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

June 29, 2026

Prepared by Dr. Terrance L. Green[1] and Dr. Havala Hanson

[1] Please send all inquiries to the lead author, Dr. Terrance L. Green at terrance@raciallyjustschools.com

Gratitude and Acknowledgements

We want to express our heartfelt gratitude to Superintendent Dr. Kimberlee Armstrong, Dr. Jon Franco (Senior Chief of Operations), Dr. Renard Adams (Chief Accountability and Equity Officer), Deborah Kafoury (Chief of Staff), the Portland Public Schools (PPS) Board of Education, and the broader PPS community for entrusting us with the important task of conducting the SEGC Equity Audit Evaluation. We are deeply grateful for your leadership, openness, and commitment to learning from the experiences of students, families, staff, and community members in service of creating a more racially equitable and socially just school district.

Additionally, we extend a very special thank you to Margaret Calvert (Assistant Superintendent of School Planning and Modernization) whose leadership, coordination, and support made this work possible. Margaret helped facilitate key connections, coordinate logistics, and support communication across the district which helped the evaluation team to engage with the people, processes, and information needed for the study. We are especially appreciative of the way she helped move this work forward with both professionalism and care.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the PPS principals, educators, and staff who participated in interviews, focus groups, surveys, and other data-gathering efforts. Your time, honesty, and insights strengthened the quality and depth of this evaluation. Finally, we offer special thanks to the families who shared their experiences, perspectives, hopes, and concerns with us. Your voices are central to this work, and we are deeply grateful for your participation.

Finally, while this study was led by Dr. Terrance L. Green, it was made possible through the work of an exceptional team of researchers who brought deep care, skill, and commitment to the project. Although members of our broader team are located across the country, we intentionally worked with primary data collectors who are based in the Portland metro area. This local presence was essential not only for supporting the local economy, but also for bringing place-based knowledge and deeper sensitivity to the communities, histories, and school contexts that shaped this evaluation. We are grateful to every member of the team whose expertise, insight, and care helped make this study possible.

If citing this report, please use the following citation: Green, T. L., & Hanson, H. (2026, June 29). Equity audit evaluation of Portland Public Schools' (PPS) Southeast Enrollment and Program Balancing [Unpublished report].

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 and the final school-by-school analysis was submitted on June 29, 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)

[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.

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:

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).

[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.

- **School-level free and reduced-price lunch** (FRPL) eligibility in 2022–23 from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data.

- 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

Finally, we developed the anticipated SEGC changes for each school by reviewing district and Board documents related to SE Enrollment and Program Balancing Phase 2. Our primary source was the SE Enrollment and Program Balancing Phase 2 School by School Impact Analysis report, which provided school level details on proposed boundary changes, feeder pattern changes, program relocations, projected enrollment, and projected building utilization. We also cross checked these summaries against the Implementation Impacts by School, Program, and Year document and Board Resolution 6513, SE Enrollment and Program Balancing Phase 2, which formally adopted the major boundary changes, program relocations, grade reconfigurations, transportation commitments, and implementation supports. To better understand the rationale, community concerns, implementation assumptions, and broader system design behind the school specific changes, we also reviewed the May 10, 2022 Staff Report on Phase 2 SE Enrollment and Program Balancing, the SEGC Phase 2 Final Report, the Community Engagement Summary, and the SE Final Proposal Assignment Graphic. We used later enrollment and utilization materials only to contextualize current conditions and distinguished those data from the original anticipated SEGC changes.

Section 1:

School-by-School Findings of SEGC Changes

Introduction to School-by-School Findings

This section presents school-by-school findings from the SEGC Equity Audit Evaluation, and to do so, we draw on both qualitative, quantitative and survey data. While our prior report summarized findings across all schools, this section examines how SEGC-related changes were experienced, implemented, and interpreted within individual school communities. This school-level analysis is important because SEGC did not land the same across all schools. In part, because each school entered the process with different histories, enrollment patterns, program identities, leadership conditions, staffing capacity, facility contexts, and relationships with families and communities. For that reason, the findings below are intended to show both the common themes that emerged within SEGC-impacted schools and the local conditions that shaped how each school absorbed, responded to, and made meaning of SEGC-related changes.

Methodological Notes About Our Qualitative School-by-School Analysis

First, the perspectives shared in the qualitative findings section reflect the experiences and viewpoints of the administrators, teachers, staff, and other participants who contributed to this study. These perspectives offer 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. Consistent with qualitative research principles of thick description,[4] [5] the findings here are intended to elevate patterns and themes that emerged from participant accounts while providing sufficient context for readers to understand the conditions under which these perspectives were shared. As such, we honor the value of participant voices while also recognizing that additional perspectives may further deepen, extend, or nuance our understanding.

Second, our preliminary analysis draws on in-depth qualitative case data collected from 9 of the 20 schools (45%) impacted by SEGC changes. In this analysis, we treat each school as a qualitative profile or case. A case, in qualitative research, is a bounded setting or unit of analysis that allows researchers to examine experiences, processes, relationships, and conditions in context.[6] Here, each school case helps illuminate how SEGC-related changes were understood and experienced within a particular school community.

These schools were not intended to serve as a statistically representative sample of all affected schools. Rather, they were selected to provide deeper insight into varied school-level experiences. Therefore, as noted earlier, our approach is best understood as purposeful sampling

[4] Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (5th ed.). SAGE.
[5] Younas, A., Fàbregues, S., Durante, A., Escalante, E. L., Inayat, S., & Ali, P. (2023). Proposing the "MIRACLE" narrative framework for providing thick description in qualitative research. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22, 1–13.
[6] Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

of information-rich cases, which is a common qualitative research strategy used to support deep, contextualized analysis rather than statistical representativeness.[7] [8] The purpose of these case data is not to claim that the perspectives from these 9 schools represent every experience across all 20 schools. Rather, these cases provide rich insight into how SEGC-related shifts were experienced, interpreted, and implemented in particular school communities.

In qualitative research, the strength of a sample is often judged by its relevance to the research questions, the depth and specificity of the data, and the extent to which it supports meaningful interpretation, sometimes referred to as information power.[9] Accordingly, the qualitative findings that we present in this report should be understood as patterns from information-rich cases, not as population-level estimates.

At the same time, these qualitative findings are not interpreted in isolation. Throughout the report, we augment the school-level case findings with survey data, administrative data, and other available documents when those sources help clarify, contextualize, confirm, complicate, or disconfirm patterns that emerged in the qualitative data. In some instances, survey or administrative data reinforced what participants described in interviews and focus groups. In other instances, those data added nuance or suggested that a participant experience was more context-specific than broadly shared. This mixed-methods approach allows us to honor the depth of school-level perspectives while also situating those perspectives within broader patterns across SEGC-impacted schools.

Since qualitative findings are not intended to generalize in the same way as survey, administrative or experimental findings, we attend instead to transferability, which is the extent to which readers can understand the conditions, contexts, and meanings surrounding the findings and consider how they may relate to other settings.[10] For this reason, the findings are presented with attention to context, participant perspectives, and recurring themes, while also honoring, again, the possibility that additional school-level perspectives may deepen, extend, or nuance the analysis.

Third, we include attention to nuances, tensions, and variations to make sure that the qualitative findings do not flatten the complexity of participants' experiences but instead reflect both the broader patterns emerging across the data and the important differences, contradictions, and

---

[7] 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.
[8] Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. Journal of Research in Nursing, 25(8), 652–661.
[9] 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.
[10] 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), Article e13762.

context-specific experiences that help explain how SEGC-related shifts were understood and experienced across school communities.

Analytic Note on Lived Experience, Observation, and Perception

It was important for our team to distinguish between participants' lived experiences and direct observations, on the one hand, and their broader perceptions or generalized interpretations, on the other. We aimed to make this distinction because both forms of evidence are important, but they do different analytic work. Lived experiences and direct observations help us understand what participants personally saw, did, heard, or experienced. For example, teaching in classrooms with more than 30 students, navigating student behavioral crises, losing a colleague, or supporting families through confusing transitions were treated as direct experiences.

At the same time, participants often used those direct experiences to make sense of broader patterns, including their perceptions of the SEGC process, the district's intentions, decision-making fairness, or which students, families, and schools were advantaged or harmed over time. These perceptions should not be dismissed, because they help explain how participants interpreted the meaning and consequences of what they experienced.

However, differentiating between direct experience and broader interpretation is important because it allows us to be clear about the kind of evidence each claim represents. So, in this report, when we refer to what participants saw, experienced, or described directly, we treat those accounts as evidence of lived experience. When we refer to what participants felt, believed, or perceived about intent, cause, fairness, or systemwide impact, we treat those accounts as meaningful interpretations grounded in experience, but not as formal causal evidence on their own.

This distinction helps preserve the integrity of our analysis. It also allows us to honor participants' voices and the patterns that emerged across their accounts, while also being careful not to overstate what the data can establish. In this way, perceptions are not treated as "less real" than lived experiences, but rather, they are treated as important evidence of how people made sense of district decisions, trust, equity, and harm in the context of SEGC-related change.

Influence of Context on Findings

We treat participants' accounts as important and credible evidence of how SEGC-related changes were experienced within school communities. Throughout the analysis, we also triangulated interview and focus group findings with available survey responses, administrative data, enrollment records, staffing records, and other district documents when those sources were available. At the same time, the context in which data were collected should be acknowledged. During parts of the data collection period, participants were navigating budget reductions, staffing cuts, declining enrollment, and rumors or concerns about possible school closures or

consolidation. Given this context, it is possible that some participants emphasized the strengths, resilience, or value of their schools in ways that were shaped by a desire to protect their school communities. This does not make their accounts less meaningful or trustworthy. Rather, it means their responses should be interpreted within a broader climate of uncertainty, where staff and families may have felt that how they described their school could matter for future district decisions. For this reason, we read participant accounts both as evidence of lived experience and as narratives shaped by the high-stakes conditions surrounding the study.

How to Read The School Profile Cases

Each school case is organized around six guiding questions that align with the audit's broader domains and research questions. For each school, we use these questions to examine how SEGC-related changes were experienced, interpreted, and implemented within that specific school context:

1. To what extent did the SEGC process affect administrator, educator, and staff morale and retention, including among personnel of color where the data allowed us to examine this?
2. To what extent did administrators, educators, and staff feel equipped to support students and families during and after SEGC-related changes?
3. How did administrators, educators, and staff experience SEGC-related changes in terms of emotional well-being and professional support, including personnel of color where this information was available?
4. How did students and families from historically underserved communities experience the quality of learning environments after SEGC-related shifts?
5. How did administrators, teachers, and staff describe the quality of learning environments after SEGC-related shifts, particularly in relation to middle grades programming and supports?
6. How did SEGC-related changes play out at each school, and what factors shaped how the school experienced, absorbed, and responded to those changes?

For each case, we first summarize the intended SEGC-related changes for that school, based on district documents and available SEGC materials. This provides important context for understanding what changes were planned or formally adopted before we discuss how participants experienced, interpreted, and responded to those changes at the school level.

Bridger Creative Science School SEGC Analysis

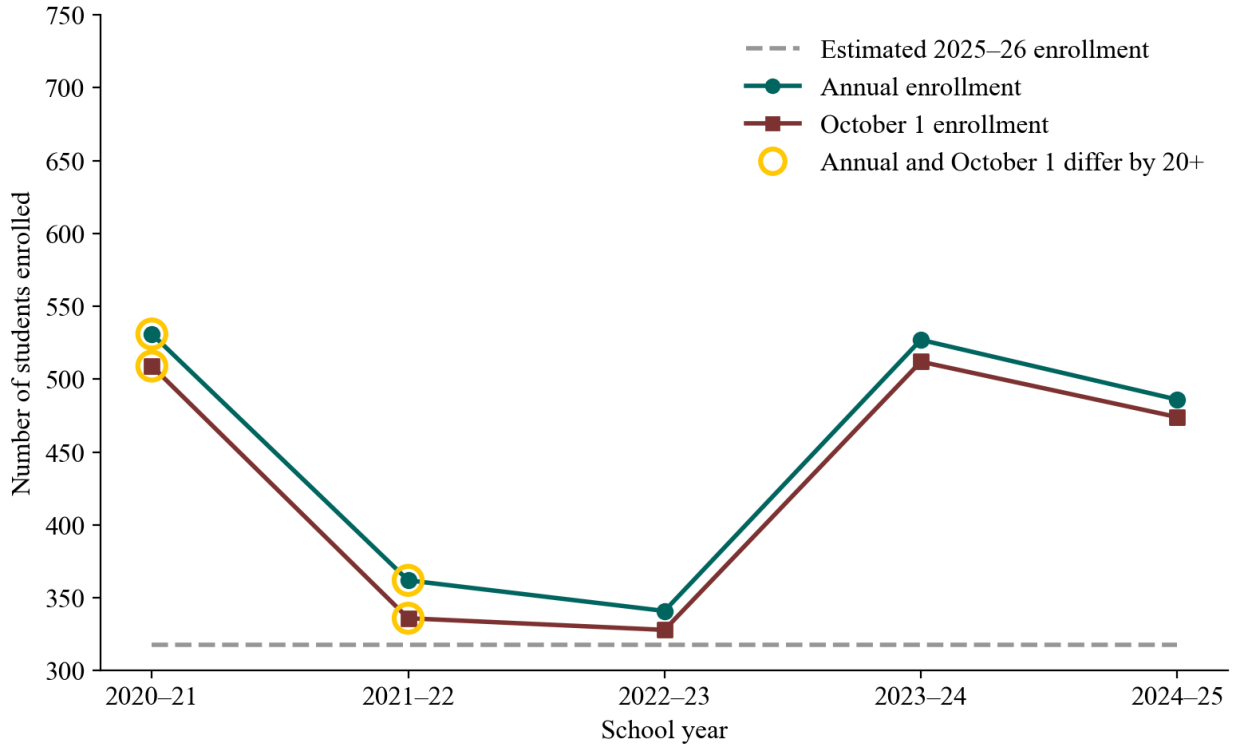
Anticipated SEGC Changes

District-related SEGC documents identified four anticipated changes for Bridger:

- a program relocation out of the school
- a program relocation into the school
- a change in instructional model
- attendance boundary changes

At the time of SEGC planning, Bridger was described as a co-located K–5 school with a small two-strand Spanish DLI program and a single-strand neighborhood program. The school had 337 students in 2021–22 and a projected enrollment of 338 students for 2025–26. Under the SEGC recommendation, Bridger's Spanish DLI program would relocate to Lent, while Creative Science School would move from Clark to Bridger and become the instructional model for the combined Bridger and Creative Science student body. New Bridger neighborhood students were expected to be automatically assigned to the Bridger Creative Science program, with the option to request transfer to a standard program, and lottery access was expected to be reduced to prioritize neighborhood enrollment.Actual enrollment data indicate that the school exceeded projected enrollment by over 150 students after the Creative Science School relocated to Bridger.

Figure 1.1 Bridger estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Adding grades 6–8 with the Creative Science program in 2023–24 accounts for some of the enrollment increase. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Bridger Creative Science School (hereafter Bridger) was also expected to experience attendance boundary changes. Specifically, kindergartners living between Division Street and Woodward Street would enroll at Atkinson, while those living between Woodward Street and Powell Boulevard would enroll at Arleta, unless they had older siblings at Bridger or received transfers.

As a result of these changes, Bridger's building utilization was projected to decline slightly, from 66.1% to 61.2% if the changes had been in place in 2021–22, and from 66.3% to 62.4% in the 2025–26 forecast. In short, Bridger was expected to shift from a co-located neighborhood and Spanish DLI school into a neighborhood-based Creative Science focus option model, while sending Spanish DLI students to Lent and shifting portions of its neighborhood boundary to nearby schools.[11]

Overview

In this profile case, we share findings from survey data interviews and focus groups conducted with Bridger participants to better understand how SEGC-related changes were experienced within the school community. Since participants included individuals who were at Bridger before, during, and after SEGC implementation, their accounts offer insight into how the school changed over time and how those changes were understood by people working inside the building. Rather than treating SEGC as the sole cause of later conditions at Bridger, this chapter examines how participants connected SEGC-related shifts to broader patterns they experienced in morale, professional support, school climate, learning environments, student and family experiences, and the school's capacity to absorb and respond to change. These accounts help illuminate how district-level decisions were lived, interpreted, and managed at the school level.

Participants

We conducted three focus groups and one individual interview with Bridger-based participants, which included nine school-based participants in total. Of these participants 6 of 9 (66%) of them were at either Bridger or Creative Science school prior to SEGC changes. Collectively, they spoke from the perspective of educators and staff who experienced SEGC-related changes in the daily life of Bridger, including changes connected to enrollment, programming, staffing, student needs, family communication, school culture, and transition support. Additionally, 15 Bridger staff responded to the staff survey and there were 87 Bridger respondents to the family and caregiver survey. Importantly, where the data did not clearly identify participants' own racial identities or provide explicit information about personnel of color, we do not make claims about differential experiences among staff of color.

[11] Portland Public Schools. (n.d.). SE enrollment and program balancing phase 2 school-by-school impact analysis [PDF].

Findings

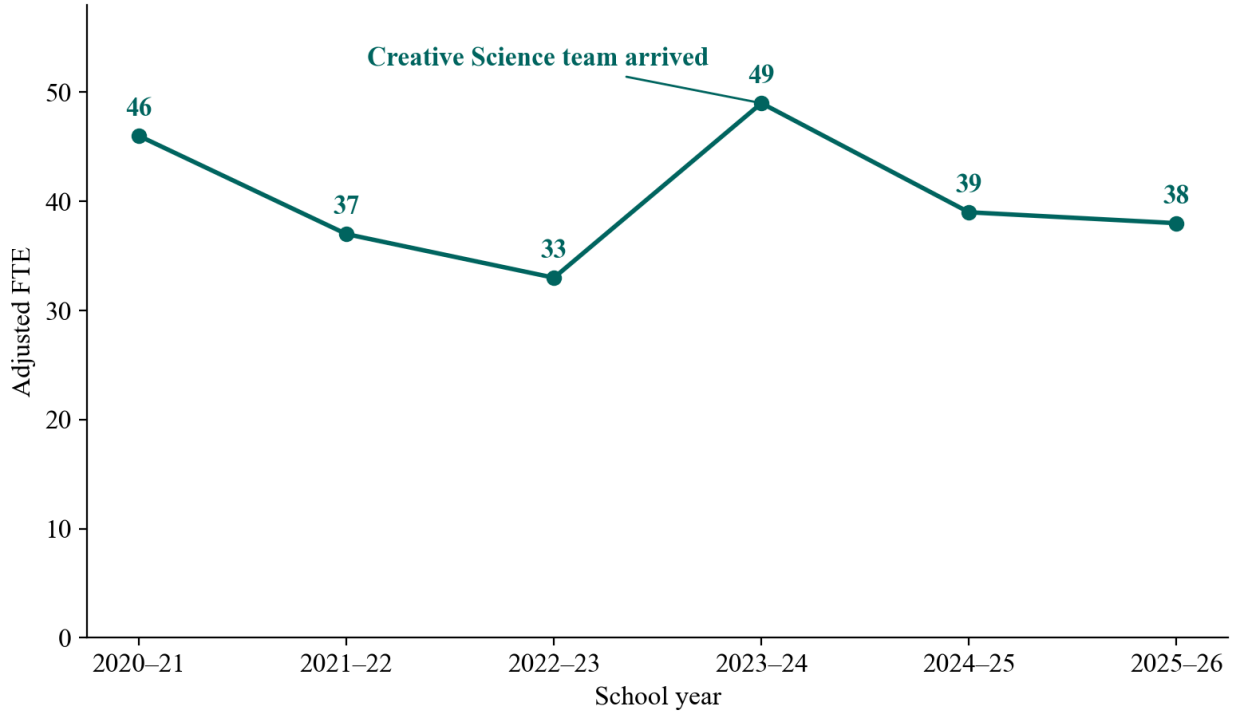
Morale and Retention

Participants described the SEGC-related changes as contributing to low morale, emotional exhaustion, and concerns about retention, layered on top of other system-wide stressors such as curriculum shifts, behavior challenges, and full time equivalency (FTE) reductions. Several teachers shared that during the first merged years, they regularly contemplated leaving the profession or taking extended leave, and they spoke of colleagues who had already taken leave and might not return. One participant described a year in which the combination of new grade-level expectations, class composition, and post-merger dynamics made continuing feel unsustainable, noting that they considered formal leave because "another year like that" felt untenable. Another participant described a year of teaching following the merger as one in which they "wanted to quit, like, every day," underscoring the depth of strain experienced at the classroom level.

Participants also linked morale to declining support and resource cuts over time. One participant explained that while the school initially received additional positions and support roles following SEGC, within a relatively short period those "gifts" were rolled back, with roughly a dozen or more FTE lost over two years. Classroom teachers echoed that they previously had a social worker and two counselors, but now saw neighborhood students receiving fewer services even as needs remained high. Altogether, these lived experiences fed a perception that staff were being asked to absorb major structural changes and higher needs with shrinking support, which, in participants' view, contributed to the erosion of morale and increased the risk of burnout and attrition.

The staffing record tracks the arc participants describe. Total staffing at Bridger stood at 46 FTE in 2020–21, declined to a low of about 33 FTE in 2022–23, then rose to 49 FTE in 2023–24 as the Creative Science team arrived (see Figure 1.1). It settled near 39 FTE in the two years that followed. The pattern participants summarize as an initial boost that was later rolled back is visible across these swings, and the scale of loss they describe, on the order of a dozen or more positions, is consistent with the size of the movements in the record. The leanest year, 2022–23, coincided with the conversion itself, when the building had the fewest adults available even as it was absorbing the most change.

Figure 1.2. Staffing at Bridger Creative Science School, 2020–21to 2025–26



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff. Adjusted FTE distributes FTE evenly across positions in cases where employees held multiple positions and were assigned 1.0 FTE for every position.

While participants frequently discussed race, equity, and impacts on students and families of color, the Bridger conversations did not provide enough explicit, disaggregated information to analyze morale or retention specifically for staff of color. For that reason, this synthesis focuses on overall morale and retention concerns at Bridger, while noting where participants raised broader equity-related themes.

Participants described SEGC-related changes as emotionally and professionally difficult. One participant stated:

"This time last year, I didn't think I was going to make it through the year… if I got another year like that… I'm looking at mental health leave."

The personnel record allows a distinction between two strains that participants described. In the transition year of 2022–23, staffing turned over sharply. About 73% of that year's staff did not return to Bridger the following year. Part of that turnover was planned, as the Spanish DLI team relocated to Lent, but the relocation accounts for only about a third of the churn (nine educators). About 40% relocated to other PPS schools and about a quarter left the district. Separately, of the 28 Creative Science educators who relocated into the building in the 2022–23 to 2023–24

transition, 24 returned for the 2024–25 school year (about an 86% retention rate). This excludes the Creative Science principal who moved to Bridger in 2022–23, and who did not return to Bridger the following year. Building-wide retention rates also rose in the years after the transition; about 86% of 2024–25 educators continued at Bridger in 2025–26.

Feeling Equipped to Support Students and Families During and After SEGC Changes

Across the conversations, participants differentiated between their own efforts to support students and families and the systems and structures provided to help them do so. At the individual level, educators described extensive work to maintain communication, build relationships, and provide continuity for families, even as they themselves felt under-informed and overextended. For example, some teachers talked about regular newsletters, informal meet-and-greets, and early relationship-building so that the first real contact with families did not happen only at parent-teacher conferences. These were framed as deliberate choices to buffer students and families from the confusion and stress of the transition.

At the same time, participants frequently emphasized that they did not feel systemically equipped. Teachers reported that information given to families about SEGC-related changes sometimes did not match what staff were told, or that messages arrived at different times or with different levels of detail, which made it hard to answer questions or provide consistent guidance. One participant characterized their experience of supporting families during and immediately after the SEGC transition as "flying blind," explaining that each fall always brings a new group of families, but in this period there was no additional clarity or structure provided despite the scale of change. Another participant described the absence of deliberate planning for a smooth merger, such as joint community-building, clear protocols, and coordinated messaging, saying they did not see "deliberate, intentional" efforts to make the transition run well.

Another participant similarly described walking into the merged context without transition plans or clear district guidance, recounting that it felt like the school had simply been handed "two buildings" with an expectation to make them function as one without a roadmap. Over time, participants perceived that promised supports, like dedicated community agents or mental health staff, were removed, which they felt further undermined their ability to respond to student and family needs once the immediate transition period had passed. Participants indicated:

"Sometimes it felt disconnected from what parents got versus what staff got… there was just so much happening that it was really hard to keep everyone on the same page that first year."

"I'm just flying blind. I just approach everything the same way I always approach it… it's just another new group of families."

Survey respondents often felt the same way. Among the staff who answered the information items, few felt well informed: 2 of 11 agreed the changes affecting their school were communicated clearly, and 1 of 11 had a reliable source to turn to during implementation. One staff member captured the experience this way:

"We lack direction, consensus and clarity. Things are never fully thought out or planned. Everything is by the seat of our pants. It's hard to get a handle on things when surprises are constant."

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants' descriptions of their emotional well-being point to high levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional wear-and-tear, with SEGC-related changes acting as a significant contributing factor alongside other system pressures. Teachers talked about needing daily personal strategies, such as meditation, therapy, or medication, simply to sustain the work, even when they also emphasized that they cared deeply about students and often loved key aspects of teaching.

Some participants described feeling set up to fail by the combination of expectations and conditions. They pointed to large class sizes with many students who had significant academic, behavioral, or safety needs; complex new curriculum requirements; and insufficient staffing or training to meet those demands. This produced a recurring emotional theme, which was that educators' sense that no matter how hard they worked, it was impossible to fully meet expectations, which contributed to feelings of inadequacy and dread about coming to work.

One participant noted that the broader climate of district instability, including leadership turnover at the central office and frequent changes at the school-level, intensified the emotional load on staff. At times, they described receiving meaningful individual support from a supervisor who intervened when community interactions became toxic, but this was contrasted with a larger pattern in which staff felt they were often left to absorb community anger and confusion without consistent backing. Participants stated:

"I have to meditate every day. Otherwise I would… I mean, I love doing the job. It's just that it's so hard that I have to really focus."

"There's always more demands… and then not being trained on any of these things, they just throw it at you, and then they say, 'Good luck.'"

The survey data suggests the emotional toll was sharpest during the SEGC implementation period and has since eased without fully resolving. None of the staff who responded felt emotionally supported through the process (0 of 10) (0%) and none agreed that their workload was manageable during the transition (0 of 9). Reflecting on their current working conditions, 6

of the 14 who answered reported that they currently feel emotionally supported. Likewise, 6 of 14 respondents agreed their current workload is manageable. This locates the sharpest difficulty in the process of change while suggesting that strain persists.

Experiences of Students and Families from Historically Underserved Communities

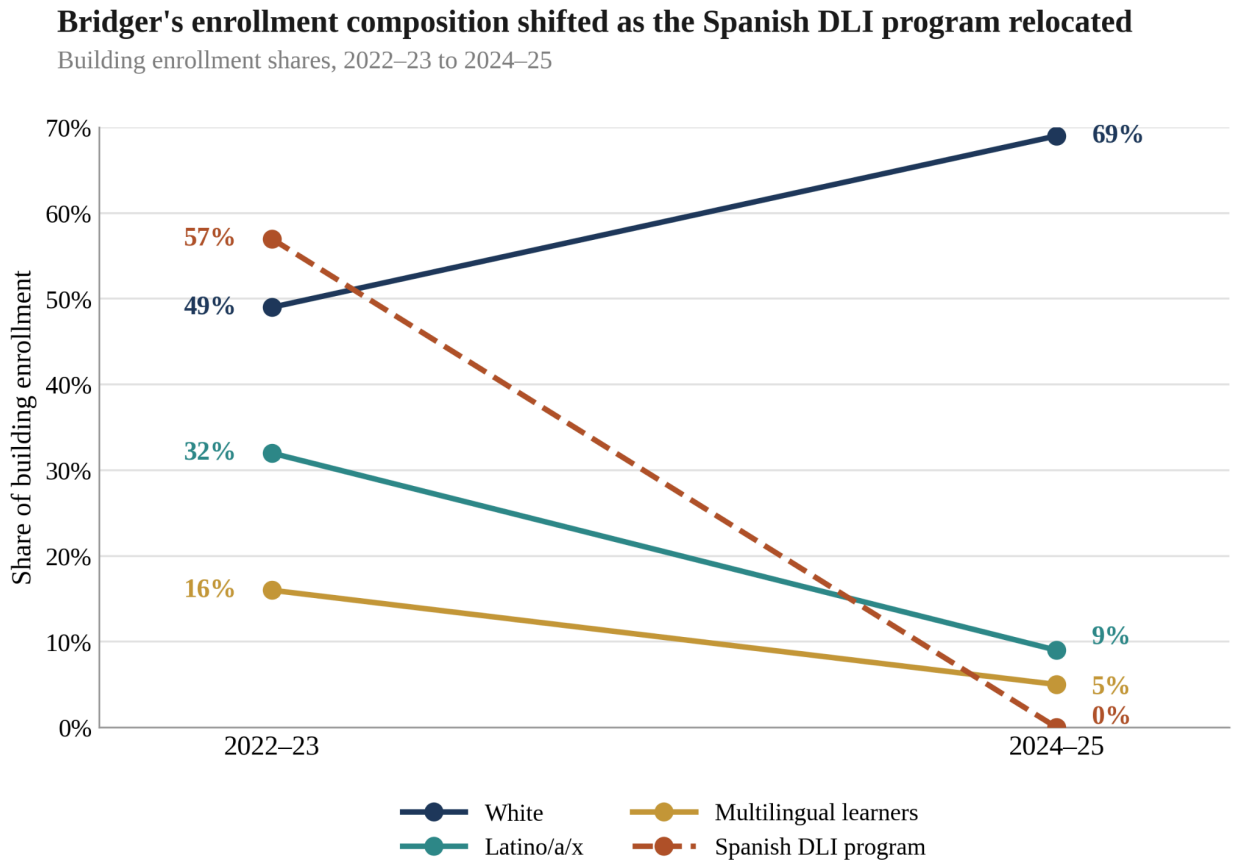
During our conversations, participants did not clearly identify themselves as staff of color or describe distinct emotional or professional-support experiences tied explicitly to their own racial identities as employees. Instead, discussions of race and equity focused primarily on students and families of color and on structural patterns, such as segregation and transfer patterns, which we discuss below.

Participants described SEGC-related changes as having mixed but differential impacts on students and families from historically underserved communities. Much of this discussion centered on the movement of the dual language immersion program, shifts in Title I status, and observed experiences of students of color, especially Black students and Spanish-speaking families.

At Bridger, staff recalled an earlier period when the school's combined dual language immersion and neighborhood population created a more visibly diverse, multilingual community, with regular cultural celebrations and an explicit emphasis on honoring different cultures. After SEGC, when dual language immersion moved to another site, participants experienced the Bridger student body as becoming more white and more affluent, while also losing the additional staffing and Title I support that had previously accompanied a higher-poverty enrollment. Some participants perceived that the dual language immersion community, now housed in a single dual language immersion school, gained benefits, such as a more cohesive linguistic environment, while Bridger's remaining neighborhood students lost access to robust support and to the daily presence of their dual language immersion peers.

The compositional change of student demographics participants described is visible in the enrollment record, and it tracks the program relocation. As the Spanish DLI program relocated to Lent, Bridger's white enrollment share rose from 49% in 2022–23 to 66% in 2023–24 and 69% in 2024–25, while the Latino/a/x share fell from 32% to roughly 9% over the same period (see Figure 1). The share of multilingual learners dropped from 16% to about 5%, and DLI enrollment, which had been a majority of the building at 57% in 2022–23, reached zero by 2023–24 as the program completed its move. In building-occupancy terms, Bridger's share of students who identify as Black, Indigenous or persons of color fell from 51% in 2022–23 to 31% in 2024–25.

Figure 1.3. Bridger's enrollment composition shifted as the Spanish DLI program relocated

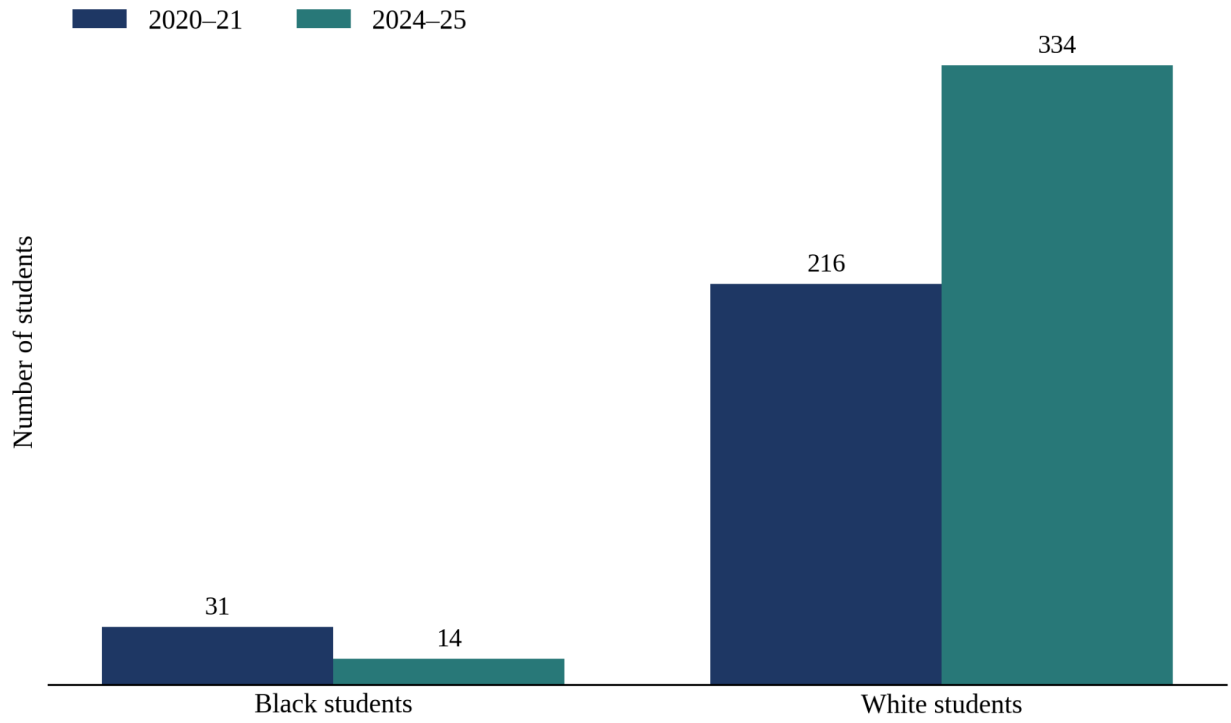


Note: Enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year.

Participants also described observations about Black students' trajectories, noting that they often saw Black students leave Bridger and move to other schools. One participant speculated that differential discipline and how behaviors were interpreted and responded to might be contributing factors, based on their direct observations in the building, though they did not have formal data to confirm patterns district-wide.

