participants also named practical logistical supports needed to make transitions work. These included long-term transportation solutions for new boundaries and program locations, updated curriculum and materials for new grade configurations and languages, and central transition-planning tools such as templates, checklists, and communication plans. For example, schools needed clear systems to manage transportation changes, staffing shifts, family communication, and instructional adjustments in a coordinated way.

To make sense of the support needs identified by participants, we created Figure 2.12 to map those needs onto an organizational change stress concept that we created in Domain 5. The figure shows that the supports participants requested were not only about easing the immediate “change load” of SEGC, such as clearer communication, transition planning, and logistical support. Many of the requested supports were also about rebuilding the organizational capacity that schools needed to absorb change well, including staffing stability, leadership support, manageable class sizes, student mental health supports, stronger school climate, collaboration, and shared identity. In this way, the chart illustrates a central lesson from the findings: when districtwide changes

increase the amount, intensity, and simultaneity of change, PPS must also invest in the organizational capacity of schools so that change does not become strain.

Figure 2.12 Participant Recommendations Mapped to the Change Stress Framework

$$\text{Change Stress} = \text{Change Load} \div \text{Organizational Capacity}$$

EASE THE CHANGE LOAD	REBUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY	
Communication and Transparency Eases intensity and needs to be clear, early, honest framing of decisions and trade-offs	Staffing and Workload Staff stability and role mix (different, needed positions)	Class Size and Time Smaller class size and planning time
Support for SEGC Members and the Process Strengthens the decision process: orientation, real data, honest scope of influence	Mental Health, SEL, and Trauma-Informed Support Counselors, social workers, etc.	Equity, Language, and Program Supports Resources to support students equitably
Operational and Logistical Supports Eases simultaneity when coordinated with transportation, materials, and planning tools	Leadership and Culture Effective and consistent principal leadership, which influences school climate	Collaboration and Culture Building Time Building of shared identity and morale
Six of the nine themes target organizational capacity . Participants asked most for the capacity that strained schools most lacked.		

Note. Each theme reflects participant recommendations. Themes on the left ease the change load and the process that introduces it. Themes on the right rebuild the organizational capacity dimensions named in the change stress framework.

The type of change matters (intensity) as much as, and sometimes more than, the number of changes (quantity).

One of the clearest findings was that not all changes were experienced equally. Program relocation, feeder loss, whole-school conversion (e.g., into a whole school DLI), and grade reconfiguration often produced deeper disruption than a boundary shift alone, especially when they altered school identity, belonging, or access to key programs. At the same time, the number of changes still mattered because schools facing multiple and simultaneous changes often described cumulative disruption and difficulty regaining a sense of equilibrium. The lesson is that PPS might consider the nature, intensity, and interaction of those changes in schools. In addition, our findings suggest that the same type of change can have different meanings depending on school level. For example, elementary participants often described feeder or boundary changes in terms of continuity and family relationships. Middle school participants more often described them in terms of enrollment viability, class offerings, elective access,

staffing, and whether a school could remain robust. PPS should consider avoiding “one-size-fits-all transition planning” and instead tailor support by school level. For example, elementary schools may need stronger family orientation, pathway support, and continuity-building and middle schools may need protection for electives, counseling, staffing, and program breadth.

Schools are not starting from the same place (organizational capacity for change), so the district should not assume they can absorb the same amount or type of change.

Our preliminary findings repeatedly suggest that schools entered SEGC with different levels of stability, staffing, leadership continuity, enrollment strength, school culture, program coherence, and community trust. Some schools were already fragile or carrying accumulated strain. Other schools had stronger internal systems and could buffer disruption more effectively. A major lesson, then, is that PPS should not apply the same change logic uniformly across schools. Before any future closure or reassignment process, the district might assess each school’s readiness and capacity to absorb change.

Trust-(re)building is shaped by (perceptions of the) process, not just the outcome(s)

Across our findings, a repeated lesson that emerged was that people judged PPS not only by what decision was made, but by whether the process felt transparent, honest, responsive, and equitable, especially since all schools in SE were not part of SEGC. Additionally, long meetings, inaccessible materials, shifting rationales, late data, and decisions that appeared predetermined all undermined trust. In some cases, participants felt that community voice was invited mainly to legitimate decisions that had already narrowed.

Leaving some Southeast schools out of the rebalancing process undermined trust and made it harder to achieve more fully balanced and equitable rebalancing

This preliminary finding suggests that because declining enrollment was a SE-wide challenge (even districtwide), future rebalancing, consolidation, or closure efforts should also be districtwide in scope, rather than concentrating the hardest decisions in only some parts of SE. Across the findings, participants repeatedly described the exclusion of more inner SE schools, often described as whiter, more affluent, and more politically protected, as a major reason they lost trust in the process and doubted the district’s application of its racial equity and social justice lens.

Recommendations

We have organized our recommendations around pre, during, post, and ongoing rightsizing district supports.

Pre-Rightsizing Decision(s)

Be explicit about tradeoffs and equity tensions

PPS should name tradeoffs directly and transparently, acknowledging that the same decision can produce meaningful gains while also creating real burdens. For instance, a consolidation may strengthen programming and staffing while increasing transportation demands for families. A DLI relocation may improve program coherence and staffing stability but reduce neighborhood access or shift who can participate. A boundary adjustment may balance enrollment in one building but reduce racial or socioeconomic diversity or destabilize enrollment patterns in another. A closure may reduce facility costs yet disrupt trusted relationships and student belonging. Our findings repeatedly show that the same change(s) can generate benefits *and* harms within the same school community, which is why explicitly naming tradeoffs is essential for equity-centered decision making.

Create a simple equity impact summary for every school closure or consolidation scenario

Our findings suggests that SEGC-impacted schools ended up serving higher shares of students of color and multilingual learners (i.e., emergent bilingual students), and students receiving special education services than projected, and participants strongly questioned whether the benefits and burdens that SEGC changed brought about were distributed equitably.

Specifically, for each proposed closure, consolidation, program move, or boundary change option, PPS should provide a clear impact summary that shows the number and percentage of students affected, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, multilingual learner status, special education status, and poverty indicators such as FRPL, where available. PPS should also identify which students are participating in key programs, so the district can transparently show how proposed changes may shift access to specialized offerings and supports across student groups. This can honestly be a dashboard. Additionally, as the district develops criteria for well-resourced schools, those criteria should be used as a filter through which all scenarios might be assessed.

Build scenarios with principals before the public rollout

Building scenarios with principals before a public rollout might strengthen both the quality and legitimacy of district decision-making. During our qualitative data collection, principals often suggested that they understand building-level consequences and community dynamics in ways that broad, centralized processes can miss. At the same time, PPS should acknowledge openly that principals may have competing interests, including understandable protectiveness over their

school's enrollment, staffing, reputation, and the possibility of closure or consolidation. That territoriality does not undermine the entire process, but it does create a predictable incentive structure and an emotional reality when people are responsible for a community they love. Perhaps, the district can address this by setting clear norms and guardrails up front and ground scenario work in shared equity goals and transparent criteria, and pair principal input with trusted community partners and equity accountability checks so that scenario-building does not become something that is viewed as “behind-the-scenes” by community and district stakeholders.

Define “well-resourced schools” through a concrete, funded, and feasible staffing model

PPS should clearly define what it means by a “well-resourced school” before using that phrase to justify boundary changes, consolidation, closure, or other rightsizing decisions. While the definition can be aspirational,⁴⁴ it should also specify the staffing, services, programs, and learning conditions that students and families should be able to expect at each grade level. At minimum, this should include expectations for classroom staffing, specialists, intervention supports, counseling and mental health supports, special education services, multilingual learner supports, enrichment and electives, planning time, leadership capacity, and family/community engagement supports (we discuss this in greater detail in section 6).

The well-resourced schools definition should also be tied to a realistic staffing and resource model that PPS can fund and sustain for multiple school years (e.g., five-year window). Given the district's declining enrollment, PPS should be cautious defining “well-resourced schools” in ways that depend on one-time adjustments, temporary funds, or enrollment assumptions that may not hold over time. Instead, the district should identify what it can realistically deliver, what enrollment levels are needed to sustain those resources, and what additional supports will be provided if schools fall below those levels because of continued enrollment decline.

If a proposed closure, consolidation, or boundary change is intended to create well-resourced schools, PPS should be able to demonstrate not only that enrollment numbers improve on paper, but that students will experience more stable staffing, stronger supports, broader programming, and more equitable access to high-quality learning environments over time, and specifically which groups of students might experience this.

Use projection ranges instead of single enrollment estimates

Our preliminary findings indicate that in SEGC-impacted schools' enrollment projections were overestimated at several SEGC schools. Several schools were more than 50 students below projections, and several other schools were more than 20 students above projections. That

⁴⁴ This recommendation should not preclude PPS from developing both aspirational models and feasible implementation models for well-resourced schools. Aspirational models can clarify the district's long-term vision for what all students deserve, while feasible models should specify what PPS can realistically fund and sustain within current and projected fiscal and enrollment conditions. Where gaps exist between the two, PPS should name those gaps transparently, identify what would be required to close them, and explain how the district will make progress over time.

matters because schools' staff, schedule, and plan programs around projected numbers. Therefore, PPS should show scenarios such as expected enrollment, lower-than-expected enrollment, higher-than-expected enrollment, higher student-need enrollment, and identify what happens under each scenario. Put simply, given ongoing state underfunding and broader macro-level factors outside the district's control, such as declining birth rates, rising housing costs, and shifting family migration patterns, the district should use enrollment projection ranges rather than a single projected number for each school. A range-based approach would better reflect uncertainty, avoid creating a false sense of precision, and support more responsible planning under changing demographic and fiscal conditions.

Conduct a cumulative equity burden analysis

The preliminary findings from our report are very clear that schools did not experience SEGC as a single event. They experienced it as layered disruption (including, for example, school mergers, program relocations, feeder loss, boundary shifts, grade reconfiguration, construction, pandemic disruption, labor actions, budget cuts, and leadership turnover). Therefore, before deciding which school communities absorb more change and which school communities have experienced the most burdens of change, PPS should identify which schools have already experienced disruptions such as prior boundary changes, program relocations, grade reconfigurations, leadership turnover, staff reductions, feeder pattern loss, high staff turnover, etc. This could also be a map or dashboard.

Pre and Post Rightsizing Decision(s)

Develop a robust, funded transition plan prior to any Board vote that spells out what implementation and multi-year supports will look like in practice

Our preliminary findings suggest that PPS could create a transition plan that includes time and space for new leadership, staff to build community and instructional and planning routines. In addition, the plan might include student transition activities, family orientation and navigation support, multilingual communications, transportation planning, continuity of special education services, support for multilingual learners, staffing and scheduling plans, culture, belonging, and community-building strategies. Again, our preliminary findings suggest that many schools felt left to invent transition supports on their own, and this support is designed to make sure that does not happen again.

Ongoing per Rightsizing Decision(s)

Support learning environments with staffing reviews and rapid adjustments

PPS should conduct a recurring enrollment, staffing, and class size review cycle at key intervals after implementation of rightsizing, including before school starts, after the first 30 school days, after the first quarter, and at midyear. Each review should assess staff and school needs as well

as compare actual enrollment and student need to projections and to clearly defined thresholds, and it should trigger real time adjustments when conditions exceed planned capacity. If class sizes, special education caseloads, multilingual learner needs, intervention access, or behavior and climate needs exceed planned thresholds, additional staffing, coaching, student supports, or schedule changes should be provided in whatever capacities PPS can. This is important because it can help the district create a critical internal feedback loop that supports staff and learning environments in the period when they are most fragile.

Visit schools, implement monitoring and feedback loops to build trust and public accountability

This recommendation comes directly from our preliminary finding that trust was weakened not only by the decisions themselves, but by how communities experienced the process over time. Across our data collection, participants described broken promises, weak follow-through, inconsistent communication, and limited visibility into whether concerns raised by schools and communities were ever acted upon. The evidence suggests that these weak feedback loops made the process feel less fair, less transparent, and less responsive, which in turn intensified mistrust and made implementation harder. In this sense, we view monitoring and feedback loops as a core trust-building strategy. This could be progress and feedback loops on measures that are important to schools, the district, and families.

Section 3:

Findings of Community Engagement, Voice, and Decision-Making: The Perspectives of SEGC Members and Families and Caregivers of Students in SEGC Impacted Schools

Perspectives of Families and Caregivers of Students in SEGC Impacted Schools

Family Perspectives Across SEGC-Impacted School Communities

This section draws on cross-school focus groups with families to better understand how they experienced SEGC-related changes. Our data includes 11 family focus group conversations, including approximately 35 parent and caregiver participants whose children were currently or formerly enrolled in schools affected by SEGC or related Southeast school changes.

The conversations included families whose native languages are English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Spanish-language or bilingual Spanish-English. Families represented a wide range of school experiences, including children who remained in their schools, children who moved schools as SEGC changes were implemented, children who participated in Spanish or Mandarin Dual Language Immersion pathways, children receiving special education services, and children whose elementary, middle, or high school pathways crossed multiple schools before, during, and after SEGC-related shifts.

The schools represented through caregivers' direct student experiences or school pathways included Lent, Bridger/Creative Science, Kellogg, Harrison Park, Woodstock, Creston, Hosford, Franklin, Cleveland, Glencoe, Lewis, Arleta, Sellwood, Roseway Heights, Winterhaven, Vestal, and one unspecified PPS K–8 to K–5 transition. Families also discussed Atkinson, Marysville, Grout, Whitman, Lane, Mount Tabor, McDaniel (high school), and other schools as consequential to SEGC-related boundaries, feeder patterns, program pathways, transportation, special education placement, or future enrollment decisions. Because several caregivers described children's movement across multiple schools, these school connections should be understood as overlapping rather than mutually exclusive.

Overall, families described SEGC not only as a boundary or program process, but as a set of changes that affected daily routines, transportation, class size, peer relationships, school identity, after-school access, sports participation, special education access, DLI pathways, and long-term feeder patterns. Families also described some real gains, especially where schools built stronger DLI communities or more welcoming middle school environments. However, those gains often existed alongside frustration with the process, unresolved pathway issues, transportation burdens, class size instability, and perceived inequities in whose communities were asked to absorb the most change.

Families Described Learning Environments as More Crowded, Less Stable, and Less Supported

Across school communities, families described learning environments as affected by class size increases, staffing instability, reduced services, and inconsistent access to supports. In some schools, families described a pattern of small classes one year and much larger classes the next,

or stable staffing one year and significant reductions the next. Families connected these fluctuations to enrollment shifts, budget pressures, and boundary decisions that they believed left some schools under-enrolled and vulnerable to cuts.

Several families described reduced access to trusted adults, specialists, counselors, library services, intervention support, after-school offerings, or special education-related supports. These reductions were especially concerning when students had IEPs, sensory needs, language needs, or other support needs that required predictable adult relationships and smaller learning environments. In these accounts, learning environment quality was not defined only by curriculum. It was also defined by whether students could access consistent adults, reasonable class sizes, supports, electives, and stable routines.

Families also described a self-reinforcing cycle in some schools: boundaries or enrollment shifts reduced enrollment, reduced enrollment led to staffing cuts, staffing cuts made the school appear less attractive or less stable, and that instability risked further enrollment loss. This concern was especially pronounced in family accounts related to Creston and other smaller neighborhood schools, where families worried that enrollment loss, staffing reductions, and declining program access could make future closure or consolidation seem inevitable. Parents stated:

“There was a reduction in available services at the school...and an increase in class sizes.”

“There might be a single third grade at Creston next year...my kid’s kindergarten was 15 kids, first grade was like 16 kids...and then moving to a 35 kid third grade class feels unnecessary.”

Families Described DLI as Both a Source of Belonging and a Fragile Commitment

Families across Spanish and Mandarin DLI pathways described dual language immersion as a major source of belonging, cultural affirmation, academic value, and long-term commitment. Several families described DLI as the reason they chose a school, stayed through disruption, accepted longer commutes, or remained committed to PPS. Families connected DLI not only to language learning, but also to multicultural communities, cross-cultural relationships, and the kind of city they hoped their children would help build.

Several families described Lent’s whole-school Spanish DLI model as a meaningful gain, especially because Spanish was more visible and central throughout the school, multicultural programming was stronger, bilingual support staff were present, and families could see a clearer schoolwide identity around Spanish language and culture. At the same time, those families described the process of getting to that model as confusing, inequitable, and under-supported. Families raised concerns about long bus rides, late transportation decisions, crowded classrooms, unclear registration, leadership instability, insufficient transition staffing, and promises that were not fully honored.

Mandarin DLI families raised related but distinct concerns. They described Woodstock as a school where the Mandarin program and neighborhood program had coexisted in a culturally meaningful way. Families described the shift to Harrison Park as creating a long commute, fragmenting relationships, and leading some Mandarin-speaking families to leave the program. Some families felt PPS described the move as serving Chinese-speaking families without sufficiently understanding distinctions among Chinese language communities or listening to the families most affected.

Across DLI communities, families described a gap between the commitment PPS asks families to make and the commitment families felt PPS made in return. Families are often told that DLI is a long-term K–12 commitment. Yet some experienced SEGC as a disruption of that very commitment. Parents said:

“It just feels like you asked us to commit to something that you’re not committed to.”

“The whole school DLI is great...but the process...was a little convoluted.”

“Whole school DLI is great. It needs to be funded, and it needs to be prioritized.”

Families Described Transportation, Geography, and After-School Access as Core Equity Issues

Families described students spending significant time on buses or in cars, children getting up much earlier than siblings, long commutes replacing walkable neighborhood routines, and students being assigned to schools farther from home even when another school was much closer. Families also described safety concerns connected to major roads, long walking distances to bus stops, traffic conditions near schools, and students traveling home in the dark during winter months.

Transportation also affected access to the full school experience. Families described after-care, sports, and electives as harder to access when students attended schools far from home or when middle school sports were tied to high school clusters rather than the middle school students actually attended. Several families described the current sports and feeder arrangements as especially difficult for Creston, Hosford, Franklin, Cleveland, Woodstock, Harrison Park, and other pathway-affected students. In these accounts, SEGC-related changes did not only determine where students went during the school day. They shaped whether students could participate in after-school activities, maintain friendships, and fully belong to the school community. Participants commented:

“My children get on the bus at 7:06 a.m....they are on the bus for a very, very long time.”

“The split feeder pattern at the middle school has made middle school sports almost impossible for many kids to participate in.”

“Kids are missing out on sports because this boundary issue was never resolved.”

Families Described Loss of Cohort, Friendship, and Community Continuity as a Major Harm

Families repeatedly emphasized that school transitions affected children’s friendships, peer groups, parent networks, and sense of community. Several caregivers described children leaving elementary school cohorts, entering middle school with only one or a few familiar peers, or having to choose between friends assigned to different high schools. Families often described these impacts as emotionally significant, particularly for middle school students, for whom peer belonging was viewed as central to well-being.

Families described some students having to rebuild friendships after years of community formation, while others were separated again at the high school level because earlier feeder questions were not resolved. Families also described parent community disruption, including the loss of walkable relationships, weaker parent networks, and difficulty accessing directories or communication tools needed to rebuild community. Parents stated:

“The hardest part for our family was losing our community. My son basically lost all of his friendships. We lost our parent group.”

“We just want our kids to stay with their friends. And I think that’s pretty reasonable to ask.”

“It felt like we almost moved to a new place.”

Families Perceived Inequitable Burdens Across Schools and Communities

Across language groups and school communities, families perceived that SEGC-related disruption was not distributed equitably. Families repeatedly described Title I schools, schools in the outer Southeast, DLI families, immigrant families, families with fewer resources, and students receiving special education services as carrying greater burdens. By contrast, they perceived some more affluent or politically powerful communities as being more protected from major changes.

Families described this not only as an outcome issue, but as a process issue. Several participants believed that families with more time, legal resources, English fluency, political connections, or ability to attend multiple meetings had more influence over final decisions. Families also noted that the communities most affected by change are often the least able to attend evening meetings,

track multiple scenarios, interpret technical documents, or advocate repeatedly across a long process. Participants described their perceptions:

“The people who can afford the time and the resources to be there are the ones who are heard.”

“An interpreter is just checking an equity and inclusion box if you don’t do anything with what you’re hearing.”

“If you’re going to do equity, you got to do it all.”

