

How Housing Affects Seattle Public Schools Enrollment

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School districts in large cities across the country—including Seattle, Los Angeles, Denver, and San Antonio—are facing a big question: **Where have all the students gone?** Many are considering school closures due to declining or stagnant enrollment. But the reasons behind this trend are more complex than just trying to bring students back.

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) used state funding to conduct a citywide [survey](#) of families, which reflected the city's racial and geographic diversity. Our Enrollment Planning team also analyzed internal data and worked with outside researchers to better understand where students are going—and why.

What did the research find?

Families with young children are moving out of the city. Why? One major reason is housing affordability. Seattle has become increasingly expensive, with a shortage of affordable homes to meet the growing demand for housing. A city contractor, BERK Consulting, found that [rising rents and home prices](#) are pushing families out.

[Data from FLO Analytics](#), a firm hired by SPS, shows that for every 10 income-restricted family-sized units (two or more bedrooms), about eight students enroll in public schools. In contrast, 10 market-rate units bring in just one student. For single-family homes, that number is only 3 students. Clearly, more affordable, family-sized housing could help boost school enrollment.

This issue also affects equity in access to schools. The city planning office's [analysis](#) demonstrates that families most likely to be displaced due to cost are families of color. Relatedly, SPS internal data shows that students of color—especially Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander students—are leaving the district at higher rates than White and Asian students.

How can housing boost school enrollment?

To build a strong, equitable school system, Seattle must be a place where all families can afford to live. That means city agencies, public schools, and local government must work together to prevent displacement and support families who want to stay.

SPS' [full Enrollment Study](#) report is available at the link.