

Ad Hoc Committee OEA Minority Report

The OEA members of the Ad Hoc Committee on school closures chose not to sign on to the recommendations for community engagement and criteria for selecting schools to be part of the process that district staff will be presenting to the board. Throughout our participation in committee meetings district staff were unable to provide us any rational justification for the need to close or consolidate schools. As detailed below, **district staff were UNABLE to show any research to support several key assumptions of the district's plan:**

- closing/consolidating schools will save the district money
- closing/consolidating schools will lead to increased academic performance for African American, Latinx, ELL, or low-income students
- scaling up small schools currently perceived as “successful” will result in continuing success for African American, Latinx, ELL, or low-income students

Given this context, the OEA members of the Ad Hoc Committee could not participate in the misleading surveys that district staff used to develop the committee's recommendations or sign onto said recommendations. As the district has been unable to provide any research based rationale for closing, consolidating or merging schools, **the OEA members on the ad hoc committee cannot in good conscience put our names on the Ad Hoc committee report back/recommendations.**

The OEA members of the Ad Hoc Committee stand with the school sites and community members who pushed back against the latest round of attempts to close our schools. We rebuke the district for the irreparable harm done to the Roots community in this past school year and for the instability brought upon sites who are threatened with closure or consolidation with little to no engagement of their communities and no coherent plan moving forward.

While we are attempting to use decision-making avenues available to us, we differ with the district in the belief that there is a need to close schools in Oakland. Our schools are not the schools students deserve; we know that. School closures, however, are not the way forward for our students or our communities. What both teachers and community members desire is authentic support of struggling schools, not abandonment and disinvestment that creates conditions that might justify school closure.

Our commitment to community, our political convictions, and our extensive review of available data **leads us to the clear conclusion that school closures will not:**

- **accomplish the goal of saving money**
- **result in improved academic outcomes for students, or**
- **result in improved social outcomes for school communities.**

*To be blunt: if the goal is saving money, closing schools won't do that.
If the goal is expanding access to quality schools, closing schools won't do that either.*

The financials:

School closures will fuel the growth of charter enrollment in Oakland, which financially harms OUSD schools. Many students from closed schools will enroll at charters. At the ad hoc meeting on April 29, 2019, district employee Nana Xu provided a financial projection model in which she estimated that the closure of Roots would save the district \$600,000 in year 5 of the CCPA expansion and an assumed 10% district enrollment attrition from Roots--a projection that seems low considering that 2011/12 attrition from closed schools was at least 16%, even reaching 38% at some schools.¹

While \$600,000 may seem like a great deal of money, it is a tiny proportion of the district's overall budget, especially considering its overspending on administration (\$22 million more than other districts in Alameda County) and consultants (\$28 million more than other districts in Alameda County).

When pressed by OEA membership for evidence that there had been financial benefit to the closure of five schools in 2011-12, Yvette Renteria admitted "We don't have information on what money was saved." 14 of the 18 OUSD schools closed since 2002 now house charter schools, which we know are leeching \$57 million annually from students in OUSD (Justice for Oakland Students "No School Closures" [infographic](#)). In fact, the Fact Finding report release in February 2019 disclosed that: "Potential savings from attempted school closures are offset by implementation costs and a loss of enrollment primarily to charter schools."

Nationally, most research indicates that little to no money is generally saved on school closures. An [audit](#) of 23 school closures and consolidations in Washington, DC in 2008 found that the closures cost the district \$39.5 million, roughly 4 times what the district expected to save. A national [study](#) of school closures and consolidations in 2011 found that "no district has reaped anything like a windfall."