Families Said Trust Depends on Clear Communication, Real Co-Design, Follow-Through, and Repair

Families described communication as confusing, circular, delayed, and often mediated through PTA networks or parent-to-parent communication rather than clear district systems. Some families said they had difficulty tracking which scenario was current, what had been decided, what remained open, and what the implications would be for transportation, staffing, high school pathways, or after-school access. Others said they did not hear about important issues until decisions had already been made.

Families also described mistrust when district promises or expectations did not materialize. This included concerns about transition staffing, transportation, community-building support, after-care, unresolved feeder patterns, and promised follow-up phases. Several families emphasized that the process does not end when the Board votes or when students are reassigned. The district must continue supporting the transition for multiple years and must track whether the intended benefits actually occur.

According to participants, PPS should not only communicate better but should create ongoing mechanisms for course correction. Families want clear criteria, transparent data, targeted outreach to affected communities, multilingual engagement, youth and family voice, and evidence that input changes decisions. They also want district leaders to account for cumulative disruption, asking not only whether a proposed change makes sense on paper, but how much change a given school community has already absorbed. Parents said:

“It felt like they weren’t listening.”

“We only found out late about possible changes. We want more time and real options, not just being told what’s already decided.”

“They need to know that the process isn’t over once they make the change.”

“The process isn’t over once they make the change... they can’t walk away and not support the transition for the subsequent years.”

Summary of Cross-School Family Findings

Taken together, the family data show that SEGC-related changes were experienced not only through where students were assigned, but through whether they could remain with peers, access after-school activities, receive services, participate in sports, maintain language pathways, and trust that the district would finish the work it started. Families described some real gains, especially at Lent and Harrison Park, where several caregivers praised school staff, school community, DLI programming, and middle school opportunities. However, these gains existed alongside frustration with the process, unresolved pathway issues, transportation burdens, class size instability, and perceived inequities in whose communities were asked to absorb the most change.

Overall, the cross-school family findings are less about a narrow story about boundaries and programs and more of a broader story about the lived infrastructure of school change: transportation, staffing, class size, cohort continuity, language pathways, after-school access, special education support, family communication, and trust. Families’ central message was that future district changes must be evaluated not only by whether enrollment looks more balanced on paper, but by whether students and families experience the change as stable, supported, fair, and humanizing.

School-Specific Family Perspectives

The school-specific family perspectives below summarize the schools and student pathways that were discussed most directly across the family focus groups and interviews. These summaries are not intended to provide a comprehensive family analysis of every SEGC-impacted school. Rather, they highlight the schools that were named by participating parents and caregivers, represented through their children’s current or former enrollment, or discussed because they were directly connected to families’ SEGC-related experiences, including school moves, DLI pathways, transportation, feeder patterns, special education placement, or access to programs and supports. Since family participation was not evenly distributed across all schools, the depth of discussion varies by school. For this reason, these school-specific summaries should be read as illustrative family perspectives from the 11 family focus groups, not as representative findings for every family or every school community. Finally, our findings here do not include all 20 SEGC-impacted schools but, again, only the schools that were discussed during our data collection.⁴⁵

Arleta

Families described Arleta as a school that had lost significant resources and staff after SEGC-related changes. They pointed to reductions in counselor time, support roles, and building-level leadership capacity as examples of how the school’s support had been weakened. Families also described a loss of racial diversity and community strength, connecting enrollment drops and resource cuts to disproportionate impacts on historically marginalized communities.

Arleta was also discussed through the lens of possible future closure. Families expressed fear that the school was being allowed to wither, which reinforced perceptions of inequity. In these accounts, Arleta was not described as simply experiencing normal enrollment change. Rather, families saw the school as part of a broader pattern in which schools serving more historically underserved communities lose resources, become less stable, and then are treated as candidates for additional disruption.

Atkinson

Families discussed Atkinson as a consequential school in the SEGC process, particularly in relation to Spanish DLI, neighborhood boundaries, and perceptions that some school communities had more influence over final decisions than others. Some families described Atkinson as a school that retained a Spanish DLI strand while other schools were moved toward whole-school DLI models or experienced more substantial program and boundary changes. Families perceived this as inconsistent with the district’s stated rationale that immersion strands should be consolidated or that similar program rules should apply across schools.

⁴⁵ In this section, we discuss some schools that were not part of our school-by-school analysis in forthcoming sections. As well, here we discuss some schools that were not part of our in-person data collection.

Families also discussed Atkinson as an example of how more privileged or politically organized school communities may have had greater influence in the process. Some participants perceived that Atkinson families were able to resist changes more effectively than communities with fewer resources, less time, or less access to district decision-making. These comments should be framed as family perceptions, but they are important because they shaped how families interpreted whether SEGC was implemented equitably.

Atkinson also came up in family accounts when caregivers discussed how special education placement decisions shaped where their children could attend school. One caregiver described living near Atkinson but having a child placed elsewhere because the appropriate classroom was full or unavailable, which raised broader concerns about how neighborhood assignment, special education services, building accessibility, and program availability intersected for families at the school.

Lent

Families connected to Lent described one of the most nuanced sets of experiences in the family data. On one hand, several caregivers described Lent's whole-school Spanish DLI model as a meaningful gain. Families spoke positively about hearing more Spanish throughout the school, stronger multicultural programming, bilingual support staff, culturally affirming events, and a growing sense that Lent had become a more coherent Spanish immersion school community. Some families described their children as happy, well-supported, and thriving at Lent, and several praised the school's current direction, staff, and community-building efforts.

At the same time, families described the process of getting to that model as confusing, inequitable, and under-supported. Families who moved from Bridger to Lent described losing walkable access to school, longer commutes, early bus times, transportation uncertainty, and a loss of neighborhood connection. Some caregivers described students riding buses for long periods or families spending substantial time driving children to and from school. Families also described concerns about larger class sizes after the move, including classrooms that became difficult to physically navigate and students with IEPs or sensory needs receiving less individualized attention in larger settings.

Families raised concerns about promised supports that did not fully materialize. Several caregivers described additional transition staffing or funding as something that had been promised or expected but then reduced, delayed, or pulled back because of budget constraints. Families also described early implementation challenges, including unclear registration, late confirmation of enrollment, lack of a permanent teacher at the start of kindergarten, leadership instability, and limited district promotion of Lent as a Spanish DLI option. In these accounts, Lent was both a place where families saw authentic programmatic and cultural strengths and a

place where families felt PPS did not provide the level of transition support needed to make the change as successful and equitable as it could have been. Parents stated:

“Whole school DLI is great. It needs to be funded, and it needs to be prioritized.”

Marysville

Marysville was discussed by families as a school affected by SEGC-related displacement and receiving-school dynamics, particularly in relation to Lent neighborhood students who did not enroll in Lent’s Spanish DLI program. Some families described neighborhood students who were reassigned away from Lent and into Marysville or other schools, emphasizing that those students and families experienced major disruption even if they were not always the most visible voices in the process.

Families also raised concerns about whether Marysville families and Lent neighborhood families were adequately heard before decisions were finalized. Several participants described a perception that Spanish-speaking families, emergent bilingual families, and families from lower-income communities were not fully informed or centered in decision-making. During one family focus group, Marysville was named in connection with students and families who had to cross major roads or adjust routines after being reassigned.

Marysville also surfaced through secondhand family accounts about receiving students from Lent and concerns that some existing families interpreted the arrival of new students through deficit-based or stigmatizing narratives. While these are not direct testimony from Marysville’s students or staff, they point to a broader implementation lesson. The lesson is that schools need intentional support for community-building, anti-bias and antiracism work, and shared identity formation when new student groups arrive.

Lewis

Families described Lewis as a strong academic and community environment that supports students well, yet they felt it was undervalued and under-resourced by the district. Parents praised the school’s academic quality and sense of community but argued that district decisions that impacted the school through SEGC changes did not adequately recognize or protect what was working.

Post-SEGC changes, families also raised concerns about large class sizes and the loss of staff and services, including supports for students receiving special education services. They pointed to inequities in class size caps between focus schools and neighborhood schools, arguing that Lewis and similar schools should not be punished or neglected because they are doing well. In their view, Lewis reflected a larger concern that high-performing neighborhood schools serving

racially, socially, and culturally diverse communities can still be weakened by boundary changes, staffing reductions, and inequitable resource allocation. One parent noted:

“Lewis is a great school with strong academics and community, but the district’s decisions don’t reflect that. It feels like they don’t value what’s working.”

Woodstock

Families connected to Woodstock described the school as a place where the Mandarin DLI program and neighborhood program had historically coexisted in a meaningful way. Some caregivers described Woodstock as a school community where families valued both language learning and broader intercultural connection. For these families, the school was not only a program site, but a community where DLI and neighborhood students interacted and where families had built long-standing relationships.

Families described the shift caused by SEGC changes of the Mandarin DLI middle school pathway away from Hosford and toward Harrison Park as highly disruptive. Some caregivers described Mandarin-speaking families leaving the program after the change, either because they did not feel heard or because the new pathway did not match what they had committed to when they entered the program. Families also described large class sizes and reduced sections in the elementary Mandarin program after enrollment declined, with one account describing a shift from two smaller sections to one much larger class and fewer dedicated language and English teaching supports.

Families raised concerns that PPS framed the move as beneficial for Chinese-speaking families without fully understanding distinctions among Chinese language communities or listening carefully to affected families. In these accounts, Woodstock became a key example of how a district may intend to strengthen DLI access, but still produce harm if it misreads community geography, language identity, school culture, and families’ reasons for choosing a pathway.

Harrison Park

Families discussed Harrison Park in several different ways. For some families, Harrison Park became a receiving middle school for Mandarin DLI students or students reassigned through boundary and feeder changes. Some caregivers described the transition to Harrison Park as difficult because it involved a longer commute, fewer familiar peers, and challenges building parent networks. Families described students entering middle school with only a small group from their prior school or without a strong connection to the new school community.

At the same time, several families spoke positively about Harrison Park as a school. Caregivers praised the school’s teachers, staff, remodeled facility, welcoming student-led transition activities, and the middle school opportunities students eventually experienced. Some families

said their children came to like Harrison Park more than expected and found strong support there. These positive accounts are important because they show that families could simultaneously critique the district process and appreciate the school that received their children.

Still, families identified unresolved implementation challenges. These included long bus rides, late or inefficient transportation routes, difficulty accessing parent directories or family contact information, limited support for rebuilding community, and sports or activity barriers tied to high school feeder clusters. Families also described Harrison Park as managing multiple high school feeder patterns, which made communication, athletics, and future transitions more complex for small cohorts.

Kellogg

Families discussed Kellogg primarily through Spanish DLI, middle school pathway, and feeder pattern experiences. Some parents described Kellogg as the middle school serving students from Lent or other Spanish DLI pathways, and some families raised concerns about the school's earlier climate and behavioral history. At the same time, families also noted that the school climate had improved over time and that leadership and staff were working to build a stronger sense of community.

Kellogg also appeared in relation to neighborhood assignment and proximity. Some families living near Kellogg described frustration that their assigned neighborhood middle school was farther away, which required their students to pass a closer school to attend another one. These comments point to a broader family concern about the relationship between program pathways, neighborhood boundaries, school proximity, and daily family logistics.

Families also raised concerns about access to full DLI programming at the middle school level. Some caregivers expressed that the DLI pathway needs to be treated as a full K–12 program, with stronger articulation from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. In these accounts, Kellogg was not only a school destination, but part of a larger program pipeline that families believed PPS needed to support more coherently.

Creston

Families described Creston as a small neighborhood school that, through SEGC changes, had been affected by unresolved feeder patterns, enrollment imbalance, and staffing reductions. Some caregivers described Creston as a strong and beloved school that nevertheless felt like it was being weakened over time by boundary decisions and declining enrollment brought about by SEGC changes.

Families raised concerns that Creston students were moved from a K–8 structure into new middle school pathways, but that the district did not fully complete the follow-up work needed to

resolve high school pathways, athletics participation, or cohort continuity. Some caregivers described Creston students moving together to Hosford for middle school but then facing splits between Franklin and Cleveland for high school. Families experienced this as disruptive because students built friendships in middle school and then faced separation again when moving to high school.

Families also connected Creston's enrollment decline to staffing cuts. They described the loss of beloved educators, reductions in services, and the possibility of much larger class sizes in future years. Some caregivers worried that enrollment decline, and staffing cuts could become a self-fulfilling cycle, making the school appear less stable and then increasing the risk of future closure or consolidation.

"There might be a single third grade at Creston next year... my kid's kindergarten was 15 kids, first grade was like 16 kids... and then moving to a 35 kid third grade class feels unnecessary."

"Invest in Creston Elementary rather than defunding it."

Together, these comments show that families were not only concerned about Creston's current staffing levels, but also about the long-term consequences of repeated reductions. In their view, protecting Creston requires interrupting the cycle in which declining enrollment leads to fewer resources, fewer resources weaken the school's appeal, and weakened appeal further threatens enrollment.

Hosford

Families discussed Hosford mainly through the lens of Creston students' middle school and high school pathway. Some caregivers described Hosford itself as prepared to receive students and generally positive as a middle school experience. They emphasized that the school staff did what they could within the structure they were given.

The concerns about Hosford centered less on the school's internal quality and more on the policy environment around it. Families described confusion and frustration that Creston students attending Hosford were still assigned to Franklin for high school, while many of their Hosford peers were assigned to Cleveland. This created uncertainty and emotional stress for students who had built friendships in middle school but faced future separation at the high school transition.

Families also described middle school sports and athletics access as a major issue. Because some sports were organized around high school clusters rather than the middle school students attended, caregivers said students could not easily participate with their Hosford peers. Families described this as especially harmful for students whose social belonging depended on participating with friends. As one parent noted:

“We just want our kids to stay with their friends. And I think that’s pretty reasonable to ask.”

This quote underscores that families viewed athletics not simply as an extracurricular issue, but as part of students’ belonging, continuity, and emotional adjustment during already difficult school transitions.

Bridger Creative Science School

Families connected to Bridger Creative Science described multiple layers of change. Some Spanish DLI families described moving from Bridger to Lent and experiencing a significant loss of proximity, walkability, and community continuity. Some described children who had attended Bridger, then Lent, and later Kellogg, creating a sequence of transitions during and after COVID-19. Families emphasized that students had already experienced pandemic disruption, and SEGC added another layer of instability.

Families also described Bridger and Creative Science as sites where school identity and program purpose shifted. Some caregivers described concerns that Creative Science’s constructivist or K–8 culture was changed or diluted as buildings and programs were reconfigured. In earlier family accounts, some caregivers described their middle school students feeling less centered or less valued after the school’s structure changed, especially when schoolwide support and activities seemed oriented more toward younger students.

Families also discussed the use of portables and mixed messages about whether buildings could support K–8 models. Some noted that portables were described as temporary or as part of the rationale for changing configurations yet later continued to be used. In these accounts, Bridger Creative Science became an example of how families experienced district communication as inconsistent or difficult to trust.

Clark Building

The Clark building appeared in family accounts primarily through its connection to Creative Science and Harrison Park-related reconfiguration. Families described changes to a constructivist K–8 program and expressed concern that a previously restorative, creative, and developmentally supportive middle grades culture had been weakened or displaced. Some caregivers described middle school students as feeling marginalized, especially when the school culture or programming became more oriented toward K–5 students.

Families also described climate concerns, including a perception that the environment became more punitive or compliance oriented. These concerns were especially salient for neurodivergent students and students who benefited from restorative or relationship-based approaches. The Clark building accounts therefore highlight that school reconfiguration is not only about where

students attend school. It can also change the culture, identity, and developmental fit of the learning environment. One parent stated:

“The middle schoolers feel like they’re in a prison now, everything is about control, and the restorative, creative culture we had is gone.”

Again, accounts like this underscore why future reconfiguration efforts should attend not only to enrollment assignments and building use, but also to the school culture, disciplinary approach, and developmental conditions students experience after a change.

Glencoe

The Glencoe focus group was mainly represented through families whose children moved from Glencoe to Harrison Park for middle school, even though Mount Tabor was the closer neighborhood middle school. The families described the hardest part of the transition as the loss of community, friendships, and parent networks. Some students entered Harrison Park with very few familiar peers, which made the transition feel almost like moving to a new place.

At the same time, the family described Harrison Park itself as a positive surprise, noting that teachers and staff were supportive and that the student eventually liked the school and program. This account reinforces one of the most important nuances in the family data, which is that a receiving school can be strong and caring, while the transition into that school can still be experienced as disruptive and emotionally difficult.

Glencoe families also discussed concerns about transportation and access. The family described long bus times, walking to bus stops, and missed transition opportunities, including not receiving the same type of tour or elective sign-up experience that students attending the closer middle school received.

“The hardest part for our family was losing our community. My son basically lost all of his friendships. We lost our parent group.”

“It felt like we almost moved to a new place.”

Importantly, these comments suggest that the transition was not experienced only as a change in school assignment, but as a rupture in the social networks, routines, and sense of belonging that had anchored the family’s school experience.

Mount Tabor

Mount Tabor was discussed by families mostly as a school that some students lived near but did not attend because of boundary or program assignments. For some families, Mount Tabor

represented a closer school that would have reduced commute time or allowed students to remain more connected to their immediate neighborhood. These accounts raised questions about proximity, transportation, and whether boundary decisions aligned with daily family life.

Mount Tabor also appeared in broader family perceptions of how SEGC affected different middle schools differently. Some families saw Mount Tabor, Harrison Park, Kellogg, Hosford, and other middle schools as interconnected through feeder patterns, program movement, and enrollment balancing decisions. The family accounts suggest that future planning should examine middle schools not only one at a time, but as part of a linked regional ecosystem where changes in one pathway have consequences for several others.

Vestal

Vestal was discussed by families in relation to special education placement, building access, program co-location, and school stability. One caregiver described a child attending Vestal even though another school was closer, because of special education placement and classroom availability. Families also discussed building accessibility, including the absence of a working elevator and how that shaped where students receiving certain services could be placed.

Families also described Vestal as a school that became more stable after another program moved out of the building, allowing the neighborhood school to use more of its full space. In these accounts, Vestal was experienced as a strong and stable school community, with limited staff turnover except where budget cuts affected positions. The Vestal example shows how co-location, building access, special education placement, and program decisions can affect both daily school functioning and families' sense of belonging.

Roseway Heights

Roseway Heights appeared in family accounts connected to student transition, support networks, and emotional strain. Families who moved to Southeast Portland or whose children changed schools described how SEGC-related changes and school transitions could disrupt peer relationships and support systems. These accounts suggest that even when a school is not the central focus of a boundary or program decision, students may still experience the effects of districtwide restructuring through changes in their peer group, commute, or school community.

Roseway Heights also appeared as part of a broader pattern in which families described students adjusting to new settings without enough scaffolding. The core concern was not only school assignment, but whether students had the relational and emotional support needed to rebuild belonging after a transition.

Lane

Lane appeared in family accounts mainly as a middle school connected to boundary shifts, Woodstock pathways, and family decisions about whether to stay, move, or seek alternatives. Some families described Lane as part of the broader restructuring that altered where students would go after elementary school. Others discussed concerns about split feeder patterns and how middle school assignments affected peer continuity and family planning.

Lane also appeared as a receiving or alternative site in conversations about middle school pathways and DLI or neighborhood program changes. The key implication is that middle school assignment decisions can shape not only enrollment numbers, but also families' sense of stability, school quality, transportation feasibility, and long-term trust in district planning.

Summary of School-Specific Family Perspectives

Across these school-specific accounts, families described SEGC-related changes as varied, layered, and highly consequential for daily life. Some schools and programs were experienced as real gains, particularly where families saw stronger DLI identity, welcoming staff, improved middle school opportunities, or more cohesive school cultures. At the same time, families repeatedly described unresolved harms, including transportation burdens, loss of peer cohorts, class size instability, staffing reductions, unclear communication, special education access barriers, and a sense that some school communities were protected while others were expected to absorb repeated disruption.

Altogether, and again, the school-specific family perspectives show that future enrollment and program decisions should not be evaluated only by whether the district creates more balanced numbers on paper. Families want PPS to examine how changes actually land in specific school communities and student pathways. That means attending to transportation, class size, staffing, DLI continuity, special education placement, after-school access, sports participation, peer continuity, language access, and the amount of prior disruption each school community has already experienced. Future district processes will need to pair technical enrollment planning with school-specific implementation supports and visible accountability for whether students and families experience the changes as stable, fair, and humane.