The enrollment record is consistent with participants' observations. The number of Black students at Bridger declined from 31 in 2020–21 to 14 in 2024–25, a 55% decline, while white student enrollment rose from 216 to 334, a 55% increase. Much of the white increase reflects the Creative Science program moving into the building. The decline in Black enrollment, however, does not correspond to either the Spanish DLI or Creative Science program relocation, and the enrollment data cannot explain its causes.

Figure 1.4.. Black and White student demographic shifts between 2020-2025



Note: Enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year.

At the middle-level, teachers reported that new lottery or transfer students with very high needs were being placed at Bridger without the corresponding adult support they felt those students would have received at a larger, better-resourced comprehensive middle school. As a result, these students were in classes where an individual adult could not realistically provide the level of one-on-one support required, which teachers described as a disservice both to those high-needs students and to their peers. Participants perceived this as a structural inequity, even though they continued to work intensively with the students in their own classrooms. Participants stated:

"I think that the immersion community may have gained some things at their new school, but the students of color and neighborhood students here lost that everyday connection and support."

"The last transfer students we've had through the lottery are so high needs… they would need a one-on-one, but they're not going to get that because that's not what we'll be budgeted for."

Perceived Quality of Learning Environments After SEGC Shifts

Participants' descriptions of the post-SEGC learning environment emphasize a tension between strong classroom-level practice and strained school-level conditions. In K–5, teachers continued to describe a commitment to project-based learning, relationship-building, and affirming student identities; in middle grades, staff spoke of a historical tradition of integrated, inquiry-driven humanities and multi-age learning. Survey respondents had positive perceptions about learning

environments: 11 of the 14 who responded to the items rated student learning environments as high quality, and 9 of 14 agreed staff collaboration supports teaching and learning.

However, they also reported that structural and policy changes linked to SEGC and subsequent district decisions often undermined these strengths. K–5 participants highlighted the collapse of multiple sections into large classes with many students on individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 plans, or safety plans, and the loss of roles like social workers and extra counselors, which they felt reduced the overall quality of support and the sustainability of high-quality instruction. They also noted a reduction in school-wide cultural celebrations and explicit multicultural programming, interpreting this as a shift away from visible acknowledgment of cultural diversity in the daily life of the school.

Middle-level participants described a marked shift from flexible, integrated curriculum to more rigid, scripted programs. They shared that where students had once engaged with longer novels, independent reading, and large cross-disciplinary projects, the newer structures emphasized short texts and narrower, test-aligned materials. Educators perceived this change as reducing student engagement and diminishing the richness of the learning experience, particularly for students who had previously thrived in more inquiry-based environments. The attempt to offer a "comprehensive middle school" menu of electives and structures within a small K–8, without additional FTE or appropriate space, was seen as especially problematic, leading to schedule designs that disrupted K–2 programming and created logistical challenges for older students. Participants also noted:

"We generally believe in kids and want to make education interactive and fun and more project-based…but now there's these big classes, kids with major needs, and fewer supports."

"It used to be multi-disciplinary, multi-age…all of that is done now. Everything seems to be locked into grade levels and a pretty scripted curriculum."

The staffing record supports these perceptions. As Bridger programs transitioned, its staffing mix changed in ways that match what participants describe. The DLI teaching block left with the program, and a social worker position present during the transition did not persist. At the same time the building added the elective and specialist roles a K–8 requires, including art, music, physical education, and a foreign language teacher appearing from 2022–23 onward, alongside growth in counseling and special education staff. Total staffing fell to its lowest point, about 33 FTE, in the 2022–23 conversion year before rebuilding. In other words, the building was assembling a broader grade span and program menu during the same window in which its overall staffing was thinnest, which is the structural version of the "comprehensive menu without the FTE" experience participants named.

How SEGC-Related Changes Played Out at Bridger and Factors Shaping the Experience
Across our Bridger-specific conversations, participants collectively described SEGC as reconfiguring Bridger's identity, enrollment, and internal dynamics, with effects that were then amplified by leadership churn (three principals during a three year period), resource cuts, and district-level instability. Before SEGC, participants remembered Bridger as a Title I school with a mix of neighborhood and dual language immersion students, extensive cultural celebrations, and a strong sense of being a close-knit, collaborative community. The SEGC decisions moved dual language immersion, shifted Title I status, and brought in a focus-option community used to a high degree of autonomy and parent influence, which participants experienced as changing both the student body and the power dynamics within the school.

Staff were generally very skeptical that the SEGC changes advanced equity. Among the staff who answered these survey questions, very few believed the changes were shared fairly across schools, and none believed the changes avoided creating new barriers for underserved students. Staff were also not convinced that SEGC made class sizes more equitable or balanced enrollment in meaningful ways. In short, staff survey responses suggest that many saw the changes as falling short of the equity goals PPS had attached to the process. Participants said:

"Barriers were only created, and I don't even know how to accurately capture that here. Everyone is adjusting, but we're all worse for it."

"We were promised a classroom teacher for 3 years. That promise was broken and we have EXTREMELY high needs students and only 2 teachers instead of 3."

Participants perceived that the merger unfolded without a clear, shared vision or adequate planning. They described minimal structured opportunities for joint culture-building, limited clarity about how positions and roles would be allocated, and repeated changes in school-level leadership during the early years of the transition. Over time, they reported that after an initial "boost" in staffing, the school experienced substantial cuts that left larger classes and fewer adults to manage increased student needs and more complex programming expectations. One survey respondent commented:

"It stressed all the teachers with the unknown and lack of leadership from principals from either schools. They made the merger harder than it needed to be and created more divide and lack of accountability and communication."

Participants also situated their experiences of SEGC within a broader context of trauma and instability. In addition to the merger, they referenced the COVID-19 period, the loss of a beloved colleague, and the deaths of two students as events that deeply affected the community and shaped how staff interpreted subsequent changes. These lived experiences fed perceptions that

the system did not adequately recognize or address compounding harms, and that the school was often left to manage large-scale change with insufficient guidance and repair. As some participants indicated:

"We went from a close and connected community to being torn apart from our colleagues and community…and then trying to rebuild with less support."

"We're trying to do everything that a comprehensive middle school can do without the FTE or resources available. It almost feels like the system is trying to kill mid-level."

The accounts above suggest that Bridger's post-SEGC experience cannot be understood as the result of a single change or decision. Rather, participants described a layered and cumulative process in which program relocation, enrollment shifts, staffing reductions, leadership instability, reduced supports, and unresolved community tensions interacted over time. While participants continued to describe deep commitment to students, families, and the school's educational vision, they also portrayed a school community that was asked to absorb significant change without the level of planning, communication, staffing, and emotional repair needed to make that change sustainable. For PPS, Bridger's experience points to the importance of treating school reconfiguration not only as a technical enrollment or facilities matter only, but as an equitable, human, relational, and instructional transition that requires sustained support before, during, and well after implementation.

Clark Elementary School

Anticipated Changes

District-related SEGC documents identified four anticipated changes for Clark Elementary School (hereafter Clark):

- a building use change
- a program relocation out of the building
- a new student and program assignment into the building
- the reopening of Clark as a K to 5 elementary school connected to the Harrison Park pathway

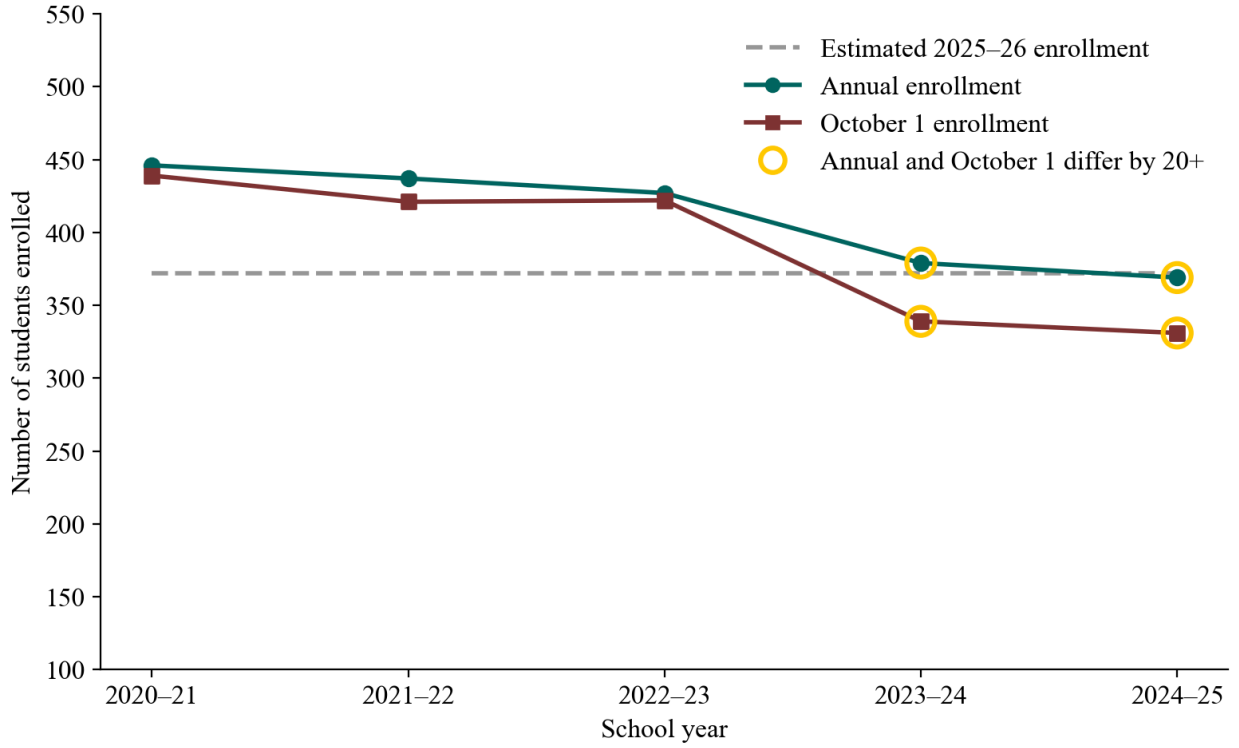
Prior to SEGC implementation, the Clark building housed Creative Science School, a K–8 focus option program with 419 students in 2021–22 and a 2025–26 forecast of 452 students. Under the SEGC recommendation, Creative Science would relocate from Clark to Bridger, and the Clark building would become the new K–5 location for Harrison Park elementary students, including students in the Mandarin DLI program. The expectation was that Clark would serve a newly configured K–5 school made up of Harrison Park neighborhood students and Mandarin elementary DLI students, with an estimated 349 students if the change had been in place in 2021–22 and a 202–26 forecast of 372 students. The projected utilization for the new Clark K–5 was 70.5% if it were in place in 2021–22 and 75.2% in the 2025–26 forecast.

In short, Clark was expected to shift from housing a K–8 focus option program to serving as a neighborhood K–5 school connected to Harrison Park. The recommendation was intended to keep Harrison Park K–5 students together, maintain the Mandarin DLI program at the elementary level, and locate elementary students in a building aligned with their assigned middle school pathway.

Overview

In this profile, we share findings from our data collection with participants at Clark to better understand how SEGC-related changes were experienced within this school community. Participants included less than five individuals. Their accounts offer insight into how the reopening and reconfiguration of Clark as a neighborhood K–5 school was experienced by people working inside the building during and after the transition. Rather than treating SEGC as the sole cause of later conditions at Clark, we examine how participants connected SEGC-related shifts to broader patterns they experienced in morale, professional support, school climate, learning environments, student and family experiences, and the school's capacity to absorb and respond to change. These accounts help illuminate how district-level decisions were lived, interpreted, and managed at the school level.

Figure 2.1 Clark estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Losing grades 6–8 with the relocation of the Creative Science program in 2023–24 accounts for some of the enrollment decline. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Participants

We share our findings based on the qualitative and quantitative data that we collect at and about Clark. This case draws on 15 staff survey respondents and 9 family and caregiver survey respondents from Clark. However, to protect participant anonymity, we do not report the exact number of Clark participants because fewer than five individuals contributed input. In small school-level samples, reporting exact counts can make it easier to infer who participated or connect particular comments to specific individuals, especially when participants hold identifiable roles or speak about highly contextualized experiences. For that reason, using "fewer than five" serves as a confidentiality threshold and helps protect participants while still allowing us to summarize the themes that emerged.

Findings

SEGC's Impact on Morale and Retention

Overall, participants described Clark as a highly diverse Title I school serving many students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, newcomer and refugee students, and students from historically underserved communities. Their accounts also suggested that the

return of a neighborhood K–5 school to the Clark building was viewed positively by many families, even as participants identified ongoing concerns related to implementation support, staff well-being, schoolwide systems, cultural belonging, and the consistency of learning environments across classrooms.

However, participants described the SEGC-related school reconfiguration to a K–5 and reopening of Clark as having mixed but significant consequences for morale, with some long-term benefits for students and learning conditions alongside persistent stress, frustration, and a sense of missed opportunity among adults.

One participant described entering an elementary school environment that felt highly dysregulated during the transition period at the prior site, including frequent fights, concerns about safety, and limited time for sustained instruction. This context created an intense starting point for the transition, where staff were not only implementing a major school change but also trying to stabilize daily routines, rebuild trust, and create the conditions for teaching and learning. In this participant's view, district leaders responded primarily by emphasizing outcomes, accountability, and perceived shortcomings, rather than fully acknowledging the complexity of the conditions staff had inherited and were trying to address. One person asserted:

"I felt like there was a lot of blame on us [as a school], even though we inherited the school and we inherited all the problems…Changes like this take time and it doesn't happen overnight. And I felt like we were getting a lot of pressure…to turn the school around overnight."

Additionally, participants in the focus group characterized overall morale as low, and emphasized internal tensions, leadership issues, and a small but "very vocal" group whose influence they saw as amplifying negativity. Participants simply described the morale as:

"Overall, I'd say poor."

"There is a select group that's a small group, but a very vocal group that kind of has tentacles reaching out, and it just impacts everyone."

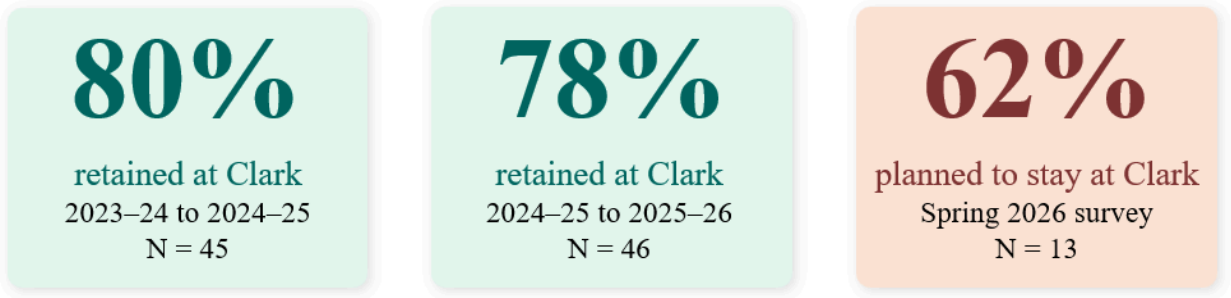
Participants perceived that retention data might look stable on paper, but that many educators would leave if they had feasible options, suggesting a hidden fragility in the workforce at Clark. A participant highlighted that:

"When you talk about retention, I could tell you at least, probably close to five teachers who would leave tomorrow if they could. But the reality is, there's just been nowhere for them to go for the last three years."

"I'm sure our retention actually looks fine…But like, we have at least three teachers…that would happily leave."

Year-to-year retention since the SEGC changes reinforces the "looks fine on paper" point. Of the staff present in 2023–24, 80% were still at Clark the following year. Of those present in 2024–25, 78% remained the year after. Decomposing the departures tracks what the participant described from the other side. Across both years, most of those who left did not leave the district. In fact, they transferred to other PPS schools, several back to Harrison Park, while only a small number, on the order of one to three per year with confirmed termination dates, voluntarily left PPS entirely.

Figure 2.2. Clark staff retention since SEGC changes



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff.

Among Clark survey respondents, 62% (8 of 13) agreed they planned to be at the school the next year, well below the 79% who said the same across all PPS staff respondents. Of the remaining 5 respondents, 4 neither agreed nor disagreed they planned to stay, and 1 strongly disagreed. The cluster of noncommittal responses supports the participant's claim: a meaningful share of respondents were not affirmatively committed to stay nor actively looking to leave.

The participants did not solely connect this to SEGC changes. In fact, participants also tied current district-level budget shortfalls and layoffs, including for central-office colleagues of color, to deep anxiety and anger, with ripple effects on morale and trust. One participant stated:

"Many of them colleagues of color were called into a meeting…and basically told… if you don't see your name, you don't have a job… It just seems so inhumane… that we would treat our people like that."

These experiences contributed to participants feeling vulnerable about their own roles, worried about additional cuts, and emotionally depleted. One participant reported not sleeping well for weeks, while another described needing a five-week mental health leave due to stress. Of 14

survey respondents, only three agreed that morale at Clark is high (21%). This reflects what focus group participants stated:

"I haven't really slept much in two weeks…it's impacting staff attendance… So yeah, I'd say that it's not… the morale isn't great."

"One person took a several week mental health leave because it's not good… I would say overall the staff is not well."

While participants did not explicitly identify themselves or other speakers by race, they did, from their perception, highlight that colleagues of color in central positions were heavily impacted by layoffs, raising concerns about equity and the message this sends about whose labor and expertise are valued.

Feeling Equipped or Not to Support Students and Families

Participants consistently indicated that they did not feel adequately equipped or supported to serve students and families, especially during the initial SEGC transition and in the immediate aftermath of reopening Clark as a K–5 school.

One participant described arriving to a severely under-structured and unsafe elementary environment with little prior groundwork laid, despite the scale of change involved, that is reconfiguring a school. They reported feeling that the school had to prioritize putting basic behavioral and safety systems in place before they could turn meaningfully to academics.

"We walked into… a school that we realized on day one needed to have systems and structures in place and as a school we are to take charge of that, but also we needed to create a school culture and climate…that was safe."

Similarly, a family survey respondent with a student starting kindergarten in the building's first year as Clark K–5 wrote:

> *"It felt like it took these past two years to even begin to start a community…There was a leadership vacuum and we needed more support as a school establishing community."*

District support in this phase was described as misaligned and, at times, counterproductive. For example, some of the people assigned to the school during the reopening period were described as inexperienced and behaviorally challenging in ways that created more work, conflict, and stress rather than relief for the school. One person indicated:

"They [the district] gave us [some people], but [they were] brand new… it ended up causing way more hours and stress… which took away from our school."

Other supports that might have helped, such as science-of-reading training and coordinated tier-3 supports, arrived later and were seen as a meaningful but delayed response.

Moreover, participants described feeling almost completely unequipped during the SECG transition. One participant summarized their sense of support when asked to what extent did you feel equipped to support students and families, the person proclaimed:

'Not at all, I would say as close to zero.'"

They perceived the district's implementation of tier-3 supports as focused on curricular tools rather than the structural and leadership issues they believed were most critical.

"We're a tier three school, which means we get a lot of support, but like, they're not the support that is helpful. It's help that's not helpful… what [we] need you guys to do is help our [school] become more cohesive."

Participants indicated they often did not know who to talk to about these concerns or did not feel confident that raising them would lead to action. Participants made comments like:

"Do you feel safe raising these kinds of concerns or ideas?

'I don't know who to talk to.'"

Survey respondents conveyed that they feel personally capable yet structurally unsupported to do their jobs. Eight of 14 respondents agreed they could carry out their responsibilities effectively but only 6 felt they had the resources to do so. One staff respondent described their working conditions, writing that "the toxic work environment and high staff turnover at this school, as well as lack of systems and organization even after three years, have severely impacted my ability to serve students and families."

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants at Clark reported that the emotional toll of the SEGC transition, ongoing school demands, and district-level fiscal crises has been substantial. While the current fiscal deficit of PPS was not the focus of our conversations, participants consistently brought the topic up.

One participant described feeling deeply unsettled by current budget shortfalls, potential furlough days, and large-scale layoffs, particularly among long-serving colleagues, many of

whom were identified as people of color. They perceived the process as abrupt and "inhumane," and reported that they and others were having trouble sleeping, worried both for students and for their own futures. As one participant stated:

"I absolutely feel vulnerable…It's just very hard, and I'm sad for all my colleagues that are impacted.

Participants linked this distress to a mix of workload, perceptions of inconsistent leadership, reactive systems, and lack of clear vision, as well as to the high cost of living and financial uncertainty tied to furloughs and cuts. Participants suggested that:

"Staff want a clear vision… because right now, it feels like everything we do… is reactive… it kind of feels like we're not even quite treading water."

"Whenever we do feel like we're making a couple steps forward…we hit a wall where there is something that we need that only an administrator can do, that doesn't get done… it's this constant battle to just like, stay at the line."

Moreover, participants acknowledged the presence of district-provided supports, especially in the tier-3 framework (which, again, they stated arrived too late), but consistently emphasized that these supports felt misaligned with their most pressing emotional and professional needs, which centered on leadership capacity, relational trust, and coherent schoolwide systems.

The survey findings suggest a mixed picture. While the Clark survey respondents align with the strain described in interviews and focus groups, they also show that staff experiences were not uniformly negative. On whether they felt emotionally supported at work, 9 of 14 Clark respondents agreed. An open response about what had most affected well-being at work surfaced the same leadership and communication theme the focus groups raised, "the change from [Harrison Park] to Clark was fine. But the leadership at Clark is non-existent. Emails are not replied, questions are not answered, events and changes are not communicated and planned." We interpret this comment not as a comprehensive assessment of any individual leader, but as evidence that some staff experienced gaps in communication, follow-through, and planning as consequential for their well-being.

It is also important to note that much of the distress participants raised extended beyond the SEGC transition itself. Concerns about layoffs of long-serving colleagues, fears of furloughs, and the manner in which budget cuts were communicated reflected current working conditions that appeared to compound the stress of earlier SEGC-related change.

Experiences of SEGC Changes for Students and Families from Historically Underserved Communities

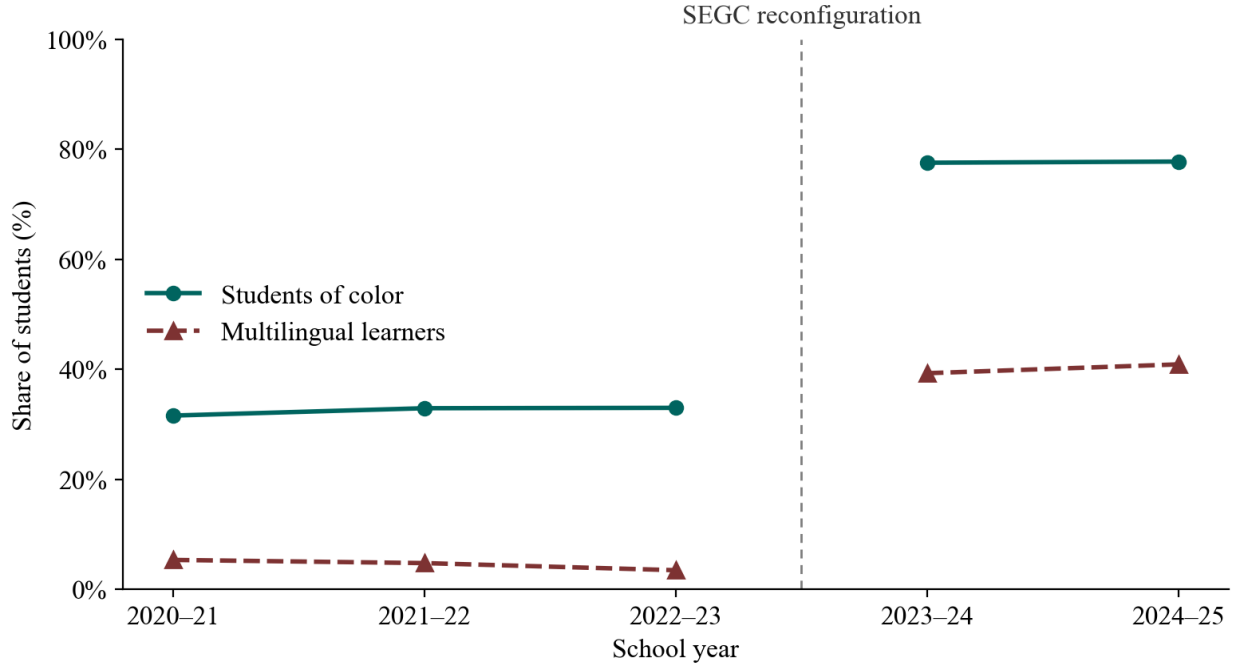
While these conversations did not include direct testimony from students or families, participants described Clark as serving a highly diverse, heavily historically underserved population, and they reflected on how the SEGC changes shaped the experience of that community.

Participants highlighted that Clark is a Title I school with majority students of color, substantial numbers of emergent bilingual students, students with disabilities, and historically underserved students. Participants noted that the surrounding neighborhood community area includes both relatively affordable single-family housing and multiple Section 8 housing complexes, and that the school serves many newcomer and refugee families from around the world. One participant shared that:

"We are one of the most diverse elementary schools… The majority of our students are students of color… about 44% English language learners…52% historically underserved…we have a lot of students that are newcomers, refugees from all over the world."

Enrollment records track how sharply the building's population changed when it reopened as a neighborhood K–5 with a Mandarin DLI program. Through 2022–23, under Creative Science, the building enrolled about a third of students of color (32–33%) and few multilingual learners (4–5%). When the Harrison Park K–5 students arrived in 2023–24, those figures moved to 78% students of color and 39% multilingual learners, holding at 78% and 41% the following year.

Figure 2.3 Changes in student composition at Clark, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Note: Enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year.

Participants reported that families in this community were largely pleased with the SEGC-driven shift that brought a neighborhood K–5 school back to the Clark building and separated elementary students from middle schoolers. According to one participant:

"In our particular community, families were very excited and happy to have the elementary school back in the neighborhood… They were also very excited to have the middle schoolers be separated from the elementary school students."

Participants observed that younger students had previously been exposed to older students' language and behaviors, which they perceived as developmentally inappropriate and harmful. They saw the reconfiguration into a separate K–5 as reducing that exposure and creating more age-appropriate environments.

At the same time, participants pointed to missed opportunities to advance racial equity and belonging for this diverse community. A particularly salient example was the decision to maintain the existing school name, despite concerns about its historical association and its mismatch with the student population. One participant shared that:

"We put a largely Black population to a school named after a slave owner. We didn't change the name, even though it was brought up multiple times…Why not use that opportunity to rebrand the school and make it something more appropriate for the demographic that it serves?"

They also described limited and fragmented cultural programming, such as relying on a multicultural event at another campus and having a single annual event on site, rather than building a cohesive, multi-faceted approach to honoring and engaging all communities. Participants perceived this as contributing to ongoing gaps in mutual understanding and episodes of discrimination among student groups. As one participant noted:

"There just seems to be kind of a lack of cohesion amongst the subgroups…I think a lot of our students of color . . . there's not a lot of understanding of different cultures… which causes some opportunities for discrimination towards each other based on a lack of understanding."

Participants also raised concerns about students receiving special education services and newcomer student experiences, noting that some specialized programs, such as a new Communication and Behavior Classroom, were not well understood by staff or students, potentially increasing stigma and misunderstanding. Finally, a participant described high rates of chronic absenteeism and limited external accountability for what they described as educational neglect, which they saw as particularly harmful to students in historically underserved

communities and at odds with district rhetoric about equity and opportunity. According to one participant:

"We were at 40% last year, on average… for chronic absenteeism… it's hard to educate kids when they're not here, and I can't hold anybody accountable…it's like, the one thing that can set them up, if they can read, they can do anything, but they don't come to school."

The chronic-absenteeism the participant flagged bears out in district attendance records. Building-level chronic absenteeism stood near 43–44% in the years after the SEGC transition.

In sum, these accounts should not be read as evidence that SEGC-related changes directly caused all of the experiences at Clark, nor should they be read as an assessment of any single school leader. Instead, they reflect how school-based employees understood the conditions students and families were navigating in a school community that had been affected by SEGC-related reconfiguration. Importantly, participants described both perceived benefits, such as the return of a neighborhood K–5 school and a more age-appropriate elementary environment, as well as ongoing concerns related to cultural belonging, chronic absenteeism, newcomer students, students receiving special education services, and uneven learning conditions. More than anything, their accounts help illuminate the conditions within a school community that had been impacted by SEGC-related changes, as well as the kinds of student and family experiences district leaders should attend to when evaluating the longer-term effects of school reconfiguration.

Post-SEGC Learning Environments for Administrators, Teachers, and Staff

Participants agreed that the quality of learning environments at Clark after SEGC is highly variable, both academically and in terms of climate. They described wide differences across classrooms in safety, sense of student belonging, academic rigor, and curricular integrity. Participants said:

"I honestly think that it varies widely between classrooms. Some classrooms are very accepting and safe learning environments, and I feel like others are not as much."

"From an academic perspective…there are some classrooms where it's like high rigor, high expectations, high integrity to curricular materials, and then others… we just have both ends of the spectrum."

The staff survey captures the variation the focus group participant noted. Asked whether students experience high-quality learning environments, 8 of 15 Clark staff agreed. Agreement that the school climate is supportive for students and staff was lower, 5 of 15, and agreement that staff collaboration supports teaching and learning was the same, 5 of 15. Views on whether class sizes

were distributed manageably were similarly mixed, 5 of 13, as was whether the current workload is manageable, 8 of 14. These are markers of the "both ends of the spectrum" participants described, with quality varying classroom to classroom.

Participants also noted that a positive school climate and strong academic rigor did not always take place in the schools as some classrooms excelled in one and struggled in the other. However, over time, one participant described moving from "out of control" conditions at the previous site (prior to Clark separate school) to gradually more solid systems, especially in behavior and safety, and then in academics, as more instructional leadership became possible. They attributed this progress to both school-based work and an eventual increase in district-level support, while stressing that the work remains incomplete.

"Our first year was really prioritized around just general safety and student behavior… we got positive behavior interventions and support in place… Every year we've gotten better… We're in a much better place [than year one]."

In sum, participants' accounts suggest that Clark's post-SEGC experience was marked by both meaningful gains and unresolved strain. Mainly, participants described the return of a neighborhood K–5 school as important for families and students, particularly because it created a more age-appropriate elementary environment and restored a local school presence in the community. Yet, at the same time, they described the transition as unfolding within a context of substantial instability, including urgent behavior and safety needs, variable classroom conditions, leadership and systems challenges, staff stress, and concerns about whether district support matched the school's actual needs. Clark's experience underscores the importance of pairing school reconfiguration with sustained implementation support and coherent schoolwide systems, both of which research identifies as central to school improvement and successful transition.[12] It also points to the need for culturally responsive community building and clear structures that support the emotional and professional well-being of the adults responsible for helping students and families experience change successfully.[13]

[12] Bryk et al., 2010; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009
[13] Ishimaru, 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Mapp & Bergman, 2019

Lent Elementary School

Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district-related SEGC documents, Lent Elementary School was expected to experience three major types of changes:

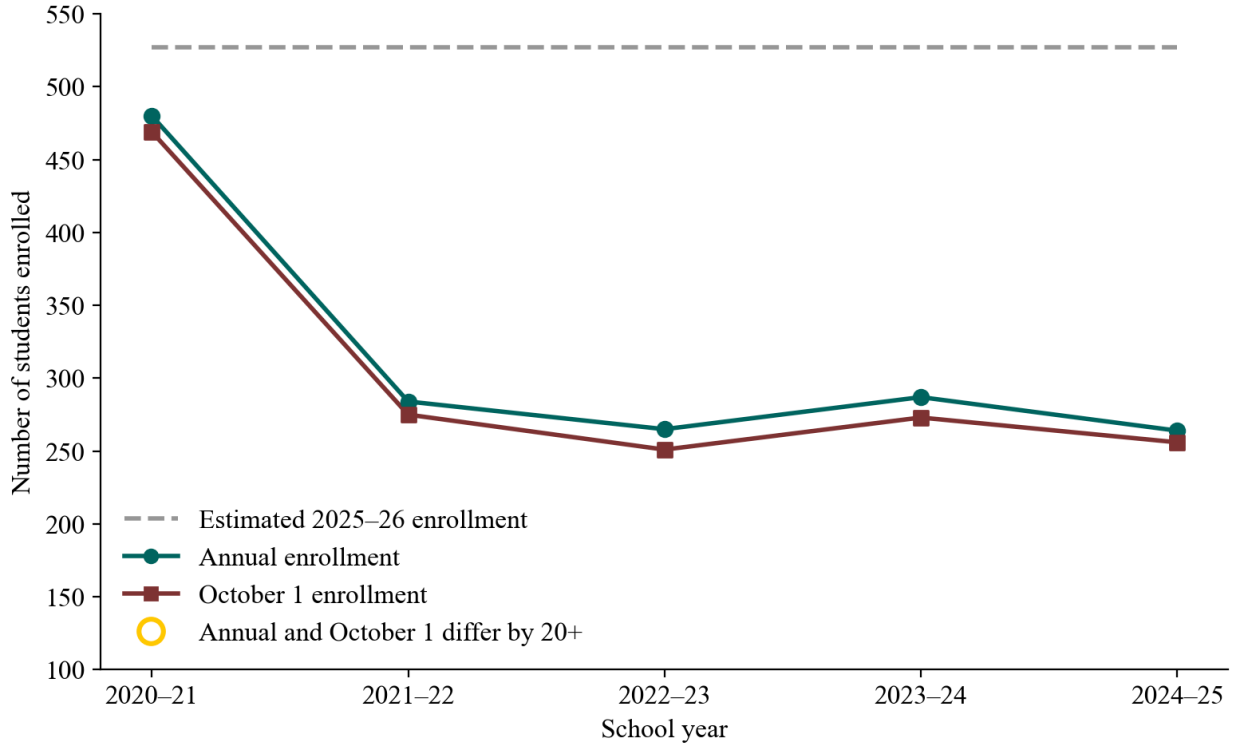
- a program reconfiguration
- a program relocation into the building
- a reassignment option for neighborhood students not enrolling in Spanish DLI

Lent was described as a co-located K–5 school with a single strand neighborhood program and a single strand Spanish DLI program, with 277 students in 2021–22, which was estimated to hold steady through 2025–26 if no SEGC changes were made. Under the SEGC recommendation, Lent would convert to a whole school Spanish DLI model by adding two strands of Spanish immersion from Bridger. Participants described this change as making Lent one of the district's whole school Spanish DLI sites. Students in Lent's neighborhood school program and future Lent neighborhood students who did not enroll in Spanish DLI were expected to have a pathway to Marysville, with bus service provided where applicable. Since district documents also called for additional transition planning for the Lent neighborhood school program, this move should be understood as part of an implementation process that required further planning with students, families, staff, and school leaders.

