

# School Board Action Report

*“Every student achieving, everyone accountable”*



**DATE:** October 24, 2008

**FROM:** Executive Committee

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**STRATEGIC THEME/  
FOCUS AREA:** Implementation of the overall goals of *Excellence for All*.

## **TITLE AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

Resolution 2008/09-2, Directing the Superintendent to evaluate balancing the geographic capacity needs across the district.	For Introduction:	October 29, 2008
	For Action:	October 29, 2008

## **TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION/EVALUATION**

- Finance Committee work on 2009/10 budget: September-October 2008
- Executive Committee meeting on Finance recommendations for closure: October 22, 2008
- Resolution introduction and action: October 29, 2008

## **RECOMMENDED MOTION**

I move that the Seattle School Board adopt Resolution 2008/09-02, which directs Superintendent Dr. Maria Goodloe-Johnson and staff to evaluate and make recommendations about program moves, program closures, and building closures.

## **ISSUE**

The School Board believes that the success of *Excellence for All*, our strategic plan, rests on creating a school system where no student suffers the education gap, where all students meet or exceed grade-level expectations and graduate from high school prepared for college, career and life.

Ensuring student success means a focus on academics, but the district's infrastructure must be evaluated as well. Continuing to spend money on older, under-enrolled facilities ensures that we spread our already limited funds over a larger area. Tightening up on those expenditures by ensuring that our facilities are balanced against our enrollment needs is one way to reallocate our budget and focus our resources.

The idea of building closures is not new to Seattle Public Schools. In 2006 seven buildings were closed throughout the district, but that did not eliminate our excess capacity. We continue to have a need to close buildings in certain areas, while in other areas the number of students ~~seats~~ outstrips

the number of ~~seats~~ students. In those areas we have a need for additional seats because there are more students than the schools can accommodate. The Board is committed to developing a capacity management policy as part of the strategic plan work, incorporating lessons learned from past and current building closures that will provide a guiding framework for the district's long-term planning for facilities that support effective academic programs.

Staff has been evaluating program moves and program closures as part of the short-term Capacity Management project. That project was not evaluating building closures—that evaluation was to come as Phase II of the project, which was the longer-term phase. The attached resolution is designed to speed up Phase II so that the geographic balancing of our capacity against our enrollment, including evaluating building closures, can be evaluated this fall and winter.

Over the last few months Seattle Public Schools has been confronted with an increasingly difficult financial situation. The Finance Committee's first look at the 2009/10 budget showed a projected \$24 million shortfall. We are now hearing negative forecasts from the state that indicate we should anticipate a much larger gap because of the shortfalls in state revenues.

This projected shortfall and the negative information from the state is coupled with a number of audits that have advised that we have significant excess capacity vis a vis our student enrollment. For example, the recent State Auditor's Report on the ten largest districts in Washington State reported that Seattle Public Schools has 18% excess capacity, compared to other districts in the state. In addition, both the Curriculum Audit commissioned by Phi Delta Kappa and the Capital Department review commissioned by the Council of Great City Schools indicated that our capacity exceeds our enrollment and recommended closing buildings. And as far back as 1990, the Washington State House of Representatives evaluation of Seattle Public Schools recommended reducing the per pupil maintenance cost of the district by reducing the number of facilities in operation.

The Board does not take the action of building closures lightly. We recognize the hard work teachers, principals, administrators, and families put in to build communities that support students. But the negative impact to all schools and programs we face if the Board does not take this kind of action will be far more painful to our students and families than the closing of facilities.

The Board also realizes that the Board Policy H 01.00, which outlines a process for building closures, contemplates antiquated communication techniques. The current policy requires only that notice be placed in newspapers (both city-wide and neighborhood), and also requires strict timelines for the local newspaper notices. The local newspapers are published on a wide variety of schedules, which makes adhering to the policy timelines difficult while also limiting community exposure to the notices.

Because of the limited communication nature required by Board policy, the Board will request that a new communication provision for the policy be developed while ensuring that state requirements regarding notice are met. The new communication provision should include communication methods relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as communication via the Internet and other media forms.

The case to do this work is compelling: the combination of a large projected budget shortfall and the number of outside voices calling for geographically balancing our capacity to our enrollment means this issue can be postponed no longer. The real savings of closure are long-term and structural. It is

incumbent upon the School Board to lead a multi-year staged process that will move us toward educating all children with the most effective use of resources.

**RESEARCH AND DATA SOURCES**

“Restructuring the Infrastructure,” Sajan George, American School Board Journal, November 2008.

A Curriculum Management Audit of the Seattle Public Schools, Phi Delta Kappa International, January 2008

Operations Audit of Seattle Schools’ Transportation, Capital Projects, Maintenance and Operations: Council of Great City Schools, September 2008.

Washington State Auditor’s Office, Performance Audit Report, School Districts’ Administration and Support Services, September 30, 2008.

Community Advisory Committee on Investing in Educational Excellence, Final Report, February 2006.

Report of an Evaluation of the Seattle Public Schools, Cresap: a Towers Perrin Company on behalf of the Washington State House of Representatives, November 1990.

**POLICY IMPLICATION**

School Board policy H 01.00 regulates the closure of buildings.

**FISCAL IMPACT/REVENUE SOURCE**

Closing buildings will have a fiscal impact in FY 09 (the 2008-09 school year). Staff are expected to bring the fiscal analysis forward if and when a building closure proposal is made.

**Expenditure:   X One-time    Annual**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

Throughout the Capacity Management Phase I project there has been significant community engagement, including two community meetings designed to gather comments on the need for additional capacity in the North and Queen Anne/Magnolia and the ongoing solicitation of input by community members. That input has helped form the recommendations to address the need for additional seats in the North, Northeast, Northwest, and Queen Anne/Magnolia clusters, but the engagement was not about building closures.

If and when building closures are proposed public hearings will be held.

**CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

The board has expressed a clear intent to support the district strategic plan and the district’s instructional core: students, teachers, and content. We are confident that our powerful district and instructional leadership will create a focused, world-class system supporting students who will be 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders and innovators. It is our responsibility to align our systems and infrastructure to

maximize the effectiveness of resources that support this effort. This resolution and direction are an important part of that ongoing work, and we are committed to this process.

**ATTACHMENTS**

**[Resolution 2008/09-02](#)**