Family and Community Voice, Engagement, and Decision-Making of SEGC Members

Building trust with families and community members during SEGC was a complex and consequential task. SEGC members were asked to participate in a process connected to balancing enrollment in the southeast part of the district.

Family and community voices are not peripheral to equitable district decision-making. They are foundational to whether district decisions are experienced as legitimate, responsive, and worthy of trust. Family engagement research frames families as full partners in their children's education, not simply recipients of information or audiences for decisions that have already been made (Ishimaru, 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2019).^{46 47} This is especially important for families and communities that have been historically excluded from district decisions, including those families who have experienced limited access to timely information, language access barriers, racial marginalization, economic exclusion, or prior harm in school systems.

As such, equitable engagement requires more than outreach, public comment, or compliance with required processes (Ishimaru, 2019). It requires relationship-building, transparent communication, attention to power imbalances, and meaningful opportunities for families and trusted community advocates to shape the decisions that affect their children, schools, and neighborhoods (Ishimaru, 2019; Ed Trust, 2024).⁴⁸

In this section, we draw on data gathered through SEGC member interviews, focus groups, surveys, meeting materials, and related documents (e.g., board documents, notes from prior consulting firms, etc.) to better understand how members experienced voice, engagement, and decision-making throughout the process.

In this chapter, we specifically address the following questions:

- 1) In what ways did SEGC members feel their input was heard, valued, and reflected in final decisions, if any?
- 2) How can future district efforts, especially those related to enrollment and program changes, better build trust and support meaningful engagement with families and communities?

⁴⁶ Ishimaru, A. M. (2019). *Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities*. Teachers College Press.

⁴⁷ Mapp, K. L., & Bergman, E. (2019). *Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family School Partnerships*, Version 2.

⁴⁸ The Education Trust. (2024). *Family Engagement: State Policy Recommendations*.

The aim of this section is to illuminate SEGC members' perceptions of engagement and influence, while also identifying lessons for future PPS decision making. This is especially important for future district efforts related to enrollment shifts, program changes, school configuration, and other decisions that directly affect families and communities. The findings in this section are intended to help PPS better understand how future processes can build trust, communicate more clearly, engage families earlier, honor community knowledge, and create stronger evidence that public participation has meaningfully shaped district decisions.

We conducted two focus groups and one interview with members of the SEGC, which included eight participants. In addition, we draw on survey responses from 22 SEGC members. These participants represented a mix of neighborhood and option schools serving grades K–8. Collectively, they spoke from the perspectives of elementary communities, including Atkinson, Creston, and a K–5 neighborhood school in outer Southeast, middle schools, including Harrison Park, Hosford, Kellogg, and Lane, and a K–8 focus and option program, Creative Science School at Bridger (see Table 4.1). The findings in this section are based mainly on these qualitative conversations, along with survey responses from SEGC members.

Table 3.1. SEGC Study Focus Group Participants by School Represented

ID	School Represented	School Level	School Type
P-01	Atkinson Elementary	Elementary	Neighborhood
P-02	Harrison Park Middle School	Middle School	Neighborhood
P-03	Creston Elementary	Elementary	Neighborhood
P-04	Hosford Middle School	Middle School	Neighborhood
P-05	Creative Science School at Bridger	K–8	Focus Option
P-06	Arleta Elementary	Elementary	Neighborhood
P-07	Kellogg Middle School	Middle School	Neighborhood
P-08	Lane Middle School	Middle School	Neighborhood

SEGC members largely felt that their input was *not* meaningfully heard, valued, or reflected in final district decisions.

Given this overall finding, it is important to note that a small number of participants felt the process clearly benefited their *own* school, but even they emphasized that many other members and communities came away frustrated and disappointed. As such, across the interview, SEGC members described a strong sense that their input was not meaningfully heard, valued, or reflected in final district decisions. One member summarized this bluntly:

“I think we didn’t feel heard, I think at all.”

Participants repeatedly characterized the experience as one where substantial time and effort did not translate into real influence. One member, who has volunteered in many capacities in district and community settings, called this *“by far the worst experience”* they had taken part in and said their work *“feels like wasted time,”* because they did not feel they made a difference or that their participation affected outcomes.

In our conversations with SEGC members, participants described a sharp distinction between how much influence they believed they had at the outset of the process and how little influence they felt they ultimately exercised over final decisions. Most joined SEGC believing they were being asked to help shape major enrollment and program choices for SE PPS schools, with some expecting a meaningful role in decision-making and others expecting at least strong advisory influence. However, it is important to note that some members admitted that it was made clear that their role was advisory from the beginning. However, over time, many participants came to believe that key decisions were predetermined, that their votes and scenario preferences were largely symbolic, and that their labor served to legitimize plans developed elsewhere.

SEGC members who responded to the survey reflected on their experiences when asked what PPS should do to communicate more clearly and more meaningfully with families if the district goes through major changes again:

“Do not ask parents to volunteer countless hours of time and pay multiple millions of dollars to consultants if the district has already predetermined the outcomes.”

“Be honest. If you already know you’re going to do something, just say it. Don’t lead people on and waste everyone’s time with workgroups and processes when in the end you’re just going to force what you wanted to do in the first place. It just destroys your credibility and erodes trust even further.”

Several participants described how they initially understood themselves as representatives of specific schools and the broader southeast community, accountable first to their local

communities and then to the district as a whole. They recalled being told they would help rebalance enrollment and advance equity as Kellogg opened, and they expected that their recommendations would carry real weight. One member summarized the shift in understanding this way:

“We really started voting, we started giving a lot of recommendations. And then it did seem like we were actually directing the staff... And in the end, for both Part One and Part Two, it became very clear that our recommendations were just that... they would then decide what they needed to take to the board... It felt like they were asking us to agree to something that we were wholeheartedly not in agreement with.”

Members repeatedly described a pattern in which they would vote on top balancing and program relocation scenarios, only to see district staff put forward something different as the apparent outcome of SEGC deliberations. This contributed strongly to a sense that their influence over decisions was minimal. As another member put it:

“We would vote for the top three scenarios, and then someone would pick the one that they liked... our votes did not count for anything. I wish they just picked a scenario at the beginning and saved everybody two years worth of volunteer time.”

Additional participants echoed this perception but added more detail about how the formal location of SEGC in the governance structure shifted over time. Early in the process, members believed they were advising the board directly then later they were told they were advising a specific central-office leader instead. One member reported, according to their perception, that this change was framed as a way to navigate public-meeting law, but it also deepened the sense that their role was advisory at best, without clear lines of accountability. Another member expressed frustration that the district continued to label the current configuration “the SEGC setup,” despite the fact that SEGC’s recommendations had not been followed:

“We were a guiding coalition... I did not believe that we had decision-making power, but it felt like our recommendation was going to carry more weight than it ultimately did. The fact that the district continues to refer to this current setup as the SEGC setup actually angers me... They did not do what we recommended.”

The perception that key outcomes were predetermined was especially strong around three areas:

- the relocation and configuration of certain focus and immersion programs,
- the decision to maintain two comprehensive middle schools at Kellogg and Harrison Park
- the narrowing of scope to exclude inner SE and high schools

Participants described specific program siting decisions as “absolutes” that limited any real flexibility. One member argued that two early program decisions largely “dominoed” everything else:

“The two big factors that felt like dominoed the rest of the decision making was [a focus option] at one school and Spanish Immersion at another. That left little to no room for decision-making. Anytime we suggested alternatives... we were told, ‘No, it’ll be fine.’”

Other SEGC members described a similar sense of pre-set boundaries. Participants recalled that Phase 1 began with the expectation that “everything was on the table.” By Phase 2, however, they felt the process had narrowed considerably after inner Southeast schools and high schools were placed off-limits through a Board decision that participants understood to be influenced by district staff recommendations. This narrowing of scope was experienced as a major reduction in SEGC’s influence and as a direct contradiction of the district’s stated equity lens. One participant stated:

“As soon as the inner southeast schools were off the table, I was like, well, this is not an equitable process. Every meeting paid homage to the racial equity and social justice lens, but once those schools were off, it just felt like this bizarre ritual.”

A survey respondent had similar perceptions:

“Don’t ask for parent feedback if you’re not taking it seriously. Do not leave out the high-income white schools from the process while focusing on “equity” it was a total gaslighting experience.”

Control over data and modeling also shaped perceptions of influence. Members consistently emphasized that while they received large volumes of data, they lacked timely, responsive, and equitable access to the specific analyses needed to test ideas and influence proposals. Participants described what several referred to as a “wall” between SEGC and the contracted analytics team. Participants stated that district-preferred ideas were modeled quickly, whereas member-requested variations took weeks or never materialized. For example, members recalled requesting scenarios to run and either never seeing the results or receiving them minutes before a vote. One member concluded:

“We would ask for different data scenarios, and we wouldn’t get the data until 20 minutes before the meeting that we were supposed to vote on it... It felt like a shell game... It felt like the dialog we were having in the meetings was completely pointless, because they had a plan, and they were going to figure out how to make it work, and we were just there to check the boxes.”

Some participants described a critical turning point when more than half the coalition abstained from the final vote, refusing to endorse a single option they considered deeply flawed. Only then did the district agree to convene a special session with the contracted analytics team to model an alternative scenario to members had been requesting. Even in that moment, the alternative was presented rapidly and with little time to refine it. For some, this experience confirmed that routine participation and respectful questioning did not confer real influence. They felt like only near-breakdown resistance forced limited responsiveness. As one member put it:

“We literally had more than half of the coalition say we’re not going to vote. We abstained from the final vote. That’s when that special meeting came to be... I wish we would have done a lot more of that earlier.”

Importantly, perceptions of influence were not entirely uniform. One participant, representing a middle school whose enrollment, according to their perception, was significantly strengthened by boundary changes, felt that the district’s goals for that part of the system were clear and that SEGC’s work helped achieve them. The participant reported that her school moved from chronically low enrollment toward a stable, sustainable size, and they credited both district demographers and SEGC discussions with making this possible. At the same time, the person acknowledged that her experience was unusual:

“I’m one of the few people that benefited almost entirely from it. My school is what got all the benefits of all the agony that everybody else went through... [School name] is around 450 now and pretty stable. We really did get what we hoped for. I know I’m a real minority voice, because I’m one of the few people who pretty much got just what they hoped for.”

That same participant also emphasized that disappointment and anger were “inevitable” for other members, given that the process necessarily involved painful tradeoffs and could not possibly give every community what it most wanted. This participant’s account underscores that perceptions of influence were shaped not only by process design and transparency, but also by whether one’s own community experienced clear benefits or clear harms.

Across all of our conversations with SEGC members, participants agreed that they felt heard and respected by one another inside SEGC. They described strong relationships, mutual listening, and emotional support among participants. However, they distinguished sharply between this internal experience and their sense of how PPS leadership and the board engaged with SEGC input. For many, the overall conclusion was that the coalition provided labor, legitimacy, and local expertise, but very limited real influence over final district decisions.

Analytic Note on Lived Experience, Observation, and Participant Perception

In our analysis, we distinguished between participants' direct lived experiences and observations, such as what they saw, did, heard, experienced, or recalled from the SEGC process, and their broader perceptions or interpretations of what those experiences meant. This distinction matters because perceptions are often grounded in lived experience, but they may also reflect participants' efforts to make sense of patterns, motives, decisions, and power dynamics that extend beyond any single moment or meeting.

The claims in this section that describe specific emotions, moments, actions, or process details are grounded in the direct accounts shared by SEGC members that we were able to speak to during the focus groups and interview. These include members describing not feeling heard, feeling that their time had been wasted, recounting voting experiences, receiving data shortly before decisions were made, abstaining from the final vote, believing that some schools were positioned for closure, or naming ways their own school communities were affected by enrollment changes. These accounts draw on participants' own words and detailed recollections of meetings, votes, letters of dissent, data requests, communication challenges, and school community impacts.

At the same time, some findings in this section reflect participants' broader interpretations of the SEGC process, not only discrete events that can be confirmed through administrative records or formal documentation. For example, when members described their influence as limited, characterized certain outcomes as feeling predetermined, named barriers between SEGC members and district decision makers, or described responsiveness as occurring only after significant resistance, we understand these accounts as meaningful evidence of how participants experienced and made sense of the process. These characterizations synthesize patterns across data collection sessions and should not be read as claims that every SEGC member had the same experience. Rather, they illuminate how participants interpreted district motives, Board dynamics, decision-making patterns, and the overall credibility of the process.

Actionable Recommendations Based on SEGC Members' Experiences to (Re)Build Trust and Support Meaningful Engagement with Families and Communities?

Drawing on the experiences of SEGC members, participants' experiences (both directly and indirectly) offered a set of concrete recommendations for how future district efforts, especially enrollment and program changes, might build trust and support meaningful, equitable engagement.

Clearly define the purpose, scope, and tradeoffs before launching future district change processes and groups

First, participants stressed the importance of clear, stable goals and scope, and of honoring those commitments throughout the process. Members believed one of the fundamental problems early on in SEGC was that the overarching goal was never fully clarified or was set incorrectly. Some participants argued that, given widespread under-enrollment, consolidation should have been an explicit target, but instead the work devolved into, what one participant described as “mitigating the impact of an already flawed plan.” As one survey respondent framed it:

“In the previous SEGC process, when district level administrators were asked if they had a goal, mission, or desired outcome for the SEGC process the initial response was that they wanted to hear from families. Although that sounds good in public venues, it also displays a lack of direction, leadership, and compass (moral and logistical).”

Participants noted that when high schools and inner SE schools were removed from consideration, it directly contradicted the stated aim of addressing district-wide equity. For future efforts, they argued that the district should explicitly define its goals (for example, consolidation versus boundary change or boundary fine-tuning), commit to considering all schools, and avoid closing off parts of the city midstream in the process. When constraints or changes are unavoidable, the district should provide a transparent rationale rather than simply announcing a narrowed scope.

Relatedly, members urged the district to be transparent with communities about the real trade-offs and be honest about pros and cons of future decisions. Participants described their own attempts, within SEGC, to generate alternative scenarios that each prioritized different values (such as balanced enrollment, proximity, or stability, etc.) and to compare outcomes. One member argued that the district should adopt a similar approach with the broader public:

“Trust people to understand tradeoffs. When you provide options, give a real accounting of the pros and cons. Show one scenario that prioritizes balanced enrollment, another that prioritizes

proximity, and so on. Then people can see the tradeoffs and understand why a certain path was chosen, even if it's not their ideal."

"Find ways to meaningfully include family input and then name how that input is included in decisions."

Participants felt that this kind of candid comparison would help families see that there is no "perfect" option, and that the chosen path reflects a reasoned judgment rather than hidden agendas.

Use clear, direct communication and consistent data to strengthen public trust

A second major recommendation concerned communication style and consistency. Participants described district communications as overly long, abstract, and lacking in concrete information. They criticized what one participant called "gobbledygook" which includes dense messages that used many words but offered little clarity. This problem, they noted, was already repeating itself in communications about new right-sizing work. One member summarized:

"The statements say so many words and say so little. Families are supposed to sit down and read a wall of words with almost no actual information. Say what you mean, be honest with people. They can handle it. They just want information. Give them the truth."

Participants also highlighted the damage done when district representatives presented enrollment and capacity figures in public that did not match the numbers SEGC members had been working with. This inconsistency, participants said, undermined credibility for both school representatives and the district. The recommendation here is that the district must make sure its data is internally aligned before it is shared in public and must correct any discrepancies openly and quickly.

Design engagement so committees and families can access, understand, and influence the process from the beginning

Third, SEGC members who participated in this research emphasized that engagement for committees and families must be accessible, equitable, and genuinely influential. They pointed out that while the district did eventually provide direct access to data consultants and sophisticated tools, this happened far too late in the process and only under heavy pressure. For future processes, they recommended making such tools and expertise available from the beginning, alongside support that helps non-technical participants understand and apply the information. This implies offering training, clear explanations, and interactive opportunities to see how proposed changes would affect different schools and communities, rather than simply delivering static spreadsheets or dense reports.

Participants also called for reducing the barriers that kept many families from engaging meaningfully. They noted that the volume and complexity of materials required substantial free time, literacy, and technology access, which effectively excluded many caregivers who worked multiple jobs, had younger children, or lacked relevant professional experience. Important to note, a large portion of the SEGC work took place during COVID-19, which required many meetings to be held online. However, participants suggested providing shorter, multilingual explainers, visual maps, and summaries, as well as offering stipends (might not be possible with the district's current fiscal conditions) or supports such as childcare, and using varied engagement formats, including small-group sessions and more informal settings. The goal, they argued, is to design processes that do not only elevate the voices of people with the most time and confidence. One survey respondent suggested:

“Necesitan tener representantes presente en la escuela, tener juntas en Español, mandar folletos a casa con mucho tiempo en anticipación de cambios.” (They need to have representatives present in schools, to have meetings in Spanish, to send pamphlets home with plenty of time before anticipated changes.)

Similarly, another recurring recommendation was to hold more, and earlier, listening sessions that focus on open-ended input rather than reaction to pre-baked plans. Members recalled that prior community sessions often came after the district had already developed a preferred scenario, so families were essentially being asked, “Do you have thoughts about this plan?” rather than, “What are your priorities before we draft anything?” One participant reflected:

“It felt like community sessions only happened once there was already something being worked with. It wasn't, ‘Come and give us your feedback’ at the start. It was, ‘Here's the plan. What do you think of it?’”

To build trust, they argued, the district should engage communities early in defining problems and values and then return with drafts that explicitly show how initial feedback has been incorporated, or, where it has not, why that is the case.

Apply the racial equity and social justice lens through concrete decisions, not symbolic language

A fourth set of recommendations revolved around applying the equity lens substantively, not symbolically. Many participants were clear that the district's equity language alone did not build trust. In fact, repeating an equity statement at every meeting while excluding inner southeast schools and focusing changes on outer southeast made the lens feel hollow. One member captured this dynamic:

“They kept reading the racial equity and social justice lens at the beginning of each meeting, but once those inner southeast schools were off the table, it just felt like a ritual. We kept saying the words, even though what we were doing was just shuffling the most under-resourced students and schools.”

Other participants said that they warned about equity language being used selectively to protect specific programs or communities, rather than to center the needs of students who have been historically marginalized. They recommended that future efforts tie the equity lens concretely to which schools and student groups are included in the conversation, and that the district publish clear equity impact analyses for each scenario. They also urged the district to prioritize direct voices from affected communities over interpretations by more advantaged advocates “speaking for” them.

Honor promised supports and create public accountability for follow-through

Fifth, participants underscored the need for PPS to follow through on promises and maintain continuity of responsibility. They pointed to specific commitments that, in their perception, were not honored, most notably additional staffing for schools negatively impacted by SEGC changes. One participant described working at a school that had been promised a set amount of extra staffing as part of the SEGC plan, only to find that leaders had to apply annually for a portion of those positions and were repeatedly denied:

“They promised additional staffing to impacted schools and then backtracked. Our principal had to apply to be allowed to request what we were supposedly guaranteed. Year after year she was denied most of it. If you promise that support as part of a plan, schools should just get it.”

Participants also linked unfulfilled promises to leadership transitions. They noted that a key central office leader was retiring at the end of the process, and they felt that promises made under that leader were not carried forward with the same level of ownership. This left them with the impression that certain assurances had been used to secure their cooperation on the final plan, without strong mechanisms to ensure delivery afterward. Overall, participants’ recommendation is that the district should only promise supports that are budgeted and structurally embedded, and should create institutional accountability, through board resolutions, policy, and public tracking, so commitments can survive changes in personnel.

Make courageous, student-centered decisions that prioritize equity over political comfort

Sixth, several participants spoke about the importance of PPS making courageous, student-centered decisions, even when it angers more privileged, white, affluent, and vocal groups. Participants observed that previous boards and administrators seemed especially reluctant to make decisions that would upset affluent communities, and that this avoidance contributed to the

district revisiting the same issues years later. One member suggested that the district must accept that some families will be unhappy and that this is not, in itself, a sign of failure:

“Maybe they could let people be mad at them. I’ve never seen an entity so afraid of people being mad at them. Some people are going to be mad. The question is whether you’re doing the right thing for students.”

Another participant added that failing to make hard choices during the SEGC process had real consequences for both equity and stability across many southeast schools. This recommendation suggests that building trust is not only about designing a more robust engagement process and communication, but also about the district demonstrating that, when it must choose between competing interests, it consistently centers students and long-term equity rather than short-term political comfort. As one survey respondent stated:

“Deberían tomar en cuenta, que para los estudiantes es difícil el cambio de escuelas frecuenté y también para los padres. Es difícil retomar confianza en el personal, los maestros y compañeros.” (They should take into consideration that changing schools frequently is difficult for students and also for parents. It is difficult to regain trust in staff, teachers, and classmates.)