The expectation was that Lent's total enrollment would increase substantially, from 277 students in 2021–22 to an estimated 527 students in 2025–26. Building utilization was projected to rise from 43.8% to 87.5% if the recommendation had been in place in 2021, and from a 2025 forecast of 43.8% to 83.4%.

In short, district related SEGC documents anticipated that Lent would shift from a small co-located neighborhood and Spanish DLI school into a larger whole school Spanish DLI site. The stated goals were to create a more robust immersion program, increase enrollment, and improve building utilization, while also creating a Marysville pathway for neighborhood students not participating in Spanish DLI.

Figure 3.1. Lent estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Overview

In this profile, we share findings from the qualitative and quantitative data that we collected with school-based staff at Lent Elementary School (hereafter Lent) to better understand how SEGC-related changes were experienced within this school community. Participants' accounts offer insight into how the reconfiguration of Lent from a neighborhood K–5 school into a full-school Spanish dual language immersion K–5 program (losing its neighborhood option) was experienced by people working inside the building before, during, and after SEGC-related changes.

The findings in this profile should be understood as school-based employees' (whom we spoke with) accounts of conditions within a school community impacted by SEGC-related changes. Overall, participants described both significant strain, including grief, staff and student turnover, loss of neighborhood access, under-communication, and front-line staff absorbing family frustration. However, they did describe important sources of affirmation at the school, including the current strength of Lent's dual language mission, greater cultural affirmation for Latino/a/x students and families, improved cohesion under current leadership, and pride in the school community's resilience. Together, these accounts provide a nuanced view of how SEGC-related

changes were experienced at Lent over time and what PPS should consider when evaluating the longer-term consequences of school reconfiguration.

Participants and Important Distinctions

Participants included approximately 15 staff members across our conversations, 12 staff who completed the staff survey, and 33 respondents to the family and caregiver survey. Participants described a rich mix of lived experiences, what they directly saw, did, felt, or heard, and perceptions or generalizations built from those experiences over time. Lived experiences included concrete events, such as students being reassigned to other schools, staff turnover, specific comments made by colleagues, the loss of neighborhood walkability, or the struggle to support particular students. Perceptions and generalizations emerged as participants interpreted these events and their patterns, for example, beliefs about which communities benefited or were harmed, how district leaders value Latino students and families overall, or whether specific program changes "gentrified" the school. Where participants generalized, for instance, about "the district," "Bridger families," or "West Side parents," those perceptions were typically grounded in years of working at Lent and multiple episodes of advocacy or conflict, but they remain interpretations, not directly observed facts.

Findings

Morale, Retention, and Lent's Identity After SEGC

In this report, we understand school morale as being closely connected to the organizational climate of a school, including the quality of relationships among staff, trust in leadership, collegial support, and the extent to which educators experience the school as a healthy and supportive workplace.[14] Participants consistently described the SEGC implementation period as emotionally intense, marked by emotional experiences such as grief, anger, and a strong "us versus them" dynamic, particularly in the first years after the merger and reconfiguration. One staff member summarized the emotional tone of those early years as:

"Those years were really terrible, those first few years…There were a lot of tears during the transition."

Participants who had been at Lent before SEGC described losing long-standing colleagues and neighbors, and the arrival of a large group of new staff and students who often felt like a separate community. One participant recalled:

[14] Hoy, W. K., Smith, P. A., & Sweetland, S. R. (2002). The development of the Organizational Climate Index for high schools: Its measure and relationship to faculty trust. The High School Journal, 86(2), 38–49.

"When the merger happened, we lost two thirds of our staff again. And so the people, the teachers, who are left, are left because we want to be here, and we love this environment… we have put in the blood, sweat and tears, we have chosen this."

Over time, many participants reported that morale has improved significantly under current leadership and with a fully dual-language immersion (DLI) configuration. As one participant observed:

"Now… I feel like we feel as a whole unit. I feel like we're moving together. We're working as one towards one goal… more cohesive."

Another participant described the staff's resilience in the face of changes, "I am proud of Lent's resilience despite constant change."

Experiences of Staff of Color and Bilingual Staff

For some educators of color and bilingual staff, the SEGC changes intersected directly with racial and linguistic identity. One participant of color reflected on the demographic shift this way:

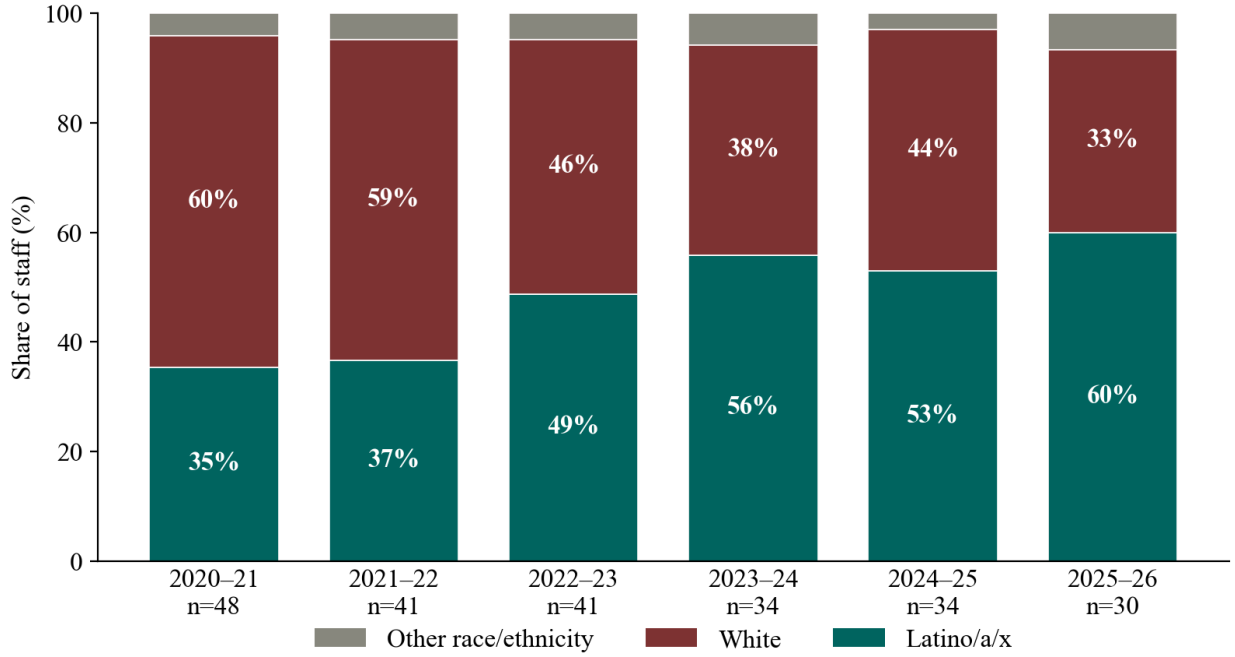
"As a brown person, I blended in here from day one, and I've loved it. It has been amazing, and all of a sudden. That was dope. People of color, yeah?"

Interestingly enough, a participant in the same school had a completely different experience regarding speaking Spanish. That is, another participant described being explicitly told not to use Spanish in front of colleagues:

"I've gotten staff members to come to me in my face and tell me, 'don't speak in Spanish in front of me.' And that was in the beginning of my school time here at Lent and that was in front of other staff members."

This participant connected such incidents to a broader feeling that dual-language staff were being asked to "stay in their lane." They remarked, "It did feel that…it was like you stayed in your lane. We'll stay in our lane, but make sure that your lane doesn't spill out of your classroom." The administrative record shows the demographic realignment that participants described. As the school converted after the 2022–23 school year, white staff left at 79% while staff of color left at 50%. Over the longer arc, the share of staff of color staff at Lent rose from 40% in 2020–21 to 64% in 2025–26, the highest of any SEGC school. Because Lent staff numbers declined over this period, the school became smaller and, concurrently, more heavily staffed by bilingual and staff of color aligned with the dual-language mission.

Figure 3.2. Racial and ethnic composition of Lent staff, 2020–21 to 2025–26



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff.

At the same time, multiple participants described the current school as a profoundly affirming professional space for bilingual and Latino/a/x educators, especially in contrast to prior placements where they felt unwelcome or constantly challenged. One person shared:

"I went from a much harder gig, emotionally, to a school where I don't have to explain who I am to any staff member. I don't have to question how I'm speaking. I don't have to overthink my language. I can just be… My well-being is higher. I lost a lot of weight in one year."

This same participant described the dual-language mission as deeply personal and restorative:

"Being able to come to work… to a place where I can use my [Spanish] language and my culture for the benefit of others and [it] feeds my own personal soul… I did not have that at the last place I was working."

Perceptions of Staff Retention at Lent

Participants reported significant staff and student turnover linked to SEGC changes. One staff member noted:

"When the merger happened, we lost two thirds of our population, yeah, maybe more."

According to participants, long-time bilingual educators connected to the neighborhood side, non-DLI, were displaced to other schools, particularly Marysville, and some described deep grief about leaving their "home" community. A participant recounted:

"We had [teachers] that were the native speakers over 20–30 years teaching here who were pushed over to Marysville."

Participants also observed that some of the families and staff who had most strongly advocated for the DLI expansion did not ultimately remain at Lent. As one participant recalled:

"A lot of the parents who pushed from Bridger for their kids to come to the school didn't end up staying…they felt like it was out of their way [and that] their students didn't feel supported."

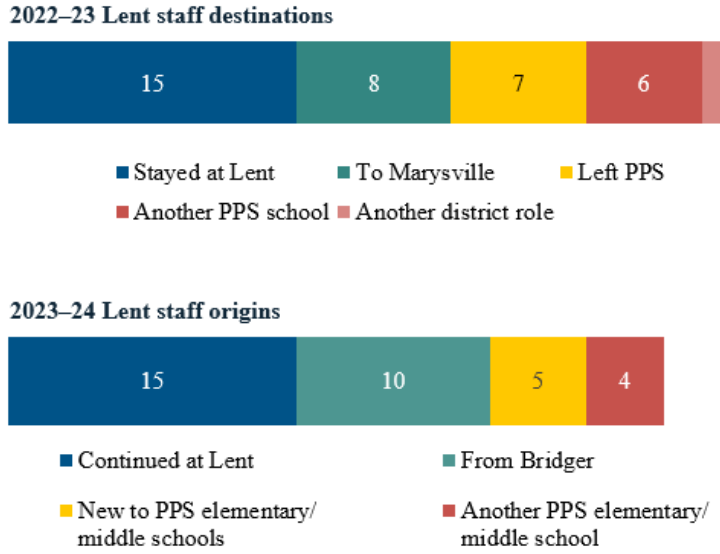
By contrast, multiple participants emphasized that the current staff is composed largely of people who have chosen to stay at Lent despite the upheaval, and who feel deeply tied to the community.

The scale of turnover participants described is also reflected in the personnel records. After 2022–23, the SEGC implementation year, 63% of Lent staff left the school, nearly double the SEGC-school average of 32%. Only Bridger, the school from which the Spanish DLI program relocated to Lent, had a higher left-school rate, at 73%. Lent and Bridger, the two schools at either end of the Spanish DLI program relocation, experienced substantial staff churn during the SEGC transition. This compounds an earlier wave of turnover that occurred in 2020–21: 46% of Lent staff and 48% of Bridger staff were no longer working at those schools the following year, compared with an SEGC-school average of 26%.

After the transition to whole-school Spanish DLI, many of Lent's staff were new to the school, and by 2025–26, only about one-quarter of the staff working at Lent had been there before the SEGC changes. Lent also cycled through four principals across six years. These shifts were not only about how many staff members left or arrived, they also changed the composition of the school's instructional model. Between 2022–23 and 2023–24, ten full-time general classroom teaching positions were removed, while DLI teaching positions increased from 8to 15. In this sense, Lent did not simply lose staff. It was substantially reconstituted around the DLI instructional model.

The participant account of long-tenured neighborhood teachers being "pushed over to Marysville" is also verifiable. Of the 41 staff at Lent in 2022–23, 15 remained the following year. Eight of the departing teachers moved to Marysville, the school that received Lent's displaced neighborhood students.

Figure 3.3. Sources and destinations of Lent staff through the transition to whole school DLI



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff.

Against this history of disruption, surveys point to the more hopeful direction that participants described under new leadership. Among the roughly twelve staff who responded to the survey, most reported positive working conditions. Nine of 12 agreed that morale at the school is high, 9 of 12 that the climate is supportive for students and staff, and all 12 that they can carry out their responsibilities effectively. This is consistent with the participant sense of a staff that has stabilized into "one unit... moving together" after the upheaval, composed largely of people who chose to stay. The survey cannot speak to how the SEGC transition itself felt; too few staff answered the retrospective items for those figures to be reported. However, among participants present during that period, testimony is direct and consistent: the early years were, in one respondent's words, "really terrible."

Feeling Under-Informed and Under-Supported During SEGC Transition

Participants widely reported feeling under-equipped during the SEGC transition itself, both in terms of information and practical resources. One participant described the sudden disappearance of the central office SEGC lead after decisions were implemented:

> *"The person who was foreseeing all the Southeast Guiding Coalition was no longer in office after everything took effect. So all of the frustration that parents had…they had no one to say [it to], and that was really frustrating."*

Another participant summarized their own understanding during the SEGC changes: "I knew pretty much nothing…the former principal…was very much for [the change]… any like upset feelings that we had… we weren't able to think about it." From another participant's perspective, there was also a sense that key contextual information about the school's recent history and

community distrust had not been communicated. Moreover, other participants described being on the front lines of community anger, particularly from families who had lost neighborhood access or were unhappy about the Spanish-immersion focus. One participant explained:

"We have been cussed out. We have been yelled at…by parents who moved into the neighborhood that do not want their students to speak Spanish, and that feel that it's unfair that their students can't go to their neighborhood school."

Participants also referenced feeling caught between district-level promises and the reality of implementation. As one participant noted:

"*What I understand is we were promised certain things to make this go better, and those certain things were not upheld. [For example] the fourth grade parents were really upset… they were promised it would be a three strand school…and the parents [started] bringing the letters that they were promised."*

These accounts suggest that participants did not experience the SEGC transition as simply difficult because change itself is difficult. Instead, they described feeling under-informed, under-supported, and left to manage the consequences of the SEGC decisions that had been made by the district. Based on participant responses, the absence of clear communication, continuity of leadership, and reliable follow-through placed school-based staff in the position of interpreting district decisions for families, absorbing frustration, and trying to maintain trust without the information or resources they needed from the district.

Staff Experiences Years After SEGC Changes

Several participants, including those who joined more recently, felt that under the current administration they are now more able to raise issues and see concrete responses. An one participant shared:

"Since administration has changed… I have noticed a lot of actual things getting done. Like, you could actually say something…it won't take forever to discuss it."

At the same time, staff still pointed to significant structural challenges, especially combined grade classes, insufficient staffing, and cuts to services such as English Language Development (ELD), that they believe will strain their capacity to support students effectively.

Staff Experienced Emotional Costs of Grief, Anger, and Feeling Unheard with SEGC Changes

Participants described significant emotional strain associated with the SEGC changes such as grief for lost community, anger about process and outcomes, and a sense that their advocacy was not meaningfully heard. One participant recalled:

"There were a lot of tears during the transition, very upsetting…the staff was a little more delicate with the staff being transitioned now than what it was like with becoming [a merged site]…For us, it was more than that…this community meant everything to me."

Another participant, reflecting on district responsiveness, said: "We went to the board meeting and everything…There were a lot of petitions signed… and still didn't feel like it made a difference…The district doesn't care." From the teachers' perspective, student and family activism, marches, testimonies, organized advocacy, was experienced as powerful but ultimately dismissed. One teacher put it this way:

"Students and families…rallied…and like it felt that no one was being heard…they felt like they were just being show ponies, because the district was like, 'yes, we want to hear you guys'…and in the end… 'thank you for your comments, but we'll decide.'"

Alongside these emotional experiences, participants also described important emotional benefits, especially in the current context of the school that included a stronger sense of shared purpose, cultural affirmation, and pride in the community's resilience.

Another participant described the dual-language school as a deeply meaningful sanctuary for Latino/a/x families in a broader national and local context of immigration enforcement. The person shared that:

"To be able to offer and provide [dual language] in a year when our federal government is picking up our families off the streets… We still are supporting families that ICE has picked up… to have a sanctuary…is amazing."

That same participant described families' willingness to travel long distances to keep children at Lent. They shared, "We do have parents who go out of their way… even after moving, we find a lot of families that move to a different district, and they're like, we're committed to bringing our students even if we have to drive 20 to 30 [minutes]."

Teachers and staff also highlighted everyday acts of allyship from some white families, such as organizing informal protections against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity. One participant described:

"For the last five months, a group of people… show up every single day… to watch for ICE… They are white families protecting our brown families."

Multiple participants expressed pride in the school's ability to hold together through constant change. People shared that, "I'm proud of Lent's resilience despite constant change." "Our community and support for one another. Staff and students [are] very supportive."

Impacts on Learning Environments and Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Before SEGC, participants described Lent as a highly diverse neighborhood school with many local students walking to school together and a rich mix of racial and linguistic backgrounds. One staff member remembered:

"We had the… Chinese families, Russian families, Chinese families, Vietnamese families, very diverse… It was probably the most beautiful thing about this school and this community."

According to participants, after the changes, many of those neighborhood students, particularly non-Latino/a/x families of color and third-language learners, for example, Somali, Vietnamese, Russian, no longer attend Lent and instead travel further to other schools such as Marysville. A participant reflected: "This is the Jade district…Vietnamese and Chinese and a lot of different people that are no longer [here]."

Staff described the loss of daily neighborhood presence as a major change in the learning environment, "We had a walking school bus every day…We don't have that anymore, because our entire population gets on a bus to go home at the end of the day." A family survey respondent echoed this loss from the parent side, describing a "loss of community...loss of walking commute to school...loss of neighborhood friends" alongside what they "gained" in "the wonderful Lent community" and "an all dual immersion school." The learning environment before the SEGC conversion gave the building its neighborhood character. This was largely displaced, and a more linguistically coherent but less racially diverse community took its place.

SEGC's DLI Decision as Both Opportunity and Trade-Off

Participants framed the full-school Spanish DLI program as a powerful opportunity for bilingualism, cultural affirmation, and equity for Latino/a/x students, and also as a structure that imposes trade-offs, particularly in middle school. On the positive side, teachers emphasized the intentionality and coherence of a full immersion model, contrasted with earlier split models where DLI was one strand among others. A participant shared:

"Being at a program that was neighborhood and dual language immersion combined, and now being at a full immersion school, it feels much more intentional in strengthening kids' native

languages and also exposing our non-native speakers… The prior program had a lot of inequities…and now that's much more equitable."

At the same time, participants raised serious concerns about the downstream middle-school experience at Kellogg for DLI students. Staff explained that these students often lose access to electives because of the need to continue Spanish coursework:

"When they go to [names a middle school], our Spanish speaking students, who have now been doing DLI for their whole careers, now don't get electives…where all the other kids get two electives. They get one and more Spanish."

Interestingly, teachers worried that students feel punished for staying in the program, "They're thinking that they have all these electives that they can take, [but] no, they can't… they're almost getting punished for learning a second language."

Experiences of Underserved Communities and Equity Lens

Participants connected SEGC's local impacts to broader questions of racial equity across PPS. Some expressed skepticism that the district fully prioritizes Latino/a/x students within its stated equity framework and specifically centers Black and Native students and families. One person shared:

"For a long time in [the district], Latinos were not on the priority list of equity. It's only Native and Black…For this entire population, it feels a little bit like, do you care?"

Another staff member captured a widely shared perception about who bore the brunt of SEGC, "Who was harmed…? Marysville and us, yeah, the Lent community." At the same time, one participant emphasized that, at least at Lent, discipline data no longer showed racial disparities for Latino/a/x students, and interpreted this as evidence that the current model can support more racially equitable experiences. One participant noted:

"This is the first school I've been at that has no racial disparity in discipline, specifically for Latino students… that's impressive… this is a racially equitable way to serve Latino students."

Indeed, for 2022–23 Lent students who persisted through the transition to 2023–24, exclusionary discipline incidents fell steadily, from 0.15 per student to effectively zero by 2024–25. However, Lent family survey respondents expressed some skepticism about the equity of the changes overall. Seven of the 42 families answering agreed that the SEGC changes moved PPS closer to racial equity, and 10 of 42 that they reduced barriers for historically underserved students. Families saw a school that serves their own children well and a district process they did not experience as equitable, consistent with staff perspectives.

In sum, participants' accounts suggest that Lent's experience after SEGC cannot be reduced to a simple story of harm or improvement. In a more nuanced way, participants described a complex set of changes in which the school lost aspects of its prior identity as a diverse, walkable neighborhood school, while also becoming a more intentional and culturally affirming Spanish dual language immersion school for many Latino/a/x students, families, and educators. These accounts align with research showing that school reconfiguration and closure processes often create substantial burdens for students, staff, families, and communities, particularly when schools serve as important neighborhood institutions.[15] At the same time, participants' descriptions of Lent's current dual language model also reflect, according to participants, the promise of well-supported dual language education to promote bilingualism, cultural affirmation, and stronger educational opportunities for multilingual students.[16] For PPS, Lent's experience underscores the importance of evaluating school reconfiguration not only by enrollment targets or program placement, but also by how changes affect school identity, staff morale, family trust, cultural belonging, neighborhood access, and the daily learning conditions of students and educators.[17]

Who Stayed and Who was Displaced: Tracking the Racial Implications Lent Community through the Reconfiguration

Participants described the school's reconfiguration as a change that helped one community and cost another. Administrative records confirm participants' perceptions. Before the conversion, in spring 2022–23, 265 students attended Lent. The following year, as the school became a whole-school Spanish DLI, 113 students (43%) stayed at Lent, while 152 (57%) left. Of those who left, 79 moved to Marysville, the designated non-DLI receiving school, 39 were middle-school-age students who aged into Kellogg, and 13 went to other schools. Within two years, 49 students from the original group, (18.5%), had left PPS entirely. The students who stayed were primarily the Spanish DLI families. The students who left were largely the neighborhood families the conversion did not retain.

The racial composition of who stayed and who left tracks one participant's observation that "non-Latinx families of color and third-language learners" no longer attend Lent. Of the 129 Latino/a/x students in the pre-conversion group, 86 stayed (about two-thirds). Of the 67 white students, 20 stayed, and most of the rest moved to Marysville or, if they were entering middle school, Kellogg. The school's Black and Asian students were almost entirely displaced of 27 Black and 20 Asian students at baseline. Meanwhile Marysville absorbed the most racially diverse slice of the displaced group (13 Black, 23 white, 19 Latino/a/x, 11 Asian, and 13 Multiracial students). During the reconfiguration,the Latino/a/x share of students at Lent rose from about 50% to 69% and the white share held near 22%. This shift is best read as two distinct

[15] de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Ewing, 2018; Ewing and Green, 2022
[16] Lindholm-Leary, 2001
[17] Bryk et al., 2010; Hoy et al., 2002

mechanisms running at once, the arrival of an established Spanish DLI program and its families, and the departure of neighborhood families without a DLI connection, rather than as a single group replacing another.

Two Lent family survey respondents captured the lived texture of the displacement that these numbers describe, including the geography that "loss of walkability" refers to:

> *"Removing the neighborhood kids from Lent was a real struggle... The Lent neighborhood families loved their school and the original decision to move them to Marysville wasn't handled with very much understanding or transparent communication... You move into a neighborhood with a school so your kids can walk to and from. Disrupting before and after school routines REALLY causes a burden on families, especially ones who are balancing multiple jobs and precarious childcare situations."*

> *"To get to Marysville from right by Lent, students have to cross 205, 92nd and 82nd Ave."*

As such, the racial equity implication of this finding is that school reconfigurations and program changes can strengthen one form of equity while creating new forms of racialized displacement. Lent's conversion to whole-school Spanish DLI appears to have created a stronger and more coherent Spanish DLI model and increased the share of Latino/a/x students at the school, which is a positive. However, the same change also coincided with a substantial decline in Black and Asian student enrollment and the movement of a more racially diverse group of neighborhood students to Marysville and other schools. This means that the equity question cannot *only* be about whether the school grew its Latino/a/x enrollment or whether the DLI model was educationally valuable. The more complex and nuanced question is whether PPS sufficiently accounted for how the school reconfiguration would affect Black students, Asian students, multiracial students, non-DLI neighborhood families, and the receiving schools expected to absorb students who no longer remained at Lent. In future program conversions, PPS should evaluate racial equity not only by who benefits from a strengthened program, but also by who is moved, who loses access, and whether receiving schools are resourced to support the students and families affected by that change.

Moreover the school reconfiguration changed the district-retention pattern for this community as well. In the year before the conversion, the Lent group left PPS at 7%, below the district rate of 9%. This was a population the district retained at above-average rates. In the conversion year, departures rose to 13%, nearly double the prior rate and above the district's 9%. The displacement turned a below-average-departure community into an above-average one.

For the students who stayed at Lent, academic and behavioral outcomes (which we mentioned above) are positive, supporting participants' sense that the full DLI model has been good for the

children it now serves. Tracking the DLI stayers against their own prior-year performance, the group gained ground academically (math growth reached +0.235 standard deviations and ELA +0.409 standard deviations by 2024–25). Chronic absenteeism fell from 42% to 24%, and, again, exclusionary discipline incidents fell to zero among this group. The displaced students fared less well at their receiving schools. Those at Marysville and Kellogg showed flat-to-negative growth in math and ELA scores and chronic absenteeism in the 39–43% range. A smaller group that scattered to other schools fared worst on academic growth, attendance, and discipline. While these results do not prove causality, they describe diverging outcomes for a cohort of students, some of whom stayed at Lent and others who left.

Ultimately, the roughly 43% of students who stayed fared well in the reconfigured Spanish DLI school, most of whom were Latino/a/x or white. There were measurable costs for the 57% who were displaced, including longer commutes and bus rides, adjusting to new school climates and rules, and building new relationships with peers and adults, and these students were disproportionately Black and Asian Lent neighborhood families.

Overall Conclusion About the Lent Case

The Lent case, again, cannot be accurately described as either a simple success story or a simple story of harm. Instead, Lent illustrates one of the central tensions of SEGC, which is that a school reconfiguration can strengthen one equity goal while simultaneously creating new equity concerns. On one hand, participants described Lent's current whole-school Spanish DLI model as more coherent, intentional, culturally affirming, and professionally sustaining for many Latino/a/x students, families, bilingual educators, and staff of color. Staff morale also appears to have improved over time, and students who remained at Lent showed positive academic, attendance, and behavioral patterns.

At the same time, these gains were accompanied by significant costs. Lent's conversion disrupted the school's prior identity as a racially and linguistically diverse, walkable neighborhood school, produced substantial staff turnover, left some staff feeling under-informed and under-supported during implementation; and displaced a majority of the pre-conversion student group. The displacement was racially disruptive, with Black and Asian neighborhood students especially likely to leave Lent, while Marysville and other receiving schools absorbed a more racially diverse group of students who did not experience the same positive outcome patterns as students who remained at Lent. In sum, Lent demonstrates the promise of a strong, culturally affirming Spanish DLI model, but it also shows the racial equity risks of achieving that model through a process that displaced other students of color and altered the school's neighborhood identity.

Marysville Elementary School

Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district SEGC documents, Marysville K–5 was impacted through 4 anticipated changes:

- three attendance boundary changes
- one additional receiving school role connected to Lent Elementary School's reconfiguration to a full Spanish DLI model.

The district documents also indicated that Marysville remained a K–5 neighborhood school assigned to Kellogg Middle School and Franklin High School, but its attendance area was adjusted through boundary changes with nearby schools. The proposal added one area from Arleta to Marysville, reassigned one area from Marysville to Arleta, and reassigned another area from Marysville to Woodmere. In total, the boundary changes were expected to impact 26 students when implemented. In addition, Marysville was expected to receive future Lent neighborhood students who did not enroll in Spanish DLI, although the district's enrollment projections for Marysville did not yet include those students. The expectation from the boundary changes alone was that Marysville's enrollment would increase modestly, from 248 students in 2021–22 and a 2025–26 forecast of 246 students to an estimated 260 students if the changes had been in place in 2021–22 and a 2025–26 forecast of 281 students. In short, Marysville was expected to remain a small K–5 neighborhood school, but with somewhat stronger enrollment through boundary adjustments and the additional possibility of receiving non DLI Lent neighborhood students (see Figure 4.1). Later family accounts suggest that Marysville became part of the broader receiving school experience connected to Lent's conversion to the whole school Spanish DLI.

Participants

This case profile draws on survey respondents from 11 staff and 6 family members and caregivers, focus groups and interviews. Across conversations at Marysville, we heard from 10 school-based participants who represented a range of roles and vantage points within the school community. Several participants also brought family or caregiver insight, either because they were parents of Marysville students or because they had first become connected to the school through parent or volunteer roles before later joining the staff.

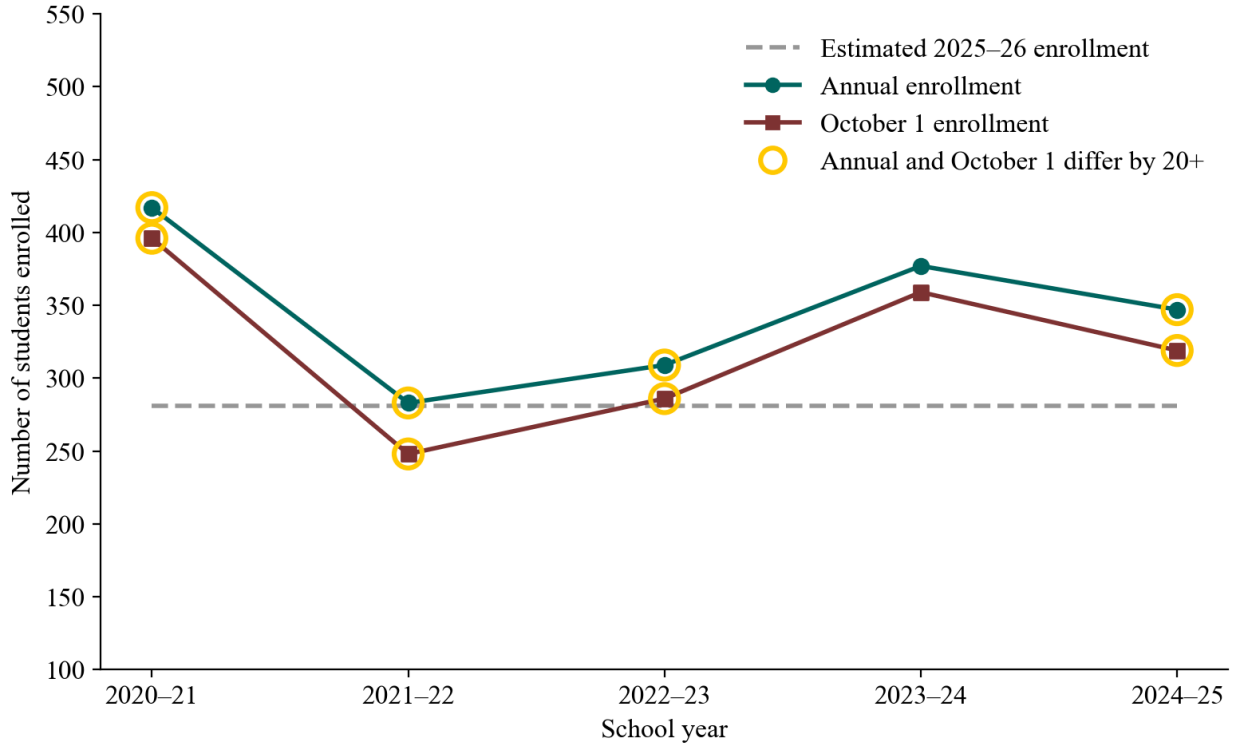
The participant group included people with deep historical knowledge of Marysville, including staff who had worked at the school for many years and could describe changes in the school's identity, leadership stability, enrollment, student needs, and relationship to the broader Southeast Portland context. Seven of the 10 participants had experienced Marysville before SEGC-related changes were implemented, which provided important pre-SEGC context. Eight participants

were present during the SEGC transition, allowing them to speak directly about how the changes unfolded and how staff, students, and families experienced the implementation period.

The conversations also included participants who had worked in other PPS schools before joining Marysville, including some with direct experience at Lent before the SEGC-related transition. As a result, the Marysville conversations included both long-standing Marysville perspectives and cross-school perspectives from staff who experienced the Lent–Marysville connection more directly.

Participants spoke from experience across early, intermediate, and upper elementary grades, as well as from roles involving day-to-day support for students and families. These perspectives were especially important because participants described how families navigated housing instability, utility debt, food insecurity, attendance challenges, language access needs, and other forms of economic or social vulnerability. Together, these accounts provide insight into how district-level decisions and communication practices were experienced by families who often relied heavily on school-based staff for information, interpretation, and support during and after the SEGC transition.

Figure 4.1. Marysville estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Overview

Participants described Marysville as a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse school community with long-standing relationships, deep staff commitment, and significant student and family needs. Rather than treating SEGC as the sole cause of later conditions at Marysville, this chapter examines how participants connected SEGC-related shifts to broader patterns they experienced in morale, retention, professional support, school climate, student and family experiences, learning environments, and the school's capacity to absorb and respond to change.

