



## **Building closure – 2008 Frequently Asked Questions**

*Updated October 23, 2008*

### **What has been announced about building closure?**

There was important discussion at the School Board's Executive Committee on October 22 about the steps Seattle Public Schools must take to balance our budget and address the imbalance in our District between where we have classroom capacity and where school aged children live. It is clear to us that we must consider building closures. This fact was shared on October 22 with Seattle Public Schools staff and with community leaders.

### **Seattle Public Schools adopted a strategic plan in June 2007. How does building closure fit with that plan?**

Excellence for All, our District's strategic plan, provides the framework for us to work together to raise academic achievement for all students and improve the operations throughout the district that support student success.

Capacity planning is one of the priority strategies included in Excellence for All. In the course of our engagement with the community and internal stakeholders over the past months, we have worked to develop options to address our immediate capacity challenges in specific clusters for the 09-10 academic year.

We planned to begin the needed longer term district-wide capacity management work this coming January. However, recent national and state-wide economic developments demand that we take significant steps now to protect the District's long-term financial health.

### **Why is it necessary to close or repurpose buildings now?**

The following realities combine to create the urgency to consider building closure:

- **Seattle Public Schools budget gap projections for 2009-10.** We must address the stark reality of an estimated \$24 million funding gap for 2009-10. This figure is an early estimate of the anticipated gap between costs to maintain current levels of services and expected revenues. This estimate may prove conservative. The financial analysis now underway will identify a variety of strategies to eliminate the known funding gap while protecting classroom funding to the maximum extent possible. We know we will

have to make additional cuts if that gap worsens.

- **State and federal budget challenges.** We also know that the state and federal governments, on which we depend for the bulk of our funding, are facing intense budget challenges. It is prudent for us to prepare for a scenario in which government funding for education would be reduced.
- **Excess capacity and too many buildings.** Multiple recent external audits and peer reviews of Seattle Public Schools (SPS) point to the need for us to close facilities in order to address excess capacity. SPS has operated for many years with substantially more capacity than needed for the number of students enrolled; and we have more school buildings than other districts with comparable student populations. Many of these buildings are costly to maintain due to their age and amount of deferred maintenance.
- **Geographic imbalance between school capacity and where school-age children live, and desire for quality schools close to home.** Some parts of the city have current and projected capacity shortages while others have excess capacity available. Families have told us that they want quality schools available close to home, and a greater degree of predictability about where their children will attend school. Matching the amount of seats with the school-aged population in each area of our city is a key component in delivering on that desire. Ensuring that available resources are not spread too thinly over too many schools will enable us to better support high quality in every school.

**I hear about building closure and repurposing. What does it mean to “repurpose” a building?**

Repurposing means that a building would remain open, but with a different mix of grades or programs than is currently there. For example, a K-5 could expand to a K-8; or a program could be eliminated and students reassigned to other schools; or an existing program could be moved from one building to another.

**Is there a list of schools under consideration for closure or repurposing?**

There is not a district-wide list of buildings that might be closed or repurposed. In the course of our engagement with the community over the past several months to address immediate capacity challenges in north Seattle and Queen Anne/Magnolia, potential options have been identified that include repurposing of buildings. There is a process for closing school buildings that includes the formal publication of preliminary and final recommendations that would be followed before any closure. Public discussion at community meetings and School Board meetings have included suggestions that the district must consider a longer term and district-wide look at its facilities, including the need for building closure.

**When and how would a district wide list of building closures or building repurposing be developed?**

The School Board is expected to give further direction to the Superintendent and her staff at the Special Board Meeting called for October 29<sup>th</sup>. A work session on student assignment and capacity management had already been scheduled for that same date at 3 to 7 pm. The Superintendent and staff will respond to the direction given on October 29<sup>th</sup> with respect to developing a project plan and community engagement process for building closure and repurposing.

**When would schools close or be repurposed?**

We expect the School Board to provide direction on the timeline at its meeting on October 29.

**Would closure or repurposing decisions be effective beginning with September 2009?**

The School Board and Superintendent acknowledge the need for the district to bring our facilities into balance with our enrollment. We are examining the steps that would be necessary for an effective building closure and repurposing process. Necessary steps in the process and sufficient resources need to be identified in order for us to make a determination about timeline.

**How will decisions be made about which buildings will be closed?**

Having determined the need to consider this step, clear criteria for building closure will need to be developed. The School Board is expected to give guidance to the Superintendent at its October 29 meeting.

**I've heard there's a shortage of space for students in some schools. Why would you close buildings?**

Balancing capacity and enrollment has two aspects. The first is to bring the overall number of seats into balance with our student population. The second is to address the geographic imbalance so that we have capacity in schools in parts of the city where children live. Demographics and enrollment change over time. The population of families with school-aged children has increased in parts of the city that currently experience shortages in classroom capacity.

**What if more families want to enroll in public schools rather than choosing private or parochial schools. Will the plan to balance capacity with school-aged population take that into account?**

Many factors will be considered as Seattle Public Schools examines the need for building closure and repurposing. There are many factors that go into a family's decision about school choice. As we implement Excellence for All, we are intent on providing excellence in every classroom in every school. As families who are not currently enrolled in Seattle Public Schools know more about the excellence of our programs demand is likely to increase. Additionally, we acknowledge that the economic situation could also influence family's decisions.

## **Won't closing schools mean that class size in remaining schools will increase?**

By concentrating students and their teachers in fewer schools, class sizes should not increase significantly, and will not exceed contract-negotiated maximum class sizes.

## **How can I keep up-to-date with this process, and how can I provide feedback and opinions?**

If directed by the board to develop a building repurposing and closure plan, a community engagement plan will immediately be developed. We will communicate information and updates in a number of ways. These will include:

- Postings on our Web site at [www.seattleschools.org](http://www.seattleschools.org) –
- Information shared with principals on a regular basis – including flyers and articles for school and PTSA newsletters
- Emails to staff and community leaders
- Updates at School Board meetings and work sessions
- We will also publish regular updates in our Seattle Public Schools bi-weekly e-newsletter, "School Beat." All staff receive this newsletter, and community members are encouraged to subscribe. Choose the "School Beat" button on the main web page at [www.seattleschools.org](http://www.seattleschools.org).

This FAQ will be updated as new information is available and questions arise.

***Prepared by Office of Communications, Seattle Public Schools  
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