Support affected schools before, during, and after major enrollment or program changes

Seventh, another recommendation that comes from our conversation with SEGC members is that major enrollment or program change (including school closures and consolidations) should be paired with a robust implementation and support plan for affected schools. Participants highlighted ongoing harms from unbalanced enrollment, staffing instability, transportation problems, and the erosion of school identities and programs. Future efforts should include concrete commitments to support transitions before, during, and after the changes. For example, this might include preserving key program elements where possible, making sure that merged or relocated schools have real access to libraries and electives, and designing transportation that supports participation in the full school day and after-school activities. The district should also plan for emotional and community support (this might include counseling, community-building events, and targeted family engagement) for students and families whose schools close or are substantially reconfigured. Eve Ewing, a leading scholar on school closures, refers to this as *institutional mourning* to describe the grief, loss, and emotional aftermath communities experience when a shared institution, such as a neighborhood school, is closed (Ewing, 2018).

Begin future processes by acknowledging past harms and establishing clear community guardrails

Finally, given the history of repeated disruptive processes and the trust that has already been lost, future efforts should begin with acknowledgement and visible guardrails. Participants described decades of shifting configurations and boundary changes in the southeast area of the district and

said this most recent process deeply damaged whatever trust remained. Before moving forward with school closures or consolidations, the district should publicly acknowledge specific past harms and missteps (such as, according to some participants, ignored dissent in SEGC, unbalanced outcomes, and perceived inequities in which communities were included), and articulate how new processes will be different. Co-designing guardrails with community members (for example, independent facilitation, data transparency measures etc.) can create visible structures that people can monitor and hold the district accountable to, rather than being asked simply to trust that the process will be better.

In sum, these recommendations do not guarantee trust or satisfaction, but they respond directly to the failures and harms that SEGC participants described. Implemented together, they would represent a concrete shift toward more honest, supported, and collaborative engagement with families and communities, with the hope of mending areas of broken trust.

Section 4:

Broader Research Context: Enrollment Balancing, School
Closures, Consolidations, Rightsizing and Equity

Broader Research Context: Enrollment Balancing, School Closures, Consolidations, Rightsizing and Equity

SEGC was not designed or implemented as a school closure initiative. However, it belongs in conversation with the school closure, consolidation, rightsizing, and district reconfiguration literature because it involves many of the same core mechanisms through which closure and consolidation processes affect students, families, staff, and communities. SEGC changed attendance boundaries, relocated programs, altered feeder patterns, shifted grade configurations, and redistributed students, staff, programs, and resources across southeast schools. These kinds of decisions can produce many of the same equity concerns documented in the school closure literature, including displacement, loss of school community, disproportionate burdens across racial and socioeconomic groups, changes in access to programs and supports, transportation challenges, and questions about whether receiving schools are prepared and resourced to serve students well. For that reason, in this section, we draw on broader national research on school closures, consolidations, rightsizing, boundary changes, program relocation, and school reconfiguration to help clarify the equity questions PPS should consider when making future districtwide changes.

As such, the purpose of this section is twofold.

First, we review research beyond Portland in which districts are responding to declining enrollment, budget pressure, underutilized buildings, aging facilities, and varied access to equitable educational opportunities.

Second, this research will provide an interpretive lens that this report will return to when analyzing the SEGC findings. In later sections, we will situate the PPS findings in conversation with this research to examine where SEGC reflects broader national patterns, where PPS's experience differs, and what lessons could inform future enrollment balancing, rightsizing, boundary, program relocation, or school reconfiguration decisions.

Finally, in this section, we use the research literature to address several key questions that can help PPS situate what is happening in the district within a national context and make equitable future decisions about rightsizing, enrollment balancing, boundary changes, program relocation, and school reconfiguration. Specifically, we ask:

1. Why do districts typically close, consolidate, or reconfigure schools?
2. Do school closures or major reconfigurations improve student outcomes?
3. Do districts typically save money when they close or consolidate schools?
4. Who typically bears the burden of school closures and related reconfiguration decisions?
5. What conditions are essential for making school closure, consolidation, rightsizing, boundary-change, or program-relocation processes as equitable as possible?

6. What does this body of research imply for PPS as we interpret the SEGC findings and consider future districtwide changes?

Within each part of this section, we summarize what the research says and then briefly consider what that evidence means for PPS.

Why Districts Typically Close, Consolidate, or Reconfigure Schools

Across districts in the United States, especially urban districts, school closures and related rightsizing decisions are typically justified through several overlapping rationales, including (a) declining enrollment, (b) budget deficits, (c) underused facilities, (d) aging or deteriorating building conditions, (e) low academic performance, (f) school choice pressures and charter school growth, and (g) efforts to create stronger or more comprehensive learning environments.⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ ⁵¹ These rationales often appear together, but not always. For example, a district may be losing students and revenue while also operating more buildings than it can afford, maintaining aging facilities, and trying to provide a broader (and even more robust) set of academic, enrichment, intervention, and specialized programs.

However, the empirical literature suggests that these decisions are rarely about enrollment alone. For example, in districts like Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, Detroit, and other districts, closures and reconfiguration efforts have been tied to a combination of underutilization, fiscal stress, academic accountability, facilities conditions, and broader governance reforms.⁵² ⁵³ ⁵⁴ Each rationale carries different implications. Closing or reconfiguring a school because it is under-enrolled is not the same as doing so because the building is unsafe, academically low-performing, or because the district is trying to expand access to stronger or more resourced programs. When these rationales are collapsed into a single “rightsizing” frame, communities may experience the process as unclear, overly technical, or predetermined.

For PPS, this means conversations about school size, utilization, and consolidation should clearly distinguish among the different reasons a school may be considered for reconfiguration (e.g., from a K–8 to K–5), consolidation and/or closure. In other words, PPS should avoid treating enrollment or utilization as a single diagnosis. Those numbers may point to a concern, but they do not explain what is causing the concern (or even what historically created the concern) or what kind of response would best serve students and families. For example, a school may be

⁴⁹ Syeed, E. (2019). “It just doesn’t add up”: Disrupting official arguments for urban school closures with counter-frames. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27, 110-110.

⁵⁰ Lipman, P. (2013). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. Routledge.

⁵¹ Bierbaum, A. (2018). School closures and the contested unmaking of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*

⁵² de la Torre, M., & Gwynne, J. (2009). When schools close: Effects on displaced students in Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

⁵³ Brummet, Q. (2014). The effect of school closings on student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 119, 108–124.

⁵⁴ Steinberg, M. P., & MacDonald, J. M. (2019). The effects of closing urban schools on students’ academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from Philadelphia. *Economics of Education Review*, 69, 25–60.

under-enrolled but beloved and relationship-rich. Another school building may be efficiently utilized but still lack sufficient interventions, counseling, enrichment, special education, or multilingual learner support. Then, another school may have declining enrollment because of broader housing, demographic, transportation, programmatic, or neighborhood conditions beyond the school's control. Treating these conditions as equivalent can lead to decisions that appear technically rational but remain educationally or racially inequitable.

In sum, the research suggests that future PPS decisions should begin with a clear diagnosis of the problem, not simply a utilization number, and should evaluate whether the proposed response actually improves students' access to stable, well-resourced, and equitable learning environments.

Do School Closures or Major Reconfigurations Improve Student Outcomes?

The empirical research on school closures and consolidations is mixed, but it consistently shows that improved student outcomes are not automatic. This happens in part because student outcomes depend heavily on the quality of the receiving school, the strength of the transition process, the continuity of student relationships, the level of disruption students experience, and the capacity of the receiving school to serve both incoming and currently enrolled students (this last point is really important and something that came up in our SEGC findings).^{55 56 57 58}

Across studies of school closures in urban districts in the nation, a consistent pattern emerges, which is that students who are displaced because of closures are more likely to benefit when they attend schools that are substantially stronger than the schools they leave. However, when students instead move to schools that are similar in performance, under-resourced, or organizationally strained, the hoped-for academic benefits often do not materialize.^{59 60 61 62} This is one of the most important lessons for PPS. A closure, consolidation, boundary change, or program relocation should not be judged only by whether students are reassigned somewhere else that improves building capacity and utilization. It should be judged by whether students are reassigned to schools with demonstrably stronger learning conditions, resources, and the capacity to serve them well.

⁵⁵ de la Torre, M., & Gwynne, J. (2009). When schools close: Effects on displaced students in Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

⁵⁶ Brummet, Q. (2014). The effect of school closings on student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 119, 108–124.

⁵⁷ Steinberg, M. P., & MacDonald, J. M. (2019). The effects of closing urban schools on students' academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from Philadelphia. *Economics of Education Review*, 69, 25–60.

⁵⁸ Gordon, M. F., de la Torre, M., Cowhy, J. R., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & Knight, D. (2018). School closings in Chicago: Staff and student experiences and academic outcomes. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

⁵⁹ de la Torre, M., & Gwynne, J. (2009). When schools close: Effects on displaced students in Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

⁶⁰ Brummet, Q. (2014). The effect of school closings on student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 119, 108–124.

⁶¹ Steinberg, M. P., & MacDonald, J. M. (2019). The effects of closing urban schools on students' academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from Philadelphia. *Economics of Education Review*, 69, 25–60.

⁶² Gordon, M. F., de la Torre, M., Cowhy, J. R., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & Knight, D. (2018). School closings in Chicago: Staff and student experiences and academic outcomes. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) school closure history is especially instructive. Earlier research on CPS closures found that many displaced students moved from one low-performing school to another (while improving utilization rates in buildings), limiting the possibility that closure would improve achievement.⁶³ The later University of Chicago Consortium study of the 2013 CPS closures adds an even deeper caution. That study found that students from closed schools experienced negative academic effects in the year closures were announced, with reading and math scores lower than expected. Reading effects rebounded after one year, but math (negative) effects persisted for multiple years. Students in welcoming schools also experienced lower reading scores in the first year after the merger (which is known in the literature as spillover effects, which we discuss below), though those effects later rebounded for students in receiving schools. The same study found that staff and students often described the process as emotionally difficult, socially disruptive, and insufficiently planned.⁶⁴

This body of evidence suggests that closures and major reconfigurations can often create multiple layers of disruption. They may disrupt academic progress, attendance routines, peer networks, relationships with trusted adults, school identity, family-school connections, and receiving-school stability. Even when some outcomes rebound, the rebound does not erase the disruption itself. For students and staff, the transition period can still carry deep educational and emotional costs.^{65 66}

At the same time, there is research that shows that school closure can produce academic benefits under specific conditions. Evidence from New York City, for example, suggests that when low-performing high schools were phased out as part of a broader strategy that included creating or expanding access to stronger school options, students who otherwise would have attended those closed schools experienced improved outcomes.^{67 68} It is important to note that this does not mean that closure itself was the sole driver of improvement. Rather, it suggests that closure is more likely to produce benefits when it is part of a broader strategy to expand access to stronger schools, not when it simply redistributes students across an already strained system.

The implication for PPS is that any future rightsizing, boundary, consolidation, or program relocation proposal should identify the educational benefit students are expected to receive, not only the enrollment or facilities problem the district is trying to solve. PPS should be able to

⁶³ Gordon, M. F., de la Torre, M., Cowhy, J. R., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & Knight, D. (2018). School closings in Chicago: Staff and student experiences and academic outcomes. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

⁶⁴ Gordon, M. F., de la Torre, M., Cowhy, J. R., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & Knight, D. (2018). School closings in Chicago: Staff and student experiences and academic outcomes. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

⁶⁵ de la Torre, M., & Gwynne, J. (2009). When schools close: Effects on displaced students in Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

⁶⁶ Engberg, J., Gill, B., Zamarro, G., & Zimmer, R. (2012). Closing schools in a shrinking district: Do student outcomes depend on which schools are closed? *Journal of Urban Economics*, 71(2), 189–203.

⁶⁷ Kemple, J. J. (2015). High school closures in New York City: Impacts on students' academic outcomes, attendance, and mobility. Research Alliance for New York City Schools.

⁶⁸ Bifulco, R., & Schwegman, D. J. (2020). Who benefits from accountability-driven school closure? Evidence from New York City. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 39(1), 96–130.

show that receiving schools are stronger, better-resourced, culturally affirming, and ready to serve additional students. Without that evidence, school reconfiguration risks becoming a technical solution that produces limited educational improvement and significant human and relational cost.

Do Districts Typically Save Money When They Close or Consolidate Schools?

School closures are often presented as a fiscal strategy, especially when districts face declining enrollment and budget deficits, which are very significant realities. However, the limited literature in this area suggests that districts typically do not save as much money as they may expect, at least not in the short term. Savings are possible, but they are often smaller, slower, more dependent on labor reductions, and more complicated than closure narratives suggest.^{69 70}

This is often the reality because the majority of school operating spending is tied to personnel, not buildings. Nationally, salaries and benefits account for approximately 80% of current public school expenditures (and in some districts is higher), which means that consolidation does not automatically generate large savings unless it also changes staffing, programming, transportation, or facility costs.⁷¹ In other words, closing a building may reduce some costs related to utilities, maintenance, administration, and operations, but the largest savings usually come from staffing changes. Edunomics Lab, which is a Georgetown University research center that explores and models complex education finance decisions to inform policy and practice, summarizes this fiscal reality with a useful rule of thumb. They suggest that when a district has under-enrolled schools, closing 1 of every 15 schools may save about 4% of a district's budget, mostly through labor costs. More specifically, these savings may come through layoffs, attrition, vacancy reductions, reassignment, or reduced future hiring. Facilities savings may occur, but they are usually much smaller because personnel represent the overwhelming share of district spending. For this reason, districts should be transparent about whether projected savings depend on reducing staff positions and whether any savings will be reinvested into instruction and student-facing supports. Additionally, facilities savings may occur, but they are usually much smaller because, again, personnel is often the largest portion of district spending.⁷²

This means that closure savings depend on whether the district can actually reduce ongoing costs. If students move to receiving schools that require additional teachers, counselors, administrators, paraprofessionals, transportation, renovations, safety supports, or transition staff, the savings may be reduced or delayed. If closed buildings still require maintenance, security, insurance, or eventual reuse planning, the savings may be smaller than anticipated. If families

⁶⁹ Pew Charitable Trusts. (2011). Closing public schools in Philadelphia: Lessons from six urban districts. Pew Charitable Trusts.

⁷⁰ Roza, M., & Dhammani, A. (2024, March 3). Closing schools: How much money does it save, and is it worth it? Edunomics Lab.

⁷¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Public school expenditures. In *The Condition of Education 2024*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

⁷² Roza, M., & Dhammani, A. (2024, March 3). Closing schools: How much money does it save, and is it worth it? Edunomics Lab.

leave the district because of the closure or reconfiguration, the district may also lose enrollment-driven revenue.⁷³

For PPS, the most responsible approach is not to assume that closures, consolidations, or reconfigurations will automatically solve fiscal problems (see later sections about what closure and consolidations can actually address). Therefore, any future proposal should include a transparent estimate of realistic net savings in relation to the feasibility of what they can offer in well-resourced schools. That estimate should distinguish among several areas such as projected staffing savings, facilities savings, transportation costs, transition costs, receiving-school investment costs, vacant-building costs, and the timeline over which savings are expected to materialize.

The equity question is also not only whether money is saved, which is important. Again, it is whether any savings are redirected toward instruction and student-facing supports rather than simply absorbed into general operations, maintenance, or deficit reduction. If a consolidation reduces the number of buildings but does not improve staffing, intervention, counseling, special education services, multilingual learner supports, electives, enrichment, or school climate, then the district may achieve technical efficiency without creating a more equitable educational experience.^{74 75}

For this reason, PPS should clearly name how much it realistically expects to save from any future closure, consolidation, or major reconfiguration, how that estimate was calculated, what costs were included or excluded, and how savings would be reinvested. A fiscally honest process should be able to answer not only, “What will be saved, if anything?” but also, “What will students receive that they do not currently receive?”

Who Typically Bears the Burden of School Closures and Related Reconfiguration Decisions?

One of the most consistent findings in the school closure literature is that closure burdens are not evenly distributed by race, social class, and geography. School closures have disproportionately affected Black students, low-income students, and communities already shaped by public disinvestment, housing instability, racial segregation, and school instability.^{76 77 78} This pattern is important because districts often use criteria that appear neutral on the surface (while important), such as utilization rates, test scores, building condition, or enrollment trends. Yet those indicators

⁷³ Pew Charitable Trusts. (2011). Closing public schools in Philadelphia: Lessons from six urban districts. Pew Charitable Trusts.

⁷⁴ Hahnel, C. (2023). Centering equity in the school-closure process in California. Policy Analysis for California Education.

⁷⁵ Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders. Research for Action.

⁷⁶ Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders. Research for Action.

⁷⁷ Ewing, E. L., & Green, T. L. (2022). Beyond the headlines: Trends and future directions in the school closure literature. *Educational Researcher*, 51(1), 58–65.

⁷⁸ Hahnel, C., & Pearman, F. A., II. (2023). Declining enrollment, school closures, and equity considerations. Policy Analysis for California Education.

are themselves shaped by historical and contemporary inequities in housing, racialized neighborhood investment, school funding, school choice, and political power.

Recent national evidence shows that majority-Black schools are far more likely to close than non-majority-Black schools, even after accounting for factors commonly used to justify closure, including achievement, enrollment, and socioeconomic conditions in surrounding communities.⁷⁹ This finding is not simply about contemporary district decision-making. It connects to a longer historical arc in which Black schools were closed during and after school desegregation efforts (e.g., *Brown v. Board I* (1954) and *Brown v. Board II* (1955)), often displacing Black educators, weakening Black institutional life, and redistributing educational control away from Black communities.^{80 81} In this sense, school closure is not only a local facilities decision, it is connected to a broader history of racialized educational displacement.

The literature also shows that closures can shape neighborhoods, not only schools. Research on school closures and gentrification finds that closures can weaken the neighborhood-school connection in ways that increase the likelihood of gentrification in highly segregated Black neighborhoods, while producing no comparable effect in White or Latino/a/x neighborhoods.^{82 83} This suggests that closure can become part of a broader spatial reorganization of cities even if it is not intentionally designed to do so.^{84 85} When a public school closes, the consequences may extend beyond students who are reassigned. The closure can affect neighborhood identity, housing dynamics, public investment, and community stability.

Qualitative research helps explain why affected communities often experience closure as a profound loss. Eve Ewing describes school closure as producing “institutional mourning,” a form of collective grief tied to the loss of a public institution that holds memory, identity, safety, and belonging.⁸⁶ Green’s work (the lead author’s prior school closure work) similarly shows that communities may experience closure as the removal of the “heart” of the community, particularly when schools function as neighborhood anchors and symbols of public commitment.⁸⁷ Green, Sánchez, and Castro’s geospatial work on Detroit further shows that

⁷⁹ Greene-Bell, D. M., & Pearman, F. A., II. (2024). Racialized closures and the shuttering of Black schools: Evidence from national data. *Harvard Educational Review*, 94(2), 187–210.

⁸⁰ Greene-Bell, D. M., & Pearman, F. A., II. (2024). Racialized closures and the shuttering of Black schools: Evidence from national data. *Harvard Educational Review*, 94(2), 187–210.

⁸¹ Tillman, L. C. (2004). (Un) intended consequences? The impact of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on the employment status of Black educators. *Education and urban society*, 36(3), 280–303.

⁸² Pearman, F. A., II, & Greene, D. M. (2022). School closures and the gentrification of the Black metropolis. *Sociology of Education*, 95(3), 233–253.

⁸³ Green, T. L., Latham-Sikes, C., Horne, J., Castro, A., & Germain, E. (2022). Making waves: Districts as policy mediators in the flow of school gentrification. *Educational Policy*, 36(4), 849–878.

⁸⁴ Lipman, P. (2013). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. Routledge.

⁸⁵ Pedroni, T. C. (2011). Urban shrinkage as a performance of whiteness: Neoliberal urban restructuring, education, and racial containment in the post-industrial, global niche city. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(2), 203–215.

⁸⁶ Ewing, E. L. (2018). *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago’s South Side*. University of Chicago Press.