Findings

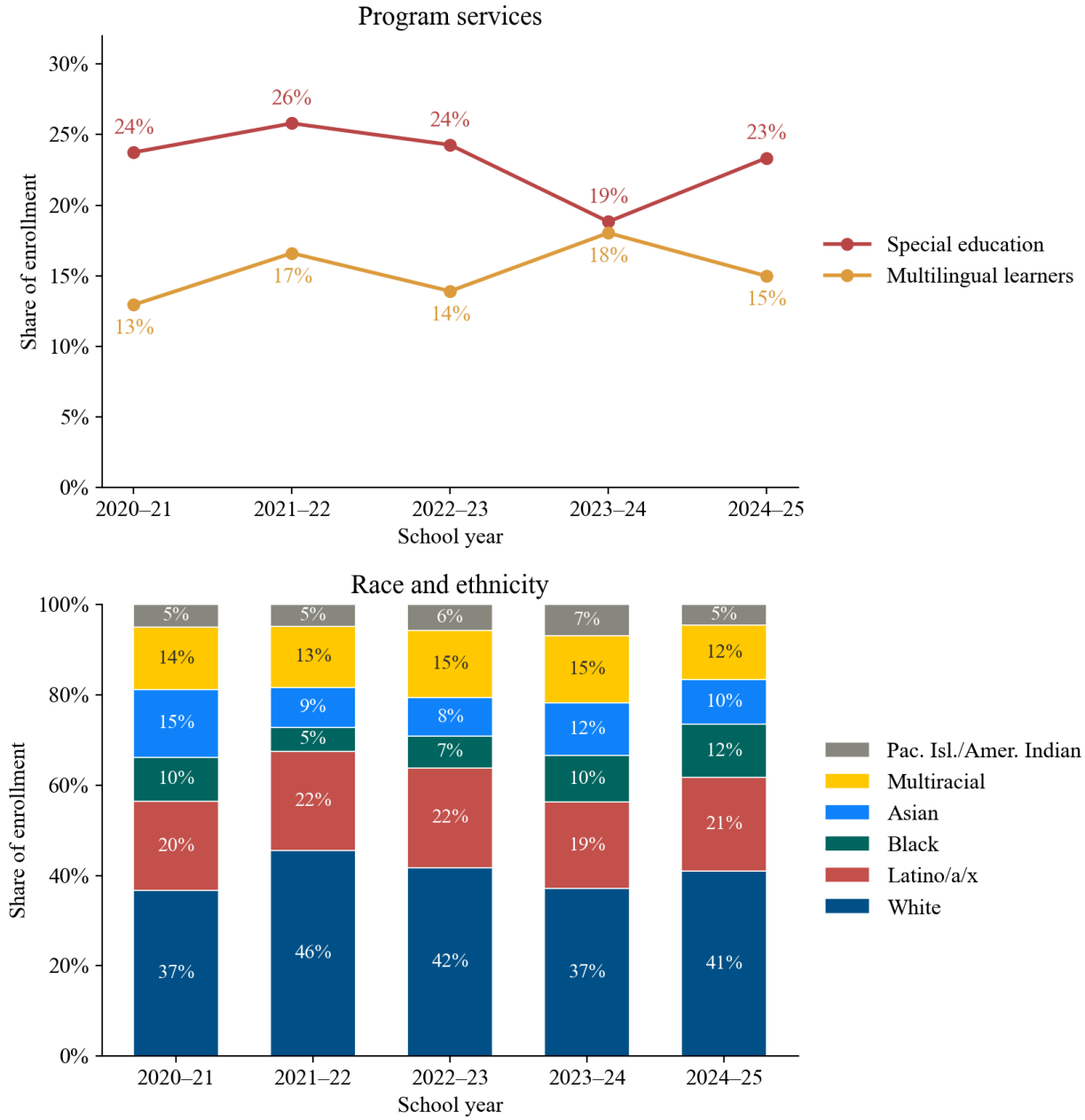
Impact of SEGC-Related Changes on Marysville

Participants described Marysville as a resilient, community centered school that had already navigated several major transitions before and around the SEGC period, including shifting from a K–8 to a K–5 configuration, rebuilding after a devastating fire, and adapting to changes in how students with social emotional and disability related needs were served. In participants' accounts, SEGC did not arrive in isolation. Rather, it layered onto a school community that was already managing significant organizational change.

Also, participants described the SEGC process and related district policy shifts as bringing an additional cluster of changes to Marysville. These included Marysville taking on a receiving school role for some Lent neighborhood students and staff connected to Lent's conversion to a whole school Spanish DLI model, serving students from a broader set of neighborhood and pathway changes, transitioning toward a more neighborhood inclusive model for students with IEPs, and continuing to support a growing number of students experiencing poverty and housing instability, including students connected to a nearby shelter. In considering these changes, participants framed Marysville not simply as a school with a modest boundary adjustment, but as a school absorbing multiple layers of transition at once.

Despite these mounting pressures, staff consistently described Marysville as a "good place to be" with strong relationships, a stable and long-serving principal, and a culture where people tend to stay once they arrive. At the same time, they emphasized that SEGC-related enrollment and program shifts intensified challenges that were already present, including very large class sizes, increasingly complex behavioral and academic needs, and frequent crises that left staff feeling overextended and emotionally drained. Participants often held two truths at once, that is, Marysville was a caring, joyful, and inclusive community that many were proud to work in, and it was also a place where burnout felt "imminent for everybody" under current conditions, according to one teacher.

Figure 4.2. Marysville student demographics, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Note: Enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year.

As one participant summarized, staff felt constantly in motion, trying to keep the system functioning in the face of compounding changes:

> *"We're surviving, like we're keeping the boat afloat. But am I really like, am I doing, like, my very best quality work with each child? Probably not…I'm like, putting out fires."*

Enrollment records are consistent with participants' portrait of Marysville as a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse school serving students with significant support needs. Across the 2020–21 to 2024–25 period, students of color made up roughly 54% to 63% of Marysville's enrollment. During that same period, students receiving special education services made up approximately 19% to 26% of enrollment, and multilingual learners made up approximately 13% to 18% (see Figure 4.2).

The enrollment data also show changes that are consistent with participants' accounts of Marysville absorbing students affected by the Lent reconfiguration. Black student enrollment declined to about 5% in 2021–22 and then rose to roughly 12% by 2024–25. Across this same period, Marysville remained one of the more racially diverse SEGC schools.

Indicators of student need were also persistently high. Chronic absenteeism remained in the high 30% to high 40% range across the 2020–21 to 2024–25 period. These patterns support participants' sense that SEGC-related shifts intensified the demands on a school that was already serving a racially diverse student body with significant academic, linguistic, social-emotional, and family support needs.

Morale, Burnout, and Staff Retention

Across roles, participants described Marysville's staff as unusually committed, collaborative, and cohesive, often using the language of "community" and "family" to characterize their relationships. Teachers and paraeducators spoke of working closely across grades, supporting each other's students, and building strong ties with colleagues over many years. One staff member noted that many educators had completed their student teaching at Marysville and then remained for a decade or more, reinforcing a sense of continuity and deep investment in the school.

At the same time, this cohesion was often described as emerging in part from shared hardship. Several participants characterized the staff as "trauma-bonded," referencing cumulative experiences of school fire and displacement, K–8 restructuring, SES program transition, COVID-19 disruptions, and then SEGC-related shifts layered on top. In this context, morale was described as both strong, in the sense of commitment and mutual care, and simultaneously fragile, in the sense that staff felt pushed to or beyond their sustainable limits. Participants shared:

"I think part of that is like a trauma bond, you know, it's a lot…we're pretty tight."

"Marysville has always been a good place to be."

Staff survey responses reflect this same tension. Marysville staff rated the school climate more positively than they rated overall morale, and most respondents who answered the retention items indicated that they intended to stay. At the same time, responses to several well-being items were mixed or negative. Only 2 of 10 staff respondents agreed that morale at the school was high, and ratings related to well-being at work generally fell at or below the neutral point on the agreement scale. In other words, staff attachment to Marysville as a school community appeared to coexist with significant concern about burnout, workload, and sustainability.

Participants echoed this tension in interviews and focus groups. Even as they affirmed their commitment to the school and its students, staff spoke candidly about exhaustion and the sense that current expectations were unsustainable.

According to participants, SEGC-related changes contributed to larger class sizes, with some kindergarten and first-grade classes serving approximately 27 students and some upper-grade classes serving more than 30 students. Participants described these larger classes as occurring alongside high behavioral, academic, and social-emotional needs, creating what they experienced as "constant crisis mode." The daily reality of frequent behavioral incidents, uneven access to support staff, and continuous interruptions made it harder for educators to feel that they could do their best work with each child, even as they worked persistently to keep students safe, supported, and engaged.

Staff Turnover, Unassignment, and Job Insecurity

Participants also connected SEGC-related enrollment shifts and the inclusive neighborhood model to staffing instability and job insecurity, particularly among para-professionals, education assistants, and some classroom teachers. Several participants described turnover not simply as a personnel issue, but as part of the cumulative strain created by high student needs, limited support, changing enrollment, and uncertainty about staffing allocations. One participant reported that, in two consecutive years, staff members left mid-year "due to the trauma, due to the burnout and lack of support," underscoring how these overlapping stressors contributed to attrition.

Paraprofessionals and education assistants described the experience of being "unassigned" at the end of the school year despite strong performance and extensive responsibilities supporting students with significant needs. Since some positions were shaped by seniority rules, enrollment projections, and shifting staffing allocations, participants described months of uncertainty about whether they would have a position at Marysville the following year. Participants explained:

"At the end of the year, it's a seniority-based job, and we were, I was just unassigned…I have to wait months to find out…This is my first time working in a seniority-based job and not a performance-based job."

"We're projected to have four paras for next year with adding a kindergarten class…that's terrifying."

Participants linked this staffing instability to enrollment projections, budget decisions, and district staffing formulas rather than to SEGC alone. However, they also emphasized that the promise of a "stronger combined school" (per SEGC) or an inclusive neighborhood model had not been matched by stable adult capacity in classrooms. One educator summarized this mismatch directly:

"I would say that when they moved everybody in together for the inclusive model, I feel like they grossly underestimated the amount of support that was actually going to take to execute everything that we're supposed to do."

The qualitative data suggest that while some staff, especially long-tenured staff and school leaders, remained deeply anchored at Marysville, paraprofessional roles and some classroom positions felt more precarious. Participants described repeated cuts,un-assignments, and uncertainty even as student needs remained high. At the same time, participants did not provide enough systematic information to analyze staff retention by race or ethnicity, so this section does not make claims about differential retention patterns for staff of color.

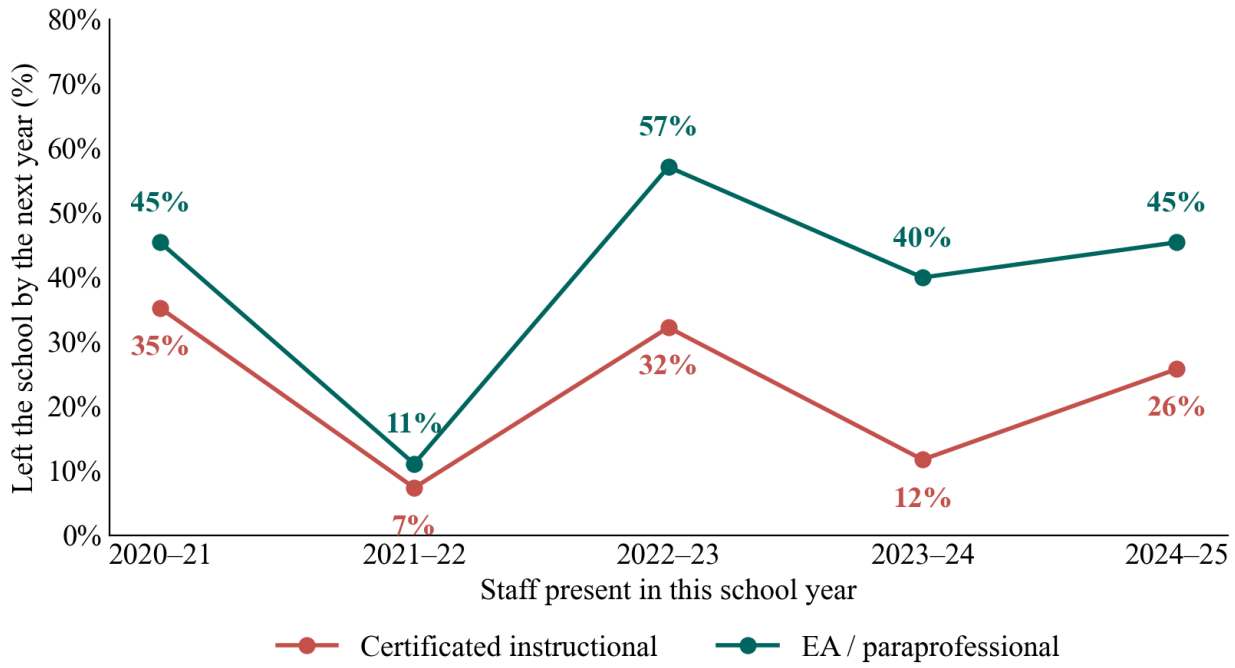
However, personnel records support the broader pattern participants described: Marysville had school leadership continuity, but substantial staffing movement beneath that stability. Marysville retained the same principal across all six years of the study window, making it the only school in the Bridger-Clark-Lent-Marysville cluster with unbroken principal continuity. This aligns with participants' descriptions of stable, long-tenured leadership. Beneath that stability, however, staffing shifted considerably.

In 2022–23, the year the reconfiguration took hold, approximately 39% of staff turned over. In 2023–24, roughly 37% of staff were new to the building as Marysville absorbed incoming students and staff from Lent. Education assistant and paraprofessional roles showed the most persistent year-to-year movement, consistent with participant accounts of unassignment and job insecurity (see Figure 4.3).

The personnel data also show that the staff who transferred from Lent to Marysville did not remain as a stable, long-term group. Eight staff members moved from Lent to Marysville as neighborhood students arrived, including seven teachers and one education assistant, all of whom first appeared at Marysville in 2023–24. Within two years, six of the eight had left the school. This pattern is best understood as movement followed by attrition among reassigned positions, rather than as a durable staffing transition. Marysville's staffing transition involved both

leadership stability and significant instability in the classroom and support roles most directly connected to daily student support.

Figure 4.3. Turnover among Marysville instructional staff by role, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as teachers, classroom educational assistants, counselors, and specialists.

Capacity to Support Students and Families

Across the Marysville conversations, administrators, teachers, education assistants, and student support staff converged on a common concern: Marysville was asked to implement the inclusive neighborhood model and absorb neighborhood students from Lent without the corresponding increase in adult support, training, mental health resources, and staffing stability needed to make the model work well. Participants did not describe resistance to inclusion itself. Rather, they described a gap between the district's inclusive vision and the level of support needed to implement that vision effectively for students, families, and staff.

Participants also described classrooms where multiple students had IEPs, significant communication or behavioral needs, trauma histories, or other intensive support needs, while para-educators and education assistants were stretched across several students and multiple rooms. In some cases, participants described students who appeared to require near one-to-one adult attention for safety, even when their IEPs did not formally designate them for that level of support. This left staff responsible for constant vigilance without the staffing ratios they believed students' needs required. Participants explained:

"Many students [are] coming in without any extra support, especially with our kinder and the first…you can see that they are suffering through every day with the kids needing one-on-one support, but all the one [adult] is surviving with multiple kids… not vocal, who have extra needs."

"If I have seven cases in my classroom on my caseload…everybody's needs are getting met, but are we all thriving? I don't know."

Participants also described district processes for adding support, such as securing an additional special educator or other adult capacity, as slow and bureaucratic. They described weeks or months of documentation, repeated requests, and delayed responses before help materialized. Even when additional staffing did arrive, participants said it sometimes coincided with other cuts, creating a zero-sum dynamic rather than a meaningful net increase in capacity.

Despite these constraints, participants consistently emphasized that Marysville staff collaborated creatively and persistently to meet students' needs. Staff described "spreading the love," improvising sensory breaks and walks, sharing responsibility across classrooms and grade levels, and stepping in for one another throughout the day. These strategies reflected strong internal commitment and collaboration. However, participants also described this level of improvisation as exhausting and difficult to sustain.

Staffing records and survey data support participants' account that the inclusive model arrived without sufficient capacity to support it over time. After an initial staffing increase when Lent students and staff transferred to Marysville, the school lost approximately 13 FTE, or 11 staff, over two years. Participants described these reductions as including restorative justice staff, interventionists, specialist time in art, music, and physical education, a multilingual education assistant, a special education teacher, and coaching roles. The staff survey reflects the same capacity concern in which only 3 of 10 (30%) staff respondents agreed that they had the resources needed to do their job effectively, and none of the 10 (0%) respondents agreed that class sizes were distributed across grade levels or teams in a manageable way. Taken together, the qualitative and survey data point to a central finding, which is Marysville staff were deeply committed to students and families, but they were trying to implement a high-need inclusive model within a staffing structure they experienced as insufficient and unstable.

Supporting Families and Providing Communication During SEGC

Participants described family support and communication during SEGC as another area where school-based staff carried much of the burden. This was especially true for families of color, families with limited English proficiency, and families navigating economic instability. Participants described school staff as the people families most often turned to for interpretation,

explanation, reassurance, and practical help, even when staff themselves did not always have clear or timely information from the district.

One participant described organizing meetings for Vietnamese-speaking families to explain boundary changes and program shifts because many families had not received or understood the district's communication. The participant explained:

"I had to gather the Vietnamese population…to let them know, 'Hey, we have a meeting with the principal about the change coming up.' And they say, 'What? There's a change coming up?'"

Participants also described challenges with new communication systems. The move from Remind to ParentSquare reportedly left many families disconnected from school communication. At the time of the focus group, participants reported that fewer than 100 accounts, including staff accounts, were active in a school serving roughly 300 students. This limited the school's ability to share timely information about events, options, and support with families who were already navigating complex transitions, long commutes, and changing school routines.

Transportation emerged as a central equity issue. Before SEGC, participants described Marysville as a largely walkable school. After the boundary expansion and the Lent transition, Marysville had multiple bus routes, and some families had to travel several blocks just to reach a bus hub. Participants described long bus rides, missed buses, difficulty attending half-days, and the burden placed on families who had to take time off work for very short school days. One participant explained:

"Now we go across the highway…It was the first time we ever had since we were dislocated, having to have buses…the inconvenience again, falling on families who had the least amount of means for getting around and traveling."

Participants acknowledged that district-funded buses were sometimes provided for evening events to make Marysville more accessible to Lent families. However, some participants experienced these efforts as limited because they still required families to gather at a secondary pickup location and did not fully address the broader access barriers created by the new geography.

Within these constraints, Marysville staff invested heavily in community-building and outreach. Participants described summer popsicle and chalk events, family game nights, music and festival-style gatherings, and proactive efforts to bridge Marysville and Lent staff and families. Staff spoke with pride about these efforts, but they also emphasized that much of this work was school-initiated rather than part of a comprehensive district transition plan.

Family voice on the Marysville transition is available primarily through open-ended survey responses because the closed-ended family items were answered by too few caregivers to report without overstating their precision. Within that limitation, family comments echoed staff concerns about strain. One caregiver wrote that Marysville had "shouldered a lot of strain in the changes," contrasting Marysville with nearby schools they perceived as less disrupted and describing the school as "less calm, more crowded and more chaotic now." A family of color described a similar gap between growing demand and shrinking support, writing that "the class sizes have grown and the support has not; in fact, teachers have been cut despite student population growth." Other families also pointed to larger classes, reduced services, and the need for more teachers and smaller groups. These family responses reinforce the staff account of a transition whose logistical, emotional, and instructional load was carried heavily by the school community.

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants described SEGC-related changes as emotionally taxing, especially when layered onto existing stressors, high student needs, budget reductions, and staff shortages. Again, educators and staff spoke about frequent behavioral crises, students with significant trauma histories, and the strain of balancing academic instruction with intensive emotional support for children and families.

Education assistants and teachers, especially in the early grades, described days when they were physically and emotionally drained. Participants described managing students who hit staff, monitoring nonverbal children for safety, responding to meltdowns and elopement, and trying to maintain instruction while also keeping students safe. One participant shared:

"Some days, some of one of my kids will body slam me multiple times and like, not only am I like physically exhausted, but then I'm just also mentally exhausted from just having having to keep that calm exterior… that's hard to contain."

Another participant described the cumulative strain across the building:

"By the end of the year…I feel like we're spread really thin… You've got a fifth grader flipping desks in the hallway, and girls looking over the stalls at each other in the bathrooms… everyone's just running."

These accounts suggest that SEGC-related restructuring did not simply introduce logistical complexity. Participants experienced it as intensifying emotional labor, reducing recovery time, and increasing the daily strain of supporting students and families with significant needs.

At the same time, participants repeatedly emphasized that Marysville's internal culture and leadership served as protective factors. Stable administration, collaborative teams, and a strong sense of shared purpose helped make the school feel emotionally supportive even when the work itself felt overwhelming. Participants described Marysville as a place where staff cared for one another, shared responsibility, and worked to maintain joy and community even during difficult periods.

One participant described intentionally drawing on previous schoolwide work around staff well-being and emotional regulation, initiated after an earlier school fire and displacement, to help staff navigate the discomfort and conflict surrounding SEGC. This participant framed change as a constant and emphasized the importance of centering the whole person, not only academics:

"We realized that we needed to center the whole person and well-being for all… By the time four years later we moved back to this campus, we had tried to have that as a thread running through… we needed to attend to that as much as the academics."

Participants also pointed to leadership continuity as unusual and stabilizing. One participant explained:

"Since 1998 we've had four administrators as principal…that is pretty much unheard of… People want to be here because we have people that care."

Participants described feeling comfortable raising concerns with building leadership and characterized school administrators as strong advocates with the district. However, they distinguished this from their perceptions of district responsiveness, which they viewed as inconsistent, constrained by budget decisions, or disconnected from the daily realities of the school.

Experiences of Historically Underserved Students and Families

Participants widely perceived that SEGC-related changes placed disproportionate burdens on historically underserved communities, particularly Lent families, Black and Latino/a/x families, families experiencing poverty, families who are linguistically diverse, and families navigating housing instability or other forms of economic vulnerability. Participants were especially concerned that students from a working-class, multicultural neighborhood were reassigned across major roads and I-205 into a more gentrified area where Marysville is located. Several participants understood this as echoing older patterns of displacement, where students and families with fewer resources carried the inconvenience and risk of district decisions.

Participants explained:

"Now, once again, we're back to like busing students, mostly BIPOC students, over into a now gentrified neighborhood… even though we might say we're doing this equity, it really does still fall hardest on those [Lent] community."

"It was weird for the district to do that in the 2020s…to bus kids out of their multicultural, working-class neighborhood across 82nd Street to a more affluent area."

Participants also described Marysville as serving students and families with significant needs beyond the SEGC transition. One participant reported that all students residing in a nearby shelter were assigned to Marysville, even though the shelter was roughly equidistant from several schools. This participant emphasized that students in the shelter were often navigating trauma and instability, making Marysville's role especially complex:

"Somehow that shelter is within our boundary… all that kid did not have any extra support beside us."

Participants also observed that families with greater financial and social capital, often described as white and more affluent, were better positioned to exercise school choice or avoid SEGC's impacts on Marysville. Participants described families using charter or private schools, changing addresses, or otherwise navigating systems in ways that were less available to lower-income families and families of color. In contrast, participants described many low-income families and families of color as having fewer practical options, especially if they needed transportation or access to specialized programs.

Administrative records support participants' accounts that the Lent-to-Marysville transition involved a racially diverse group of displaced students. Of the 265 students enrolled at Lent in 2022–23, the year before Lent's whole-school Spanish dual language conversion, 79 were reassigned to Marysville as their designated neighborhood school. That group included 13 Black students, 23 white students, 19 Latino/a/x students, 11 Asian students, and 13 multiracial students. This is consistent with participants' observation that many neighborhood families moved while the dual language population largely remained at Lent.

The tracked student data also suggest that this displaced group experienced a difficult transition. Compared with their own prior-year performance, the cohort showed a small positive change in math in the first year and roughly flat results afterward. Reading results declined in the first year and then improved slightly. Chronic absenteeism for this group remained in the 39% to 43% range. These data should not be interpreted as estimates of Marysville's effect on students or as causal evidence about SEGC. Rather, they provide cohort-level context showing that the students

who bore the costs of displacement entered a school environment that participants described as already carrying substantial demands.

One family survey respondent from the displaced community described that harder landing directly, writing that the move from Lent to Marysville "was not handled very well." The family reported a rise in behavioral issues and bullying, larger classes, reduced learning time, and diminished support for an older child with an individualized education program who eventually transferred schools. This single account does not represent every displaced family's experience. However, it provides a concrete example of how the transition was experienced by at least one family and helps contextualize the cohort-level patterns.

Participants also reflected critically on how SEGC's stated equity goals around dual language immersion and regional balance played out in practice. One participant recalled that early phases of SEGC framed dual language immersion as a strategy for better serving students whose home language was not English. However, participants questioned whether final decisions fully aligned with that intent. They noted that the DLI strand was concentrated in a school farther from many Latino/a/x families, while Atkinson, located in a whiter and more affluent neighborhood, retained a single-strand DLI program. Participants also observed that some immigrant families may have been hesitant to enroll their children in full Spanish immersion in the broader political climate, preferring rapid English acquisition for reasons of perceived safety. One participant said:

"The intention, I think, can really be there…But what ended up, though, was not what necessarily happened… If [DLI] was a real driver for this process, I'm not sure that that really was fulfilled."

At the school level, participants described Marysville's own efforts to support belonging for historically underserved students. Staff highlighted culturally specific affinity groups, including groups for Pacific Islander students, neurodivergent students, and LGBTQ+ students. Participants described these groups as important mechanisms for helping students feel seen, supported, and connected to school. One participant explained:

"We run a lot of affinity groups that embrace the student and motivate the student to come to school, make them feel a sense of belonging."

Together, these accounts suggest a complex equity picture. Participants viewed the regional SEGC process as producing mixed and sometimes inequitable outcomes, particularly for families who were displaced or had fewer choices. At the same time, they described Marysville as investing in school-level practices designed to support belonging, affirmation, and care for historically underserved students once they arrived.

Quality of Learning Environments After SEGC-Related Shifts

Participants described Marysville's post-SEGC learning environment as both deeply caring and significantly strained. Again, educators consistently characterized the school as inclusive, relationship-rich, and committed to students. At the same time, they described large classes, wide skill ranges, intensive behavioral needs, and frequent disruptions as making it harder to provide the academic instruction, differentiation, and enrichment they wanted all students to receive.

Teachers in early grades described classrooms of approximately 25 to 28 students, including multiple students with IEPs, students who are nonverbal, and students with developmental or safety needs that required significant environmental adaptation. Participants described removing materials that could be swallowed, limiting some enrichment activities because they were unsafe for particular students, and managing transitions with intense adult supervision.

Upper-grade teachers described classes with more than 30 students, but with many students performing two or more grade levels below expectations, alongside students who were on grade level or advanced. Participants said this range made differentiation extremely difficult. One participant noted that students who were ready for deeper learning sometimes received less attention because staff had to prioritize crisis management and foundational skills.

At the same time, participants described powerful examples of social inclusion that they associated with the inclusive model. They described classmates making room for a child who rarely joined carpet time, students helping nonverbal peers access preferred items, and entire classes "rallying around" students with significant needs. One participant reflected:

"It was like the class just rallied around him and he was so loved and cared for… That's the kind of thing that I think is what we need in the world. But we also somehow need to get them to show growth in MAP scores or whatever."

Another participant described the tradeoff this way:

"I feel like it's a slight on the academic side for a boost on the social aspect of it."

Participants therefore did not describe Marysville's learning environment as simply weak or strong. Rather, they described a caring and inclusive environment where social-emotional growth, empathy, and peer inclusion were visible, but where academic instruction was harder to deliver at the desired level because of class size, student needs, staffing constraints, and frequent interruptions.

The staff survey supports this mixed picture. Among staff who answered, 4 of 11 (36%) agreed that students experienced high-quality learning environments, and only 3 of 10 (30%) agreed that

the learning environment was equitable. Staff collaboration was rated more positively, with 6 of 10 (60%) respondents agreeing. This suggests a school where committed adults were working collaboratively within constrained conditions. The survey pattern aligns with participants' descriptions of genuine social inclusion and strong staff commitment alongside large classes, wide skill ranges, and frequent behavioral disruption.

Schoolwide test-score records should be interpreted cautiously. Marysville's standardized math and reading scores were below the district average across the period and moved only modestly between 2021–22 and 2024–25. Math scores changed from approximately -0.61 to -0.53 standard deviations, while reading scores changed from approximately -0.52 to -0.41. Because Marysville's population changed over this same period as the school absorbed a displaced and higher-need cohort, these schoolwide figures reflect shifting student composition as well as classroom conditions. They should not be read as evidence that SEGC caused academic improvement or decline. Instead, they provide context in that Marysville's measured outcomes did not collapse under the added strain participants described, but schoolwide test scores alone cannot resolve questions about instructional quality, differentiation, or the daily experience of learning after SEGC.

How SEGC-Related Changes Played Out at Marysville

Participants described SEGC-related changes at Marysville as a convergence of boundary adjustments, enrollment shifts, program changes, grade reconfiguration, and the implementation of the inclusive neighborhood model. These changes occurred within the context of a Title I, shelter-serving school already supporting students and families with substantial needs.

Marysville became the neighborhood school for a group of students reassigned from Lent. Participants estimated that roughly 90 to 100 students and about 11 staff members, including teachers and para-educators, transferred from Lent to Marysville in the initial year of the transition. Marysville's catchment area also expanded from a compact, walkable zone to a much larger area stretching roughly from 72nd to 112th, crossing major roads and I-205. As a result, Marysville shifted from a school participants described as bus-free to one with multiple bus routes, including routes serving students from the shelter.

Marysville also transitioned from a K–8 to a K–5 school as Kellogg reopened for middle grades. At the same time, the school phased out self-contained SES classrooms and became a fully inclusive neighborhood school, serving students with diverse IEP needs in general education settings unless they required alternative placements. Two pre-K classrooms were also added and initially integrated into Marysville's staffing and support structures, though participants described those classrooms as later becoming more administratively separate while remaining on campus.

Participants identified several factors that shaped how Marysville absorbed these changes. Leadership stability and staff culture were repeatedly described as central. Participants pointed to the principal's long history at the school and the deep roots of many staff as helping Marysville approach the transition with a sense of shared identity and purpose. Participants also described proactive community-building as a major factor. School staff visited Lent, participated in difficult community conversations, and worked to validate the anger and grief families felt. One participant described the stance this way:

"There was a lot of really… upset and tears and anger… I'm fine with that. I'm not going to try and convince you it's not… but I'll be here whatever happens."

In the spring and summer before and after the transition, Marysville hosted joint family game nights, festivals, and informal "popsicle and chalk" events to help Lent and Marysville families meet one another and begin building trust. Staff also waited to revisit the school's values until the communities were together, then co-constructed shared commitments for the combined school community. One participant explained:

"We did a lot of work around it as a team here, and tried to do a lot of community building work and events and sort of redid our values… We waited till we were all together so we could… talk about our combined sense of what we wanted to do."

At the same time, participants were clear that district-level design decisions shaped the broader conditions in which Marysville operated. Several participants believed that SEGC drew a "hard line" that excluded more affluent Southeast schools from major changes, leaving Marysville and similar schools to absorb more disruption. Some participants also argued that DLI and focus-option decisions advantaged families with greater mobility, information, and political access. In their view, enrollment balance in some schools came "at the expense" of others, and financial or political considerations often appeared to outweigh the district's stated equity goals.

Administrative data help clarify why participants experienced the 2022–23 to 2023–24 window as especially intense. During that period, Marysville moved through its pandemic enrollment trough, absorbed displaced families, experienced approximately 39% staff turnover, brought in roughly 37% new staff, lost 8.5 FTE, saw its exclusionary discipline rate rise from effectively zero before the changes to among the highest among SEGC schools, and added bus routes for a community that had previously been largely walkable. The clustering of these changes in a short period supports participants' account that Marysville was absorbing multiple major transitions at once.

Overall, participants framed Marysville as a case where SEGC may have "worked" in a narrow enrollment sense by stabilizing the school's size and sustaining a robust school community, but

only because school-level leadership, staff culture, and community-building efforts compensated for gaps in district planning, resourcing, and communication. What distinguished Marysville's response was the stability underneath the change. The school retained the same principal across all six years of the study window and maintained a core of long-tenured staff. The data show how much Marysville had to absorb; the participant accounts show why many experienced that absorption as survivable rather than wholly destabilizing. This should not be interpreted as proof that SEGC caused any single outcome at Marysville. Rather, it shows how SEGC, pandemic effects, budget reductions, student need, staff stability, leadership continuity, and local community-building interacted to shape Marysville's experience.

Lewis Elementary School

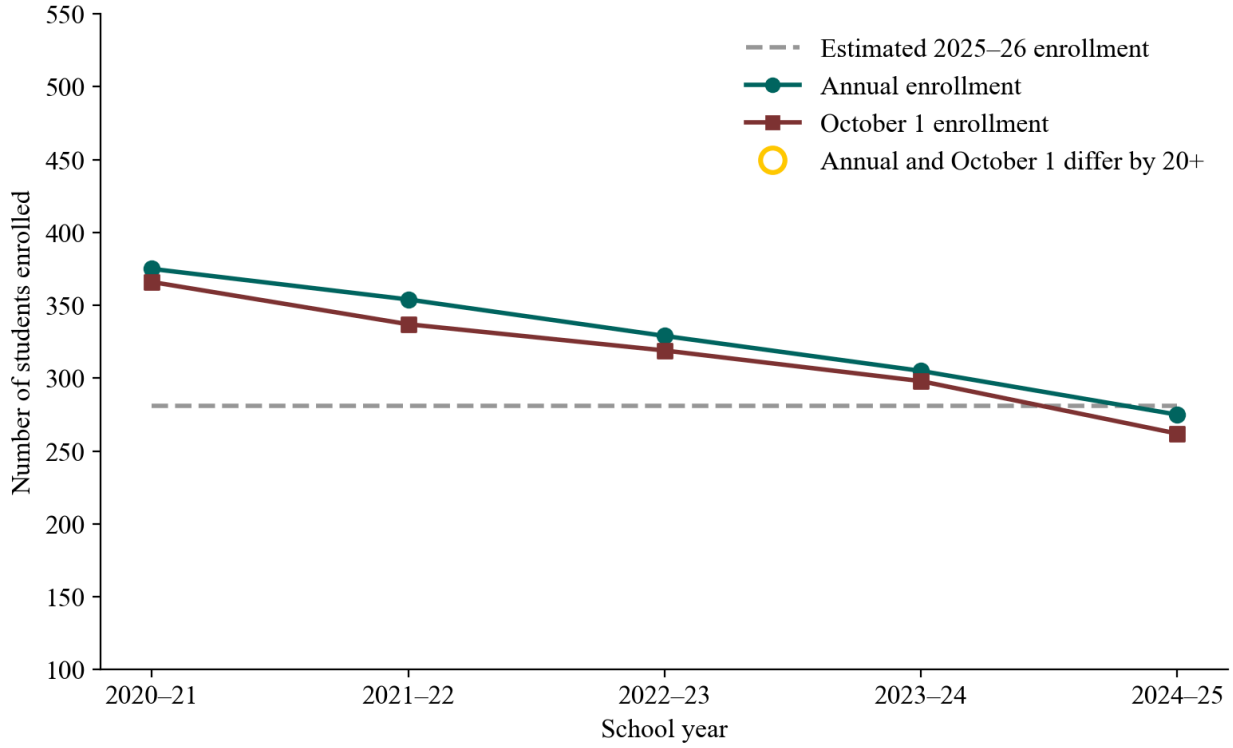
Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district SEGC documents, Lewis Elementary School was impacted mainly through:

- a boundary change (which made its catchment smaller)

Lewis Elementary School (Lewis) remained a K–5 neighborhood school. Under the SEGC recommendation, the eastern portion of the Lewis attendance area was reassigned to Whitman Elementary School. District documents identified Lewis as a school that had exceeded the district's 80% target utilization in recent years, with a 2025–26 forecast utilization of 80.6% before the recommended change. After the boundary adjustment, Lewis's projected 2025–26 enrollment decreased from 358 students to 281 students, and its projected utilization decreased from 80.6% to 63.3%

Figure 5.1. Lewis estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

In short, Lewis was expected to become a smaller and less crowded school, while Whitman was expected to receive additional students and move toward a more stable enrollment level. The change was part of the broader SEGC effort to balance enrollment across Southeast schools. At the same time, before SEGC was implemented, community feedback reflected concerns about

the limited scope of the process, opposition to split feeder possibilities between Sellwood and Lane, and mixed views about shifting some students toward Whitman and Lane.

