

How Closing Schools Harms Children

David Spring M. Ed. May 10, 2024

In May 2024, the Seattle School District announced that they were facing a \$100 million dollar budget shortfall – which will grow to a \$150 million dollar budget shortfall in the next couple of years.

Seattle Schools OKs proposal that could close 20 elementary schools

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To partially address this problem, they have proposed closing 20 elementary schools. As each elementary school has about 300 students, **the plan to close 20 elementary schools will harm about 6,000 children.**

The estimated savings for closing each elementary school is about one million dollars. It should be obvious that closing all of these schools will only address \$20 million out of a soon to be \$150 million budget shortfall. What is really going to happen is that eventually dozens of teachers will be fired and class sizes are going to go up – meaning that struggling students are less likely to get the help they need.

This is going to be difficult for parents to accept given that in the past 6 years they have seen their property taxes skyrocket by more than 60% - and just a few years ago, they were told that the “McCleary Fix” meant that there would be “ample funding” for our public schools. Clearly we have all been misled.

But it is our children who will be most harmed by closing local elementary schools. This is because the ability of children to learn is not only related to secure and stable family relationships – but also to secure and stable community relationships. The reason for small local elementary schools is to have schools very close to where children live. Ideally, each elementary school should have a playground where the family can walk to the school even when the child is three or four years old so that the child can get used to attending the school, playing on the playground and develop a positive secure attitude about the school.



Ideally, the family can also attend community events at their local school like attending plays and carnivals – even when the child is three or four.



In short, the local elementary school is not just a place for a bunch of classrooms, it is a place where a child is invited to join and participate in community events. Closing a local elementary school is like closing the life blood of the community. And it harms the child's ability to build a connection to their local community and their local elementary school.

Seattle School District administrators claim that closing small elementary schools will allow them to provide elementary schools with more resources. In fact, by increasing class sizes, children will have fewer resources as their teacher will have less time to spend helping them in areas where they are struggling.



A better option that is more understanding of each child's need for connecting with their own local elementary school is to insist that our state legislature comply with their obligation under our Washington State Constitution to provide "ample funding" for our schools.

If the current batch of school board members and legislators turn their backs on thousands of elementary school students, then we as parents need to organize to elect school board members and legislators who will do a better job of honoring our kids and funding our schools – which is why we hope you will join our Washington Parents Network!

Regards,

David Spring M. Ed.