⁸⁷ Green, T. L. (2017). “We felt they took the heart out of the community”: Examining a community-based response to urban school closure. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25(21), 1–30.

closures and charter openings can be spatially patterned within racialized and marketized education landscapes, which underscores the importance of examining closure geographically and historically rather than only treating each school as an isolated building.⁸⁸

This matters for PPS because future rightsizing conversations may be framed around enrollment, utilization, or cost, but communities will experience them through histories of trust, belonging, neighborhood change, racial equity, and prior district decisions. The district should therefore ask not only which schools are under-enrolled, but also which communities have already borne previous burdens of displacement, boundary change, program relocation, underinvestment, housing instability, transportation barriers, and school instability.

What Is Essential for Making the Process as Equitable as Possible?

The research suggests that humanizing and equitable closure, consolidation, rightsizing, boundary-change, or program-relocation processes require much more than public meetings. They require clear criteria, upfront analysis of race, geography, and class, honest tradeoff analysis, meaningful community influence, receiving-school readiness, funded transition plans, and long-term monitoring.^{89 90}

In this section, we summarize what the literature suggests is essential.

First, equity-centered processes should begin with clear public-facing criteria before any school list is developed. These criteria should include more than utilization and enrollment. They should include components such as student need, facility condition, program access, transportation burden, receiving-school quality, special education capacity, multilingual learner supports, staff stability, neighborhood impact, racial equity, and the history of prior disruption, to name a few.⁹¹

⁹² If a district begins with a list of schools before communities understand the criteria, the process is more likely to be experienced as predetermined (which was something that emerged during our SEGC analysis, more on that later in the report).

Second, as much as possible, students should be moved only to schools that are demonstrably stronger, better resourced, and prepared to receive them (unless they move to an equally resourced school). Across the empirical literature, receiving-school quality is one of the strongest conditions shaping whether closure produces benefits or harms. A new assignment is not enough. The receiving school must have the staffing, space, leadership stability, intervention systems, student support services, school climate, and family engagement capacity to serve additional

⁸⁸ Green, T. L., Sánchez, J. D., & Castro, A. J. (2019). Closed schools, open markets: A hot spot spatial analysis of school closures and charter openings in Detroit. *AERA Open*, 5(2), 1–14.

⁸⁹ Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders. *Research for Action*.

⁹⁰ Ewing, E. L., & Green, T. L. (2022). Beyond the headlines: Trends and future directions in the school closure literature. *Educational Researcher*, 51(1), 58–65.

⁹¹ Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders. *Research for Action*.

⁹² Hahnel, C. (2023). Centering equity in the school-closure process in California. *Policy Analysis for California Education*.

students well.^{93 94} However, because school quality⁹⁵ and resources are often unevenly distributed across neighborhoods, especially along racial and socioeconomic lines, assigning students to stronger or better-resourced schools may require long travel distances that create new burdens for students and families.

Third, receiving-school capacity must be assessed and funded before implementation. Closure and consolidation decisions affect not only displaced students, but also students already enrolled in receiving schools. Research shows that receiving schools can experience strain or negative spillover effects when they absorb displaced students without sufficient preparation.⁹⁶ Therefore, districts should treat receiving-school readiness as an equity requirement, not an implementation detail.

Fourth, districts should create multi-year transition plans rather than one-time implementation plans of support. Transition support should begin before a final decision and continue after students and staff move. This includes academic support, social-emotional support, student orientation, staff integration, family navigation, transportation assistance, multilingual communication, school culture-building, and explicit attention to grief, loss, and institutional mourning. A closure or major reconfiguration can be technically planned and still emotionally and organizationally underprepared.^{97 98}

Fifth, staff stability should be treated as central to student stability. Closures, consolidations, and program relocations affect teachers, administrators, office staff, counselors, paraprofessionals, specialists, and other adults who hold relationships with students and families. Staff displacement can weaken institutional memory and disrupt trusted relationships, particularly for students and families who rely on school-based adults to navigate change. Equity-centered processes should include staff placement plans, staff retention strategies, support for receiving-school teams, and specific attention to retaining staff of color, multilingual staff, and staff with deep community ties.^{99 100}

Sixth, transportation and access burdens must be analyzed as equity issues. Longer travel times, unsafe routes, limited bus service, disability-related transportation needs, and reduced access to

⁹³ Steinberg, M. P., & MacDonald, J. M. (2019). The effects of closing urban schools on students' academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from Philadelphia. *Economics of Education Review*, 69, 25–60.

⁹⁴ Gordon, M. F., de la Torre, M., Cowhy, J. R., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & Knight, D. (2018). School closings in Chicago: Staff and student experiences and academic outcomes. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

⁹⁵ School quality as determined by traditional markers such as test scores, students' grades, attendance, etc.

⁹⁶ Brummet, Q. (2014). The effect of school closings on student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 119, 108–124.

⁹⁷ Ewing, E. L. (2018). *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago's South Side*. University of Chicago Press.

⁹⁸ Green, T. L. (2017). "We felt they took the heart out of the community": Examining a community-based response to urban school closure. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25(21), 1–30.

⁹⁹ Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders. *Research for Action*.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon, M. F., de la Torre, M., Cowhy, J. R., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & Knight, D. (2018). School closings in Chicago: Staff and student experiences and academic outcomes. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

after-school activities can affect attendance, family engagement, belonging, and participation in enrichment. In Philadelphia, displaced students experienced increased absences after closure, making transportation and school access central to the equity analysis.^{101 102}

Seventh, community engagement must occur early enough to shape, or at least, inform, options, not merely react to final proposals. Research on mass school closure shows that affected communities may mobilize powerfully to defend their schools, but low responsiveness from decision-makers can undermine trust and democratic participation.¹⁰³ Engagement is not meaningful simply because people are invited to speak. It becomes meaningful when communities know what is open for influence, what constraints are fixed, what data is being used, how input will be weighed, and how final decisions changed because of public participation.

Eighth, districts should examine neighborhood impacts. Schools are not only instructional sites. They are public institutions embedded in neighborhood histories, racialized geographies, and community networks. Closure and reconfiguration decisions should therefore include a facilities reuse strategy, community benefit analysis, and safeguards against accelerating neighborhood disinvestment, displacement, or loss of public infrastructure.^{104 105 106}

Ninth, districts should monitor outcomes for several years after implementation. Closure, consolidation, boundary, and program relocation decisions should not end with a board vote or the first day of school in a new configuration. Districts should publicly track achievement, attendance, discipline, mobility, special education supports, multilingual learner services, transportation burden, staff retention, family experience, school climate, and whether promised resources actually materialized. Without longitudinal monitoring, districts may not know whether a major change reduced inequity, redistributed inequity, or created new harms.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the most equitable rightsizing process is one that does not begin with a closure list. It begins with an educational equity and adequacy question: what conditions are necessary for students to thrive, what resources are required to create those conditions, which schools currently lack those conditions, and what set of changes would

¹⁰¹ Steinberg, M. P., & MacDonald, J. M. (2019). The effects of closing urban schools on students' academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from Philadelphia. *Economics of Education Review*, 69, 25–60.

¹⁰² Hahnel, C. (2023). Centering equity in the school-closure process in California. *Policy Analysis for California Education*.

¹⁰³ Nuamah, S. A. (2022). *Closed for democracy: How mass school closure undermines the citizenship of Black Americans*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁴ Greene-Bell, D. M., & Pearman, F. A., II. (2024). Racialized closures and the shuttering of Black schools: Evidence from national data. *Harvard Educational Review*, 94(2), 187–210.

¹⁰⁵ Pearman, F. A., II, & Greene, D. M. (2022). School closures and the gentrification of the Black metropolis. *Sociology of Education*, 95(3), 233–253.

¹⁰⁶ Green, T. L., Sánchez, J. D., & Castro, A. J. (2019). Closed schools, open markets: A hot spot spatial analysis of school closures and charter openings in Detroit. *AERA Open*, 5(2), 1–14.

improve those conditions while minimizing harm? For PPS, the district should take heed and strong considerations in implementing the nine suggestions listed above.

Conclusion

In sum, the broader research provides a clear caution. Future rightsizing, closure, consolidation, boundary, or program relocation decisions should not be driven by utilization rates or enrollment numbers alone. Enrollment matters, especially in an enrollment-driven finance system, but enrollment is not the same as educational quality or equity (even though there is a relationship between the two). Again, a school can be under-enrolled and still be deeply important to students, families, staff, and surrounding neighborhoods. A school can be efficiently utilized and still lack adequate staffing, intervention, enrichment, counseling, special education services, multilingual learner supports, or school climate capacity.

A central question for PPS should therefore be whether any proposed change will create more equitable, stable, well-resourced, accessible, culturally affirming, and academically strong learning environments for students. Before any final decision, PPS should be able to show why the change is necessary, what alternatives were considered, how racial equity was weighed, whether affected students will move to stronger and better-resourced schools, whether receiving schools are ready, what transition supports will be funded, how transportation and access burdens will be reduced, how staff stability will be protected, how community input changed the proposal, how much the district realistically expects to save, and how outcomes will be monitored over time.

Put simply, the lesson from the research is not that districts should avoid all difficult decisions. The lesson is that closures, consolidations, boundary changes, and program relocations are more defensible when they are part of a credible plan to improve educational opportunity, not merely redistribute students or reduce the number of buildings.

Section 5:

Situating SEGC Findings Within the Broader Research on
Enrollment Balancing, School Closures, Consolidations,
Rightsizing and Equity

What SEGC Findings Confirms, Complicates, and Adds to the Research

At PPS’s request, this section places the SEGC findings in conversation with the broader research literature reviewed earlier in this report on school closures, rightsizing, boundary changes, program relocation, and district reconfiguration. This is a common practice in peer-reviewed empirical research. Typically, after presenting findings, researchers often return to the prior literature to explain what the study confirms, what it complicates, and what it adds to the field’s understanding of a problem. That is our aim for this section.

Specifically, in this section, we revisit the research discussed earlier in the report and ask:

1. What does SEGC findings confirm from the broader literature?
2. What do SEGC findings complicate from the broader research?
3. What does SEGC findings add to our understanding of equity-centered district change within the context of boundary changes, enrollment balancing and school closures and consolidations?

Across the literature, as noted earlier, school closures and related forms of district reconfiguration are rarely only technical decisions. Districts often frame these decisions through rationales such as enrollment decline, fiscal pressure, building utilization, academic performance, and program efficiency, but their consequences are educational, relational, racialized, spatial, and organizational.¹⁰⁷ The SEGC findings strongly affirm this broader point. Even without closing schools, PPS’s boundary changes, program relocations, grade reconfigurations, feeder shifts, and enrollment balancing efforts raised many of the same equity questions that appear in the school closure and rightsizing literature such as:

- who benefits, who bears the burden
- whether receiving schools are ready
- whether students gain access to stronger learning environments,
- whether staff stability is protected
- whether families experience the process as equitable
- whether district promises are matched by implementation capacity

What SEGC Findings Confirms

SEGC findings confirm that technical enrollment balance does not automatically produce schools having what they need to serve students and families well.

One of the clearest lessons SEGC findings confirm is that technical improvement does not automatically translate into equitable educational improvement. The school closure and

¹⁰⁷ Eddins et al., 2024; Ewing & Green, 2022; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2011

rightsizing literature repeatedly shows that closing, consolidating, or reassigning students does not improve outcomes unless students move into schools that are substantially stronger, better resourced, and prepared to receive them (Brummet, 2014; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Gordon et al., 2018; Steinberg & MacDonald, 2019). Similarly, the SEGC findings show that enrollment became more balanced, especially at the middle school level, but that balance was complicated by broader enrollment decline, inaccurate projections, higher-than-anticipated student need, staffing strain, and uneven perceptions of learning environments.

More specifically, this finding matters because it challenges the assumption that enrollment balance, by itself, is a sufficient equity outcome. In PPS, enrollment distribution became more even across SEGC schools, but many schools were also smaller than projected and served higher shares of students of color, multilingual learners, and students receiving special education services than anticipated. The central equity question, then, is not simply whether schools became more balanced numerically. The deeper question is whether schools had the staffing, intervention systems, enrichment opportunities, special education services, multilingual supports, and adult capacity needed to serve their actual students well.

SEGC findings, therefore, confirm a core lesson from the broader literature, which is that districts should not confuse technical rationality with educational sufficiency (i.e., schools having what they need to serve students and families well). A technically balanced system can still be under-resourced. In other words, a school can be more efficiently configured and still lack the conditions students and staff need to thrive. For PPS, future rightsizing or enrollment balancing efforts should treat enrollment balance as one indicator within a broader educational equity and adequacy framework, not as proof that equity has been achieved.

SEGC Findings Confirm That Receiving-school Readiness and Implementation Capacity Matter.

The broader literature consistently shows that student outcomes depend heavily on the capacity and quality of receiving schools. In other districts, the benefits or harms of school closure were shaped less by closure itself and more by where students went, what conditions awaited them, and whether receiving schools could absorb additional students without destabilizing their own learning environments (Bifulco & Schwegman, 2020; Brummet, 2014; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Gordon et al., 2018; Kemple, 2015; Steinberg & MacDonald, 2019).

SEGC findings thus confirm this lesson, but in the context of boundary changes, program relocation, feeder shifts, and grade reconfiguration rather than formal school closure. In our study of SEGC, staff repeatedly described having to manage complex changes with insufficient guidance, late or incomplete information, and limited district transition infrastructure. Some schools relied heavily on local leadership, school culture, internal support teams, translation work, and staff improvisation to support students and families.

This pattern broadens the concept of receiving-school readiness. In SEGC, readiness was not only about whether schools had physical space for students. It was about whether schools had the staffing, leadership stability, family communication systems, intervention capacity, special education supports, multilingual supports, and cultural as well as emotional infrastructure to absorb change. SEGC confirms that district reconfiguration is also an implementation challenge, not only a planning challenge. A district can design a technically coherent boundary or program plan, but if school communities are left to absorb the emotional, logistical, and instructional burden without sufficient support, the change can feel destabilizing even when some other goals are met.

SEGC Confirms That Reconfiguration Burdens Are Not Evenly Distributed.

The school closure literature consistently shows that closure burdens are racially and economically uneven. Majority-Black schools have been disproportionately likely to close, and closures have often affected communities already shaped by disinvestment, housing instability, school instability, and racial segregation (Eddins et al., 2024; Ewing & Green, 2022; Greene-Bell & Pearman, 2024; Hahnel & Pearman, 2023). Ewing's concept of institutional mourning and Green's work on community responses to closure also show that schools function as neighborhood anchors, not merely service-delivery sites (Ewing, 2018; Green, 2017).

SEGC findings confirm this broader lesson, even though SEGC did not close schools. Staff and SEGC members perceived that low-income communities and communities of color bore disproportionate disruption. SEGC members who participated in the process reported extremely low confidence in procedural fairness and believed that the benefits and burdens of the changes were not distributed equitably. This concern is further strengthened by our finding that SEGC schools served substantially higher shares of students from low-income backgrounds than SE Portland schools that were not included in the process.

SEGC therefore shows that the equity questions raised by school closure research also apply to boundary changes, program relocation, and school reconfiguration. A district does not have to close a school for communities to experience inequitable burden, loss of access, racialized displacement, weakened trust, or the perception that some communities were protected while others absorbed change. This is one of the most important interpretive lessons for PPS, which is that racial equity analysis should not begin only when closure is on the table. It should guide every major decision that redistributes students, programs, staff, and resources.

SEGC Confirms That Staff Stability Is Central to Student Stability.

The broader literature increasingly emphasizes that closures and major reconfigurations affect staff as well as students and families. Staff displacement, morale decline, professional uncertainty, and the loss of trusted adults can weaken the relational infrastructure that students

and families depend on (Eddins et al., 2024; Gordon et al., 2018). SEGC strongly confirms this point.

The SEGC implementation year produced a significant staffing disruption. According to our quantitative analysis, staff of color experienced especially sharp effects, including higher rates of school departure and district exit compared with staff of color in non-SEGC schools. Latino/a/x staff departure patterns were shaped in part by DLI program relocation, while Black staff experienced persistently elevated turnover and higher involuntary termination rates. Our findings also show that staff morale was most negatively affected where SEGC-related change overlapped with repeated staffing loss, role instability, annual cuts, and leadership turnover.

This finding matters because future rightsizing conversations often focus heavily on students and buildings, while treating staff movement as a secondary operational issue. The SEGC findings suggest that this would be a mistake. Staff are part of the student support infrastructure. They carry relationships, language access, family trust, institutional memory, cultural knowledge, and daily implementation capacity. If reconfiguration disrupts staff of color, bilingual staff, trusted support staff, or stable school leadership, the district may weaken the very conditions needed for students to experience the new configuration as supportive.

SEGC Confirms That Participation Without Power Can Deepen Distrust.

The school closure and rightsizing literature consistently shows that community and family engagement can become a site of distrust when communities believe decisions are predetermined or when participation does not meaningfully shape outcomes (Eddins et al., 2024; Nuamah, 2022; Syeed, 2019). SEGC strongly confirms this lesson. SEGC members often described the coalition itself as collaborative and respectful but distinguished that internal experience from their sense that PPS leadership and the board did not meaningfully act on SEGC input. They also reported limited confidence in decision rules, low trust in rightsizing, and strong disagreement that benefits and burdens were distributed equitably.

This finding is especially important because SEGC was designed as an engagement-centered process. The findings suggest that participation alone is not the same as shared power. Community members may feel heard by one another while still feeling unheard by decision-makers. They may invest time, expertise, and emotional labor into a process and still conclude that the final decisions were constrained, symbolic, or predetermined.

For PPS, the implication is direct, which is that future engagement processes should define what is open for influence, what is not, what constraints are real, how data will be used, how alternatives will be modeled, and how community input will shape final decisions. Otherwise, community engagement can produce the appearance of inclusion while deepening mistrust.

What SEGC Complicates

SEGC Complicates the Research Because It Did Not Produce Broad Measurable Academic Harm.

One important way SEGC findings complicate the school closure literature is that it did not produce the kind of broad academic disruption often documented in large-scale school closure contexts. Research on Chicago's 2013 closures found negative academic effects for students from closed schools, including reading and math effects that emerged around the closure announcement and persisted longer in math (Gordon et al., 2018). By contrast, the SEGC matched analyses found that students attending SEGC schools had broadly similar academic and behavioral outcomes to matched peers in non-SEGC schools, with some positive associations for Black students, elementary students, multilingual learners, DLI students, and students in schools with higher free or reduced-price lunch eligibility.

This complicates the broader literature in useful ways. To be clear, it does not mean SEGC was experienced as easy, equitable, or well-supported. Rather, it means the measured academic and behavioral outcomes did not show broad harm relative to matched peers. The SEGC findings, therefore, reveal a gap between measured outcomes and lived experience. Middle school families reported fewer positive perceptions of learning environments than elementary families, and staff described many learning environments as caring but structurally strained. Thus, SEGC complicates some closure findings in its quantitative outcome pattern, but it confirms the broader literature's point that academic outcomes alone do not capture the full cost of major reconfiguration.

SEGC Complicates the Research Because DLI Relocation Did Not Produce Widespread District Exit but Still Produced Program-level Sorting.

Another way SEGC complicates the literature is that SEGC-related DLI relocation did not appear to produce widespread district exit among DLI students. DLI students whose programs moved largely stayed in PPS, and DLI students left PPS at lower rates than non-DLI students. This pattern suggests that DLI participation may have functioned as a retention factor for some students and families, even during program relocation.

However, this should not be read as evidence that relocation was harmless. The findings show that relocation still mattered for who followed the program, who left the program, who absorbed transportation burdens, and how program composition changed. Students who left relocated DLI programs more often spoke a language other than English at home, suggesting that families with different levels of program attachment, transportation flexibility, and schooling alternatives responded differently to relocation.

This finding complicates the broader literature because it shows that district exit is not the only way to understand displacement. In many closure contexts, researchers ask whether students leave the district or transfer to lower or higher-performing schools. SEGC shows that program relocation can produce a more subtle form of sorting, which is not necessarily district exit, but program-level sorting shaped by race, language, family capacity, program attachment, and transportation.

SEGC Complicates Simple Success or Harm Narratives.

SEGC also complicates any simple narrative that district reconfiguration either worked or failed. The findings show that the same change could produce gains and harms in the same school site. Some schools experienced stronger program coherence, more developmentally appropriate configurations, or greater cultural affirmation for particular student groups. At the same time, those same changes sometimes reduced neighborhood access, disrupted school identity, weakened diversity, created transportation burdens, or damaged trust.