Participants

In this chapter, we share findings from survey respondents interviews and focus groups conducted with school based participants at Lewis. Across the Lewis conversations, we heard from 13 unique school-based participants. The participant group provided a strong longitudinal perspective on the SEGC transition. Eleven of the 13 participants, or 84%, worked at Lewis before, during, and after SEGC-related changes. Their perspectives allowed us to compare how participants described Lewis's pre-SEGC identity, staffing, enrollment, and school conditions with how they described the school after SEGC implementation. The remaining 2 participants were connected to Lewis during and after the SEGC-related changes, which offered insight into how those changes continued to shape the school's current conditions even for staff who did not have the same pre-SEGC point of comparison. Eleven Lewis staff responded to the staff survey and there were 43 respondents to the family and caregiver survey.

Overview

In this chapter, we examine how participants connected SEGC related changes to broader patterns they experienced in morale, retention, professional support, school climate, student and family experiences, racial and socioeconomic diversity, and the school's capacity to absorb and respond to change. These accounts help illuminate how district level decisions were lived, interpreted, and managed at the school level by the educators, staff, and administrators responsible for supporting students and families through transition. The goal of this profile is to illuminate how SEGC related decisions were experienced at Lewis not only as boundary or enrollment balancing changes, but as changes that affected the daily work of educators, the experiences of students and families, the school's racial and socioeconomic composition, and the identity and functioning of the school community.

Findings

Participants Described Lewis as a High-Functioning School Community Strained by SEGC-Related Enrollment Loss

Overall, at a high level, participants described SEGC as reshaping Lewis primarily through boundary changes that reduced enrollment, shifted the school's racial and socioeconomic composition, contributed to staffing reductions, and disrupted some students' middle school pathways.

At the same time, participants consistently described Lewis as a high-functioning, tight-knit, and "special" school community whose staff culture, whole-child focus, and neighborhood relationships helped the school absorb some of the SEGC changes. One person summarized the school this way:

> *"If we walked through the building right now, you would see basically everybody doing what they're supposed to be doing… it's a pretty special little place here… I've been in some rough and rumbles in my career, and this is definitely a little sweet spot."*

Teachers echoed this image, emphasizing both the relational culture and the neighborhood feel. Participants said:

> *"The staff here… very healthy and supportive, and just really have each other's backs."*

> *"It's like the neighborhood feel here… the school is this meeting place where kids just show up. You can drive by on a Friday at five o'clock and there might be a kid playing basketball that you taught."*

Essentially, participants depicted Lewis as a small, relationship-rich elementary school whose strengths lie in its culture and staff cohesion. These are precisely the kinds of intangible assets that can be most vulnerable when enrollment shrinks and resources are cut.

Survey data corroborate this portrait of a strong school-level community. Among Lewis families responding to the survey (N = 50), ratings of the school itself were high. Families rated their student's sense of belonging at about 4.5 on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. This means that roughly half of families strongly agree and half of families agree their student feels a sense of belonging at Lewis. Similarly, families indicated that their students felt safe (mean 4.3/5), and about 9 in 10 families reported feeling welcome communicating with the school and feeling that their family belongs and is respected there. Staff also had positive perceptions of their working conditions. All 11 responding staff agreed that the climate is supportive for students and staff (mean 4.6/5). Nearly all agreed that students experience high-quality learning environments (mean 4.6/5) and that staff collaboration supports teaching and learning (mean 4.5/5).

Morale, Retention, and the Impact of SEGC on Staff Stability

According to participants, morale at Lewis was described as a tightrope between a strong school culture and chronic stress. Participants generally described day-to-day morale as relatively high, especially compared to other schools in the district, but layered with profound fatigue, grief over repeated cuts, and growing distrust of district leadership. One educator captured the dual reality:

> *"I'd say, relatively speaking, compared to a lot of other schools…morale [here] probably higher than those. At the same time…budget goes down, expectations go up…I feel like we're like on this tightrope right now."*

Another person similarly distinguished between internal climate and system-level pressures:

> *"Morale wise, like overall is good…when you talk about just the day-to-day, come in, close your door, do your job, have fun with your kids. But as soon as you start bringing in the reality of what's going on just as a district…that's where it's tough. You still get a lot of the 'what's next?' questions."*

The survey data is consistent with this dual reality. Among responding staff, the current-conditions well-being items sat in positive territory, with school climate rated supportive (mean 4.6/5, all 11 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing) and most staff reporting they felt emotionally supported at work (mean 4.2/5). At the same time, the items related specifically to the SEGC period were uniformly negative. Across the SEGC implementation period items about well-being, the average response was 2.5 on a five-point scale (9 survey respondents were at Lewis during the transition), with staff disagreeing that changes were implemented with dignity and care (mean 2.4/5) and reporting that the changes added stress and lowered morale during the process. The split between a positive present and a negative SEGC-period recollection mirrors the "tightrope" participants described. In other words, participants described Lewis as a locally strong culture carrying the weight of district-level strain. Workload was the one current-conditions survey item that fell into negative territory. Staff rated workload manageability at an average of 2.7 out of 5, which is consistent with participants' descriptions of staff feeling stretched thin as positions have been reduced.

Staff morale at Lewis appears to rest on a strong, locally cultivated culture of collaboration, kindness, and mutual support. At the same time, participants described anxiety and disillusionment as being driven largely by district-level conditions and decisions, including SEGC-related enrollment changes, budget shortfalls, staffing reductions, and perceived inequities in how resources and burdens were distributed. Participants did not attribute all of these concerns directly to SEGC. However, the current budget deficit and related staffing cuts were clearly on their minds and shaped how they made sense of the school's current conditions.

Repeated Cuts and Churn to Staff Impacts on School Morale

Multiple participants described a pattern of annual FTE reductions, un-assignments, and staff bouncing between schools, largely as a function of declining enrollment triggered by SEGC boundary changes and broader PPS trends. One teacher explained:

> *"We've lost staff…not because they're moving on to something else, because they want to, but because the district has unassigned them or cut our FTE, which is a little heartbreaking when you've invested so much in your relationships…we've had several staff who have had to bounce back and forth between [schools]."*

Another participant summarized the pattern over time:

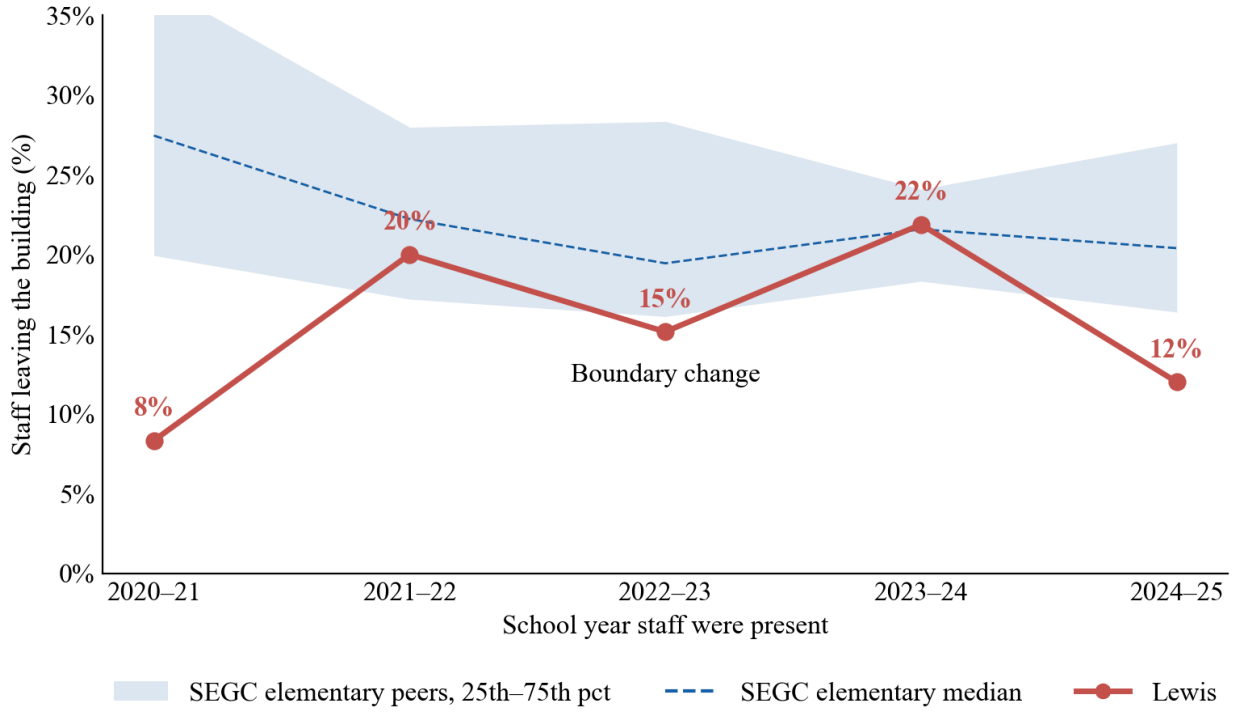
> *"Every single year that I've been here, there has been a reduction in at least a half-time staff member or a full-time staff member… in the library that's meant*

going from a position that covered two half-time workers to now just one half-time worker, but I still have the same amount of books and almost the same number of classes."

These are lived experiences of concrete staffing losses and reassignments that participants described. However, participants then generalized to a broader narrative that Lewis and similar schools are, as one participant stated, "bleeding out" staff year after year, not due to internal (school) dysfunction but because of structural decisions about boundaries, enrollment targets, and budgets.

The administrative record complicates, but does not dismiss, participants' description of Lewis as "bleeding out." Participants' sense of loss was grounded in real year-over-year reductions in staffing, positions, and school capacity. However, the personnel data suggest that Lewis was not an outlier in overall staff turnover compared with other SEGC elementary schools. The share of staff leaving the building reached approximately 22% in 2023–24 and 20% in 2021–22, but across SEGC elementary schools, the share of staff leaving schools generally ranged from about 20% to 26%. Lewis therefore sat at or below the peer range throughout this period. In 2022–23, the year the boundary change took effect, Lewis's staff departure rate was approximately 15%, which was lower than both the broader SEGC elementary comparison range and Lewis's own surrounding years.

Figure 5.2. Lewis elementary staff turnover rates relative to other SEGC elementary schools, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff.

This distinction helps tell the fuller story. Personnel records do not support interpreting Lewis as an outlier for turnover, and this is consistent with participants' own descriptions of Lewis as having stronger morale and cohesion than many peer schools. At the same time, the records do confirm the pattern of staffing contraction that participants experienced as heartbreaking. For Lewis staff, the concern was not only who left, but what the school could no longer sustain as enrollment and staffing declined.

Additionally, several participants emphasized the importance of school leadership in shaping how staff experience district-level change. Since Lewis was getting smaller, leadership continuity could not prevent enrollment-related staffing reductions, FTE losses, or the broader effects of budget constraints. However, it appears to have helped buffer some of the relational and organizational strain associated with those changes. Lewis was one of the few schools in the analysis that had the same principal across the full six-year study window, from 2020–21 through 2025–26. This continuity helps contextualize participants' repeated praise for the current leader's role in maintaining trust, protecting staff culture, and helping the school remain cohesive during a period of shrinking enrollment and reduced staffing capacity. It also distinguishes Lewis from schools where SEGC-related change occurred alongside leadership turnover, making it harder for staff to experience stability, communication, and relational trust during major change.

Feeling Equipped or Not to Support Students and Families Through SEGC Changes

Participants across our conversations highlighted a persistent information gap between district-level decision-making and school-level implementation during SEGC and its aftermath. School-level staff were expected to hold family anxiety, explain boundary lines, and promote new feeder patterns without clear or timely guidance. One participant described the experience of fielding boundary questions this way:

> *"We had to answer a lot of questions…a lot of questions we didn't have answers to. Parents were always, 'Is that my street? One more street over?' And then they'd [the district] send us these maps that were like, even with a magnifying glass you couldn't see on your computer…Does that say 43 or 45? I don't know.'"*

Another participant similarly reflected:

> *"We felt like we did a lot of listening…[and would respond] Yeah, I'm really sorry, that's not fair,' but I don't feel like we were equipped very well… and neither were families. Families were confused, why the wealthier schools weren't impacted, and what their options were."*

In the same manner, another participant characterized the district communications more bluntly during SEGC:

> *"We got emails…[but] we didn't get the sense that any of us had any say. I think it always felt like it was kind of like, well, they're gonna do it. The process went on for a really, really long time, and then it was kind of like, 'It's done,' without big announcements or 'This is how it's gonna work.'"*

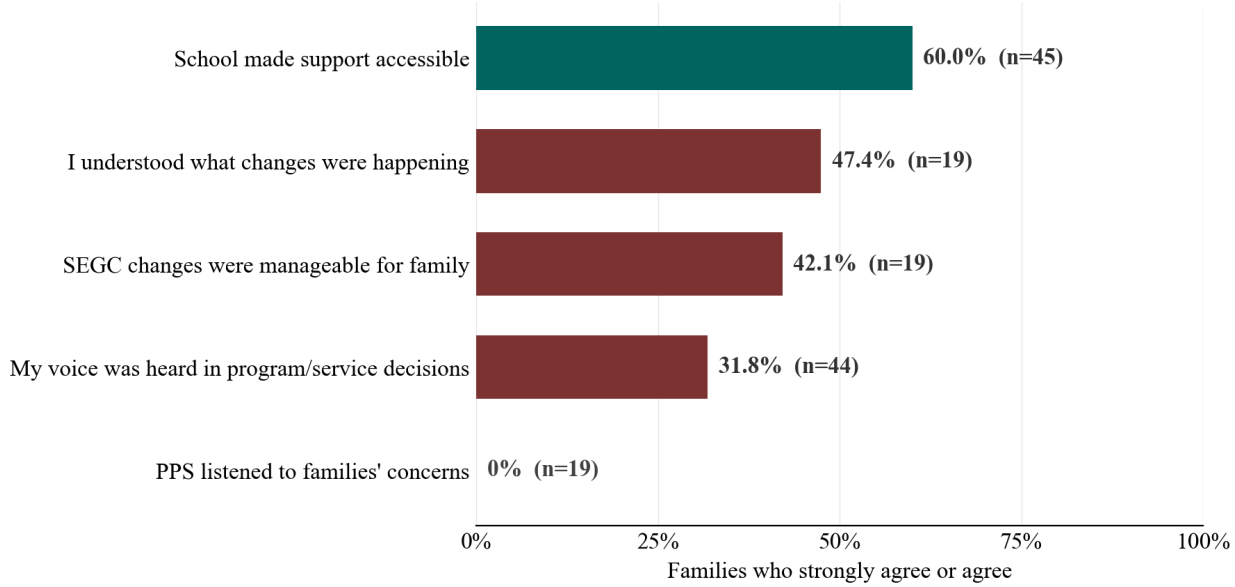
These personal accounts of specific practices, including having to explain unreadable maps to families, mass emails, and long online meetings that all hurt communication and the schools ability to respond to SEGC changes. From these experiences, participants inferred a broader pattern, which was that the central office "listening sessions" felt performative rather than genuinely responsive, and building leaders were left to absorb community distress with little real support.

Both the staff and family surveys corroborate this information deficit. Among responding staff, the SEGC-period access-to-information items averaged 2.6 on a five-point scale,[18] with staff disagreeing that the changes were communicated in a way that made the timeline and expectations clear, and that they had a reliable point of contact for accurate answers about SEGC changes. The SEGC-period support items were similarly low (category average 2.4/5). Current-conditions access to information was rated only modestly better (mean 3.7/5), and current access to the resources needed to do the job remained negative (mean 2.5/5), which tracks the accounts of staff covering gaps left by reduced positions.

The family survey complements the qualitative findings and points in the same direction, adding another direct source of family voice about communication, manageability, and trust. Among Lewis families, fewer than half agreed that they understood what was happening during the 2023–24 SEGC year or that the changes were manageable for their family. Moreover, the pattern is notable that only about one-third of respondents agreed that their voice was heard in decisions about programs or services for their child. Families rated district listening lowest of all with no responding family agreed that PPS listened to families' concerns when making decisions affecting the school community. By contrast, school-level supports were rated more positively, with about 6 in 10 families agreeing that the school made support accessible. This reinforces the case's broader distinction between families' positive experiences with Lewis as a responsive school community and their more negative experiences with the district-level SEGC process.

[18] "Nonmissing N" refers to the number of respondents who provided a usable response to a specific survey item. In this case, the statistic is based on 9 respondents who answered the item, rather than the full survey sample.

Figure 5.3. Lewis family perceptions about the SEGC process and current support at their school.



Note: The green bar indicates a survey item concerning perceptions of current school climate. Red bars represent items about perceptions of the SEGC process in 2023–24 and before.

Moreover, staff at Lewis devoted significant energy to helping fifth graders and their families transition to middle school under new, split feeder patterns brought on by SEGC changes. One teacher described the isolation of two students now assigned to Lane while the rest of their peers go to Sellwood:

> *"We have two kids that are isolated from all their peers that they've been with because of this boundary…they live on the other side of 52nd. They were allowed to stay at Lewis once the division changed, but they weren't allowed to go to middle school with the rest of their peers. It's so isolating. I just can't believe it."*

Families also described how new feeder patterns disrupted peer continuity, leaving some students separated from classmates they had attended school with for years. In these accounts, the harm was not only logistical; families described students feeling socially isolated when boundary changes allowed them to remain at Lewis for elementary school but prevented them from following the same middle school pathway as their peers.

Another participant explained what they could offer families:

> *"There really wasn't much we could tell them… A lot of the conversation was, 'Families make schools better. If you have this perception about the middle school your child is going into, get really involved.' That was what we were sharing, but that's really all we could offer."*

Participants also described feeling under-equipped when trying to support students with high or complex needs. In several accounts, staff said they reached out to the district for help, but experienced the response as focused more on monitoring, documentation, or compliance than on providing additional support. One participant described a case involving a young student of color who spoke a less common home language and had significant learning needs:

"We have a situation this year, young student of color who really struggles with learning… the amount of effort that has gone into trying to get somebody from the district to help out a little bit…instead, it literally feels like, as a school, we're on a plan of improvement, and we have to document all this stuff. We didn't get any help, we just got oversight."

Another participant described this as a broader pattern:

"Sometimes you get told what you're supposed to do, rather than support in doing what you'd like to do… with a new student they'll say, 'Do a better job,' instead of, 'Can we give you temporary support while you figure this out?'"

These comments help explain why participants did not always feel equipped to support students and families after SEGC-related changes. The concern was not that school staff lacked commitment or knowledge. On the contrary, participants felt that the school was expected to meet increasingly complex student needs without enough practical assistance from the district. In these accounts, staff experienced a gap between being held accountable for student support and being given the staffing, expertise, and temporary resources needed to provide that support well.

Analytically, the specific student case and the associated documentation demands represent participants' direct lived experience. The broader conclusion that the system prioritized documentation over substantive assistance is an interpretation participants drew from those experiences. This distinction matters, but the pattern remains important: staff felt less equipped when district support arrived primarily as oversight rather than as concrete help.

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants described significant emotional strain, burnout, and, in some cases, moments when educators came close to leaving their roles. Several participants spoke directly about the cumulative effects of larger classes, reduced support staff, tighter schedules, and changing assignments. One teacher explained:

"I've almost almost quit…larger classes plus tighter duty schedules, and then an absence of support staff… makes you feel like a really bad teacher when you're not able to pick up the needs. You know what kids need, but you can't meet it."

Other participants linked morale and stress to the ongoing experience of doing more with less after SEGC-related enrollment changes and subsequent staffing reductions. Participants described the strain this way:

"Smaller school, less support staff… it just made it harder on everybody, trying to pick up the gaps that are suddenly gone, not feeling like you can do a good enough job at it."

"We are being cut and we are losing classes… I've done a 2–3 blend, I've done second grade, I've moved classrooms, now I'm teaching first grade, now I'm going to be teaching a 1–2. It is very stressful and draining and traumatic at times."

These accounts describe direct lived experiences of burnout, role churn, emotional fatigue, and professional frustration. Participants were not speaking abstractly about change. In fact, they were describing what it felt like to work in a school where staffing reductions, changing assignments, and increased student needs made it harder to provide the level of support they believed students deserved. The interpretive layer is that participants understood SEGC-related enrollment shifts, budget constraints, and broader district decisions as collectively creating a teaching environment that felt increasingly unsustainable, even for highly committed educators.

Survey findings reflect this same tension between strain and commitment. Several responding staff members agreed they had considered leaving the school due to SEGC-related changes, and several also reported considering leaving PPS. These responses align with accounts from educators who described coming close to quitting. At the same time, staff also reported a strong intention to remain, with nine in ten agreeing that they planned to work at the school the following year. Together, these findings suggest that staff commitment to the school remained strong, even as educators reported significant stress, fatigue, and concern about the sustainability of current conditions.

Participants also described being pulled between care for staff and families and a lack of timely, transparent information from the central office, especially during the recent budget crisis. One participant explained:

"We just learned… we have a $14 million shortfall, and people are like, 'Who's running that checkbook?'… They never told the principals in the district. We all heard about it on the same day as everybody else. And now, like, we're hearing nothing."

Participants described the emotional labor of managing staff anxiety about unpaid days, shifting calendars, and uncertainty about pay. One participant shared:

"Teachers are like hyperventilating… 'Do I save my money this month because I might not have four days worth of pay in June?'… As an admin, we're just dangling… I came in this morning and triaged. I can move Field Day. I can move promotion. But I can't solve anybody's pay."

These comments reflect direct experiences with high-stakes uncertainty, limited information, and the emotional labor of trying to support others without clear answers. Participants then extended those experiences into a broader critique of district communication and decision-making, describing a pattern in which central-office uncertainty cascaded into stress for school staff, students, and families. The concern was not only that difficult decisions were being made, but that the lack of timely, actionable communication made those decisions harder for school communities to absorb.

Trust, Safety, and District Feedback

When asked whether they felt safe raising concerns during SEGC-related changes, most participants distinguished between feeling safe within the school and feeling confident that district leaders would listen or respond. Participants generally described Lewis as a place where they could raise concerns with school leadership, especially with the current administrator. However, they expressed much less confidence that concerns raised beyond the school level would lead to meaningful district action. One person drew a distinction:

> *"I felt safe raising concerns to my principal, but at the same time I didn't feel like anyone else was going to be listening… I didn't feel like we had a voice there*."

Another participant reframed the issue as less about fear and more about low confidence in district responsiveness:

> *"It's probably not safety, it's just apathy. It's like, well, why bother? I just don't have confidence that they're going to make a good decision… we talk a lot, but it doesn't go anywhere."*

A third participant described the emotional cost of watching students, families, and staff testify during the SEGC decision-making process without seeing that testimony meaningfully reflected in final decisions:

> *"The district needs to do a better job of not graciously accepting testimony and feedback as if they're gonna implement it… Kids get up at a board meeting and talk about how they're losing their entire friend world, and the board says, 'We really respect and value your voice,' and then they do what they were going to do anyway… If I did that to a fourth grader, they would be so upset with me."*

These comments combine direct observations, such as board meeting testimony, unanswered questions, and perceived gaps in follow-through, with participants' broader interpretations of district listening and decision-making. The central concern was not primarily fear of retaliation. Rather, participants described a sense of futility: they felt compelled to advocate for students and families but did not believe that advocacy would meaningfully shape district decisions.

Survey data suggest that this low trust was shared by both staff and families. Among responding staff, the trust category averaged 1.9 on a five-point scale among nine respondents. Agreement that the district could be trusted to handle rightsizing decisions fairly and equitably averaged 1.6/5, and no responding staff agreed that PPS followed through on its commitments. Families reported similar concerns. Agreement that the district could be trusted to handle rightsizing fairly and equitably averaged about 2.1/5, with only about one in ten families agreeing. No responding family agreed that the benefits and burdens of SEGC changes were distributed equitably across Southeast Portland schools.

The qualitative and survey data synthesized above suggest a sharp distinction between trust in Lewis as a school community and trust in district-level decision-making. Staff and families generally described Lewis's teaching, learning environment, and school-level relationships positively. However, they expressed much lower confidence in PPS's ability to listen, follow through, and distribute the burdens of major district decisions fairly.

Equity, Diversity, and Learning Environments After SEGC

Across our conversations with Lewis participants, a consistent theme was that SEGC-related boundary changes altered the school's racial, socioeconomic, and neighborhood composition. Participants repeatedly described the loss of specific boundary areas as a loss of diversity, community connection, and neighborhood identity. One participant described the shift this way:

"We were a much more diverse school… half of [my child's] class was out of neighborhood boundaries, and there was a lot more diversity coming in. Now the demographics have changed a lot. The school community has gotten smaller and whiter."

Another staff member connected this directly to the boundary change:

"Because of the boundary change we just have fewer students of color. Those 10 blocks we lost from 52nd to 62nd, that's a pocket with much more diversity."

A third participant described the change in even more relational terms:

"You literally took all the cultural diversity we had out of here…That was part of the love of this building, making everybody feel like it's a true community that supports everybody. People were really sad about that. 'Why are you doing this to us?'"

These accounts reflect participants' direct observations of changes in the school community, especially the loss of particular neighborhood areas that staff understood as more racially,

culturally, and socioeconomically diverse. They also reflect participants' perceptions of how those changes affected the feel of the school and the experiences of students of color and lower-income students who remained. In their view, Lewis became smaller and less connected to some of the diverse neighborhood relationships that had previously shaped the school's identity.

Although students and families of color were not direct participants in these Lewis staff conversations, participants described what they saw and heard regarding impacts on lower-income students and students of color. One participant reflected:

"I think our poor students are affected the most… they feel more isolated in the community as we've grown richer, as we've cut that 52nd… there's more othering as the school community has gotten smaller and whiter."

Participants also described specific cases in which boundary and feeder-pattern decisions created disproportionate burdens for students and families who needed additional support navigating transfer processes. One participant described two fifth-grade students who were separated from their peers because of the boundary change:

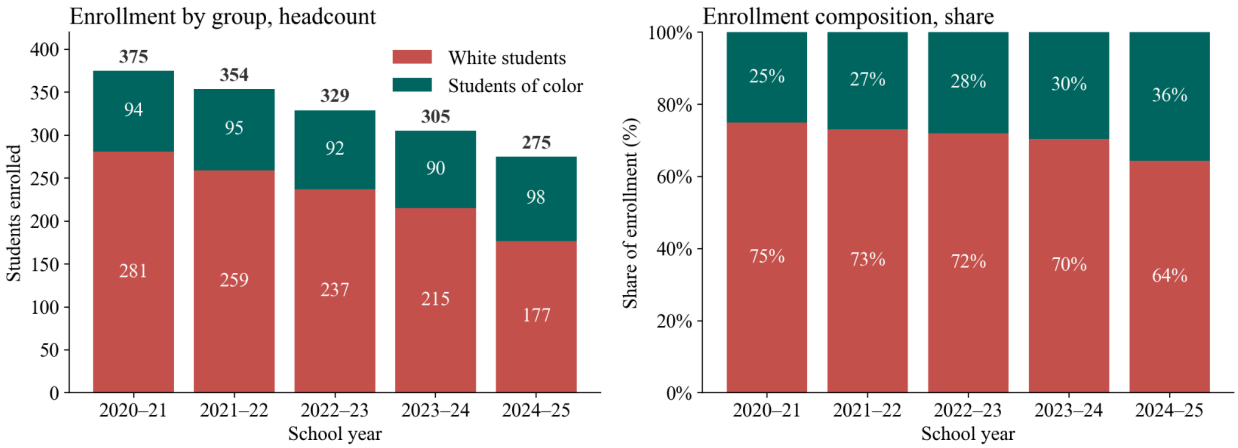
"These are also families that need a lot of support with [transfer paperwork] and wouldn't know otherwise to jump through these hoops, and there's no guarantee. So there's two kids that are isolated…It's so nuts to me. I just can't believe it."

These accounts are grounded in participants' direct observations of particular children, families, and neighborhood changes. The broader conclusion that SEGC concentrated harm on lower-income students and students of color by making some students more isolated and less supported is an interpretation participants drew from those concrete experiences. That interpretation is important to report, but it should be understood as participant meaning-making rather than formal causal evidence on its own.

Family survey responses are consistent with participants' sense that families did not experience SEGC as advancing equity at Lewis. Among Lewis families, agreement that SEGC changes increased diversity at the school averaged 1.7 on a five-point scale, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Agreement that the changes moved PPS closer to racial equity averaged 1.9/5, and 0% of responding families agreed that the benefits and burdens of SEGC changes were distributed equitably across Southeast Portland schools.

At the same time, student enrollment records both support and qualify participants' descriptions. Lewis enrollment declined substantially, from 375 students in 2020–21 to 275 students in 2024–25. White student enrollment accounted for most of that numerical decline, falling from 281 to 177 students. As a result, the share of Lewis students identifying as white declined from approximately 75% to 64%, while the combined share of students of color increased from approximately 25% to 36%. In this sense, Lewis became smaller and proportionally less white over time, even as participants experienced the school as having lost particular sources of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity.

Figure 5.4. Lewis elementary enrollment decline and composition shift, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Note: Enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year.

Interestingly, both findings can be true at the same time. The administrative data do not support a simple claim that Lewis became proportionally whiter overall. However, the qualitative data show that participants were not only describing percentages. They were describing the loss of specific neighborhood blocks, relationships, peer groups, and forms of community diversity that had mattered to the school's identity. In other words, the findings would suggest that the diversity participants mourned was tied to place, relationships, and neighborhood access, not only to the schoolwide racial percentage.

A second pattern is also worth noting carefully. The share of students receiving special education services rose over the period, from approximately 20% to 28%, while the actual number of students receiving special education services stayed relatively stable, from roughly 73 to 77 students. This appears to be a denominator effect,[19] which is that as total enrollment declined,

[19] A denominator effect occurs when the percentage or share of a group changes primarily because the total population used to calculate the percentage changes, rather than because the number of people in the group changed substantially. In this case, the number of students receiving special education services remained relatively stable, but total school enrollment declined; as a result, students receiving special education services became a larger share of the school population. This follows the basic logic of proportions, where a percentage is calculated by dividing a subgroup numerator by the total population denominator.

students receiving special education services became a larger share of the school population, even though the number of students receiving those services did not substantially increase. This does not, by itself, establish a change in the student population or explain why the shift occurred. However, it does help explain why participants may have experienced Lewis as a smaller school with fewer resources but continued responsibility for serving students with significant support needs.

Perceptions of Middle School Options and Unequal Access to Choice

Participants described how family perceptions of middle school options shaped how some families responded to SEGC-related feeder pattern changes. Importantly, these accounts should be read as participants' perceptions and second-hand observations, not as a direct evaluation of Lane or Sellwood as schools. The central equity issue participants raised was not simply that families preferred one middle school over another, but that families with more information, time, resources, and social capital appeared better positioned to navigate around new assignments.

One participant described the difficulty of helping families adjust when students who previously expected one middle school pathway were assigned elsewhere:

"In this community, everybody went to Sellwood…we switched the boundaries…our whole low socioeconomic group is now going to either Whitman or Lane, which the community was really upset about… Lane is a middle school that has struggled for years…the district has done nothing to make Lane exciting."

The same participant described efforts to make the new middle school pathway feel more welcoming and positive for students:

"We did our fifth-grade move-up day… We sent them with a teacher, we paid for them to go to Dairy Queen…'This is going to be awesome. Look what's in your neighborhood.' They had a great time when they got there. But the community culture is like, 'I don't want my kids there.'"

Other participants described how families with greater resources could sometimes use formal or informal strategies to avoid assigned pathways. One participant noted:

"We have families who file grievances…kids who went to Sellwood and Cleveland who had access to information and privilege to use the narrowest of loopholes…whereas some of our families wouldn't know how to do that. And there are families who literally rent apartments or find another address to get into a different school."

These accounts are important because they show how boundary and feeder pattern changes can interact with unequal access to information, advocacy, and choice. The specific examples of move-up days, grievances, and address changes reflect participant accounts of what they observed or heard in their school community. The broader equity concern is that even when assignment rules appear neutral, families with more time, knowledge, flexibility, or resources

may be better able to navigate exceptions, while lower-income families may be more likely to absorb the assigned change. For PPS, this suggests that future feeder pattern or boundary changes should include proactive family support, clear transparent transfer rules, and careful monitoring of whether exceptions and workarounds reproduce inequities by race, income, language, or neighborhood.

How SEGC Played Out at Lewis and What Shaped That Experience

Across the Lewis data, participants described SEGC as reshaping the school primarily through enrollment loss, boundary changes, staffing reductions, and disrupted student pathways. Participants consistently described Lewis as becoming smaller after SEGC-related boundary changes, with enrollment declining from roughly 400 or more students to approximately 260 students. They connected this decline first to the loss of key boundary areas, including areas east of 52nd Avenue and, in earlier boundary changes, areas between 39th and 41st, and then to COVID-19-related shifts and broader demographic changes. Participants emphasized that, from their perspective, Lewis lost boundary area and enrollment without receiving an offsetting program, population, or resource addition in return.

Participants also described significant staffing and program reductions as part of Lewis's post-SEGC experience. These included the loss of multiple paraeducators, Learning Center paraeducators, reading specialists, partial reductions in PE and music, and substantial reductions in library and ELL staffing. Staff also anticipated the possibility of multilingual learner services dropping to zero FTE despite the continued presence of students needing multilingual learner support. In participants' view, these reductions affected the school's ability to provide the same level of individualized support, intervention, enrichment, and whole-child programming that had long been central to Lewis's identity.

Participants further described one-class cohorts and blended grades as important features of Lewis's current conditions. Some cohorts now have only one classroom moving through the grade levels, and staff anticipated multiple 1–2 and 2–3 blended classrooms in the coming year. Participants viewed these structures as challenging because they may be misaligned with the adopted curriculum, developmentally difficult for students, and demanding for teachers who must plan for multiple grade levels within the same classroom.

Overall, these are concrete school-level changes, including enrollment decline, boundary shrinkage, reduced FTE, fewer support positions, and changing class structures. Staff interpreted these changes as evidence that Lewis experienced SEGC largely as a loss of students, staff, and capacity rather than as a reconfiguration that brought new resources or opportunities. This does not mean SEGC alone caused every challenge Lewis now faces. However, the Lewis case shows how boundary changes, declining enrollment, staffing formulas, budget pressures, and broader demographic shifts can combine to make a strong school feel increasingly vulnerable.

