

## Checklist for Closing a School

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- Review the legal requirements: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.335.020>
- Review school board policy for closing a school: [Sample Policy No. 6883](#)
- Form an advisory committee to develop a comprehensive ten-year facility master plan which addresses facility and site conditions, technology readiness and educational suitability; maintenance costs; school size and usability; minimizes overcrowding; and formulates a plan that includes the possible demolition of abandoned school sites or alternative use of buildings no longer needed by the district
- Keep the community informed and the process credible, transparent and non-political as possible

### Gathering facts...

- Determine enrollment projections (group buildings, i.e., lowest enrollment moves to neighboring school)
- Inventory the capacity and conditions of existing facilities
- Determine per-student operating cost at each facility
- Consider the uniqueness of the educational program at each site
- Identify the specific environmental/safety concerns of each site
- Aesthetics / physical condition of the school
- Evaluate the ethnic balance
- Develop a maintenance level and cost for the building (open and closed) if it remains a part of district
- Determine the saving in facility operating costs
- Identify the possible uses of space for the building(s) once it has been closed (Lease, sale, removal from instructional space, etc)
- Determine the transportation costs
- Determine the availability of nearby schools to the one chosen for closure

## Making the decision...

- Analyze the facilities plan and develop detailed options
- Present the options to the school board for study and feedback
- Conduct public meetings – At a minimum, the notice of any public meeting pertaining to a proposed school and/or cluster of schools closure shall contain the date, time, place, and purpose of the meeting. Notice of each meeting shall be published once each week for two consecutive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the school, subject to closure, is located. The last notice of a public meeting shall be published not later than seven days immediately before the final hearing.

Representatives from the district and/or committee should define the problem behind the consideration for school closure. Graphically illustrate such data as declining enrollment figures, site-specific operating costs, and overall district financial difficulties. Discuss what is at stake: specific programs, reduced class sizes, even district financial solvency and academic performance. Demonstrate how academic standards can be maintained (or improved), special programs (e.g., special education, after school) continued, and new transportation needs accommodated. Explicitly show how school closure is a solution, or part of the solution, to a serious problem.

Allow ample time (but with individual time limits) for the community to express their comments, opinions and ideas. Listen without comment. Use school board study sessions to review and analyze comments.

- The board should consider, as an action item, a board resolution based upon the superintendent's recommendation to close a specific school

## Following the decision...

- Once the decision has been made to close a school, staff (first), parents and the community members need to be notified through direct mailings, press releases, newsletters, web sites, and community meetings
- Conduct school staff meetings on site regarding the transition plan. (Again, provide the reasons for the decision to close the school)
- Provide visitation for students who will transfer to a new school

Organize a transition team to monitor the progress of student and staff assignments to the replacement sites, oversee textbook and instructional material allocation, and move or store furniture or equipment as needed for the transition

## Disposing of a school...

- A vacant school site and empty buildings are district liabilities. They still require upkeep, maintenance, security, and insurance coverage (in fact, empty buildings may raise insurance costs). Unless the district foresees reopening the schools in the near future or is willing to financially support a vacant-school liability, closed schools should be leased, re-used, or sold outright.
  
- Review the statutes for disposing of property:  
<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.335>

## Conclusion...

The decision to close a school is anguishing. It profoundly affects parents, neighborhoods, communities, district personnel, and, of course, students. It affects relationships, routines, and cherished territorialities. In short, it alters not only district operations but also lives.

A decision not to close a school, however, amidst circumstances of declining enrollment and economic necessity, can be imprudent. And while the immediate effects of closing a school may be painful, the long-term effects can be beneficial to everyone.

Indeed, the process of closing a school is difficult, but if done correctly, it becomes less difficult.

Additional resources are available by contacting John Dekker, Washington Association of School Administrators at: <http://www.wasa-oly.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>