This complication is important for PPS because rightsizing conversations are likely to generate polarized narratives, which is very common in districts across the nation. Some stakeholders may point to efficiencies, new programs, or enrollment balance as evidence of success. Others may point to displacement, weakened trust, or staffing disruption as evidence of harm. The SEGC findings suggest that both can be true. The more important analytic task is to identify the distribution of benefits and burdens across students, families, staff, programs, and neighborhoods.

What SEGC Adds to the Research

SEGC Adds Evidence That Racialized Displacement Can Occur Through Program Relocation and Reconfiguration, Not Only Through School Closure.

One of the most important contributions of the SEGC findings is that they show racialized displacement can occur through program relocation and school reconfiguration, not only through formal school closure. The conversion of one school to whole-school Spanish DLI coincided with substantial student movement, including the near disappearance of Black students from the school and a large increase in Latino/a/x enrollment. At the same time, some participants described the full-school Spanish DLI model as more intentional, coherent, and culturally affirming for Latino/a/x families.

This is not a simple harm story or a simple benefit story. It is an equity tradeoff. The same change that strengthened linguistic and cultural affirmation for one racially minoritized and historically underserved community also displaced another racially minoritized and historically underserved group and reduced neighborhood access for non-DLI families. This adds to the

closure and rightsizing literature by showing that programmatic equity and racial equity must be analyzed together. Put simply, a change can advance one equity goal while undermining another.

For PPS, this is a critical finding. Future program relocation decisions should not assume that expanding or consolidating a specialized program automatically advances equity. The district should ask questions like:

- Which students gain access?
- Which students lose access?
- Which students must travel farther?
- Which students lose neighborhood continuity?
- Which families have the resources to follow the program?
- Which groups become more concentrated, more isolated, or less visible in the new configuration?

SEGC Adds Evidence That Schools Can Experience Cultural Affirmation and Institutional Loss at the Same Time.

The SEGC findings also add to the literature by showing that the same school can be experienced simultaneously as a site of loss and a site of affirmation. Closure literature often emphasizes institutional mourning, neighborhood loss, and community displacement (Ewing, 2018; Green, 2017). SEGC findings affirm these concepts but adds complexity in that some schools experienced loss of neighborhood identity, walkability, diversity, or prior community structure while also becoming more coherent, affirming, or developmentally appropriate for specific student groups.

This is especially visible in the DLI findings. Some participants described stronger program coherence, cultural affirmation, and linguistic identity after consolidation. Others described loss of neighborhood access, reduced diversity, diminished elective access, or weakened school-community ties. These findings suggest that major district reconfiguration should not be evaluated as simply harmful or beneficial. The analytic task is to identify the distribution of gains and losses across groups.

This adds to the literature by emphasizing simultaneous equity effects. Future PPS decisions should therefore avoid one-dimensional equity claims. A decision may be good for multilingual program coherence and harmful for neighborhood access. It may create a stronger middle school model and reduce racial or socioeconomic diversity. It may improve facility access and still damage trust. A more mature equity analysis must hold these tensions together rather than choosing one story.

SEGC Adds Evidence That Cumulative Change Load May Matter as Much as the Formal Policy Change.

The broader implementation literature argues that schools interpret and enact reforms through existing organizational conditions, including leadership capacity, staff culture, staffing stability, school climate, and district-school alignment (Aldridge & McLure, 2024; Bryk et al., 2010; Honig & Hatch, 2004; McLure & Aldridge, 2022; Spillane et al., 2002). SEGC findings add to this literature by showing that the effects of district reconfiguration depend not only on the formal change itself, but also on the cumulative change load schools are already carrying.

Across schools, participants described SEGC as layered on top of other disruptions such as pandemic recovery, construction, budget cuts, labor actions, leadership turnover, school mergers, grade reconfiguration, feeder changes, and prior program shifts. Participants described this not as a single transition, but as a dense web of transitions or multi-year erosion. This finding is important because districts often evaluate each change separately, while school communities experience changes cumulatively.

For PPS, the implication is that future rightsizing or reconfiguration processes should include an implementation burden assessment (as mentioned previously). Before asking a school to absorb another major change, the district should examine what that school has already experienced, including leadership turnover, staff loss, enrollment decline, prior boundary changes, construction disruption, program relocation, student need, family trust, and internal capacity. A change that appears reasonable in isolation may become destabilizing when layered onto accumulated strain.

SEGC Adds Evidence That Local Leadership and School Culture Can Buffer Harm but Cannot Substitute for District Support.

SEGC also adds to the broader literature by showing how school-level leadership and internal culture mediate the impact of district reconfiguration. In several schools, stable leadership, strong staff culture, relational trust, and trauma-informed routines helped staff and families navigate change. These schools were not unaffected but rather they had stronger internal capacity to absorb strain.

At the same time, we caution against romanticizing local resilience. Strong school cultures often buffered harm that district systems did not adequately prevent. Staff repeatedly described district support as late, partial, unclear, or mismatched to school realities. In this sense, school-level leadership functioned as a compensatory mechanism. It helped schools survive the change, but it did not erase the need for stronger district planning, communication, staffing, or transition infrastructure.

This adds to the literature by clarifying that “school capacity” should not become an excuse to shift implementation burden downward. Future PPS processes should identify where local leadership is strong but also ask what the central office must provide so schools are not required to carry district change through local improvisation alone.

SEGC Findings Add Evidence That Procedural Equity May Matter Even When Student Experiences Remain Relatively Positive.

A striking SEGC finding is that SEGC members reported deep dissatisfaction with the process and equity outcomes, while also reporting student experiences that were comparable to other families. This adds to the literature by showing that dissatisfaction with reconfiguration does not always reflect narrow self-interest or direct personal harm. In PPS, some of the people closest to the process judged it harshly precisely because they had inside knowledge of how decisions were made, what data were available, how alternatives were constrained, and how burdens were distributed.

This finding matters for future engagement. Districts sometimes interpret community criticism as resistance to change or dissatisfaction with individual assignments. The SEGC findings suggest a different possibility in which participants may support the need for change while objecting to how the process defines problems, controls data, narrows options, distributes burdens, or fails to act on equity commitments. This aligns with research showing that low responsiveness in closure processes can undermine democratic trust and civic participation (Nuamah, 2022).

For PPS, procedural fairness should be treated as an equity outcome in its own right. A process can produce some student-level stability and still damage trust if participants experience it as opaque, constrained, or inequitable. Future processes should therefore assess not only whether students are doing well after implementation, but also whether communities believe the district acted transparently, consistently, accountably, and equitably.

Overall Interpretation

Together, the SEGC findings confirm, complicate, and add to the broader research on school closures, rightsizing, boundary changes, and district reconfiguration. SEGC findings confirm the literature’s central caution that technical solutions do not automatically produce educational equity. It also confirms the importance of receiving-school readiness, staff stability, meaningful community engagement, racial equity analysis, transportation burden, and implementation support.

At the same time, SEGC complicates the literature because it did not produce broad measurable academic harm, because DLI relocation did not produce widespread district exit, and because several changes produced gains and harms simultaneously. These complications are important because they prevent the report from reducing SEGC to a simple success or failure story.

Finally, SEGC adds to the research because it shows that many equity concerns associated with school closure can emerge even when no school is formally closed. Boundary changes, program relocation, grade-span reconfiguration, feeder shifts, and enrollment balancing can still produce displacement, loss, staff disruption, unequal burden, weakened trust, and institutional mourning. They can also produce gains, including stronger program coherence, more developmentally appropriate configurations, and more culturally affirming environments for some students. The core equity task is to examine the distribution of those gains and burdens.

Again, one of the most important lessons for PPS is that future rightsizing, boundary, consolidation, or program relocation decisions should be evaluated through an educational equity, sufficiency and implementation-readiness lens. The district should not ask only whether a building is underutilized or whether enrollment is balanced. It should ask whether the proposed change will create stronger and more equitable learning environments, whether receiving schools are prepared, whether historically underserved communities are protected from disproportionate burden, whether staff stability is preserved, whether transportation and access barriers are addressed, whether families have meaningful influence, and whether the district has the capacity and resources to keep its promises.

A Brief Note on Focus Options and Equity

Focus options were not a primary focus of this evaluation. However, they emerged during data collection as an important issue that PPS will likely need to address in current rightsizing conversations and decisions. We briefly discuss focus options here because they are connected to several broader questions at the center of rightsizing such as:

- how students and programs are distributed across the district
- how enrollment patterns affect school stability
- how family choice shapes access to opportunity, and whether future decisions will advance or undermine the district's commitment to well-resourced, racially equitable and socially just schools

In this sense, focus options are not treated as a separate topic, but as part of the larger equity context in which PPS must make decisions about boundaries, consolidations, program locations, and school consolidations and/or closures. Below, we briefly discuss our understanding of the history of focus options in PPS, how they intersect with race, equity, enrollment, and access to opportunity, and offer considerations for how the district might attend to these issues in future rightsizing decisions.

As such, PPS's rightsizing work must be understood against the district's longer history of student assignment, desegregation, transfer, and focus option policies dating back to the 1970s.

Historical accounts of PPS’s desegregation efforts show that the district relied heavily on voluntary transfer and one-way busing approaches that placed the burden of integration primarily on Black students and other students of color, rather than requiring shared responsibility across the district.¹⁰⁸ By the early 1970s, PPS’s Schools for the Seventies plan sent Black students to schools across the district while allowing white students to voluntarily attend majority Black schools, which was a design shaped in part by fears that mandatory reassignment of white students would produce backlash and accelerate white and middle-class flight from the district.¹⁰⁹ In this way, PPS’s enrollment policies often attempted to manage racial equity concerns while also protecting the preferences of often white, middle-class, and more privileged families.

This history did not end with busing. As PPS moved through later desegregation, transfer, magnet, and focus option policies, in-district choice became a central mechanism through which families could navigate the district. These policies created meaningful opportunities for some students, but they also allowed families with greater information, mobility, and social capital to access preferred schools and programs while neighborhood schools serving historically underserved communities were often left more vulnerable to enrollment loss, instability, and reduced program offerings.¹¹⁰ PPS’s own enrollment and transfer policy now states that the district seeks to provide “equal access to educational options” and promote “equity and diversity” in student transfers and admissions, which underscores that choice systems must be actively governed to prevent unequal access and unequal consequences (Portland Public Schools, 2015).

That history matters for current and future rightsizing decisions. If PPS is not careful, school closures, consolidations, boundary changes, and program relocations could reproduce the same pattern under a new name, which is protecting the preferences of families most likely to mobilize, opt out, or leave, while asking Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, immigrant, low-income, and other historically underserved communities to carry the heaviest burden of system change.

Equity-centered rightsizing cannot be held captive by the anticipated departure, resistance, or “exit” of privileged families. To be clear, this does not mean dismissing their concerns or excluding them from the process. It means refusing to let their preferences function as an informal veto over decisions intended to create a more coherent, stable, well-resourced, and racially equitable and socially just school system.

Therefore, the central question for PPS should not be, “What plan will least disrupt the families most likely to leave?” (not that anyone is asking that in PPS but that is a question that has emerged nationally). The central question should be, “What plan best advances equitable access

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977; Serbulo, 2019

¹⁰⁹ (Serbulo, 2019).

¹¹⁰ (Serbulo, 2019; Portland Public Schools, 2016).

to high-quality, well-resourced schools for the students and communities PPS has historically underserved?” Given the district’s history, future rightsizing must be guided by transparent equity criteria, not by the fear of losing the families with the most social, political, and economic power.

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Section 6:

Enrollment and the Conditions for “Well-Resourced”¹¹¹ Schools

¹¹¹ The phrase “well-resourced schools” is placed in quotation marks to signal that it is not a fixed, neutral, or self-evident category. What counts as “well-resourced” depends on student need, school level, staffing models, program expectations, community context, funding conditions, and the district’s equity commitments. For that reason, the term requires definition and critical interrogation rather than being treated as a common-sense label. In this report, “well-resourced schools” refers to schools that have the enrollment, staffing, supports, program breadth, class size conditions, and relational infrastructure necessary to provide students with a complete, stable, and equitable educational experience.

Enrollment and the Conditions for “Well-Resourced Schools”

We included this section in response to questions raised by PPS central office leaders about enrollment, school size, and the conditions necessary to create “well-resourced schools.”

This section is not intended to function as a formal school finance study. Such a study would require a more extensive fiscal analysis, including detailed examination of staffing formulas, school-level budgets, facilities costs, transportation costs, projected enrollment, and the specific resource model PPS intends to use to define a well-resourced school (which was not the purpose of this evaluation).

While this report does not offer a formal school finance analysis, it draws on relevant research, available district and state documents, and our equity-centered interpretation of the SEGC findings to identify key considerations PPS should weigh when connecting enrollment, staffing, resources, and school quality.

Additionally, it is important that this section should not be read as determining which schools PPS should close, consolidate, reconfigure, or maintain based on the enrollment numbers and school sizes discussed below. If PPS and the Board consider closures or consolidations, those decisions must be made through a local process that includes extensive community engagement, Board deliberation, school-level analysis, and other factors.

The purpose of this section is to support PPS in making locally grounded and equity-centered decisions about enrollment, school size, and resource allocation. It clarifies the enrollment, staffing, funding, and program conditions PPS should consider before any future closure or consolidation decision is made.

The central argument of this section is straightforward, which is enrollment matters because Oregon’s school finance system is largely enrollment driven. Through the State School Fund, Oregon distributes operating revenue using an equalization formula based heavily on weighted average daily membership, or ADMw. As a result, enrollment changes directly shape the resources available to PPS to staff schools, sustain programs, and provide students with a complete educational experience. Given this reality, this section addresses five guiding questions:

1. Why should PPS derive its own enrollment standards rather than importing school-size numbers from other districts?
2. How might PPS determine enrollment ranges for well-resourced schools in a way that begins with equity, staffing supports, and equitable student experience rather than building utilization alone?

3. What does the research on school size suggest, especially for students who have been historically underserved and what are the implications for PPS?
4. What enrollment ranges might make well-resourced elementary, middle, and K–8 schools financially possible in Portland under Oregon’s current funding conditions?
5. What can school consolidations and closures realistically accomplish?

Before you proceed, it is important to note that some parts of this report, including this section, may feel somewhat repetitive by design. Given the length of the report, readers may enter at different points rather than reading it straight through from beginning to end. For that reason, we occasionally restate key context, findings, and framing so that each major section can be understood on its own.

Question 1: Why should PPS derive its own enrollment standards rather than importing school-size numbers from other districts?

This section begins by clarifying why enrollment standards for “well-resourced schools” should be locally derived rather than borrowed from other districts or only reduced to building utilization rates. As such, we want to caution PPS from simply borrowing an enrollment number or school size from another district for the purposes of achieving well-resourced schools. We make this caution for several reasons.

First, this matters because enrollment thresholds are shaped by local funding formulas, labor costs, staffing models, facilities conditions, student need, and enrollment trajectories. Therefore, a number that appears reasonable in, for example, Seattle, Denver, San Francisco, or San Antonio may not be fiscally or educationally practical in Portland. While peer districts can help PPS understand how other systems have approached enrollment decline, school consolidation, and “well-resourced school” planning, their numbers should inform PPS’s approach rather than determine Portland’s threshold.

This is especially important in Oregon because, as stated earlier, the State School Fund distributes revenue to districts through a weighted enrollment formula. Oregon uses ADMw, or weighted average daily membership, to account for additional costs associated with serving particular student populations and district conditions. In this context, enrollment is not only a demographic measure. It is also a revenue base that determines what schools can staff and sustain.¹¹²

Oregon distributes the majority of school operating revenue on a per student basis. For PPS, sustained enrollment decline is not simply a facilities problem caused by empty seats. It is a

¹¹² [Oregon Department of Education. \(n.d.\). State School Fund. Oregon Department of Education. Oregon’s State School Fund is distributed through an equalization formula, and weighted average daily membership is used in the funding formula to account for student and district characteristics.](#)

resource problem that reduces the revenue available to staff schools, sustain programs, and support students. This is why utilization rates, while useful, provide only a partial picture. Utilization typically measures the relationship between current enrollment and building capacity, often based on square footage. This number can tell PPS how full or empty a building is. However, it does not, on its own, show whether students have access to a complete educational program or to the academic, social-emotional, enrichment, and staffing supports necessary for a well-resourced school.

It is therefore plausible that a school can have a relatively high utilization rate and still lack a rich, rigorous, and culturally responsive and equitable learning environment, core educational supports and program components that students need, including adequate counseling, library services, arts, music, physical education, intervention support, and stable grade-level teams.

Conversely, a school with low utilization may have strong adult-student relationships, deep community trust, strong family connection, and a school culture that is especially important for students experiencing inequity, displacement, or marginalization. It is important to note that utilization rates tell districts something about facilities. They do not fully tell districts enough about educational equity and adequacy.

For this reason, PPS should distinguish among three kinds of enrollment numbers that are often collapsed into one debate: (1) peer district thresholds, (2) adequacy prototypes, and (3) locally derived planning ranges.

As such, we draw on the Oregon’s Quality Education Model (QEM) and the Odden-Picus Evidence-Based Model as examples of adequacy prototypes because they use model school sizes and staffing assumptions to estimate the resources needed for educational adequacy. Specifically, the QEM uses prototypical school sizes to estimate the resources needed to meet Oregon’s education goals. The Odden-Picus Evidence-Based Model similarly uses school prototypes to estimate staffing and program resources associated with educational adequacy.¹¹³ By educational adequacy, we draw on the work of Picus and Odden, to mean “providing a level of resources to schools that will enable them to make substantial improvements in student performance over the next 4 to 6 years, as progress toward ensuring that all, or almost all, students meet their state’s performance standards in the longer term.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ [Oregon Quality Education Commission. \(2024\). Quality Education Model report. Oregon Department of Education.](#) The QEM uses prototypical schools, including a 360-student elementary school and a 500-student middle school, to estimate the resources needed to meet Oregon’s education goals. Picus Odden & Associates. (n.d.). The evidence-based model. The Evidence-Based Model uses prototypical schools and evidence-based staffing assumptions to estimate adequate school resources.

¹¹⁴ Picus Odden & Associates. (n.d.). The Evidence-Based Model. Picus Odden & Associates.

However, adequacy models should not be confused with practical planning floors under current funding conditions and realities. Oregon has not consistently funded schools at the level its own adequacy model identifies as necessary.¹¹⁵

Given this reality, peer district numbers for enrollment standards and school size require caution. For example, Denver identified low-enrollment thresholds by examining when schools require subsidy to maintain minimally required programming.¹¹⁶ Seattle’s well-resourced schools work connected enrollment, building capacity, and program access in its consolidation planning. These examples are useful because they show that other districts have had to connect enrollment, staffing, facilities, and educational program design. However, their specific thresholds are not transferable to PPS because, again, Oregon’s funding system, labor costs, and local enrollment conditions differ from those districts.

Therefore, we suggest that the most defensible and useful approach is for PPS to derive its own planning ranges from Oregon’s actual funding system, PPS’s staffing costs, PPS’s school-level allocation model, the ADMw profile of each school, and projected enrollment decline.

Question 2: How might PPS determine enrollment ranges for well-resourced schools in a way that begins with equity, staffing supports, and equitable student experiences rather than building utilization alone?

Again, we want to make clear that determining the appropriate enrollment range for a well-resourced school is a decision PPS should generate through a transparent local planning process and not impose through a single numerical threshold. School size should be treated as an equity question instead of only as a technical one. In other words, the central question is not only, “How many students should a school have?” but rather, “What teaching conditions, staffing resources, student supports, and equitable learning opportunities should every PPS student be able to count on in every school?”

Given this, we suggest that PPS take three steps to identify enrollment ranges for elementary, K–8, middle schools.

¹¹⁵ [Legislative Fiscal Office. \(2025\).](#) 2025-27 budget review: State School Fund and Common School Fund. Oregon Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Fiscal Office notes that the 2023-25 State School Fund appropriation of \$10.2 billion was approximately \$1.5 billion, or 11.5%, below what the QEM generated as the amount required to meet the educational goals assumed in the model. Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). Quality Education Commission reports

¹¹⁶ Denver Public Schools. (2022). Declining enrollment: Considerations for moving forward. Denver Public Schools Board of Education. Denver identified schools under 215 students as receiving a small-school subsidy to maintain minimally required programming, and later school closure criteria included schools under 215 students as well as schools under 275 students with projected decline. Seattle Public Schools. (2021). Facilities master plan update. Seattle Public Schools. Seattle Public Schools. (2024). Well-resourced schools update.