Several factors shaped how SEGC landed at Lewis. First, participants pointed to district process design. They described long virtual meetings that felt difficult to follow and not always responsive, complex documents and maps that were challenging for families and even school leaders to interpret, and limited visible district presence at Lewis to explain the rationale, tradeoffs, and consequences of the proposed changes.

Second, participants described frustration with what they perceived as the inequitable distribution of burden across Southeast schools. Several participants believed that nearby, more affluent schools with strong parent networks were largely protected from major SEGC-related changes, while Lewis and other less affluent schools absorbed more of the disruption. Participants experienced this as inconsistent with the district's stated racial equity and social justice commitments.

Third, local leadership and staff culture shaped how Lewis absorbed the changes. Participants widely described Lewis as having a strong culture of collaboration, care, and mutual support. They credited school leadership with helping rebuild trust, protect staff culture, and preserve some programming, including specials, for as long as possible despite shrinking allocations. This local culture appeared to buffer some of the harm associated with SEGC-related changes. At the same time, because relationships at Lewis were so strong, the loss of staff, students, and services was experienced as especially painful.

Finally, participants placed SEGC within a broader neighborhood and citywide context. They pointed to rising housing costs, gentrification, limited rental housing, and fewer young families in the immediate neighborhood as additional forces contributing to enrollment decline. In this sense, Lewis's experience was shaped not only by SEGC decisions, but also by larger housing, demographic, and fiscal conditions beyond the school's control.

Harrison Park Middle School

Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district SEGC documents, Harrison Park K–8 was impacted through five major anticipated changes:

- a grade reconfiguration
- a relocation of K–5 students to Clark
- one boundary change
- two middle school feeder changes
- one program receiving change

Harrison Park was designated to convert from the last neighborhood K–8 program in Southeast Portland into Harrison Park Middle School. Its K–5 students, including students in Mandarin DLI, were expected to move to Clark K–5, while Harrison Park became a middle school serving a newly configured set of neighborhood and program students. The proposal moved one boundary area from Harrison Park to Kellogg, and added one boundary area from Mt. Tabor to Harrison Park. It also shifted the Atkinson neighborhood feeder from Mt. Tabor to Harrison Park, and shifted the Vestal neighborhood feeder from Roseway Heights to Harrison Park. Overall, the changes were anticipated to impact approximately 240 students once implemented. In addition, the Woodstock Mandarin DLI middle school pathway, which had previously fed to Hosford, was relocated to Harrison Park, involving 116 students.

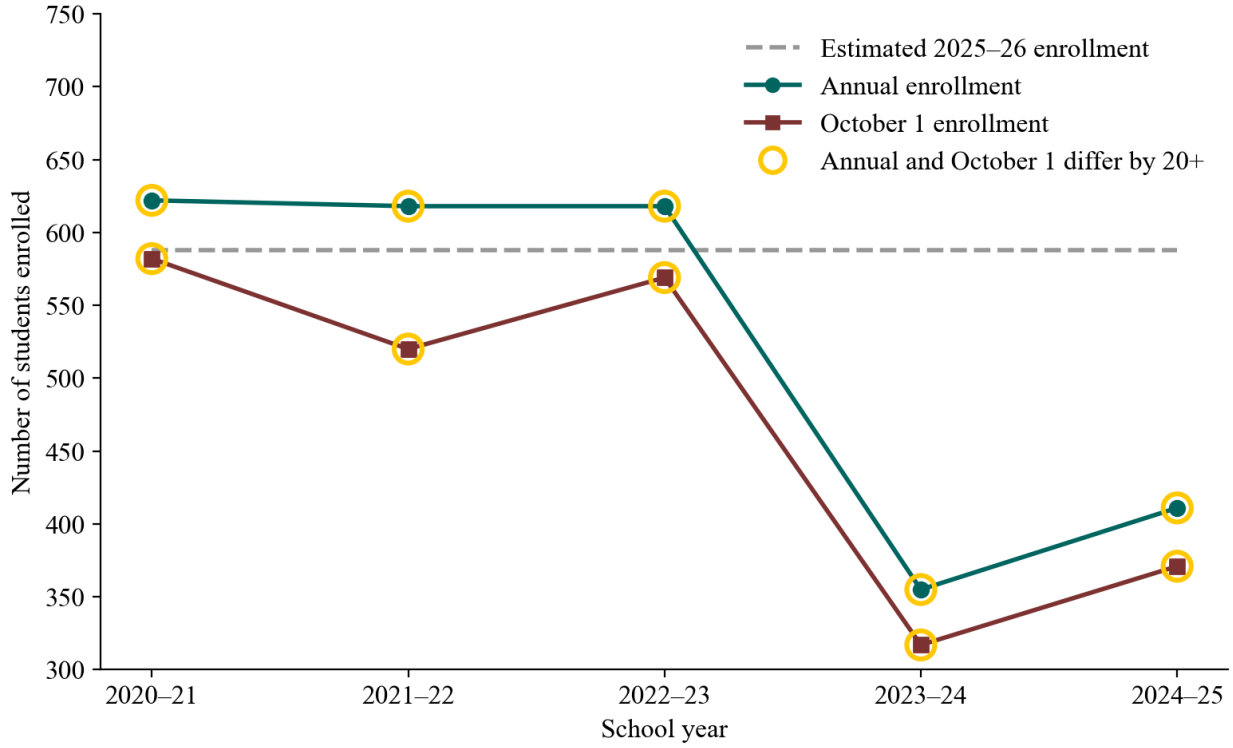
The expectation was that Harrison Park Middle School would open with an estimated 558 students if the changes had been in place in 2021–22 and a 2025–26 forecast of 588 students, with projected utilization of 62.7% and 66.1%, respectively. In short, Harrison Park was expected to become a larger regional middle school, keep its existing elementary community together at Clark, and serve as the consolidated middle school location for Mandarin DLI (see Figure 6.1).

Participants

Across the Harrison Park conversations, we heard from three school-based participants who brought broad perspectives on the school's SEGC-related transition. In addition, there were 4 staff and 13 family and caregiver survey respondents. Together, their accounts provided insight into how the school experienced changes in grade configuration, student enrollment, school identity, staff culture, student support, and day-to-day implementation. Two of the three participants had experience at Harrison Park before SEGC-related changes took effect, when the school operated as a K–8. All three participants were present during the SEGC transition or implementation period, and all three remained connected to Harrison Park after the school

became a comprehensive middle school. As a result, the Harrison Park conversations provide a before, during, and after view of how SEGC-related changes were experienced, managed, and understood within the school community.

Figure 6.1. Harrison Park estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Overview

This chapter examines how SEGC-related decisions were experienced at Harrison Park. The analysis looks beyond the formal changes themselves, including boundaries, feeder patterns, program relocation, and grade reconfiguration, to consider how those changes affected the daily work of school staff, the experiences of students and families, the school's racial and socioeconomic composition, and the identity and functioning of the school community.

This school-based analysis is especially important because participants described Harrison Park as experiencing both meaningful gains and significant strain. That is, on one hand, participants described expanded middle school opportunities, improved facilities, increased access to electives and specialist teachers, and a more developmentally appropriate structure for middle school students. On the other hand, they described demographic shifts, concerns about the loss of racial and socioeconomic diversity, stress associated with district processes, limited

implementation guidance, and ongoing questions about whether SEGC fully reflected PPS's stated equity commitments.

Overall, the Harrison Park case shows that SEGC-related changes cannot be understood only as policy adjustments to enrollment or program placement. They also reshaped how the educators in the school understood itself, how staff supported students and families, and how the promise of a stronger comprehensive middle school was experienced alongside concerns about equity, implementation, and community change.

Findings

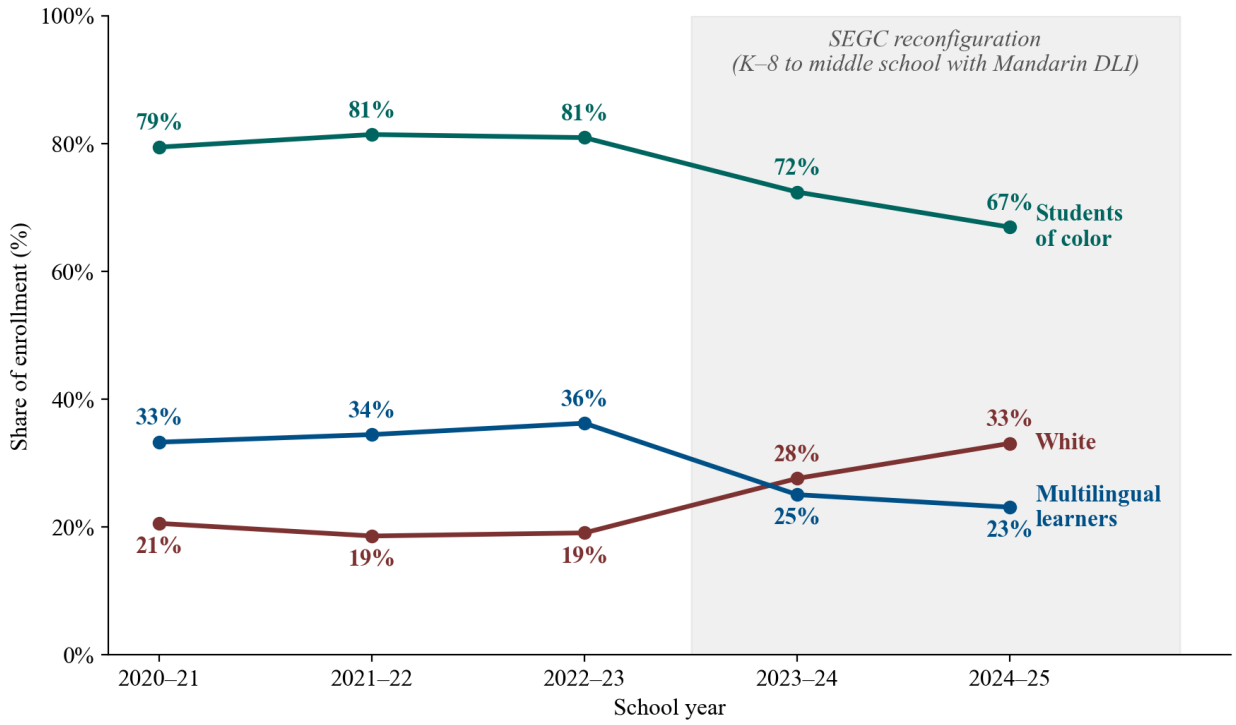
How SEGC Shaped Harrison Park

SEGC-related changes at Harrison Park unfolded as part of a dense web of transitions. The school shifted from a K–8 model to a comprehensive 6–8 middle school, underwent major capital construction, absorbed new feeder patterns, received the middle-grades portion of a Mandarin DLI program, and navigated the broader context of the pandemic, labor actions, and budget instability. Participants emphasized that these changes did not land as isolated policy or technical adjustments. Together, they reshaped Harrison Park's demographic profile, learning opportunities, school identity, and day-to-day functioning.

The central story of Harrison Park is therefore one of expanded opportunity accompanied by significant disruption. Participants described meaningful improvements for middle school students, including a more developmentally appropriate grade configuration, more electives, greater access to specialist teachers, a stronger library experience, improved classrooms, air conditioning, and a rebuilt interior environment. At the same time, they described demographic shifts, equity concerns, limited district implementation guidance, and a sense that school-level staff had to absorb and solve many of the practical challenges created by SEGC.

Administrative records support participants' account that the reconfiguration year marked a clear shift in the school's composition. During the K–8 years, Harrison Park's enrollment was about 81% students of color. After SEGC-related changes, that share declined to 72% in 2023–24 and 67% in 2024–25. White enrollment rose from about 19% during the K–8 years to 33% in 2024–25, Black enrollment declined from roughly 23% to 14%, and multilingual learner enrollment declined from about 36% to 23%. Participants experienced these shifts not only as demographic changes, but also as changes in the culture, identity, and equity context of the school.

Figure 6.2. Harrison Park racial/ethnic and multilingual learner composition, 2020–21 to 2024–25



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year.

These transitions were concentrated in a short period. In 2023–24, Harrison Park experienced the enrollment inflection from 618 students to 355 students, the shift in racial composition, the simultaneous staffing of Clark and Harrison Park, the relocation of the Mandarin DLI middle-grades pathway, and continued construction-related disruption. Participants described this period as one in which the school had to manage multiple forms of change at once, while also maintaining stability for students, families, and staff.

Morale, Retention, and Adult Well-Being

Across the Harrison Park conversations, participants described a strong internal school culture that helped buffer the strain of SEGC-related change. They repeatedly emphasized staff cohesion, leadership stability, and shared commitment as reasons staff continued to stay, even when external conditions were difficult. One participant summarized the staff climate this way:

"We don't have a lot of staff turnover, and that, in of itself, is a testament of, like, the climate and culture that [the principal] has created and maintained."

Participants also described the K–8 to middle school transition as revealing staff commitment to the school. When the elementary and middle grades separated, all classroom teachers whose

roles placed them in the middle school program returned to Harrison Park after its reconfiguration to a middle school. Personnel records support this account. Of the 22 Harrison Park staff in 2022–23 whose position titles placed them clearly in the middle school program, 20 continued at Harrison Park Middle School in 2023–24, a continuation rate of 91%. When narrowed to classroom teachers, the continuation rate was 20 of 20.

The post-reconfiguration record adds nuance. Harrison Park maintained very high teacher retention in the first two years after conversion: 25 of 26 teachers, or 96%, returned from 2023–24 to 2024–25. In the most recent year, however, school-based staff reported that teacher retention declined to 73%, with 24 of 33 teachers returning for the 2025–26 school year, due in part to budget-related staffing cuts.

Participants connected the school's ability to absorb change to long-standing leadership and a strong sense of collective responsibility. One participant described the staff's response to construction, room moves, a strike, and SEGC-related change as a shared experience:

"We've gone through a strike… all of this construction… I had more than half of my staff have to move mid year… and our staff has been really flexible, and I think a lot of part of that is because we're all in it together."

At the same time, participants were clear that this internal resilience did not eliminate the emotional toll of the process. SEGC meetings, construction disruption, pandemic conditions, labor actions, and budget instability were described as cumulative stressors. One participant described the weekly SEGC sessions during the pandemic as emotionally taxing:

"It was three hours of my life every Thursday night, sitting in my room on a computer… there's some trauma… I had to pick up a rock."

Another participant connected adult well-being to broader district systems, especially for staff and leaders of color. This participant described Harrison Park as a school where their racial, cultural, and linguistic identity felt valued, while also naming a larger district pattern of insufficient support:

"I'm in a much better place now that I'm at a school where my racial, cultural, linguistic identity is an asset… That wasn't the case in previous spaces."

"I continue to see… an exodus of administrators of color, of staff of color, because there aren't systems and supports in place."

These accounts suggest a dual reality. Harrison Park's internal culture, staff cohesion, and leadership stability helped sustain morale and retention through significant change. At the same time, participants experienced district-level processes as stressful, uneven, and insufficiently attentive to adult well-being, particularly for staff and leaders of color.

School-Level Capacity and District Support During and Post SEGC Implementation

Participants consistently described SEGC implementation at Harrison Park as a process in which school-level staff had to create systems, solve problems, and manage complex implementation tasks without a clear district playbook, defined responsibilities, or sufficient central-office guidance. Participants did not describe themselves as lacking commitment or capacity. Rather, they described having to rely heavily on their own experience, relationships, and initiative because the transition did not come with a clear implementation playbook. One participant described the challenge of staffing and planning the new middle school while simultaneously managing the departing elementary school:

"I was in charge of doing the staffing and hiring and getting all the people ready for the middle school, and at the same time doing all of that work for the elementary school that was departing… There was not this, 'Here's this guidebook, here's what you're supposed to be doing.' It was just I had to figure it out."

Participants also described how some SEGC implementation supports were not clearly defined. In one account, a person assigned to support planning arrived without clear direction from the district about what the role was supposed to involve. As the participant recalled, when asked, "What were you told to do?" the person responded that they had not been given specific guidance.

Participants also described this lack of clarity as part of a broader district pattern. Harrison Park staff often acted first, solved immediate problems, and communicated upward afterward rather than waiting for central office direction. One participant described this posture as grounded in responsibility to the school community:

"I don't need that support. That's not who I am… I'm just gonna do what I need to do… because that's what our community needs."

Participants also pointed to missed opportunities to strengthen support for historically underserved students. One participant described a grant opportunity that could have connected the building renovation to expanded student programming, but said it was not supported by district leadership. Another described the creation of a newcomer hub for recently arrived multilingual students, which participants saw as successful but short-lived:

"We worked really hard to build a newcomer hub…and we ran it for a year. It was very successful… and we were really seeing a different set of growth… Unfortunately, [the department] pulled back on it right away. It was really heartbreaking."

These examples shaped participants' broader view that district support was often episodic and fragile. They saw Harrison Park as capable of building strong local solutions, but not always

supported by durable district systems. One participant summarized this concern by describing PPS as large but lacking clear, consistent processes:

"We're a huge district that doesn't seemingly have very clear systems on how to do, like, almost anything."

For Harrison Park, then, staff felt equipped to support students and families largely because of school-level expertise, trust, and improvisation, not because SEGC came with a comprehensive implementation infrastructure.

Historically Underserved Students and Families

Participants described SEGC changes as significantly altering Harrison Park's racial and socioeconomic composition. Before the transition, participants described Harrison Park as one of the most racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse schools in the district, with a small white student population, a large Somali and broader African student population, and substantial Asian and Latino/a/x communities. One participant recalled:

"When I started here, I think we were probably the most diverse school…We were 14% white. And…we had like 38 languages…our black population was about half African American and half African."

Another participant emphasized the scale of the shift:

"When I came here… we were about 17% white… one of the largest Somali populations… very, very diverse… now we are, I think at least 42% white, and that has really shifted things in the building."

Administrative data show a similar pattern. When Harrison Park shifted from a K–8 to a middle school, the more diverse K–5 population left for Clark along with the elementary portion of the Mandarin DLI program, while a reconfigured middle school population arrived through new feeders. In raw counts, Black enrollment declined from 143 students in 2022–23 to 57 students in 2023–24, white enrollment declined from 118 to 98, and total enrollment declined from 618 to 355. The following year, the middle school grew to 411 students with a whiter racial composition than the prior K–8 school.

Participants also raised concerns about how power and voice operated during SEGC. Several participants perceived that white, middle-class, and more affluent parents from across the region had greater influence in SEGC deliberations, while families of color, immigrant families, and lower-income families had less access to the process. One participant described the subtext they heard in some parent concerns about Harrison Park:

"We want our kids to be in the neighborhood school… we want this, or we want that… what wasn't being said is they didn't want to come here. That was very clear… what it really came

down to is, 'I don't want my kids to go to school with those kids.' And we know who those kids are… our students of color."

Another participant summarized the broader pattern this way:

"The more white and affluent a community was, the less change that they saw, and the more likely that their voice was heard and their desires honored."

Participants worried that historically underserved families, including Black, Latino/a/x, Native, immigrant, and low-income families, had less time, language access, familiarity with district processes, and political influence to shape SEGC decisions. As one participant explained:

"Our white population is definitely the predominant population [districtwide], and they're also the noisiest, and they also know how to work the system the best… Our families [at Harrison Park] aren't the ones that are getting heard as much… I worry… the voices of our Black, Latinx, Native families weren't heard."

Family survey responses add nuance to this picture. Among current Harrison Park family respondents, 83% agreed that their student's culture and language were valued at school, 78% felt welcome communicating with the school about their student's needs, and 76% reported that their student felt a sense of belonging. At the same time, instructional and equity items were more mixed as 46% agreed that the learning environment was high quality, 54% agreed that the school responded helpfully when their student needed additional support, and 66% agreed that learning experiences had been fair or equitable.

Open-ended family responses also complicate the diversity-loss theme. Many current families entered Harrison Park through new SEGC feeder patterns and therefore compared Harrison Park to their prior middle school pathway, not to Harrison Park's former K–8 baseline. One family described the challenge as "mainly proximity to middle school now farther" and a "perceived loss of prestige switching from Tabor Middle to Harrison Park," while also naming benefits such as "attending a more ethnically and socio-economically diverse school," having a reliable bus, and seeing their child learn to use TriMet independently. This does not contradict staff accounts of diversity loss. Rather, both can be true: Harrison Park became less diverse than it had been as a K–8 school, while still being more diverse than some of the schools from which new students arrived.

A Spanish-speaking DLI family also described the transition as an adjustment while emphasizing that teacher continuity helped:

"El cambio por un año a Clark (5to. Grado) y luego de regreso a Harrison fue un ajuste que tomó un poco de tiempo… Afortunadamente los maestros se mantuvieron en su puesto y eso ayudó mucho."

Translated, the caregiver was essentially saying that"The move for one year to Clark (5th grade) and then back to Harrison was an adjustment that took a little time… Fortunately, the teachers stayed in their positions, and that helped a lot." This comment reinforces a broader theme in the Harrison Park case: the transition was difficult, but continuity in relationships helped some families and students absorb the change.

Learning Environments After SEGC

Participants were clear that, from a programmatic and facilities standpoint, Harrison Park's middle school students now experience a richer learning environment than they did under the K–8 model. Participants described the K–8 configuration as limiting the school's ability to fully serve middle school students. One participant reflected:

"We were not doing our middle school students justice when we were K–8… nine grade levels… a Mandarin immersion school… a district behavioral classroom… I could do all of those things marginally, but never felt like I was doing an outstanding job at any one thing."

As a comprehensive middle school, Harrison Park was able to offer more electives, arts and music opportunities, library access, and interventions. One participant described the shift this way:

"Our middle school students definitely have a richer experience… they didn't have a whole lot of electives… now they have access to librarian, band, art, more often."

Family survey responses align with this programmatic improvement. Sixty-four percent of current Harrison Park families agreed that their student could access the classes, programs, or learning opportunities they needed, and 74% agreed that their student had access to programs and opportunities regardless of race, language, disability, or family background. Participants also described the capital project as a major improvement to the learning environment. One participant emphasized that the rebuilt interior signaled care and respect for students:

"This school now has been rebuilt from the inside. The outside facade is the same, but 40 million has been put into this building… every student deserves to be in a space that is aesthetically pleasing where they feel valued."

Participants also noted improvements in the behavioral climate after the shift to a focused middle school grade span. With K–1 grades no longer in the building and the school focused on grades 6–8, participants described fewer serious behavioral incidents and a generally calmer middle school environment:

"What's happening here… it's pretty minimal. It's a pretty chill environment in terms of behaviors…We don't have very many fights. We don't have very many big problems… we have a lot of little problems."

At the same time, participants described classrooms where students had very different levels of academic preparation and family resources. Some students were at or above grade level and had strong support outside of school, while others were significantly below grade level or needed more intensive academic, behavioral, or social-emotional support. Participants said this wide range of needs made it more difficult for teachers to differentiate instruction and support all students equitably. One participant described the challenge:

"We have a significant chunk of students who are at or above grade level, and a significant chunk who are well below, and there isn't a significant middle ground… that sets a really difficult space for teachers."

This growing disparity, combined with limited intervention resources, made differentiation more difficult. Participants therefore described the learning environment as improved in structure, facilities, and opportunities, but still challenged by academic stratification and uneven student need.

Overall Interpretation

The Harrison Park case shows why SEGC cannot be evaluated only by whether a school gained or lost enrollment, received a program, or changed grade configurations. According to participants, Harrison Park experienced real gains, including a stronger middle school structure, improved facilities, more electives, better access to specialist teachers, and a clearer developmental focus for early adolescents. Participants consistently recognized these benefits and, in many cases, viewed the shift to a comprehensive middle school as educationally important.

At the same time, these gains came alongside substantial disruption and unresolved equity concerns. Harrison Park became less racially and socioeconomically diverse than it had been as a K–8 school, lost a substantial portion of its Black and multilingual learner population, and entered a new phase in which families' experiences of diversity differed depending on whether they were comparing Harrison Park to its former K–8 identity or to the schools and neighborhoods from which they arrived. Participants also described a district process that felt reactive, overly responsive to the loudest voices, and insufficiently guided by a coherent equity-centered implementation strategy.

What helped Harrison Park absorb the change was not simply the design of SEGC. It was the school's internal stability. Long-standing leadership, strong staff cohesion, shared hardship, and deep commitment to students helped the school manage a concentration of transitions that might otherwise have produced greater instability. The personnel record supports this interpretation: staff continuity through the immediate conversion was unusually strong, even though more recent retention patterns suggest that the strain may be catching up over time.

In sum, SEGC at Harrison Park functioned as an intense, locally managed remaking of the school. It expanded opportunity for middle school students while also raising difficult questions about demographic change, equitable voice, implementation support, and district accountability.

Kellogg Middle School

Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district SEGC documents, Kellogg Middle School was impacted through three major anticipated changes:

- one feeder or boundary change to Hosford
- two small boundary changes to Lane
- one Spanish DLI program receiving change from Mt. Tabor.

Kellogg was expected to remain a Franklin High School feeder middle school serving both neighborhood students and Spanish DLI students. However, the SEGC recommendation adjusted Kellogg's enrollment in two directions. On one hand, Kellogg was expected to lose the Creston neighborhood feeder to Hosford, along with two small areas on the southern edge of Kellogg's boundary that would shift to Lane. On the other hand, Kellogg was expected to receive the Spanish DLI program from Mt. Tabor, specifically the Atkinson-fed Spanish DLI middle school pathway. Altogether, 177 students enrolled at the time of implementation were expected to be impacted by the changes.

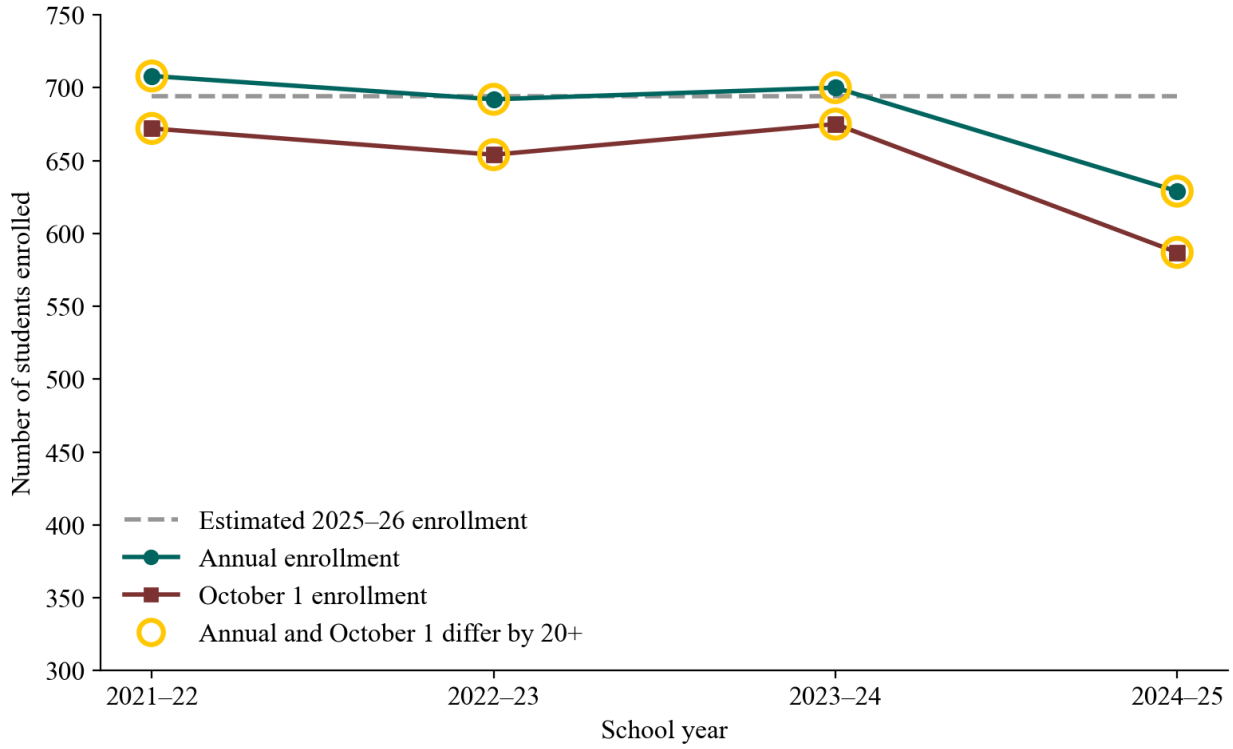
The net effect was expected to be a modest enrollment decrease. District documents listed Kellogg's enrollment at 684 students in 2021–22, with a 2025–26 forecast of 727 students. If the recommended changes had been in place in 2021–22, Kellogg's estimated enrollment would have been 659 students, with a 2025–26 forecast of 694 students. Utilization was also expected to remain high, shifting from 87.9% in 2021–22 and 93.4% in the 2025–26 forecast to 84.7% and 89.2%, respectively. In short, Kellogg was expected to remain one of the larger and more highly utilized middle schools in Southeast Portland, while becoming the consolidated middle school site for Spanish DLI.

Participants

Across the Kellogg Middle School conversations, we heard from three school-based participants who brought broad perspectives on the school's post-SEGC experience alongside 11 staff and 21 family survey respondents. Together, their accounts provided insight into school climate, staffing, student support, intervention services, dual language programming, and the ongoing effects of boundary and program changes. Since Kellogg had recently reopened as part of the broader Southeast Portland middle school reconfiguration, most participants spoke primarily from a post-SEGC vantage point. They described how Kellogg was experiencing the effects of SEGC after implementation, including the consolidation of the Spanish DLI pathway, staffing reductions, student support needs, and the development of the school's middle school culture.

One participant also brought a broader cross-school perspective connected to the Spanish DLI consolidation. This perspective helped illuminate how SEGC-related changes were experienced before, during, and after implementation across schools connected to that program pathway. Importantly, the Kellogg conversations provide insight into how a newly reopened middle school absorbed SEGC-related boundary changes, program consolidation, and post-implementation staffing and student support challenges.

Figure 7.1. Kellogg estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2021–22 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Overview

The aim of this chapter is to illuminate how SEGC related decisions were experienced at Kellogg not only as boundary, feeder pattern, or program placement changes, but as changes that affected the daily work of school leaders and educators, the stability of the Spanish dual language immersion program, the supports available to students, and the broader functioning of the school community.

Findings

Overall Impacts of SEGC-Related Changes at Kellogg

Across the Kellogg conversations and survey respondents, participants described SEGC-related changes as part of a larger set of structural shifts that shaped the school after its reopening. Kellogg was described as a diverse middle school with a substantial Spanish DLI program, a strong internal commitment to students, and a staff culture that participants viewed as improving over time. At the same time, participants emphasized that the consolidation of Spanish DLI, boundary adjustments, and post-reopening growth occurred alongside deep budget cuts, staffing reductions, and ongoing uncertainty about the school's capacity to sustain the support students needed.

Additionally, participants described SEGC as strengthening the coherence and identity of the Spanish DLI pathway, while broader fiscal and staffing conditions limited the school's ability to fully realize the benefits of that change. In their accounts, Kellogg's staff remained committed to students and to one another, but the school was repeatedly asked to do more with fewer adults, fewer support roles, and less stability.

Participants described Kellogg as a place where students want to be and where families actively seek access. One participant pointed to the school's strong demand for transfers and its "unique diversity," including Latino/a/x, Black, Asian American, Native, Pacific Islander, multiracial, and white students. Administrative records are consistent with this portrait of Kellogg as a substantively diverse middle school. Latino/a/x students increased from 30% of enrollment in 2021–22 to 34% in 2024–25. Black students remained between 5% and 6%, multiracial students remained at about 10%, and Asian students declined from 11% to 7%. White students remained the largest single racial group, at approximately 41% to 42% across all four years. In other words, Kellogg's diversity was real and stable through the SEGC implementation window, rather than simply a new outcome produced by SEGC.

Participants also emphasized that Kellogg's diversity and program strengths unfolded within a difficult staffing context. They described the school as losing 11 staff members in one year and five more the next, including key support roles and experienced DLI teachers. Participants did not always separate SEGC-related impacts from broader budget and staffing challenges. However, they consistently described the same pattern: SEGC created or reinforced important programmatic possibilities at Kellogg, but the school's ability to deliver on those possibilities was constrained by staffing cuts, increased workloads, and fragile student support systems.

Morale and Retention

Participants described morale at Kellogg as both improved and fragile. On one hand, participants described a stronger internal culture, better relationships with current building leadership, and a more cohesive staff climate than in earlier years. One participant described staff survey results as

having improved sharply over time, especially around staff relationships with building administration. They attributed this improvement to a people-centered approach that emphasized listening, matching staff to roles that fit their strengths, and creating opportunities for teachers to lead in areas such as advisory and social-emotional learning.

Teachers also described a strong sense of collegial respect. One teacher described Kellogg as "a fairly united staff" where "everyone on staff has a really high regard for everyone." This internal cohesion mattered because many staff had worked together across multiple years and schools, and those relationships helped stabilize the school during a difficult period.

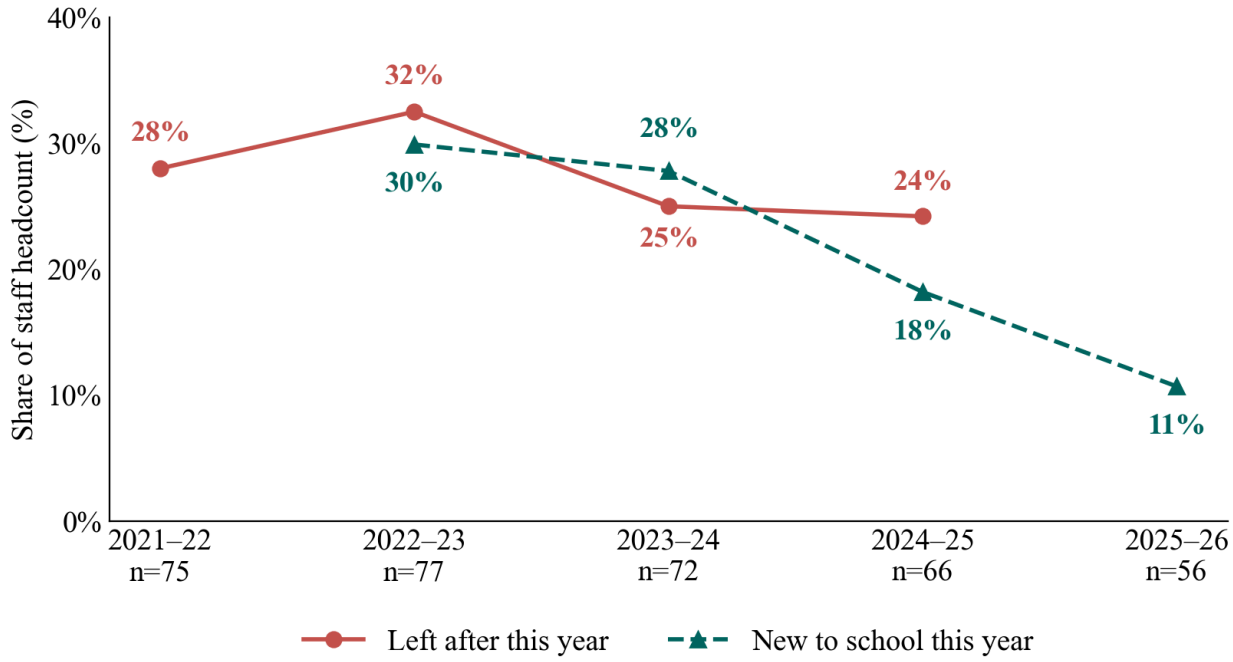
At the same time, participants repeatedly described burnout, insecurity, and fatigue. Connected to SEGC changes, one teacher noted that "we have been burnt out for a number of years," connecting that burnout to repeated staffing reductions, expanding roles, and the emotional toll of trying to maintain support for students with fewer adults. Retention and job security emerged as central concerns. One teacher reported having been "cut or unassigned twice… in five years," describing how hard it was to imagine a long-term future in the district under such conditions. Another described living "year to year" and concluded, "this doesn't feel like a secure job." A different participant's account reinforced this sense of instability. This participant described the pain of seeing two long-serving, highly regarded DLI teachers unassigned because of staffing reductions:

"This year was rough because we had to take two 10-year veterans or DLI teachers that are loved by the kids, loved by the community, loved by their peers, and we had to unassign them… Those are hard because we love them. We care about them.

