



SAVE OUR SCHOOLS 497 urges the board to vote no on proceeding with any school closures on Monday, Feb. 14. The group of concerned parents, staff and community members believe the proposals to close school are rushed, inequitable, fiscally unsound and erodes community support in our public school system.

Our four central concerns are that:

1. The district is being asked to vote to proceed with closing schools a little more than a month after the possibility of school closures was announced in a public meeting. In doing so, they created a process that is rushed and allows for little community input.
 - The decision to close a school forever reshapes our neighborhoods, and deserves to be part of a well-thought-out, long-term plan that invites community involvement.
 - Proposals to close schools need to provide more details on how students of the proposed schools will be supported, concrete plans for future uses of the buildings that will close and consideration on transportation options.
 - Pausing an immediate push to close schools would allow for the district to better understand how the pandemic has reshaped enrollment trends and if any of the more than 600 students who left the district will return.

2. This plan is not equitable to our most marginalized students.
 - The schools proposed for closure represent five of the district's six Title One Schools. The Title One designation is placed on schools with the highest percentage of children from low-income families.
 - The schools proposed for closure are high-performing schools with award-winning teachers and staff with strong community support.
 - Studies have shown that displaced students can have lower test scores, more absences and suffer negative learning effects after relocating to new schools, this is especially true if they are moved to equal or lower-performing schools.
 - The shift to virtual and hybrid schooling during the pandemic has disproportionately affected the most marginalized in our community. These school closures would only compound the disadvantages already in place following a year of disrupted learning.
 - By proposing to close five Title One schools, the district is placing the burden of balancing the budget on our poorest schools and students. The budget shortfall is a district-wide problem and enrollment declines during the pandemic happened everywhere. In fact, school enrollment declines happen in larger percentages in schools not proposed for closure.

3. Not all cost-saving measures have been explored. Nor, have the true costs of closing schools and busing students to new locations been fully presented to the board.
 - The board has not explored the cost-savings of realigning next year's administrative staffing to 2019-20 levels, saving on salary costs.
 - While proposals have been made to close schools, the district has not recommended closing the Educational Support Center and relocating administration and staff to district buildings that are not at capacity or being fully utilized.
 - The board has not shown additional transportation costs for busing students to new schools.
 - Budget projections on school closures include the cost-savings from ten proposed eliminated positions that will occur regardless of school closures.

4. Closing schools will erode community support in Lawrence's public schools.
 - In 2013, the community overwhelmingly passed a bond issue to improve school buildings, which was closely tied to a larger conversation to keep neighborhood schools open.
 - The community will continue to pay for that bond issue for the next 25 years and some of those school improvements have been completed just a few years ago.
 - Closing schools breaks the commitment and promises the school board and district made to this community in 2013. That trust could be hard to restore the next time the community is asked to vote on a bond issue.