Step One: Define What Constitutes a Well-Resourced School and Its Staffing Model

The starting point for determining school size should be a values and equity decision that is tested against fiscal reality. Given PPS’s structural deficit and sustained enrollment decline, the district cannot define well-resourced schools without asking both what students deserve and what the system can reliably and feasibly sustain.

Thus, this step is especially important because a well-resourced school cannot be defined only by building utilization, enrollment efficiency, or the number of students assigned to a campus. It must be defined by the actual teaching conditions, student supports, staff roles, and learning opportunities that make a school educationally equitable and robust. This is also where PPS’s racial equity and social justice commitments must become truly operational. Therefore, a well-resourced school should be designed to help pay down what Gloria Ladson Billings calls the “education debt,” meaning the accumulated historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debts owed to students and communities who have been systematically underserved by public institutions.¹¹⁷

Moreover, based on Oregon’s Quality Education Model (QEM), the Odden and Picus Evidence Based Model, and professional association standards reviewed for this report (e.g., school counselors, etc.), the staffing support model for a PPS elementary school might include, at minimum, classroom teachers at class sizes that meet or approach Oregon’s QEM targets, a full time school counselor, a certified school librarian with dedicated technical support, a full time nurse, specialist teachers in art, music, and physical education, instructional coaching, and access to social workers and school psychologists.^{118 119 120 121 122}

For elementary schools, this means PPS should clarify whether every school is expected to provide class sizes that meet or approach QEM’s elementary class size target of approximately 20 students per class (which actually may be more students per class in reality, see below for details), or whether PPS will adopt a phased local standard such as smaller class sizes in

¹¹⁷ Ladson Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3 to 12.

¹¹⁸ [Oregon Department of Education. \(2025\).](#) Oregon class size report for the 2024 to 2025 school year. The report notes that the 2022 QEM adjusted class size targets to 20 students per class for elementary schools and 20.8 students per class for middle and high schools, and that the 2024 QEM maintained those targets.

¹¹⁹ [Picus Odden and Associates. \(2025\).](#) An update of the Evidence Based Model developed for Wyoming and comparison to the 2025 to 2026 Wyoming funding model. The report describes the EB Model as a school finance adequacy model that includes core teachers, specialist teachers, instructional coaches, tutors, counselors, nurses, librarians, and other school-based resources.

¹²⁰ [American School Counselor Association. \(n.d.\).](#) School counselor roles and ratios. ASCA recommends a student to school counselor ratio of 250 to 1.

¹²¹ [American Association of School Librarians. \(2019\).](#) Appropriate staffing for school libraries. AASL states that every learner should have access to an updated school library with a full time certified school librarian and dedicated technical or clerical support.

¹²² [National Association of School Nurses. \(2020\).](#) School nursing role in student health and academic outcomes: Position statement. NASN states that access to a registered professional nurse all day, every day can improve student health, safety, and educational achievement.

kindergarten through grade 3 and somewhat larger class sizes in grades 4 and 5.¹²³ This decision matters because class size is not only a staffing variable. It is also an equity variable, particularly in schools serving students who have experienced accumulated educational debt.

PPS should also define whether every elementary school should have a full-time counselor rather than a counselor shared across multiple buildings. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of 250 to 1, which means that a well-resourced school model should treat counseling access as a core student support rather than an optional add-on.¹²⁴

Similarly, PPS should define whether every school should have a certified school librarian present throughout the school day, supported by technical or clerical staff. The American Association of School Librarians identifies full-time certified school librarians, supported by dedicated technical and clerical staff, as central to an effective school library program.

Additionally, the same logic applies to health, social-emotional, and mental health supports. The National Association of School Nurses has argued that students benefit from access to a registered school nurse all day, every day, and that nurse staffing should reflect student need rather than rely only on simple ratios.

Similarly, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students, while the School Social Work Association of America recommends one school social worker for every 250 students.^{125 126} These ratios should not be treated as automatic formulas for PPS, but they help clarify the level of support that professional associations consider necessary for responsive and equitable student care.

It is important to note that some of these positions may not be generated automatically through Oregon's current funding formulas. Therefore, defining them as part of the staffing support model also requires PPS to name which positions are district investment commitments. For example, if PPS's financial analysis shows that the state funding model does not generate a full-time nurse until a much larger enrollment level, then PPS should be explicit that nurse staffing is not merely a formula-funded position. It is a district investment decision.

For middle schools, it is essential that the staffing support model include all of the above, but it must also reflect the developmental and programmatic needs of early adolescents. This includes departmentalized subject area teachers, a meaningful elective structure, intervention and

¹²³ Oregon Department of Education. (2025). Oregon class size report for the 2024 to 2025 school year. The report notes that the 2022 QEM adjusted class size targets to 20 students per class for elementary schools and 20.8 students per class for middle and high schools, and that the 2024 QEM maintained those targets.

¹²⁴ American School Counselor Association. (n.d.). School counselor roles and ratios. ASCA recommends a student to school counselor ratio of 250 to 1.

¹²⁵ [National Association of School Psychologists. \(2020\). Professional standards.](#)

¹²⁶ [School Social Work Association of America. \(n.d.\). National census of school social workers.](#)

enrichment opportunities, expanded counseling capacity, special education and multilingual learner supports, and a teaming or advisory structure that allows adults to know students well and belong to an inclusive and equitable community. A well-resourced middle school cannot be defined only by having enough students to fill a building. It must have enough students and staff to provide a coherent, equitable, socially and emotionally robust, and intellectually stimulating middle-grade experience. These are all equity commitments.

Without a clearly defined and publicly committed staffing and support model, the phrase “well-resourced school” risks becoming too vague to guide difficult decisions. It must function not only as an aspiration, but also as an operational and, most important, feasible, standard for how PPS allocates staff, programs, supports, and resources across schools.

Step Two: Translate the Staffing Support Model into Classrooms or Sections per Grade

After PPS defines what constitutes a well-resourced school and the staffing support model of a well-resourced school, the district should translate that vision into the number of classrooms or sections needed at each grade level. This is a critical step because the practical unit of school design is not the total enrollment number by itself. It is also the grade level cohort.

For elementary schools, PPS should consider how many classrooms per grade are needed to provide manageable class sizes, stable staffing, collaboration among teachers, student support, and flexibility when enrollment fluctuates. For example, an elementary school with too few students per grade may not be able to sustain multiple classrooms at each grade level without either increasing costs or combining classrooms in ways that can reduce instructional coherence.

Conversely, a school with enough students to sustain multiple classrooms per grade can more easily support teacher collaboration, student grouping, intervention, and schedule flexibility. For middle schools, the question might shift from classrooms per grade to sections per grade because of the departmentalization in middle schools. Thus, PPS should consider how many sections are needed in each grade to support a full academic schedule, electives, intervention, enrichment, counseling, special education services, multilingual learner supports, and teacher teaming. The Evidence-Based Model emphasizes that adequate school staffing includes not only core teachers, but also specialist teachers, instructional coaches, counselors, nurses, librarians, tutors, and other student support roles.¹²⁷ This means that middle school enrollment ranges should be tied to the schedule and staffing model required to offer a full middle-grade program.

Given the work of SEGC, PPS might be looking to phase out K–8 schools. However, we address them here since the district still has K–8 schools. For K–8 schools, PPS should consider both dimensions at once. In other words, K–8 schools must sustain elementary classrooms and middle

¹²⁷ Picus Odden and Associates. (2025). An update of the Evidence Based Model developed for Wyoming and comparison to the 2025 to 2026 Wyoming funding model.

grade programming in the same building. This means PPS should not assume that a K–8 school can be evaluated using only the elementary school logic or only the middle school logic. A K–8 school may have enough students overall but still have small grade level cohorts in grades 6 through 8 that limit electives, intervention groups, advisory structures, and staffing flexibility.

Only after PPS identifies the desired number of classrooms or sections per grade should it translate that design into a total school enrollment range. This sequence matters. If PPS begins with a total school size number, the district may miss whether that number actually produces the grade-level staffing supports and program conditions students need. But if PPS begins with the desired learning environment (which includes the needed staffing model) and then identifies the number of classrooms or sections required to sustain it, the resulting enrollment range will be tied to educational adequacy and equity rather than only to efficiency or facility use.

Step Three: Test the Number Against Oregon Funding Reality and PPS Enrollment Attrition

Everything that we said in steps one and two must be understood within the context of step three. As such, PPS should then test the resulting enrollment range (gathered from above) against Oregon’s funding reality and PPS’s own enrollment history. This is the feasibility test, which will more than likely be an iterative process. Oregon’s QEM provides an important adequacy benchmark because it was developed as a research and data-driven tool to estimate the level of state school funding required to meet Oregon’s educational goals.¹²⁸ The QEM uses prototype schools, including an elementary prototype and a middle school prototype, to estimate statewide school costs and identify the resources needed to support effective schools.¹²⁹

However, PPS should not treat the QEM number as a complete local planning model for several important reasons. First, the QEM was first published in 1999 and has been updated over time, but its prototype approach remains a statewide model rather than a Portland-specific school design process.

In addition, the 2024 QEM report states that if the fully implemented QEM is not funded, Oregon districts will not have sufficient funds to implement the best practices needed to meet Oregon’s education goals.¹³⁰ For the 2025 to 2027 biennium, the QEM estimated that full implementation would require \$13.526 billion, which was about \$2.252 billion above the projected current service level.¹³¹

This funding reality matters for PPS. If QEM represents an adequate benchmark and Oregon has not fully funded that benchmark, then PPS should treat QEM as a starting floor, not as the final

¹²⁸ Oregon Department of Education. (2025). Oregon class size report for the 2024 to 2025 school year.

¹²⁹ [Oregon Department of Education. \(2025\). Oregon’s Quality Education Model.](#)

¹³⁰ Oregon Department of Education. (2025). Oregon class size report for the 2024 to 2025 school year.

¹³¹ [Quality Education Commission. \(2024\). Quality Education Model executive summary.](#)

definition of a well-resourced school, which we cannot be overstated. The district should also avoid setting enrollment targets so close to the QEM prototype that predictable enrollment decline immediately pushes schools below the level needed to sustain staffing, programming, and student support.

For that reason, PPS should add a local enrollment decline buffer based on its own historical enrollment patterns (see below for more details). This is critical because PPS's own enrollment history is the best available predictor of what PPS might expect in the district. Again, the district should not rely primarily on what happened in other districts to estimate future attrition in PPS schools. Again, while those cases may offer useful lessons about process, implementation, community engagement, and equity risks, they should not drive the numerical enrollment assumptions for Portland. PPS's own year-to-year enrollment data should be used to estimate how much enrollment cushion schools need so they do not fall below the staffing and program levels needed to remain well-resourced over time.

With that said, the following section (below in question 4) offers preliminary planning numbers that illustrate what this logic could look like if PPS begins with QEM as an adequacy floor, adds a PPS-specific attrition buffer, and considers the number of classrooms or sections needed per grade level to sustain a high-quality and equitable school experience. Importantly, these numbers should not be understood as automatic closure thresholds. Rather, they should be understood as planning floors that help PPS assess whether schools are likely to remain large enough over time to sustain the staffing, programming, relationships, and student supports associated with well-resourced schools.

Question 3: What does the research on school size suggest, especially for students who have been historically underserved and what are the implications for PPS?

The research on school size does not support a simple conclusion that smaller schools are always better or that larger schools are always more efficient. Instead, the literature points to a set of tradeoffs (regarding school size) that PPS must hold together. The research suggests that smaller schools often provide stronger relationships, greater student visibility, easier family connection, and more intimate school climates.¹³² ¹³³ Larger schools often provide more staffing flexibility, more program breadth, stronger grade-level or subject-area teams, and greater capacity to offer specialists, electives, and intervention support.¹³⁴ However, it is important to note that neither size produces educational quality by itself. Size matters because of what it enables or constrains.

¹³² Luyten, H., Hendriks, M., & Scheerens, J. (2014). School size effects revisited: A qualitative and quantitative review of the research evidence in primary and secondary education. Springer.

¹³³ Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2009). A review of empirical evidence about school size effects: A policy perspective. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 464–490.

¹³⁴ Andrews, M., Duncombe, W., & Yinger, J. (2002). Revisiting economies of size in American education: Are we any closer to a consensus? *Economics of Education Review*, 21(3), 245–262.

Several studies suggest that smaller schools can be especially beneficial for students from low-income backgrounds and other historically underserved groups. Leithwood and Jantzi's foundational review of 57 empirical studies concluded that the weight of evidence favors smaller schools, especially for students from low-income backgrounds.¹³⁵ Other research similarly found that school size can intensify or reduce the relationship between poverty and achievement, suggesting that larger school settings may amplify inequity when they weaken relationships, visibility, and responsiveness. Lee and Loeb's study of Chicago elementary schools found that schools enrolling fewer than 400 students were associated with stronger teacher collective responsibility and stronger student achievement than larger schools.¹³⁶

At the same time, the research cautions against treating smallness itself as the intervention. More recent reviews have found that school size effects on academic achievement are mixed, modest, and highly dependent on context. For example, Luyten, Hendriks, and Scheerens' synthesis found that the clearest advantages of smaller schools often appear in non-cognitive outcomes, including belonging, safety, student participation, school climate, and relationships.¹³⁷ Egalite and Kisida's longitudinal study of more than one million students (across 4 states) found that achievement tended to decline as school size increased, particularly in higher grades, but also emphasized that the effects varied by context and were not mechanically determined by enrollment alone.¹³⁸

The key lesson for PPS is that school size operates through mechanisms. Smaller schools may make it easier for adults to know students well, notice when students are struggling, communicate with families, and build shared responsibility among staff. These conditions are especially important for students who have experienced marginalization in schools, displacement, poverty, racialized exclusion, and/or inconsistent access to institutional support. However, larger schools may make it easier to provide and staff a broader educational program. Larger schools can often support more stable grade-level teams, full-time specialists, stronger intervention systems, elective offerings, arts, music, physical education, counseling, and other academic, social-emotional, enrichment, and staffing supports that students also need.

For PPS, the research suggests that the sole goal should not be to maximize or minimize school size. The goal should be to identify an enrollment range where schools are large enough to sustain a complete and equitable educational program yet connected enough to preserve the

¹³⁵ Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2009). A review of empirical evidence about school size effects: A policy perspective. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 464–490.

¹³⁶ Lee, V. E., & Loeb, S. (2000). School size in Chicago elementary schools: Effects on teachers' attitudes and students' achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 3–31.

¹³⁷ Luyten, H., Hendriks, M., & Scheerens, J. (2014). School size effects revisited: A qualitative and quantitative review of the research evidence in primary and secondary education. Springer.

¹³⁸ Egalite, A. J., & Kisida, B. (2016). School size and student achievement: A longitudinal analysis. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 27(3), 406–417.

relational conditions that matter most for students and adults. This means PPS should avoid two oversimplifications.

First, we suggest that PPS distinguish between educational value and fiscal/programmatic viability. A small school may be relationship-rich and important to its community while still requiring a transparent analysis of what it would cost to provide students with a full program.

Second and conversely, a larger school may be more fiscally viable while still failing to provide the relationships, supports, and staffing conditions students need. The more defensible approach is therefore to ask what level of enrollment, staffing, program design, and investment is necessary for students to experience a complete, stable, equitable, and relationship-rich school.

Overall, the research suggests that PPS should treat school size as a design question, which is, again, a question related to what enrollment level allows a school to provide the equitable learning environments, relationships students need, support, and the full educational program they deserve? Thus, enrollment levels should be evaluated in relation to the educational program students experience, the staffing model a school can sustain, the relational conditions students need, and the equity commitments PPS has made to communities that have historically received less.

Question 4: What enrollment estimate ranges (not exact number) might make equitable and well-resourced elementary, middle, and K–8 schools financially possible in Portland under Oregon’s current funding conditions?

As stated previously in this section, PPS should consider Oregon’s QEM as an adequacy benchmark, but not as a final enrollment target. The QEM is useful because it identifies a prototypical elementary school of 360 students and a prototypical middle school of 500 students, with average class sizes of approximately 20 students in elementary schools and 20.8 students in middle schools.¹³⁹ However, again, the QEM’s prototype school structure was developed as a statewide funding model using composite schools, not as a precise enrollment standard for every PPS school. Again, the Oregon Department of Education notes that the Quality Education Commission was appointed in 1999 to validate and refine the Oregon QEM and that the model helps lawmakers estimate the cost of providing the education programs necessary for Oregon students to meet state goals. For this reason, PPS should treat QEM as a minimum adequacy floor rather than a complete contemporary model of what every well-resourced school requires.

This caution is especially important because, as stated above, Oregon has not funded schools at the level required to fully implement the QEM. As noted above, the 2024 QEM report estimates that full implementation for the 2025 to 2027 biennium would require \$13.526 billion, which is

¹³⁹ Oregon Department of Education. (2025). Oregon class size report for the 2024 to 2025 school year.

\$2.252 billion more than the projected investment needed to maintain the current service level. Research indicates that the historical appropriations below current service level has led to cuts in the level and quality of educational services schools are able to deliver. In practical terms, this means PPS should not interpret the QEM prototype numbers as sufficient by themselves. They should be used as adequacy benchmarks that must be adjusted for local enrollment decline, state funding constraints, and the staffing conditions PPS ultimately defines as necessary for well-resourced schools.

Therefore, the suggested ranges that we put forth below should also be understood in context. At the time of this writing (early June 2026), PPS has not yet publicly defined the full staffing support model, program expectations, student support model, or classroom and section structure that will constitute a well-resourced school in Portland. Thus, the numbers below should be understood as preliminary planning estimates. They are intended to show what enrollment ranges become reasonable when PPS begins with QEM, accounts for Oregon's funding conditions, and adds a local attrition buffer based on PPS's own enrollment history. They should be refined once PPS defines what every well-resourced elementary, K–8, and middle school should actually provide.

Since PPS has experienced sustained enrollment decline (and is expected to do so at least until the 2033–34 school year), the district should add a local attrition buffer to the QEM numbers. Based on districtwide enrollment data, the typical net declining school (between 2020–21 and 2024–25) lost about 16 students per year, while individual year to year dips were often larger. For elementary schools specifically, the median annualized loss among net declining schools was approximately 16.5 students per year, or about 82.5 students over five years. We suggest rounding up for planning purposes, this then supports an elementary attrition buffer of approximately 85 students (on the more conservative end). For middle schools, the median annualized loss among net declining schools was approximately 15.25 students per year, or about 76 students over five years. Again, we suggest rounding up for planning purposes, this thus supports a middle school attrition buffer of approximately 75 to 80 students (on the more conservative end). Since middle schools are more sensitive to enrollment loss in scheduling, electives, teaming, and student supports, PPS may want to stress test the middle school number closer to 100 students over five years.

Using this logic that we stated above, PPS might consider 450 students as a practical elementary planning floor. An elementary school serves six grade levels, kindergarten through grade 5. At the QEM elementary prototype of 360 students, that equals approximately 60 students per grade, or three classrooms per grade at about 20 students per class. If PPS begins instead with 450 students, the school would have approximately 75 students per grade. That could support three classrooms per grade at about 25 students per class, or provide enough enrollment cushion so that, after expected decline, the school remains closer to the QEM prototype of three classrooms

per grade at approximately 20 students per class. In other words, 450 is not the ideal school size target but rather a PPS planning floor that adds a five-year attrition buffer to the QEM adequacy benchmark.

Even with this buffer (or whatever buffer the district decides), PPS should plan for how schools will be resourced if enrollment continues to decline. Over time, a school that begins with three classrooms per grade could fall to two classrooms per grade, which may increase class sizes, reduce staffing flexibility, and make it harder to sustain the full range of supports associated with a well-resourced elementary school.

Similarly, for middle schools, PPS should consider 600 students as a practical planning floor. In a grades 6–8 middle school configuration, enrollment is spread across three grade levels. At the QEM middle school prototype of 500 students, that equals approximately 167 students per grade. At QEM class size assumptions, this supports roughly eight core sections per grade. A 600-student middle school would begin with approximately 200 students per grade, which could support about eight sections per grade at 25 students per section, or more sections if PPS aims to move closer to QEM class size assumptions. This creates a five-year buffer against expected enrollment loss while preserving the staffing and scheduling scale needed for a fuller middle grade program, including electives, intervention, enrichment, counseling, special education services, multilingual learner supports, and team-based structures for early adolescents.