Personnel records support participants' description of ongoing instability. Of approximately 75 staff present each year, between 24% and 32%, left Kellogg after each of the first four years. New-staff intake remained between 18% and 30% each year. This level of sustained turnover was unusual among SEGC schools, where turnover more often spiked during a transition year and then stabilized. At Kellogg, turnover was elevated from the beginning and remained elevated. Confirmed district-exit rates were 20% and 23% in the first two years, indicating that early churn included a substantial share of staff leaving PPS entirely rather than simply transferring to other district schools.

The staffing footprint also contracted substantially. Total staff FTE fell from 74 in 2021–22 to 55 in 2025–26, a net reduction of 19 FTE. Kellogg also experienced three different principals across its first five years. Participants described current staff-leadership relations as improving, but that improvement occurred within the context of prior leadership turnover, repeated staffing cuts, and ongoing uncertainty. Thus, Kellogg's morale story is best understood as a partial recovery in internal culture amid continued structural instability.

Figure 7.2. Kellogg's turnover rate



Note: The sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff.

Capacity to Support Students and Families

Participants consistently described Kellogg staff as deeply committed to supporting students, while also feeling under-resourced and structurally constrained. Teachers described clear awareness of students' needs in areas such as social-emotional learning, regulation, conflict resolution, restorative approaches, and individualized support. However, they also said the training and staffing needed to implement those supports were often insufficient, especially for teachers expected to meet a wide range of needs in general education classrooms. One teacher explained:

> *"We have a real need for social, emotional skill building… and it needs more specific attention and more expert approach… Kids who need a check in, check out or need an escort plan, we struggle to follow through on things like that because teachers are being spread too thin."*

Participants described the work as a "management beast," where teachers were expected to plan instruction, meet legal and IEP-related responsibilities, cover for missing adult roles, manage student behavior, and respond to crises with limited backup. Teachers described calling the office during a crisis and reaching voicemail or not receiving in-person follow-up because there were not enough administrators or support staff available to respond. One participant described similar constraints from a resource-allocation perspective. With limited discretionary FTE, the school had to choose between hiring climate or coaching staff and investing in reading and math

intervention. The participant framed the decision to prioritize intervention as a moral necessity because so many students were reading or performing below grade level.

Other participants agreed that intervention classes were making a meaningful difference for students. They described reading and math intervention as helping students feel "seen and heard and helped and met where they are." However, these interventions were fragile because preserving them required sacrificing other support roles. One teacher described working as a full-time math interventionist while also teaching a PE elective and leading a grade-level success work, essentially carrying multiple jobs within one FTE. Another teacher warned that intervention access could shrink as staffing was reduced:

> *"These intervention classes are what's making the difference overall, and we're having to scramble to keep them… Those classes are going to grow. Those kids are going to have less access to interventions if they need them."*

Personnel records align with participants' accounts of reduced support capacity. Counselor FTE declined from 4.0 in 2021–22 to 3.0 in 2024–25. Social worker FTE declined from 2.0 in 2021–22 to zero in 2025–26. The combined student-management, behavior, and mental-health category dropped from 3.5 FTE in 2022–23 to 1.5 FTE in 2025–26. Kellogg also lost about 2.5 FTE in education assistant roles between its opening and 2025–26.

Staff survey findings reinforce the same pattern. Among the 11 staff who responded, only three (27%) agreed that they had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively, and all 11 indicated that SEGC-related changes added stress to their work. One staff respondent wrote that Kellogg needed "another elective teacher and more teachers in general to create more flexibility in our master schedule," noting that classes were "full, especially electives," and that scheduling students had become difficult. These findings suggest that Kellogg had committed staff and promising student supports, especially interventions, but lacked the stable staffing capacity needed to make those supports broad, sustainable, and reliable across the school.

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants described emotional well-being at Kellogg as shaped by two opposing realities: meaningful relational support inside the school and persistent stress from workload, staffing cuts, and district-level decisions, in which some of these participants contributed to SEGC changes. One participant described receiving useful professional development, mentoring, and induction support, including coaching on difficult tasks such as staffing conversations. This participant described being able to call district leaders and mentors when they felt "lost," and characterized that support as important for sustaining new principals.

Teachers also described collegial and principal support as strengths. They described a staff that "get[s] along really well" and "work[s] together very well." One teacher noted that with the current principal, "if I have any questions or concerns or needs, I can raise them," while another

said they "could bounce any idea off" the principal. These relationships helped create a sense of local trust, even when staff felt the larger system constrained what could actually change.

At the same time, participants described significant emotional fatigue. Teachers repeatedly referenced burnout, "doing more with less," and the stress of filling gaps left by staffing reductions. They described teaching multiple preps, covering electives outside their primary expertise, leading schoolwide initiatives, and taking on unpaid or informal duties such as supervising dismissal and after-school safety. One teacher described the daily stress of dismissal this way:

"I'm just trying to help the special ed buses get out, or help kids get across the street without getting hit by a car, and then parents are actively trying to hit them with their cars… Parents have only tried to hit me with their cars three times."

Another participant described days when behavioral crises were happening simultaneously across the building, leaving limited adult capacity to respond:

"If there's like a fight on the third floor and then there's a kid having a crisis on the second floor and then there's something happening on the first floor, and there's only one administrator in the building, you have to pick which kid to go deal with."

Staff survey responses are consistent with this mixed picture. Of the 11 staff who responded to the workload item, five agreed (45%) that their current workload was manageable. Four of 11 agreed that morale at the school was high, and five of 11 agreed that they felt emotionally supported at work.

Class-size pressure was another major source of stress. Only 1 of 11 staff (9%) respondents agreed that class sizes were distributed in a manageable way. One staff member wrote that "classes of almost 40 are too large for students to thrive in." Another wrote that "staff cuts and increased classroom sizes create a culture of stress," with student behaviors "taking over and causing disruptions, which create an unproductive learning environment."

Participants also expressed frustration with district-level decisions, including shifting deficit figures and investments they perceived as disconnected from direct student support. One participant argued that the system had become "top heavy" and that more licensed educators should be working directly with students:

"More people who are licensed to work with kids should be working with kids, and there should be less roles outside of the classroom… If you're in our industry and you're not working with kids, I think that you need to be put under a magnifying glass."

These accounts reflect professional pride and commitment alongside a perception that the system is not adequately configured to sustain the emotional health of school-based staff. Participants

discussed initiatives for historically underserved students, but they did not provide enough direct evidence to analyze whether emotional well-being differed by staff race or ethnicity.

Experiences of Historically Underserved Students and Families

Participants repeatedly described Kellogg's diversity as central to the school's identity and mission. They described the school as serving Latino/a/x students, Black students, Asian American students, multiracial students, Native and Pacific Islander students, and white students, as well as students in Spanish DLI and students needing academic, social-emotional, and behavioral support.

Administrative records support the description of Kellogg as a diverse middle school with a substantial Spanish DLI pathway. The Spanish DLI program grew from 159 students at Kellogg's opening in 2021–22 to 233 students in 2023–24, where it remained in 2024–25. The consolidation of Spanish DLI from Mt. Tabor is visible in the data between 2022–23 and 2023–24, when Kellogg's DLI enrollment rose by 62 students.

Participants described this consolidation as especially important for Latino/a/x students and Spanish DLI students. One teacher argued that having "the dual language community all centered in one location is much more helpful," especially compared with the prior configuration in which there was only "one section per grade" and limited collaboration among DLI teachers. At Kellogg, the DLI team initially grew, allowing for stronger collaboration and a more coherent program.

At the same time, participants offered a critical interpretation of the broader SEGC process. One participant argued that the schools and communities most affected by boundary and program changes were often communities of color and lower-income communities, while wealthier and whiter neighborhoods experienced less disruption. The participant stated:

"If you live in Sellwood, your school didn't change. If you live in Laurelhurst, your school didn't change… across all five or six schools that had big changes, it was communities of color who were most affected and lowest socio-economic."

The same participant recalled early SEGC proposals that would have placed both Chinese and Spanish immersion at Harrison Park rather than in the new Kellogg building. Families perceived this as racially inequitable:

"That was the perception of shoving all the Latino kids and all of the Chinese immersion students at Harrison Park and letting a bunch of white neighborhood kids be here at the brand new school… It was a big racial issue."

According to participants, advocacy helped shift Spanish DLI into Kellogg, and the current configuration is viewed as better serving Latino/a/x students and DLI students by placing the

program in a more central and well-resourced middle school building. However, participants also worried that repeated budget cuts, especially the unassignment of experienced DLI teachers, undermined the stability of the very program SEGC had consolidated.

These accounts suggest a nuanced equity finding. At Kellogg, SEGC appears to have strengthened one important equity goal by consolidating Spanish DLI into a larger, more coherent middle school program. At the same time, participants believed that the broader SEGC process placed disproportionate burdens on lower-income communities and communities of color across Southeast Portland. In other words, SEGC may have advanced equity in one programmatic respect at Kellogg while also reinforcing perceptions that communities with less power carried more of the disruption.

Quality of Learning Environments

Participants described Kellogg's learning environment as shaped by the tension between a standardized comprehensive middle school model and the diverse needs of the students the school serves. Participants noted that PPS uses high-quality instructional materials aligned to state and national standards, which can provide consistency across schools and smoother transitions for students who move between buildings. However, a participant also described limits to this approach:

"The curriculum doesn't always speak to the diverse needs of our kids… teaching and learning for… brown and black populations works differently than a standardized kind of sit and get type of model."

One person argued that Kellogg needed more differentiated, inquiry-driven, and experiential approaches to better engage its students. However, implementing that kind of pedagogy at scale was difficult under current staffing and resource constraints, especially when many students entered below grade level in reading and math. Other teachers' accounts reinforced this concern. They described large classes, multiple preps, and wide-ranging academic needs as barriers to deeper instruction. One teacher framed the challenge this way:

"Teachers can only go so deep when you're doing three different things with 35 different kids. So how can we get more adults… working with smaller groups of kids?"

Within this context, intervention classes were described as a bright spot. Teachers described reading and math interventions as transformative for some students, especially when students' behavioral challenges were connected to academic frustration or low skill levels. Participants described students in intervention classes as feeling "seen and heard and helped and met where they are." They also described notable academic growth among some participating students.

However, administrative records complicate any simple interpretation of the learning environment. Kellogg's exclusionary discipline rate increased across the SEGC implementation

window, from 0.13 incidents per student in 2021–22 to 0.17 in 2022–23, 0.27 in 2023–24, and 0.38 in 2024–25. Chronic absenteeism remained between 38% and 40% across the four years, while attendance remained between 87% and 88%. These are descriptive school-level trends, not causal estimates of SEGC's effect. Still, the direction of the discipline trend sits in tension with participants' descriptions of intervention gains for participating students. It also overlaps with the period when behavior, student-management, and mental-health support staffing declined.

The most accurate interpretation is that Kellogg's learning environment contained both promising and strained elements. The school offered important intervention support and a more coherent Spanish DLI structure, but large class sizes, reduced support staffing, contributed to increased discipline incidents, and persistent absenteeism limited the extent to which those supports could reach all students consistently.

How SEGC Changes Played Out at Kellogg

At Kellogg, SEGC-related changes were experienced most directly through the consolidation of the Spanish DLI program and related boundary and feeder-pattern adjustments. Spanish DLI students from Mt. Tabor arrived in 2023–24, two years after Kellogg's reopening. Administrative records show 58 students leaving Mt. Tabor's Spanish DLI program and 62 students being added to Kellogg's enrollment. One teacher described moving from another middle school to Kellogg along with students when DLI was centralized. The participant acknowledged that the transition was disruptive for students, some of whom experienced being "tossed together" and continued to describe the move as "mildly traumatic." Over time, however, this participant viewed the consolidation as programmatically beneficial:

"Specifically here, having the dual language community all centered in one location is much more helpful… It is better for the teachers and it's better for the program at the middle school level, in my opinion."

This consolidation did not occur in isolation. Participants located it within a broader sequence of events. Kellogg's reopening, the multi-year SEGC process, leadership transitions, the end of pandemic relief funds, declining state and district budget capacity, and repeated staffing reductions. During 2023–24 and 2024–25, several pressures converged: Spanish DLI consolidation, principal transition, major FTE reductions, and an exclusionary discipline rate that more than doubled between 2022–23 and 2024–25. These patterns do not prove causation, but they show how SEGC-related changes interacted with other conditions that shaped Kellogg's experience.

Participants also pointed to leadership, staff culture, and district communication as key factors in how Kellogg absorbed these changes. They contrasted earlier leadership instability and strained teacher-administration relationships with the current principal's more relational, people-centered approach, which they believed helped repair "super old wounds" and rebuild trust. They also

described a relatively cohesive staff, many of whom had prior working relationships, as an important buffer against the stress of change.

At the district level, participants' experiences were more mixed. One participant described central office leaders as generally accessible and responsive when called. Others, however, expressed skepticism about district priorities and communication, citing shifting deficit numbers, confusing SEGC scenarios, and contested investments. One teacher argued that the district took too long in SEGC planning and that a shorter, clearer, more transparent process that acknowledged fiscal realities and equity tradeoffs would have better served communities.

Overall, participants' accounts suggest that SEGC-related changes at Kellogg, especially the Spanish DLI consolidation, were experienced as educationally sound in principle but difficult to sustain in practice. The consolidation strengthened the program's identity and coherence, but underfunding, staffing reductions, leadership transitions, and reduced support capacity limited the school's ability to realize the full promise of those changes for students, families, and staff.

Overall Interpretation

The Kellogg case illustrates one of the central tensions of SEGC which is that a structural change can be programmatically sensible and still be difficult to implement equitably if the school does not have stable staffing, adequate support roles, and sufficient resources. Kellogg appears to have benefited from the consolidation of Spanish DLI in several important ways. Participants described a stronger DLI identity, more collaboration among DLI teachers, and a clearer middle school pathway for students. Administrative data show the program grew substantially after consolidation.

At the same time, Kellogg's ability to sustain these gains was undermined by repeated staffing reductions, ongoing turnover, reduced support capacity, large classes, increased discipline rates, and persistent absenteeism. Participants described a school with strong commitment, improving internal culture, and promising interventions, but also one where staff were stretched thin and where key student supports remained fragile.

Mt. Tabor Middle School

Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district SEGC documents, Mt. Tabor Middle School was impacted through three major anticipated changes:

- one boundary change
- one middle school feeder change
- one program change.

Mt. Tabor remained a middle school serving its neighborhood, Japanese DLI, and, at the time, Spanish DLI students, but the proposal removed some students and program enrollment from Mt. Tabor to reduce crowding and support broader regional program consolidation. A small boundary area east of NE 60th Avenue was reassigned to Harrison Park. The current Atkinson neighborhood feeder pattern also shifted from Mt. Tabor to Harrison Park. In addition, the Atkinson Spanish DLI pathway shifted from Mt. Tabor to Kellogg. These changes were estimated to impact 180 students in total once implemented.

The expectation was that Mt. Tabor's enrollment and utilization would decline substantially, from 645 students in 2021–22, to a 2025–26 forecast of 660 students, to an estimated 479 students if the changes had been in place in 2021–22, and to a 2025–26 forecast of 456 students. In short, Mt. Tabor was expected to become less crowded, while Harrison Park gained neighborhood feeder enrollment and Kellogg became the regional home for Spanish DLI at the middle school level.

Participants

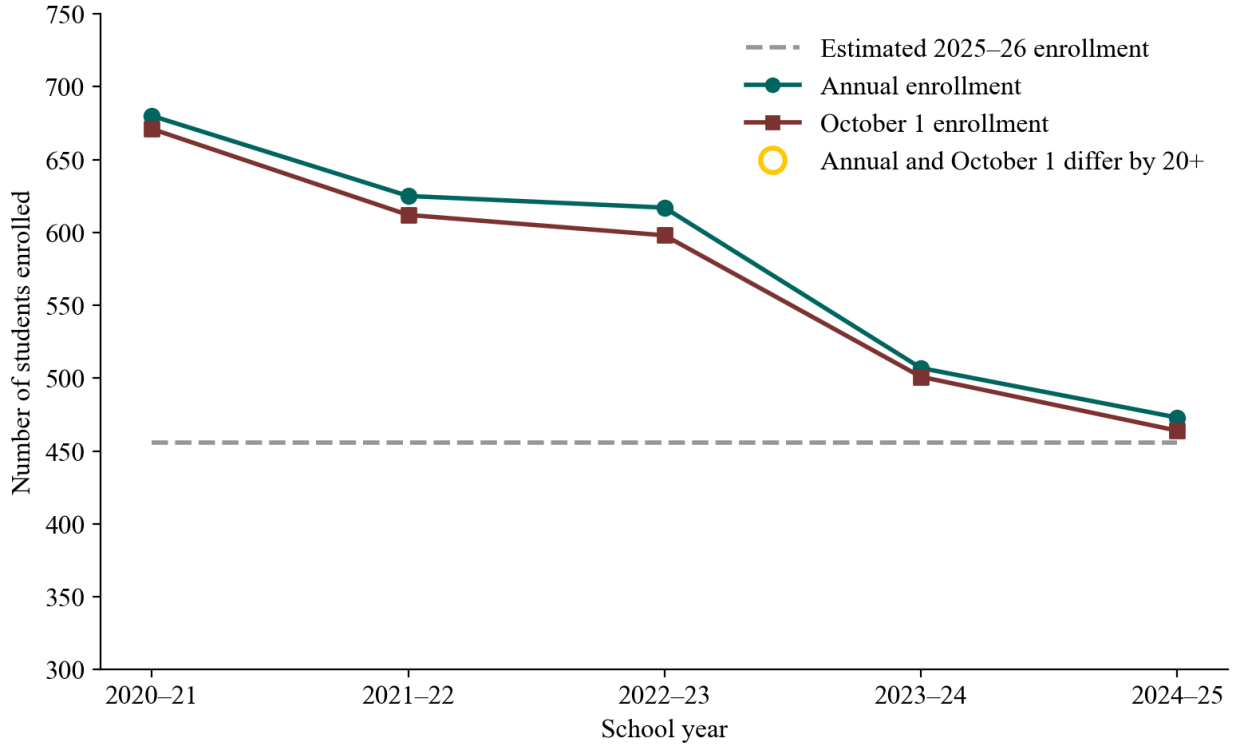
Across the Mt. Tabor Middle School conversations, we heard from seven school-based interview and focus group participants who brought a range of perspectives on the school's SEGC-related experience. In addition, 11 staff and 27 family members and caregivers responded to surveys. Collectively, participants spoke about changes in enrollment, staffing, student support, specialized services, school culture, learning conditions, and the broader identity of the school community.

The participant group included both long-standing members of the Mt. Tabor community and participants who became connected to the school as SEGC planning or implementation was underway. Three of the seven participants were at Mt. Tabor before, during, and after SEGC-related changes, which allowed them to describe how the school shifted over time. Four participants were present during and after the SEGC-related changes, offering insight into how

the school experienced implementation and how those changes continued to shape current conditions.

Together, these perspectives provide both historical and current insight into Mt. Tabor's SEGC-related experience, including how participants understood changes in the school's enrollment, diversity, staffing, learning environment, student support capacity, and internal culture.

Figure 8.1. Mt. Tabor estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Overview

In this chapter, we share findings from survey respondents, administrative data, interviews and focus groups conducted with school based participants at Mt. Tabor to better understand how SEGC related changes were experienced within this school community. More specifically, the aim of this chapter is to illuminate how SEGC related decisions were experienced at Mt. Tabor not only as boundary, feeder pattern, or program placement changes, but as changes that affected the daily work of educators, the supports available to students, the school's racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity, and the identity and functioning of the school community.

Findings

A Strong School Community Experiencing Cumulative Loss

Across the Mt. Tabor administrative data, survey response, and conversations, participants described SEGC-related changes as a multi-year process that reshaped the school's size, composition, staffing, and program capacity. Participants repeatedly emphasized that Mt. Tabor entered SEGC as a large, over-capacity middle school with multiple feeders and language pathways. After SEGC-related changes, the school lost a feeder, portions of another boundary area, and its Spanish DLI program. Participants connected these changes to a substantial enrollment decline, repeated staffing reductions, larger classes, fewer electives, reduced supports, and diminished racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity.

Administrative records support the broad arc participants described, while clarifying some of the details. Mt. Tabor's enrollment declined from 680 students in 2020–21 to 473 students in 2024–25, with the steepest single-year drop occurring between 2022–23 and 2023–24, the year the Spanish DLI program left. Staffing also declined substantially, from about 58 FTE in 2020–21 to about 33 FTE in 2025–26. The largest headcount drop corresponded with the departure of the Spanish DLI program.

Participants did not describe this as a single moment of disruption, but as a slow erosion. Each year brought new reductions, sometimes several staff positions at a time, until Mt. Tabor fell below the enrollment level participants understood as necessary to sustain a robust comprehensive middle school. Several participants described this as especially frustrating because SEGC had been presented as part of a broader regional balancing strategy, but the anticipated future changes that might have replenished Mt. Tabor's enrollment did not occur.

Nevertheless, nearly every participant emphasized Mt. Tabor's strong internal culture. Participants described the school as caring, collaborative, well-organized, and deeply committed to students. They praised the strength of staff relationships, the consistency of schoolwide systems, and the sense that students experience Mt. Tabor as a safe and supportive place to learn. As one participant explained:

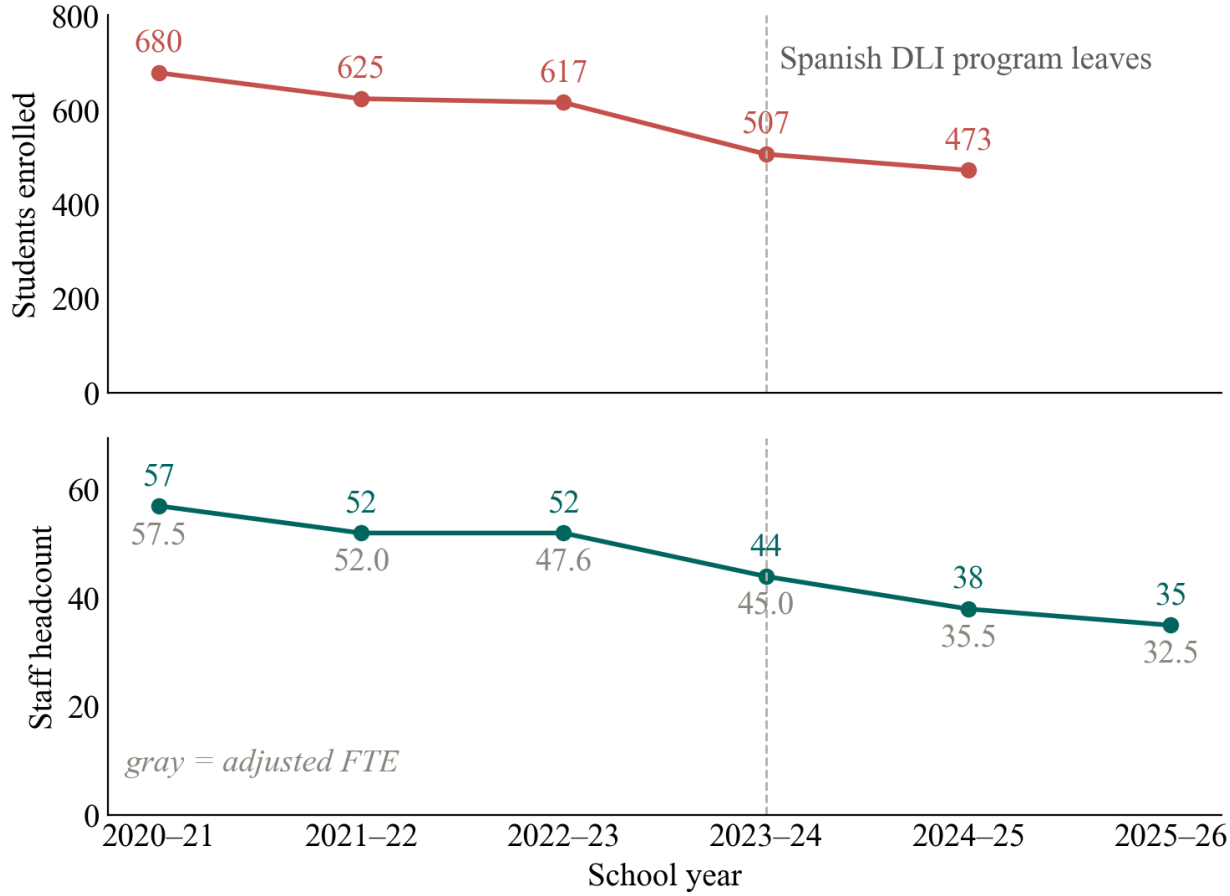
> *"This is such a good school because we have great, seasoned, caring teachers who collaborate…I wish more kids could come to the school, because they get a good education."*

Another participant described the school's climate this way:

> *"We have a really inclusive learning environment at the school…We work really hard to promote a safe, positive school climate where kids can feel like they belong."*

Participants essentially held two truths at once: Mt. Tabor remained a strong school community, and it also experienced SEGC as a process that reduced its enrollment, staffing, diversity, and program breadth without the compensating support or future balancing changes participants expected.

Figure 8.2. Mt. Tabor enrollment and staff counts, 2020–21 to 2025–26



Note: Student enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. The staff sample includes instructional employees, such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and specialists in addition to front office staff. Adjusted FTE distributes FTE evenly across positions in cases where employees held multiple positions and were assigned 1.0 FTE for every position.

Morale, Retention, and Trust

Participants drew a sharp distinction between trust inside the school and trust in district-level decision-making. Within Mt. Tabor, participants described strong collaboration, supportive school-based leadership, and shared systems that helped staff maintain a sense of cohesion despite repeated cuts. Participants described colleagues as working well together, supporting one another, and sustaining a strong learning environment for students.

The staff survey supports this picture of a strong internal climate. Among 11 Mt. Tabor staff respondents, 10 agreed that staff collaboration supported teaching and learning, 10 agreed (90%)

that the school climate was supportive for students and staff, and all 11 agreed that students experienced high-quality learning environments. However, the same respondents were more divided on morale as only 4 of 11 agreed (36%) that morale at the school was high.

Participants connected morale concerns to repeated staffing cuts. They described years of losing multiple staff positions, including educators they viewed as newer, more diverse, more energized, or more connected to equity and inclusion work. Participants experienced these losses as both practical and relational because fewer adults meant fewer support for students, but also fewer colleagues carrying the school's culture and equity commitments.

Personnel records help clarify this pattern. Staff departures from Mt. Tabor did not spike dramatically over time. In fact, departures eased across the study period. The larger issue was that departing staff were not replaced. New staff hires fell sharply after SEGC-related enrollment losses, which meant the school's workforce shrank. Staff FTE declined substantially even though most departures were internal moves within PPS rather than exits from the district. In other words, participants' sense of loss was not primarily about a mass exodus from the profession. It was about the school enrolling fewer students and employing fewer staff over time.

The personnel data also complicate participants' perceptions about staff diversity. The share of staff who were white remained relatively stable, while the absolute number of staff of color declined as the total workforce shrank. Participants who described losing colleagues of color were therefore naming a real loss in people, even though the proportional composition of the staff did not shift in the same way. The administrative data do not capture the age, energy, disability inclusion practices, or equity orientation that participants also associated with the colleagues they lost.

While participants described strong trust in school-based relationships, they expressed very low trust in district-level follow-through. Participants described unrealized promises, limited access to transitional supports, late changes to SEGC recommendations, and engagement processes that felt unlikely to alter final decisions. Several participants recalled that SEGC was supposed to be part of a broader multi-phase regional process, with future boundary work expected to bring new enrollment to Mt. Tabor. From their perspective, that follow-up work did not materialize, leaving the school smaller and less resourced.

One participant summarized this sense of broken promise:

"There were some promises from the district that weren't actualized… we've dropped… to 430, so we've lost about 300 students… and there's no support to make sure that we're still able to offer that robust programming."

Another participant described the engagement process as feeling performative:

"They spent so much money doing all of these research and focal groups [for SEGC]…but, you know, they basically did what they wanted to do in the first place. So what was the point?"

Survey responses reflect this lack of system-level trust. None of the 10 respondents who answered the question agreed that PPS followed through on its commitments, only 1 of 11 agreed (9%) that the district could be trusted to handle rightsizing fairly and equitably, and none of 11 agreed that SEGC changes were distributed equitably. Yet 10 of 11 respondents (90%) still planned to return to Mt. Tabor the following year. This pattern reinforces the larger finding that participants remained committed to the school, but expressed deep distrust in the district systems shaping the school's future.

Capacity to Support Students and Families

Participants described Mt. Tabor staff as a committed to supporting students and families, but not consistently equipped with the information, resources, or staffing needed to manage SEGC-related changes well. Some district support was available, including communication templates, offers for central staff to attend meetings, and limited transition funding. However, participants emphasized that much of the practical work of helping families understand and navigate the changes fell to individual schools. One participant explained:

"More of it… was on individual schools to be responsive to their own communities and figure out, how do we do that?… It really was like on individual schools to figure out, how do we support our students and their parents in the best ways possible?"

Participants described local efforts to support families, including transition events where staff from receiving schools came to meet students and families, explain new school settings, and answer questions. However, participants also said that many classroom teachers, counselors, and staff working with students receiving specialized services did not receive enough practical guidance about how to respond to family questions or support students through the changes. One participant stated:

"No one talked to us at the building level or asked us our opinions about these [SEGC] changes… There wasn't anything given to us like that."

The staff survey aligns with this sense of limited support. Among Mt. Tabor respondents, only 2 of 11 agreed (18%) that they had the resources needed to do their jobs effectively. During the SEGC process specifically, none of 10 respondents agreed that they had the information and resources needed to respond to student and family questions, none agreed that they had support to address challenges, and only 1 of 10 agreed (10%) that they had the support needed overall.

Participants also described feeling unable to offer families meaningful solutions when students or siblings were affected by boundary and feeder changes. Staff said they could explain the rules, but they could not change them. In some cases, the only practical advice participants felt able to give families was to pursue hardship transfers or move into the desired boundary. One person stated:

"When families would talk to me about… their older sibling went here… all I could say was, there's nothing I can do to help you unless you move into our neighborhood boundary."

These accounts suggest that Mt. Tabor staff carried significant relational and communication labor during SEGC, but did so without a coherent field-level implementation strategy that equipped them to answer questions, support transitions, or resolve the concerns families brought to them.

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants described SEGC conditions as emotionally taxing, even though many felt supported within the school. The emotional strain was especially evident in descriptions of reduced staffing, larger classes, increased caseloads, and the feeling of not being able to meet students' needs as fully as educators believed they should.

One participant described the impact of losing specialized staffing and absorbing additional student needs midyear:

"It's hard because it's just me… I have students that I know their needs are not getting met, even though I try really, really hard every single day…"

Other participants described classes with more than 40 students, multiple course preparations, and the loss of intervention positions and specialist supports. These conditions affected both instructional quality and professional efficacy. One participant explained:

"It's more difficult to feel that you're doing your job well. We've spread so thin, so many students, so many preps… I feel like just when you start to get momentum in one class… the other two get left behind."

Staff survey responses converge with these accounts. Only 2 of 11 respondents (18%) agreed that their current workload was manageable, and only 2 of 10 agreed (20%) that workload was manageable during the SEGC process. These findings suggest that participants' concerns about workload were not isolated comments, but reflected a broader pattern among survey respondents.

At the same time, participants again distinguished between system-level strain and school-level support. Several participants said they felt safe raising concerns within the school and credited school-based leaders and colleagues with communicating updates, solving problems, and buffering staff where possible. One participant stated that:

"In my building, with my community, my principal, my staff, my students, it's… wonderful, but the systemic issues make morale lower."

One participant added an important disability justice perspective. This participant described experiencing the school and district as inaccessible and marginalizing for disabled staff and students, even while others described Mt. Tabor as an inclusive school. They described serious facility and access barriers, including inaccessible restrooms, doors too narrow for a wheelchair, and the need to map which entrances and exits a wheelchair-using student could safely use. The participant also described broader district practices that made disabled staff feel unsupported:

"We're left out, we're ignored, we're forgotten… My students are not considered. They're not included…"

This testimony complicates the broader story of Mt. Tabor's strong culture. It shows that an organization can be experienced as caring and inclusive by many participants while still failing to provide adequate structural access and belonging for students and staff with disabilities. This distinction matters because internal goodwill does not substitute for accessible facilities, adequate accommodations, or inclusive systems.

Survey findings reinforce the difference between current school-level support and SEGC-period support. Seven of 11 respondents (63%) agreed that they currently felt emotionally supported at work, while only 2 of 10 agreed (20%) that they felt emotionally supported during the SEGC process. This suggests that participants may now experience Mt. Tabor as a supportive school, but did not feel adequately supported during the period of SEGC-related change.

Experiences of Historically Underserved Students and Families

Participants consistently described SEGC as reducing Mt. Tabor's racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity, especially through the removal of the Spanish Immersion program and changes to feeder patterns. Participants said the departure of the Spanish DLI program reduced the number of Latino/a/x and Spanish-speaking students, shifted the school's culture, and left remaining neighborhood Latino/a/x students with fewer peers who shared similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

One participant explained:

"It's not as diverse as it was before, meaning that we no longer have a large population of students who were in the Spanish Immersion program… The neighborhood Hispanic students don't have as many students to identify with."