Academic and Community Concerns

Criteria for closure

Academic-related school-closure models "rely mostly on proficiency as a measure of school performance, which is a statistical estimation based on a single point in time, susceptible to

¹ This number does not take into consideration the hiring of a full time employee during the 2019-20 school year to track and support Roots students who were impacted by the closure.

distortions and statistical error, and generally ignore a more valuable analysis of inputs and outputs—for example, school and teacher quality, school climate, available resources, parental support, and other measures that capture a more holistic picture of the school's effectiveness.”² Given the realities of OUSD’s highly class- and race-segregated schools, and an enrollment process that disproportionately concentrates need, it is no mistake that schools targeted for closure and consolidation have student populations in which African American, Latinx, special education students and students with trauma are highly represented. 17 of the 18 schools closed in OUSD since 2001 were majority African American (Justice for Oakland Students “No School Closures” [infographic](#)).

Threat of Closure

Schools threatened with closure are frequently schools that need additional support. With the introduction of the mere idea of closure, however, disinvestment in the school increases. With teachers looking to find new employment and students feeling targeted, staff absences and student conflict create a toxic environment.

Shuffling students

Data about the academic performance of students who were displaced by the 2011-12 school closures is either unavailable or was not recorded by the district. Nationally, we know that children displaced to higher performing schools ‘tend’ to do better academically than their peers displaced to schools that perform at similar or worse levels than the schools from which the students were displaced. We also know that most often students displaced from one closing school move to another struggling school. Despite the promised ‘opportunity ticket’ for Roots students, there are simply not many openings in more highly desired middle schools.

School closures, therefore, don’t address the issue of quality; instead, they serve to shuffle students around to different low-performing schools.

Remaining questions and call:

The call from Superintendent Johnson-Trammell to ‘right-size’ our district by ‘concentrating resources at fewer school sites’ and creating full service community schools stands in contradiction to the majority of research on quality schools and the importance of small schools; the current landscape in OUSD in which the smaller district high schools are graduating the highest percentages of African-American, Latinx and ELL students; and the desires from our school communities to keep neighborhood schools.

If our goal is to “Increase excellence in achievement and program effectiveness for low income students of color, ELLs, and students with disabilities,” we need to ensure that extra “spots” that

² American Federation of Teachers Call for a National Moratorium on Mass School Closings. <https://www.aft.org/resolution/call-moratorium-mass-school-closings>

are created in “quality” schools actually serve these populations. Where is evidence of scaling up a school to benefit the education of low income students of color, ELLs and students with disabilities? The single example given by district employees of an expanded school, Melrose Leadership Academy, has not expanded with equitable access: the new spots are going to students who are whiter, wealthier, non ELLs (English only and Initially Fluent), and without IEPs.

The truth is that many of our schools are struggling. That’s real, and it is an urgent matter that we are not doing right by our students; particularly our low-income, SPED, African-American, Latinx and ELL students.

Our question, however, is why take the path of closures over the path of improvement?

Most of the schools being targeted for closure and consolidation are the ones in which years of disinvestment have resulted in the staff dealing with frequent turnover while serving a student population who may not see the school as desirable. We all want to make our schools better. More than most, we know the heartbreaking ways in which we are failing our students. **What we are asking for is not a preservation of the status quo, but rather a vision that we can mobilize toward rather than a confusing mandate to create criteria for slightly less painful school closures, despite no clear evidence that school closures will save money or improve education for our kids in this district.**

In the short term, we call on the school board to immediately:

- Extend the pause on school closures/consolidations for a minimum of one year to allow for “collaborative conversations and to discuss potential opportunities/solutions before anything is decided” (as recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee) with schools in Cohort 2
- Publicly identify the schools in Cohort 2 and schools up for consideration for future cohorts
- Meet with OEA representatives and community members to develop a research-based work plan for the OUSD Office of Innovation

With hope for our students,

The OEA members of the Ad Hoc Committee on school closures:

Chela Delgado, OEA Executive Board member, OUSD grad, MLA parent and CCPA teacher
Megan Bumpus, OEA Executive Board member, REACH Academy teacher, parent
Olivia Udovic, Manzanita SEED teacher, Manzanita SEED and United for Success Academy parent
Cassandra Chen, United for Success Academy teacher