For K–8 schools, because QEM does not provide a separate K–8 prototype, PPS should consider a local planning estimate of approximately 650 students. A K–8 school serves nine grade levels, kindergarten through grade 8th. At 650 students, the school would average approximately 72 students per grade, enough to sustain roughly three classrooms or sections per grade at about 24 students per class or section. If the school declined to approximately 600 students over time, it would still average about 67 students per grade, or roughly three classrooms or sections per grade at about 22 students per class or section. However, PPS should be clear that a 650 student K–8 school is not equivalent to a 600-student dedicated middle school. A dedicated 600 student middle school has about 200 students per grade in grades 6 through 8, while a 650 student K to 8 has only about 72 students per grade across all nine grade levels. This means K–8 schools may be able to sustain three sections per grade, but they may still have less flexibility for electives, intervention groups, advisory structures, and specialized middle grade programming.

Again, we importantly state that these numbers should be considered in light of the research that we discussed on school size in the prior section (research question 3).

Moreover, we cannot state enough that these numbers should not be used as automatic closure thresholds. They should be used as planning ranges to assess whether schools are likely to remain large enough over the next five or so years to sustain the staffing, programming, class

size, and student support conditions associated with however PPS describes well-resourced schools. Schools below these ranges **may still be necessary**, valued, and educationally strong, but they may require additional district investment, a specialized program model, or an explicit equity rationale. Schools above these ranges may be more financially efficient, but PPS should still examine whether they remain relationship rich, developmentally appropriate, and responsive to student and family needs.

Figure 6.1 Deriving Planning Floors for Well Resourced Schools

Each planning floor begins with the Oregon Quality Education Model adequacy benchmark, EB Model prototypes, and adds a five-year local attrition buffer.



School type	QEM prototype	Five-year buffer	Planning floor range estimate	What the floor is built to sustain
Elementary	360	+ about 85	Approximately 450+	6 grades, about 75 per grade. Three classrooms per grade at about 25, with cushion to stay near the QEM target of three classrooms at about 20 after expected decline.
Middle	500	+ about 100	Approximately 600+	3 grades, about 200 per grade. About eight sections per grade at 25, preserving electives, intervention, counseling, special education, multilingual supports, and team structures.
K–8	<i>no QEM prototype</i>	<i>local estimate</i>	Approximately 650+	9 grades, about 72 per grade. About three sections per grade at about 24, but less flexibility than a dedicated middle school for electives and middle grade programming.

Note. QEM is the Oregon Quality Education Model adequacy benchmark (elementary prototype 360, middle prototype 500) and EB Models prototype schools. Buffers reflect the five-year median enrollment loss among net declining PPS schools, about 85 for elementary and 75 to 100 for middle. The elementary floor rounds 360 plus 85 up to 450. QEM provides no K–8 prototype, so 650 is a local planning estimate. Figures are preliminary planning estimates, to be refined once PPS defines its well-resourced school model.

Question 5: What can school consolidations and closures realistically accomplish?

In theory, school consolidations and closures can increase the probability that enrollment conditions under which “well-resourced schools” become financially and feasibly possible. The logic is that PPS may be able to use existing resources more efficiently by reducing some duplication across under-enrolled buildings, concentrate staff and programs in fewer school sites, and spread some fixed administrative, operational, and facility costs across a larger number of students.¹⁴⁰ However, this is a theory of resource efficiency, not a guarantee of equitable educational improvement.

Importantly, school consolidations and closures cannot solve the larger macro conditions that are producing, and even intensifying, enrollment and fiscal pressure in the district. PPS’s enrollment challenges are largely shaped by forces that extend beyond the district’s direct control, including declining birth rates, lower kindergarten and early-grade capture rates, family migration patterns, housing costs, housing production patterns, and the share of age-eligible families who choose PPS rather than other public, charter, private, or homeschool options.¹⁴¹ Portland’s broader housing context also matters. The city’s housing reports continue to identify affordability as a major challenge for Portland residents with rents and home prices outpacing incomes and creating conditions that affect whether families with children can remain in the city.¹⁴² These are not problems a school district can solve through fiscal cuts, consolidations, or closures.

Additionally, school consolidations and closures cannot resolve the broader state funding conditions in which PPS operates. Oregon’s QEM identifies the resources needed to support a quality education and is explicit that districts need sufficient funding to implement the best practices associated with the state’s education goals. Even if PPS uses its existing resources more efficiently, consolidations and closures do not automatically make the state funding system more adequate, reduce housing costs, increase birth rates, reverse family displacement, or eliminate competition through school choice mechanisms. These forces arrive at the district’s front door and shape the realities of school enrollment, staffing, and budgeting, but again, they cannot be solved by closing buildings.

This distinction matters because research suggests (which we reviewed earlier in this study) that districts often overestimate the savings produced by school closures and underestimate the costs that remain after students leave a building, which plays into a district’s ability to deliver on its promises of well-resourced schools. The reality is that relatively little research has accurately evaluated long-term district savings from closures and that savings are often substantial only

¹⁴⁰ Andrews, M., Duncombe, W., & Yinger, J. (2002). Revisiting economies of size in American education: Are we any closer to a consensus? *Economics of Education Review*, 21(3), 245–262.

¹⁴¹ [Portland State University Population Research Center. \(2025\)](#). Portland Public Schools enrollment forecasts, 2025–26 to 2034-35.

¹⁴² [Portland Housing Bureau. \(2025\)](#). 2024 State of Housing in Portland report.

when closures are paired with personnel reductions.¹⁴³ The same review notes that districts often underestimate additional costs, including transportation for displaced students, preparing receiving schools to accommodate students from closed buildings, transition costs, and the ongoing costs of vacant buildings. The National Education Policy Center similarly notes that closures often fail to produce the expected fiscal benefits because personnel costs make up the majority of district expenses, buildings can be difficult to sell, and closed schools may continue to require maintenance.¹⁴⁴

The building-disposition problem is especially important. Closing a school does not immediately eliminate the cost of owning the school building. Districts may continue to pay for maintenance, security, insurance, utilities, surveillance, repairs, vandalism response, environmental review, demolition, broker fees, legal work, and staff time associated with managing, marketing, leasing, or selling the property.¹⁴⁵ The Pew Charitable Trusts' study of shuttered public school buildings in Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City, Missouri, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Tulsa, and Washington, D.C. found that districts must often pay for maintenance, security, and insurance while they search for new occupants, which helps to explain why the net operating savings from closing a building are often less than expected.

Given this, PPS should not assume that closed school buildings can be sold quickly or for the revenue originally projected. The research does not provide a single reliable national average for how long it takes districts to sell closed schools, because the timeline depends on a number of variables such as the local real estate market, building condition, zoning, neighborhood context, deed restrictions, political priorities, and whether the district wants to sell, lease, repurpose, or hold the property. However, the available evidence suggests that disposition of school buildings can often take years, and in some cases have taken a decade or more. Therefore, PPS should treat building sale revenue as uncertain, delayed, and context-dependent, not as an immediate or guaranteed offset to closure costs. In addition, another lesson for PPS is that a closure plan should include a building disposition plan, a maintenance and security cost estimate, a community reuse process, and a realistic timeline for sale, lease, reuse, or even demolition before closure decisions are finalized.

To this end, for consolidations and closures to benefit students, PPS should be able to answer about their expectations (not exact answers) about the following questions before any final decision:

- What specific resources will students gain in the receiving school?

¹⁴³ Eddins, M., Pehrson, M., & Burgess, K. (2024). Revisiting research on school closings: Key learnings for district and community leaders.

¹⁴⁴ National Education Policy Center. (2025). Answering the important questions about closing schools.

¹⁴⁵ [The Pew Charitable Trusts. \(2013\). Shuttered public schools: The struggle to bring old buildings new life.](#)

- Will class sizes get larger, smaller, or remain the same?
- Will students gain access to additional specialists, electives, intervention staff, counselors, library services, arts, music, physical education, or enrichment opportunities?
- What transition support will be provided to students, families, and staff?
- What transportation costs, travel-time burdens, and safety considerations will be created by the change of potential consolidations or closures?
- What investments will receiving/welcoming schools need before students arrive?
- How will PPS protect student belonging, cultural identity, and school-community relationships, especially for racially minoritized students?
- What will PPS do if projected savings do not translate into school-level improvements?
- What ongoing costs might remain for closed buildings, including maintenance, security, insurance, utilities, surveillance, repairs, broker fees, legal work, demolition, or environmental remediation?
- What is the realistic timeline for selling, leasing, repurposing, or otherwise disposing of closed buildings?
- How will PPS communicate which problems consolidations and closures can reasonably address and which broader structural conditions remain unresolved?
- How will PPS monitor whether students who are displaced actually experience better educational conditions in well-resourced schools?

A school consolidation or closure process that does not answer these questions risks spending significant political capital and causing real community harm in exchange for a budget adjustment rather than an equitable educational improvement. It also risks placing too much explanatory weight on school-level decisions while leaving the larger drivers of enrollment decline and fiscal stress underexamined. The enrollment question and the resources question are inseparable. PPS should treat them that way. Enrollment can help create the conditions for “well-resourced schools,” and consolidations and closures may help PPS use existing resources more efficiently. But resource efficiency should not be treated as the end goal. The central question is whether students, families, and educators experience the result as more stable, more supported, and more equitable.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This evaluation shows that SEGC was not experienced as a single, uniform district initiative. It was experienced differently across schools depending on the type and intensity of change, each school's prior history, leadership stability, staffing capacity, program identity, family trust, and the level of district support available before, during, and after implementation. Across the findings, one overarching lesson is clear: technical changes to boundaries, programs, feeder patterns, and enrollment distribution do not automatically produce equitable or well-resourced schools. Equity depends on how decisions are made, how burdens and benefits are distributed (and dare we say eliminated), how schools are supported to absorb change, and whether students, families, and staff experience the process as transparent, responsive, and fair.

The SEGC findings point to both caution and possibility. In some places, SEGC-related changes were associated with greater enrollment balance, stronger program coherence, more culturally affirming environments, or more developmentally appropriate school configurations. In other places, school communities experienced loss, staffing instability, reduced trust, transportation burdens, weakened neighborhood connection, and implementation strain. In several schools, both realities were true at once.

Future districtwide change efforts should therefore begin with clearer goals, transparent decision rules, meaningful community engagement and influence, strong implementation planning, receiving-school readiness, and explicit attention to racial equity. PPS should also assess the amount of change each school has already absorbed before asking it to absorb more. If the district uses the lessons from SEGC to strengthen planning, communication, staffing, transition support, and accountability, future enrollment balancing and rightsizing efforts can move beyond technical reconfiguration toward a more coherent and equitable vision of well-resourced schools for all students.

Our team is deeply grateful for the opportunity to conduct this evaluation and to learn from the many PPS students, families, educators, staff, school leaders, district leaders, and community members who contributed their time, insight, and lived experience to this work. We recognize that SEGC touched deeply held questions about school identity, racial equity, neighborhood belonging, language access, staff stability, and public trust. We do not take lightly the responsibility of documenting those experiences with care, honesty, and dignity.

As PPS moves forward, our hope is that this report serves not only as a record of what happened, but as a resource for what can be learned. The work ahead will require courage, transparency, humility, and sustained commitment. It will also require the district to hold complexity well: to acknowledge harm where harm occurred, to preserve what communities value, to build on what worked, and to make future decisions in ways that are more inclusive, better supported, and more clearly connected to the educational experiences students deserve. The ultimate measure of future districtwide change should not be whether plans look coherent on paper, but whether

students, families, and staff experience schools as places of racial equity, social justice, belonging, stability, opportunity, and care.

Dr. Green's Overall Takeaways on the Use and Interpretation of This Report

As the lead researcher for this SEGC Equity Audit Evaluation, I want to be clear about how this report should and should not be used. This report should not be read as a justification for school closures, consolidation, or any predetermined future rightsizing decision in Portland Public Schools. Decisions about school closure, consolidation, boundary changes, program relocation, or school reconfiguration are local decisions that should be made with the people most directly affected by the consequences, including students, families, educators, school staff, school leaders, and communities. This report is intended to help PPS understand what can be learned from SEGC, not to authorize or validate any specific future action.

I also recognize that in climates where school closures, consolidations, or rightsizing decisions are being considered, reports like this can be interpreted in many different ways. Some readers may look for findings that support a position they already hold, whether in favor of or against future school changes. I ask readers not to read into this report any interpretation beyond what is actually written. We wrote what we mean in the report. Where the evidence supports a claim, we tried our best to name that claim. Where the evidence is limited, mixed, or based on participant perceptions, we state that as clearly as possible. If clarification is needed about any finding, interpretation, limitation, or recommendation, I encourage readers to contact me directly before attributing meanings to the report that are not stated in the text.

Again, for this report, the purpose is to help PPS understand how SEGC-related changes were experienced by students, families, staff, school leaders, and SEGC members, and what those experiences suggest for future districtwide decision-making.

In short, this report should be used as a learning document. It offers evidence about what SEGC participants, school communities, and families experienced. It identifies patterns of trust, disruption, support, and inequity, and it raises questions PPS should address before undertaking future districtwide changes. If PPS moves forward with future rightsizing or reconfiguration efforts, the findings in this report suggest that the district must do so with greater clarity, stronger implementation support, deeper community partnership, and visible accountability to the students, families, and educators most affected.

Finally, the future of PPS should not be guided by enrollment numbers, facility utilization, budget pressure, or program efficiency alone. Those considerations matter, but they should be held accountable to the district's stated commitments to racial equity and social justice. If racial equity and social justice are truly the ideals PPS espouses, then they must function as the heartbeat, guiding force, and arbiter of district decision-making. They should shape how

problems are defined, whose experiences are centered, how tradeoffs are evaluated, how burdens are distributed, and whether proposed solutions actually and equitably improve the daily educational lives of students, families, and educators. Again, the central question for PPS is not only whether future decisions are technically defensible, but whether they are experienced as just, transparent, humanizing, and worthy of public trust.

Research Team Bios

Terrance L. Green, Ph.D. (he/him) (Principal Investigator, Lead Researcher)

Dr. Terrance L. Green is a tenured Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin. He is a nationally recognized expert on urban school closures, equity audits, and racial justice in schools. His scholarship on school closures has appeared in leading peer-reviewed journals and has been featured in widely read public outlets beyond academia. Dr. Green is the creator of the Rightsizing Equity Audit and has extensive experience building district and school-leader capacity to conduct rigorous, equity-centered audits. Over the course of his faculty career, he has taught more than 100 district and school leaders how to conduct school and community equity audits. In addition, he has conducted equity audits and supported decision-making processes for districts across the country. He also previously served as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Green earned his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is a former high school science teacher.

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Havala Hanson, Ph.D. (she/her) (Quantitative Researcher)

Dr. Havala Hanson has over 15 years of experience as an education researcher, helping school leaders understand how programs and policies impact opportunities, experiences, and outcomes. She specializes in combining qualitative insights and quantitative analysis to understand not just if an initiative works, but why and for whom. Dr. Hanson has led evaluations and community-engaged research in districts facing complex change, and is deeply committed to elevating educator, staff, and family voices. She started her career as a teacher in Milwaukee, WI, and has lived and worked in Portland since 2012. These experiences and her training in culturally responsive and inclusive evaluation shape her approach to designing evaluations that respect local realities and support district planning with transparency, empathy, and equity. She holds a Ph.D. in Statistics, Policy, and Education from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, a master's degree in Urban Education Policy from Brown University, and a bachelor's degree in English and Spanish Education from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater.

Lydia Hamilton, PMP (she/her) (Project Manager)

Lydia Hamilton is a corporate-trained operations leader and entrepreneurial consultant whose work centers on enterprise execution, organizational performance, and strategic implementation. She draws on more than 20 years of experience managing complex, high-value initiatives to bring structure, clarity, and accountability to mission-driven and growth-oriented organizations. Over the course of her career, Lydia has managed portfolios with budgets of up to \$30 million

and directed cross-functional teams of more than 65 professionals. Her work is grounded in Waterfall methodology and informed by Six Sigma principles, ensuring disciplined delivery across all phases of the project lifecycle. Lydia's professional background includes leadership roles with organizations such as General Electric, Wikipedia, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and Northwestern Mutual, where she developed a foundation in operational rigor across corporate, media, financial services, and global nonprofit environments. She is the Founder and Principal of Lyd on tha Go, LLC, where she partners with executive leaders to translate strategy into measurable results. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Loyola University Chicago and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP).

Katelin Trautmann, Ph.D. (she/her) (Quantitative Researcher)

Dr. Katelin Trautmann is a former classroom teacher and instructional coach whose work focuses on the intersection of educational policy, equity, and institutional change. She draws on this experience to inform her approach to research and engagement, grounding her work in the practical realities of teaching, leadership, and implementation. She is currently a postdoctoral scholar at Penn State University, where she works with the Research Translation Platform supporting research processes related to policy translation and institutional change. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Texas at Austin, and her research broadly examines equity-oriented initiatives and the sociopolitical dynamics that shape their implementation.

Shannon Davidson, Ph.D. (she/her) (Quantitative Researcher)

Dr. Shannon Davidson is a mixed-methods researcher based in Portland, Oregon who has collaborated extensively with school districts, state education agencies, and community-based organizations. Since earning her Ph.D. from Stanford University's Graduate School of Education, Dr. Davidson has led applied research and evaluation projects with partners in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Regional partners include Astoria School District, Wenatchee School District, the Oregon Department of Education, the Association of Alaska School Boards, Alaska's Educational Resource Center (SERRC), and Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Dr. Davidson is dedicated to supporting data- and story-informed decision-making that fosters positive, lasting outcomes for youth, families, and communities. As the author of "Trauma- and Resilience-informed Practices for Postsecondary Education. Davidson has presented widely on trauma, resilience, inclusion, and belonging at postsecondary institutions, school counselor associations, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

Kimberly Clarida, Ph.D. (she/her) (Quantitative Researcher)

Dr. Kimberly Clarida is a mixed-methods and policy researcher whose work examines K–12 leadership, education policy, and organizational practices. Informed by her experience working in schools and collaboration with districts, nonprofits, and policymakers, her research explores

how policies and organizational processes shape access to school leadership opportunities and high-quality education for historically marginalized students and educators. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Michigan State University and earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Texas at Austin.

Heather N. Bennett, PhD., JD. (she/her) (Quantitative Researcher)

Dr. Heather N. Bennett is an educational equity strategist, attorney, and leadership scholar with more than 15 years of experience advancing transformative equity initiatives across K–12, higher education, and international education systems. She currently serves as the Southeastern Pennsylvania Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium and as a Senior Policy Consultant and Publishing Editor for the National Institute for Customizing Education (NICE), where she facilitates equity certification programs for K–12 school districts nationwide. Dr. Bennett is also an adjunct professor at Penn State University, teaching Education Law and Leadership. Dr. Bennett previously served as the inaugural Director of Equity Services at the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), where she supported public school boards and districts in developing equity-centered governance tools, policy frameworks, and strategic programming. Internationally, she served as a Trustee of the International School of Bangkok and as Senior DEIA Director for the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia in Bangkok, Thailand. Dr. Bennett began her career as a Teach for America corps member, teaching high school social studies in Fulton County, Georgia.

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Dr. Ozen Guven is a senior researcher with over a decade of experience leading implementation research and evaluations of K–12 curricula, professional development, and instructional services across U.S. and global contexts. Her work focuses on advancing equity and improving outcomes for historically underserved populations, with particular focus on literacy development, multilingual learners, refugees, and newcomer immigrants. She has extensive experience partnering with school districts, nonprofits, and community-based organizations to produce evidence that informs practice, program improvement, and decision-making. Dr. Guven brings deep expertise in qualitative and mixed-methods research, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, ethnographic observations, and document analysis. She has served as Principal Investigator or qualitative lead on multiple mixed-methods studies integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. Her research portfolio includes leadership on several studies focused on refugees, newcomer immigrants, and multilingual learners across U.S. and international contexts. This work has examined access to education, language of instruction policies, instructional quality, and student and educator experiences in diverse settings. Dr. Guven earned a Ph.D. in International Education from New York University and a B.A. in Teaching English as a Second Language from Bogazici University in Turkey. She is certified in Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation. She has worked with research institutions,

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