

Closure Update—Phase II

One of the elements to the School Board's 5-2 approval to close 7 schools was an agreement that we would enter into a Phase II of closures. That Phase began in August, and we were attempting to identify additional buildings in West Seattle, the Central area, and in the North to close. After numerous meetings, we identified the closure of AS #1 and the co-location of the AS #1 program with the Summit program in the North; and we identified the closure of the Roxhill building in West Seattle. We also identified the merger of the Pathfinder and Cooper students into the Cooper building and the closure of the Genesee Hill (Pathfinder program) building. We did not identify a closure candidate in the Central area as the criteria we were using identified T.T. Minor as the appropriate closure candidate, but T.T. Minor had been foreclosed as a closure candidate by the School Board during their vote in Phase I.

These recommendations, like all closure recommendations, were controversial. After the release of the Preliminary Report: Phase II and the public hearing at Roxhill the Superintendent removed Roxhill from the closure list. While much of the school met our closure criteria, after delving deeper into their data and hearing from the families, we realized what a unique and diverse environment Roxhill is and we determined that closing it would be detrimental to the students and the District.

In the end, when the Phase II recommendations were introduced, the School Board voted to indefinitely table the recommendations and, for all intents and purposes, Phase II was over.

While we continue to have excess capacity at all levels in the District, there are no closure plans currently underway.

Implementation of Phase I Closures

Unfortunately having to do Phase II diverted us from focusing on the implementation of Phase I until mid-October. However, once we began working with the schools affected by Phase I we were able to move forward.

The key with implementation was getting information out quickly and having clear directions and plans. There were a number of issues that needed to be resolved—the two main “people” issues were which staff would be at the new schools and which would be displaced, and who would be the new principal; the other issues were the facilities or logistical issues—which classrooms would teachers move into, how would special equipment be moved, what happens to the leftover curricular materials after the books are merged, when would boxes arrive, when will boxes and furniture be moved.

In terms of the people issues, the first thing to do was to identify the new principal—this person would then work on staffing, budgets, transformation plans, etc. All of the principals were named in early December, well before the normal staffing and budget period began. The principals are:

Broadview-Thomson/Viewlands Jeanne Smart (formerly Broadview-Thomson principal)

High Point/Fairmount Park	Gayle Everly (formerly High Point principal)
Emerson/Rainier View	Marion Vinson (formerly Emerson principal)
Dearborn Park/Whitworth	Ellen Punyon (formerly Wing Luke principal)

And the principals from these buildings who were not appointed to these positions ended up in:

North Beach	Joanne Bowers (formerly Viewlands principal)
Wing Luke	Davy Muth (formerly Fairmount Park principal)
Roxhill	Cathy Thompson (formerly Rainier View principal)
Sacajawea	Barry Dorsey (formerly Whitworth principal)

Evelyn Fairchild, principal of Dearborn Park, is retiring at the end of this academic year.

Once the principals were named, staffing and budget decisions could begin. Staffing decisions were made during our normal staffing process in February/March. First we gave the schools enrollment projections, based on current enrollment at both schools and a conservative projection of the percentage of students whom we expected to be in place on the first day of school. This gave the schools some sense of how big they would actually be, and allowed them to determine how many teachers in which grades they needed.

At approximately this same time the School Board asked that we contact every family in a closed school and ask them what their intentions were—attend the new merged school or attend elsewhere. We contacted, in person, over 800 families and found that, in every school, a majority of the families expected to attend the new merged school.

We also made an enrollment exception for these families—rather than asking them to reapply to a new school because their school had closed, we automatically assigned them to the new/merged school so that if they wanted to attend that school they were not required to do anything. (We will have a better idea after October 1, our traditional count date, about which students actually chose to attend their new school or chose to attend elsewhere.)

Once the schools had early enrollment projections they could identify staffing. This means they could tell how many teachers they needed, in which grades, and could then use the seniority lists of the merged staffs to see who would remain at the new school and who would be displaced. Staff who were displaced through the closure process received “super seniority” in the next phase of hiring.

After the staff was identified, the logistical areas were tackled. Of course there is the issue of moving the staff in the closed building out, but a number of staff remaining in the receiving building also had to move, because classroom configurations were rearranged to better meet academic needs. For example, a school might have had 2 classrooms in each grade, and with the consolidation they now have 3 per grade—in order to keep grades together classrooms had to be moved around to make sure that all the 1st grades were together, all the 2nd grades together, etc. We

have finalized all the classrooms now, and we've also identified all the construction type work that needs to be done—moving library shelves or special education equipment, for example, or moving walls to make multiple small rooms into fewer larger rooms.

At this point teachers and staff are packing up their materials for moving to their new schools, we are going through the libraries and purging and packing, and we're identifying the curricular materials that are "leftovers" so that we can catalog them and offer them to other schools to enhance their curricula.

Staff will be out of the buildings by June 26 so that we can complete the moves and the construction, and they will be back in the buildings on August 20 so that they can get their classrooms in order before school starts!

We expect a busy summer, what with all the moves, the construction, and all the little things that I'm sure will pop up. However, our goal is a first day of school that appears—to the students and parents—to be no different than in years when we have not had any closures.

Next Steps

We will be writing a final report on the entire closure process this fall. In this report we will be able to finalize what was actually spent, what we actually expect to save, and where students and staff ended up. This report will be on-line, as are many of our current closure activities.