

What the Research Says About the Effects of School Closures

Academic Outcomes

- The negative short-term impacts of school closures on students' academics are well documented: **students' test scores and grade point averages tend to fall** in the year before and immediately after closure.¹
- The long-term effects are more mixed. If students land in an academically stronger school, they can see test score gains; if not, their scores decline—and **studies show that students often do not land in stronger schools.**²
- Closure has been shown to have **long-term negative impacts on college degree attainment, employment, and earnings.**³
- Students on IEPs and 504 plans whose schools close often face **challenges in continuation of services.**⁴
- Moving students to a school with more academic opportunities can expand educational access, but only if access isn't reduced by limited seats, transportation requirements, or other restrictions.⁵

Social and Emotional Outcomes

- Closure has been shown to **disrupt students' relationships with peers and teachers and lead to anxiety and confusion.**⁶
- Experiencing a school closure is associated with an **increase in absenteeism and behavioral issues.**⁷
- After their schools close, students often face **longer travel or bus rides to school** and are **less involved in after-school clubs and sports**, even if the number of extracurricular options expands. These effects are often heightened for students in rural communities.⁸

Equity

- Most research shows that school closures **disproportionately impact low-income and Black and Latine communities.**⁹ This is because:
 - The metrics often used to decide school closures—enrollment, facility condition, and test scores—are outcomes of a **legacy of discriminatory education policy** towards Black and Latine communities. But even when controlling for these metrics, the most recent national study of school closures still found that **majority Black schools were more likely to close.**
- School closures often **erase important Black cultural institutions.**¹⁰
- School closures have been shown to **perpetuate and exacerbate race and class-based inequities.**¹¹

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Community

- School closures are associated with a **decrease in parent involvement** in school.¹²
- What little research there is examining school closures' impacts on communities indicates that closure can be **economically and socially harmful**, especially for rural communities.¹³
- School **closures reduce jobs**, remove a place where people gather socially, and eliminate an important historical and cultural institution.¹⁴
- School closures **increase the likelihood and extent of the gentrification** of Black neighborhoods.¹⁵

Local Economies

- School closures may **negatively impact nearby local businesses**—like convenience and grocery stores, diners, banks, and service stations—that depend on families, students, and staff as customers.¹⁶
- School buildings often go unsold and abandoned, **creating unsafe conditions in local neighborhoods**.¹⁷
- School closure has been shown to close businesses and cause families to move from the area.¹⁸

District Finances

- There are very few comprehensive evaluations of the financial effects of school closures.¹⁹
- What little research there is on the financial impact of school closures suggests that **they do not bring savings**, or that any savings are negligible or far below what was projected.²⁰ This is because:
 - Staff is a district's largest budget line item, and closures often don't meaningfully reduce staff.
 - Closures themselves are **associated with enrollment loss**,²¹ reducing the district's overall per-pupil funding from state and federal governments.
 - **Remaining schools often require costly renovations** to accommodate new students.
 - The **costs of transporting more students** to schools farther away may increase following school closures.
 - It is often **difficult to sell or repurpose** closed school buildings.²²
- The relationship between staffing and school closures is complicated.
 - Keeping a small school open may force reductions in staffing, as administrators make hard decisions about cutting costs. At the same time, in some cases, closing a school can bring job loss for teachers, administrators, and staff.²³
 - School closures have been shown to **cause teacher attrition**.²⁴

Endnotes

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Endnotes (Cont'd)

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