Administrative records support the specific loss participants described while complicating the broader claim that the school became "whiter." Latino/a/x enrollment declined from about 11% to 12% before the program moved to 8.5% in 2023–24, dropping from 71 to 43 students that year. Multilingual learner enrollment also declined, from 4.4% to 2.0%, as the Spanish DLI program moved to Kellogg. These figures support participants' accounts that Mt. Tabor lost a particular linguistic and cultural community.

However, the overall racial composition did not become whiter by percentage. The white student share declined from 63% in 2020–21 to 58% in 2024–25, while the multiracial share increased from 19% to 26%. The reconciliation is that both counts and proportions matter. The number of students of color declined as the school became smaller, and the Latino/a/x and Spanish-speaking community declined in both count and share. Participants were therefore describing real departures and the loss of a specific community, even though the school's overall percentage of white students did not increase.

Participants also described the loss of support and spaces that had centered Spanish-speaking families and Latino/a/x students, including a monthly Spanish-speaking family coffee, a Hispanic student affinity group, and more regular translation and interpretation practices. Someone shared:

"We used to have a monthly… coffee for Spanish speaking parents. We lost that… We used to have a student affinity group for Hispanic students. So we lost that…"

Participants also described Spanish DLi students as experiencing repeated instability. They noted that the program had been relocated before and was moved again under SEGC, requiring some students to change schools late in their middle school experience. One participant described students who had completed seventh grade successfully at Mt. Tabor but were required to move for eighth grade because of SEGC:

"For us to uproot those kids… that's not providing stability… that is once again being like your program doesn't matter."

At the same time, another participant suggested that consolidating the Spanish DLI program at another school could provide students with a larger peer community and stronger wraparound support. This points to an important tension in the Mount Tabor accounts. Mount Tabor lost an important source of diversity and program identity, while the receiving school may have gained a

more coherent Spanish DLI pathway. Since these are staff perspectives rather than direct accounts from students and families after the move, claims about benefits at the receiving school should be understood as perceptions rather than established outcomes.

However, enrollment records show the program shift clearly. Spanish DLI enrollment at Mt. Tabor declined from 75 students in 2020–21 to zero after the program moved to Kellogg. Of the Spanish DLI students enrolled at Mt. Tabor in 2022–23, 36 transferred to Kellogg the following year and remained enrolled in Spanish DLI. The students followed the program, but the staff did not move as a full team. Meanwhile, Mt. Tabor's Japanese DLI program remained at the school and grew to represent a much larger share of total enrollment after the Spanish DLI program departed.

Overall, participants viewed the loss of Spanish DLI as more than a program change. They understood it as a loss of cultural community, family engagement structures, peer representation, and equity-centered practice within Mt. Tabor.

Quality of Learning Environments After SEGC

Participants described Mt. Tabor's learning environment as both strong and constrained. On the positive side, they highlighted consistent schoolwide systems, collaborative teacher planning, strong student support routines, standards-based grading, and a culture where students experience classrooms as focused on learning. Participants described Mt. Tabor as a school where adults work closely together, expectations are clear, and students are supported academically and socially. One participant explained:

> *"They definitely see that the teachers work closely together, even on the curriculum… it's rigorous and grade level appropriate… there's a real culture of learning in the classroom."*

Another participant described the school's inclusive climate:

> *"We have a really inclusive learning environment…We work really hard to differentiate instruction so [students] can access it, and we work really hard to promote a safe, positive school climate where kids can feel like they belong."*

At the same time, participants were explicit that SEGC-related enrollment loss and staffing reductions weakened the school's ability to sustain the full range of learning opportunities and support associated with a comprehensive middle school. They described core classes with more than 40 students, multiple course preparations for teachers, fewer elective sections, reduced intervention supports, and fewer adults available for restorative practices, student support, and enrichment. Participants also described the library becoming less accessible because the librarian had to teach content classes. A participant shared that:

"Kids can't go to the library throughout the school day because our librarian now has to teach content classes… our book circulation this year is abysmal."

Another participant summarized the central issue:

"Class size… is the foundation of all of our success. It's the foundation of all of our problems."

Survey findings show the same dual reality. All 11 respondents agreed that students experience high-quality learning environments, and 9 of 11 agreed that the learning environment is equitable. Yet only 1 of 11 agreed that class sizes are distributed in a manageable way. Only 3 of 11 agreed that students have equitable access to high-quality programs and opportunities, and only 2 of 11 agreed they have the resources needed to do their jobs effectively. This suggests that participants believed Mt. Tabor still provided strong teaching and climate, but did so under resource conditions that made equitable access harder to sustain.

Participants also raised concerns about disabled students in specialized programs who joined mainstream electives. With 40 or more students in some classes, participants worried that general education teachers did not always have the time, training, or capacity to implement accommodations and modifications well. A person indicated that:

"You put [students receiving specialized services] into 40 plus students, the teachers don't have the time or the energy to make the modifications or accommodations… so then they're being failed."

A recurring theme was the gap between district rhetoric about comprehensive middle schools and Mt. Tabor's post-SEGC reality. Participants recalled that district leaders had described 500 students as the threshold needed to support robust middle school programming. Participants believed Mt. Tabor had previously functioned as that kind of comprehensive middle school, with strong electives, supports, and staff capacity. After SEGC, however, the school remained below that threshold without sufficient compensatory FTE. A participant indicated that:

"They [the district] talked about…middle schools need to have at least this number of students enrolled in order to be able to offer the robust programming that we need, and that threshold was 500 students. Clearly, we haven't been at 500 students in several years…and there's no support to make sure that we're still able to offer that robust programming."

Another participant stated the concern more directly:

"What we had with more students, the comprehensive Middle School, is what the goal was for all middle schools, and in creating it for other middle schools, they took it away from us."

This became one of the core interpretive frames participants used to understand SEGC: in trying to create more comprehensive middle school experiences elsewhere, they believed the district made Mt. Tabor less comprehensive.

How SEGC Played Out at Mt. Tabor

Participants described SEGC's impact at Mt. Tabor as a sequence of interconnected changes. Before SEGC, Mt. Tabor served a neighborhood program, a Japanese dual-language immersion pathway, and a Spanish DLI pathway. The school's combined enrollment placed it above capacity and allowed it to sustain a broad range of programming and supports.

SEGC changed this structure by removing a major feeder, relocating the Spanish DLI middle grades program to Kellogg, shifting portions of another boundary area, and leaving the Japanese DLI at Mt. Tabor. Over time, these decisions contributed to a steep enrollment decline, which then triggered staffing reductions and program contraction. Participants described losing specialized roles, intervention supports, restorative justice capacity, climate positions, and elective sections.

Participants also emphasized unrealized balancing moves. They believed SEGC was not supposed to stand alone, but was expected to be followed by future boundary work in other parts of the district that would bring new enrollment to Mt. Tabor. When that did not happen, participants experienced the school as being left under-enrolled and under-supported. As noted by a participant:

"[SEGC] was not supposed to live on its own…we figured within that three-year time span… another movement in North and Northeast… would happen, and we would see an influx… That did not materialize at all."

Another participant summarized the outcome:

"The biggest change is a lot fewer students, which has resulted in less staff, less diversity… Our school is under-enrolled and has suffered great losses while we're waiting for the changes to come."

Administrative data confirm that 2023–24 was an especially intense year of change. The Spanish DLI program departed, enrollment dropped sharply, Latino/a/x and multilingual learner shares fell, the multiracial share rose, exclusionary discipline incidents per student increased, and total FTE continued its decline. These patterns should not be interpreted as proof that SEGC caused

each outcome. Other factors, including districtwide enrollment decline, pandemic recovery, and budget constraints, were also operating. However, the clustering of these changes helps explain why participants experienced SEGC as a major turning point in the school's trajectory.

Several conditions shaped how Mt. Tabor absorbed these changes. Leadership continuity and communication helped buffer some of the disruption. Staff collaboration and strong internal norms also helped the school adapt to new schedules, enrollment realities, and student needs. Meanwhile, participants described district politics, inequitable community voice, and delayed follow-up planning as intensifying the harm. They perceived that certain "pockets of privilege" had greater influence during SEGC, while less advantaged communities struggled to have concerns heard. Participants also described the long duration of the process and virtual engagement during the pandemic as barriers to authentic participation.

Facility and accessibility constraints also shaped the experience, especially for students and staff with disabilities. Participants described an older building where physical access issues made inclusion more difficult and where district commitments to inclusion were not always matched by accessible infrastructure.

Overall Interpretation

The Mt. Tabor case illustrates how a school can remain strong internally while being weakened structurally. Participants described Mt. Tabor as a caring, collaborative, and academically strong middle school. Survey responses support this view, particularly around school climate, collaboration, and high-quality learning environments. Yet the same participants and survey respondents also described low system-level trust, unmanageable workload, insufficient resources, large class sizes, and deep frustration with SEGC's implementation and follow-through.

The strongest throughline across the Mt. Tabor data is cumulative loss. Participants experienced SEGC as reducing the school's enrollment, staffing, diversity, language programming, family engagement structures, and comprehensive middle school capacity. Administrative records support much of this account, especially the enrollment decline, Spanish DLI departure, staffing contraction, and loss of Latino/a/x and multilingual learner enrollment. At the same time, the records complicate some perceptions, including the idea that the school became proportionally whiter overall. This distinction matters: participants were describing real losses in specific students, communities, programs, and relationships, even when some schoolwide percentages moved in more complex directions.

In short, SEGC at Mt. Tabor was experienced less as a single boundary adjustment and more as a redistribution of students, programs, and resources that left the school smaller and less comprehensive than it had been. Mt. Tabor's internal culture helped the school continue serving

students well, but it also masked how much the school was absorbing. For PPS, the key lesson is that strong school culture cannot substitute for adequate enrollment, staffing, accessibility, program support, and district follow-through. Future districtwide changes should not assume that a high-functioning school can absorb repeated losses without weakening the very conditions that made it strong.

Kelly Elementary School

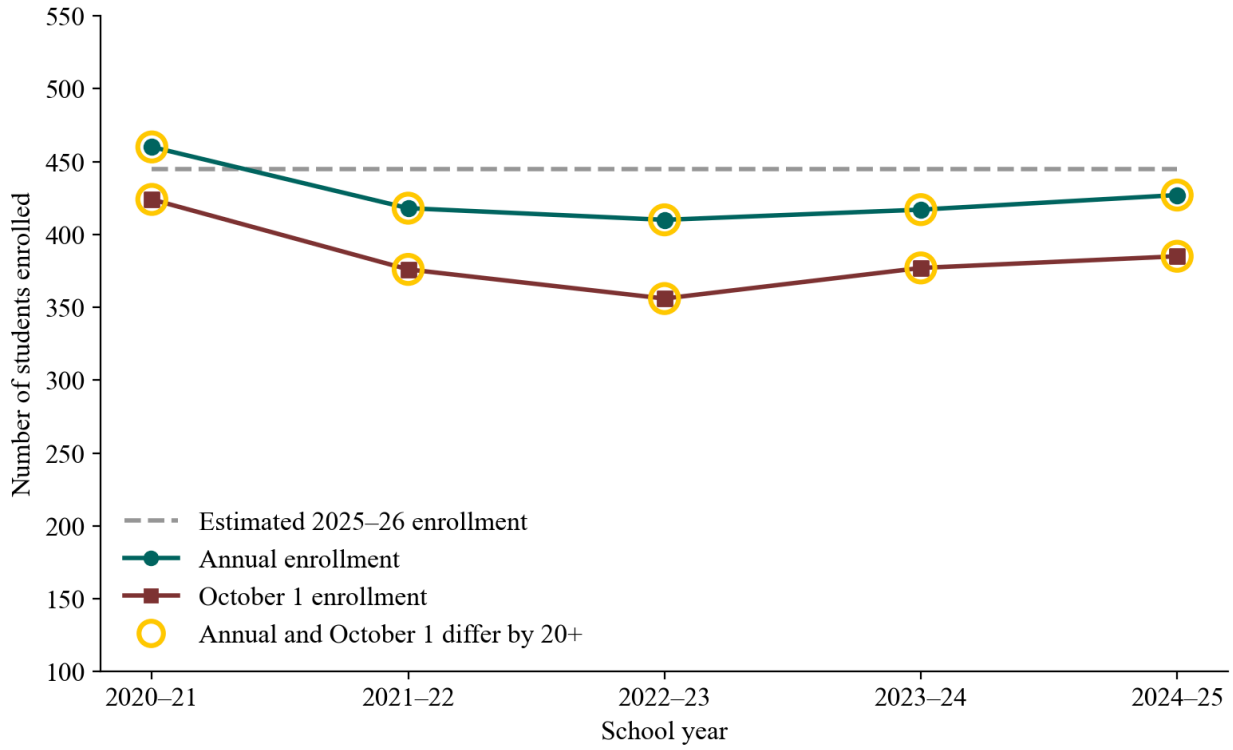
Anticipated SEGC Changes

According to district SEGC documents, Kelly K–5 was included in the SEGC review scope but had no proposed structural changes. Kelly remained a K–5 school with both a neighborhood program and a Russian DLI program, assigned to Lane Middle School and Franklin High School.

District documents noted that Kelly's neighborhood program had one of the highest concentrations of racially and culturally diverse students in the region. They also noted that Kelly's Russian DLI program served mostly students who lived outside PPS and had been shrinking from two strands to one strand per grade level. One option considered changing the Russian DLI middle school feeder pattern from Lane to Harrison Park.

In short, Kelly was expected to remain structurally unchanged under SEGC, with its existing neighborhood and Russian DLI configuration intact and no boundary, feeder, program, or grade reconfiguration changes proposed. At the same time, Kelly remained connected to the broader SEGC ecosystem because its middle school pathway, Lane, was part of the regional balancing work.

Figure 9.1. Kelly estimated, annual, and October 1 enrollment, 2020–21 through 2024–25.



Note: Enrollment is measured by enrollment in the building, not by program. Annual enrollment is based on assignment of students to the school they attended for the most days during the school year. October 1 enrollment counts students enrolled in the school on that single date.

Participants

Across the Kelly conversations, we heard from five school-based participants who brought a range of perspectives on the school's SEGC-era experience during interviews and focus groups along with 16 staff and 15 family members or caregivers who responded to surveys. Collectively, participants spoke about changes in enrollment, staffing, student support, family communication, school culture, language programming, and the broader uncertainty facing the school community.

The participant group included both long-standing members of the Kelly community and participants who became connected to the school during or after SEGC implementation. Three of the five participants were at Kelly before, during, and after SEGC-related changes, which allowed them to describe how the school shifted over time. One participant joined during the SEGC implementation period and remained afterward, offering insight into how the changes were experienced while they were unfolding. One participant joined after SEGC-related changes had already been implemented, providing a current perspective on how enrollment shifts, staffing pressures, program concerns, and broader district uncertainty continue to shape the school.

Together, these perspectives provide both historical and current insight into Kelly's SEGC-era experience and help illuminate how participants understood the school's changing conditions before, during, and after implementation.

Overview

This chapter examines how SEGC-related and SEGC-adjacent changes were experienced at Kelly Elementary School. Participants described Kelly as a culturally and linguistically diverse school with strong relationships, a calm and structured learning environment, and an important role serving immigrant, refugee, multilingual, and low-income families. At the same time, they described the SEGC era as part of a broader period of uncertainty shaped by staffing reductions, enrollment and boundary shifts, proposed grade-level blends, the contraction of the Russian DLI program, transportation barriers, and concerns about future consolidation and/or school closures.

Findings

A School Community Navigating Uncertainty

Across the Kelly conversations, participants described the school as having a strong internal core and a "bright future," even as it operated within a district context marked by financial uncertainty, staffing reductions, and concerns about future consolidation. Most participants did not describe SEGC as a process they understood in detail. Instead, they experienced SEGC-related and SEGC-adjacent changes through concrete effects and risks, including proposed grade-level blends, enrollment and boundary shifts, program contraction, transportation

barriers, and ongoing questions about whether Kelly would be protected or destabilized in future district decisions.

Administrative records support participants' sense that Kelly remained relatively stable internally during SEGC implementation while the broader district context was shifting. Enrollment was essentially consistent from 2021–22 through 2024–25, ranging from 410 to 427 students. Kelly also experienced within-year enrollment growth after the October 1 count in each school year from 2022–23 to 2024–25. Since the study does not include records of students who transferred into PPS after October 1, these midyear increases are likely underestimated. Participants' report of a substantial midyear increase is therefore supported within the available data.

Kelly's student composition also shifted somewhat during this period. White enrollment declined from approximately 55% to 45%, Latino/a/x enrollment increased from approximately 17% to 23%, and multilingual learner enrollment remained high, ranging from roughly 43% to 51%. According to participants, these changes appear to reflect broader neighborhood and enrollment patterns rather than a direct SEGC effect, but they provide important context for understanding the school community participants described.

Participants consistently portrayed Kelly as calm, relationally strong, and deeply connected to students and families. They described staff as "banding together" through repeated stressors and credited long-standing relationships, school-based leadership, and student support systems with helping the school remain stable for families. The overall picture is of a school whose internal culture helped buffer some of the most visible impacts of district-level uncertainty, even while participants remained concerned about future cuts, program changes, and consolidation.

Morale and Retention

Participants described staff morale at Kelly as resilient but pressured. On one hand, they described deep attachment to the school and strong relationships among staff. One participant explained:

"I work with a lot of the same people that were here when I was hired, and it feels like family… It's kind of a tough school… and that consistency for the families that we work with… I feel really proud of."

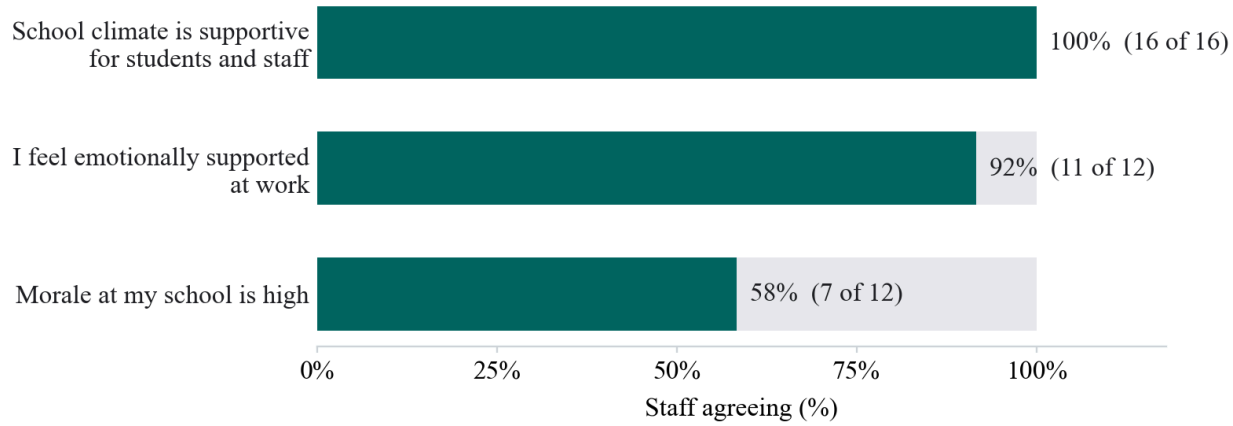
Another participant described staff relationships as a kind of "trauma bonding,"[20] emphasizing that repeated stressors had pushed staff to rely on one another:

"I feel like we're very bonded. It's almost like trauma bonding, like we have to band together, because every year… people are getting unassigned. There's staff reductions, there's fewer budgets…"

[20] Interestingly, a participant from another school used the same framing of trauma bonding.

The staff survey reflects this same mix of attachment and strain. All 16 responding (100%) staff agreed that the school climate was supportive, and most respondents reported feeling emotionally supported at work. At the same time, agreement that morale was high was more moderate, with 7 of 12 respondents (58%) agreeing. This suggests that staff viewed Kelly as a supportive place to work, while also feeling the cumulative pressure of budget uncertainty, staffing reductions, and program vulnerability.

Figure 9.2. Kelly staff survey respondents' perceptions about support and morale



Participants were especially concerned about how future district decisions could affect staffing and retention. The Russian immersion program was described as central to Kelly's enrollment, staffing, identity, and family community. One participant explained the risk this way:

> *"Something that could happen to us would be that they removed the Russian immersion program, and there goes 30% of our student population, and there goes 30% of our teachers, and it happens overnight."*

Staff also described the loss of enrichment and support roles over time, including music and after-school programming, and connected those reductions to fewer opportunities for students and more strain on adults. However, available personnel data do not suggest a major SEGC-driven wave of staff departures at Kelly. Instead, the data suggest gradual pressure, with one more difficult year followed by recovery. Staff retention dipped in 2022–23 but then improved for two consecutive years, reaching 89% in the most recent observable year. This aligns with participants' descriptions of staff trying to "hold the line" rather than leave the school.

Capacity and Communication During SEGC-Related Changes

Participants generally felt capable of supporting students and families in day-to-day school life. They described relying on strong relationships, trauma-informed routines, counseling and social work supports, and deep knowledge of families' needs. However, when asked specifically about

SEGC-related changes, participants often expressed uncertainty about what had happened, what was being proposed, or how decisions affected Kelly.

Survey responses reflect the same distinction between general confidence in day-to-day practice and uncertainty about SEGC-specific communication. Most staff respondents agreed that they were generally given clear guidance when questions came up about changes affecting their work and that they could carry out their responsibilities effectively. SEGC-specific communication was much weaker. Among those who answered the SEGC-specific items, no respondents agreed that communication made the timeline and expectations clear, and none agreed that they had a reliable point of contact who could provide accurate answers when questions came up.

Participants therefore described a gap between local capacity and district communication. They felt equipped to care for students and families because of the school's internal systems and relationships, not because SEGC-related decisions were communicated clearly or supported through a coherent implementation plan. For Kelly, this meant that school staff could maintain day-to-day stability while still feeling uncertain about the larger district decisions shaping the school's future.

Emotional Well-Being and Professional Support

Participants located SEGC within a broader period of exhaustion that included COVID-19 recovery, budget crises, contract disputes, layoffs, furlough discussions, and anxiety about future consolidation. One participant described the district context as "really grim times financially." Another described the emotional dissonance of being asked to focus on compliance metrics immediately after major staffing reductions. One person noted that:

"The district just got done un-assigning nearly 250 people… then they called all the principals together… They want to talk to them about how many times they need to go into every classroom and check the box that the teachers have their learning targets up… It's detached, it's dehumanizing, it's transactional.

Participants also connected emotional well-being to class size and student need. Some described recent years with smaller class sizes as far more sustainable and emotionally healthy. One participant explained:

"This year has been, like, amazing… I had 18 kids [previously] and this year I had 19… Those are very small classes, and that has highly affected my emotional well-being."

At the same time, survey responses show that workload remained a serious concern. Only 3 of 12 staff respondents agreed that their current workload was manageable. Family survey comments also reflected concern about class size, with one family writing that "30 kids is too many" and another identifying "large class size and difficult behavior issues" as negative factors affecting learning.

Taken together, these findings suggest that staff well-being at Kelly was shaped less by any single SEGC decision and more by the cumulative uncertainty surrounding the school. SEGC-related proposals, such as grade-level blends, became one additional source of stress layered onto budget cuts, program reductions, workload pressures, and the ongoing demands of post-pandemic recovery.

Experiences of Historically Underserved Students and Families

Participants repeatedly emphasized Kelly's importance for immigrant, refugee, multilingual, and low-income families. They described the school as a form of critical infrastructure for families who rely on school-based relationships, language access, counseling, social work, food and housing support, and trusted adults.

One participant explained:

"We have a lot of students that see our school as critical infrastructure to their lives… access our local social worker or Morrison counseling services for licensed therapy sessions or access to English language skills."

Another participant described the school's linguistic and cultural diversity:

"There's 29 home languages spoken in our school… We are among the most diverse elementary schools in the whole city… when kids and families come here, they see themselves, and they're loved and cared for…"

Family survey responses, while based on a small sample, align with this positive view of Kelly. Nearly all responding families reported that their student felt safe at school and was learning a lot. Most also reported that their child felt a sense of belonging, that their child's culture or language was valued, and that they felt welcome communicating with the school. Open-ended family responses emphasized caring teachers and administration, with one family simply naming "his teachers" as what helped their child learn.

Participants were especially concerned about how transportation, program contraction, and boundary policies affected families already navigating vulnerability. One participant described the frustration of families living in a nearby shelter being denied transportation because they were just inside the one-mile radius. They said*:*

"We think we have like a path shelter home within a mile of our school… I've had to tell many families that we don't provide transportation… It's pretty much an automatic no from the Transportation Department."

Participants also connected the contraction of the Russian immersion program to newly arriving Ukrainian refugee families. One participant explained that the program had previously had two strands per grade, but had been reduced to one, even as demand increased:

"We used to have two strands [in Russian immersion]… it has been cut to one… there has been a huge surge of the Ukrainian refugees that come in, and they're not able to get enrolled, because we have a limited space as well…"

Administrative records show that Russian DLI enrollment has remained stable at approximately 150 students each year since 2021–22, and available staffing records show continuity among Russian DLI educators. However, participants and family survey comments indicate that families continued to value the program and, in some cases, wanted it expanded. One Russian-speaking family described Russian-language instruction as important because Russian is their native language. Another asked the district to open an additional Russian dual-language immersion class.

These accounts suggest that SEGC-era decisions and future consolidation concerns carry heightened risk for Kelly because many families rely on the school not only for academics, but also for language, culture, services, safety, and belonging.

Quality of Learning Environments

Participants described Kelly's learning environment as calm, structured, and supportive, especially given the level of student need. They emphasized consistent routines, trauma-informed practices, respectful relationships, and classrooms where students are generally engaged in learning. One participant described the school this way:

"When you walk the halls here it is quiet. Kids are in their classrooms… When you go into classrooms, kids are learning. I think that for the most part, we have calm, engaged learning environments…"

Another participant connected this calm to structure and mutual respect:

"I think it's pretty structured… which students get used to and at the same time, it's friendly to both students and teachers… respecting each other."

A third participant emphasized the importance of trauma-informed routines:

"Our routines are very trauma-informed… kids know that school is going to be the same in a good way every time that they come, and that the adults are here to keep them safe."

Staff survey findings strongly support participants' descriptions of a positive learning environment. All responding staff agreed that staff collaboration supported teaching and learning and that the school climate was supportive. Nearly all agreed that students experienced high-quality learning environments and that the learning environment was equitable. These ratings were notably stronger than the districtwide pattern among survey respondents.

At the same time, participants stressed that the quality of Kelly's learning environment is not automatic. It depends on class size, staffing, support services, and the school's ability to avoid disruptive structures such as grade-level blends that staff believed would be harmful for particular cohorts. Survey responses also point to this vulnerability that staff responses about whether class sizes were manageable were split, with the average response near neutral.

Participants therefore described Kelly's learning environment as strong but precarious. The school's calm and supportive climate is produced through ongoing adult effort, predictable routines, and stable relationships. If staffing is reduced, class sizes increase, or grade-level blends are imposed without regard to student need, participants believed the conditions that make Kelly work could weaken quickly.

How SEGC-Related Changes Played Out at Kelly

Participants did not describe Kelly as experiencing a major program relocation or grade reconfiguration directly through SEGC. Instead, again, as mentioned prior, they described SEGC-related and SEGC-adjacent dynamics as part of a broader pattern of district decision-making that affected the school's sense of security. These included boundary and enrollment shifts, proposed 4/5 grade blends, the contraction of the Russian DLI program, transportation barriers, and concerns that Kelly could become part of a future consolidation process.

The proposed 4/5 blend was one of the clearest examples participants raised. Participants described the cohort as having significant needs, including refugee students and students with serious trauma histories, and said school staff worked hard to prevent a blend they believed would undermine students' ability to have their needs met. One participant explained:

"There was a lot of concern about blending the fourth and fifth grade… that particular cohort had four or five students that had to be separated… several different administrators have had different values, [but] every single one identified this as a serious area of concern and has done as much as they could to prevent that from impacting our school or our students' ability to have their needs met."

Participants also linked SEGC to future consolidation conversations. One participant described the school's strategy as trying to secure a "seat at the table" rather than waiting for decisions to be made elsewhere:

"It's either going to happen without us or it's going to happen with us. And if we don't have a seat at the table, things will happen to us."

Participants described both risk and possibility in this future-facing conversation. The feared scenario was that the Russian DLI program could be removed, leading to a sudden loss of students, staff, and community identity. The more hopeful scenario was that Kelly could become

a consolidation site, grow enrollment, reoccupy its annex space, and strengthen its role as a stable hub for students and families.

Several factors shaped how Kelly responded to these uncertainties. Participants described a local approach that involved shared problem-solving, staff input, and efforts to define school needs clearly. Staff cohesion and tenure also mattered; participants repeatedly described Kelly as a "family" whose long-standing relationships supported collective problem-solving. The school's facility and enrollment profile also shaped its position: participants viewed Kelly's capacity, annex space, and relatively low retrofit costs as making it both viable and exposed in future consolidation decisions.

Overall, Kelly's SEGC-era experience was less about one discrete change and more about ongoing uncertainty. Participants described a school trying to protect what works, serve a highly diverse and high-need community, and position itself proactively in district conversations that could reshape its future.

Overall Interpretation

The Kelly case shows how SEGC-related change can be experienced indirectly, through uncertainty, program vulnerability, staffing concerns, and future consolidation risk rather than through one major immediate reconfiguration. Participants did not portray Kelly as a school that had been dramatically disrupted by SEGC in the same way as some other schools. Instead, they described Kelly as a strong and stable school community operating in a fragile district environment.

The central tension is that Kelly appears to be working well for students and families, especially immigrant, refugee, multilingual, and low-income families, but participants worried that the conditions making the school work could be weakened by staffing cuts, transportation barriers, program contraction, grade-level blends, or future consolidation decisions. Administrative and survey data generally support this picture that enrollment remained stable, midyear enrollment growth was plausible, school climate and learning environment ratings were strong, and staff retention recovered after a difficult year. At the same time, workload, class size, and district communication remained areas of concern.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned from School-by School Analysis

The school-by-school findings show that SEGC was experienced less as a single enrollment balancing initiative and more as a series of locally lived changes that landed differently across school communities. SEGC as a district-level change strengthened some program pathways, reduced crowding in some places, and created more developmentally appropriate grade configurations. However, at the same time, it also produced enrollment loss, staffing reductions, disrupted relationships, transportation burdens, diminished trust, and new equity concerns in other places. For this reason, SEGC should not be evaluated only by whether it balanced enrollment, improved school utilization rates, or relocated programs according to the district's original plan. It should also be evaluated by how those changes were experienced inside schools by the students, families, educators, staff, and school leaders who carried the consequences over time.

The central lesson from this school-by-school analysis is that racial equity and social justice are not achieved through intent or rhetoric alone. They become real, or can be often undermined, in implementation. Racial equity and social justice are experienced in whether families understand what is happening and why, whether students remain connected to peers, trusted adults, and accessible programs, whether receiving schools have the staffing and support to absorb change, whether historically underserved and racially minoritized communities carry disproportionate burdens, and whether the district follows through on what it promised. Across the schools, participants often recognized the stated equity goals behind SEGC, but they also described gaps between those goals and the lived realities of implementation.

As such, these school-by-school findings offer several lessons for PPS.

One major lesson is that strong schools can still be weakened by repeated losses. Several schools in our analysis were described as caring, collaborative, relationship-rich communities with strong internal cultures. These strengths helped schools absorb SEGC-related changes, but they did not eliminate the consequences of enrollment decline, staffing reductions, program movement, or reduced support. In some cases, the very schools that were able to "make it work" did so because staff and leaders stretched themselves to compensate for gaps in district planning and resources. Given this, PPS should be careful not to mistake school-level resilience for evidence that SEGC change was adequately supported or accomplished. A school's culture, relationships, and trust are real assets, but they are not unlimited resources.

A second lesson is that program coherence can come with displacement costs. Some SEGC decisions appear to have strengthened important programmatic goals, especially around dual language immersion and middle school configuration. For example, consolidating language

pathways or creating fuller middle school structures may provide real benefits for students who remain in or enter those programs. However, those benefits must be weighed alongside the experiences of students and families who were moved, who lost neighborhood access, who faced longer transportation routes, or who entered receiving schools under strained conditions. Future program decisions should therefore ask not only whether a program is stronger after reconfiguration, but also who was displaced to make that strength possible and whether those students and families were equitably supported.

A third lesson is that receiving schools need more than enrollment. They need organizational capacity to equitably and properly support students. Several schools were asked to receive students, staff, programs, or new grade configurations while also managing existing student needs, budget pressures, staffing instability, and COVID-19 post-pandemic recovery. Receiving students is not simply a matter of assigning them to a new building. It requires transition staffing, transportation planning, multilingual communication, student support services, family engagement, special education and multilingual learner capacity, and time for school communities to build trust. Future districtwide enrollment changes should include a receiving-school readiness plan before implementation begins.

A fourth lesson is that families and staff judge equity by follow-through, not just words. Across school communities, participants often distinguished between being invited to speak about SEGC changes and believing their input mattered. Many described SEGC engagement processes where they shared concerns, attended meetings, testified, reviewed maps, or supported families, but did not see clear evidence that community input shaped final decisions or implementation supports. This distinction matters for trust. Future family and community engagement processes related to enrollment should make clear what is open for influence, what has already been decided, what criteria will guide decisions, and how community feedback changes the final plan. Without visible follow-through, engagement can be experienced as procedural rather than meaningful.

A fifth lesson is that PPS should evaluate the cumulative burden before adding new changes to any school community (we offered this lesson in our phase 1 report that included our cross-school findings). Many SEGC-related changes were not experienced one at a time. They overlapped with leadership transitions, construction, budget reductions, labor disruptions, COVID-19 recovery, staffing cuts, program changes, and broader demographic shifts. We learned that a boundary change that looks manageable on paper may feel very different in a school that has already lost staff, absorbed displaced students, changed grade configurations, or endured repeated uncertainty. Future enrollment planning should include a cumulative impact review that asks what a school has already absorbed, what supports remain in place, and what additional burden a proposed change would create.

Finally, PPS should build stronger mechanisms for post-implementation learning and course correction measures. School change does not end when boundaries are redrawn, programs are

relocated, or students move buildings. For students, families, and staff, the real work begins after implementation. Future districtwide enrollment changes should include public checkpoints, clear indicators of success and harm, family and staff feedback loops, and the authority to adjust course when unintended consequences emerge. These mechanisms should track not only enrollment and utilization, but also staffing stability, class size, student belonging, transportation burdens, program access, discipline, attendance, family trust, and whether receiving schools are able to provide the support students need.

In sum, the school-by-school findings suggest that future enrollment balancing, program relocation, consolidation, closure, or rightsizing efforts should be designed as multi-year equity implementation processes, not one-time technical and policy decisions. PPS should be able to show not only what will change, but why it is necessary, who will benefit, who may be burdened, what supports will be provided, how promises will be tracked, and how the district will respond if the lived experience of students, families, and staff does not match the intended goals. The most important lesson from SEGC is that districtwide change must be judged not only by the logic of the plan, but by the justice of the experience.