

## **ISCA Position Statement: Response to School Closings and Recommendations**

The possibility of an unprecedented number of schools closing in Chicago brings to the forefront the need to carefully consider the impact this will have on impacted students, families and communities. Of most concern to ISCA is the impact of these closures on students. ISCA recognizes that students from pre-k/kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade will respond differently to school closures and have a variety of developmentally specific needs. For nearly all of these closing schools, there is only one school counselor, many of whom are delegated to clerical tasks that do not directly serve their students. While school counselors are highly qualified to assist students with academic, career and social emotional challenges, questions arise about how this extent of school closures, and how the resulting needs of students will be properly addressed in such large numbers.

ISCA recognizes that students, their families and communities will likely face some or all of the following issues as they prepare for, go through and then adjust to school closings:

**Loss and Grief:** Not unlike losing a loved one, leaving a school that is closing may be devastating for some students and families who have built strong ties to faculty, staff and other families. Some students, especially young ones, may not understand the context of why their school is closing, why they cannot return to their school next year or why they must go to a new school that is unfamiliar to them. For those who have built strong ties to their closing school, grief and loss will likely be experienced. Students may express sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, anger and confusion evidenced by crying, withdrawal, and changes in behavior or academic performance. Students from closing schools may believe their school is a failure and that therefore they too, are failures.

**Transition:** The process of leaving a school and going to a new one, in and of itself, poses many potential challenges for students and families. While many students from closing schools will enter "welcoming" schools, the climate and culture of schools vary greatly from one to the next, even if they are in close proximity to one another. Families and students will not be familiar with the staff and faculty but may also not know the current families or the norms, procedures or expectations of the school. Depending upon how the "welcoming" schools receive their new students, children and families may experience anxiety, confusion and even isolation or alienation. Students who receive special needs may be especially vulnerable in transitioning and adjusting to school closures. These students' families can be expected to have concerns about whether or not their children will have the same services at the welcoming school as they had at the closing school.

**Adjustment:** Adjustment is part of the process of transition but how students adjust depends upon many factors. Adjustment is not always smooth. Students from closing schools will likely experience a period of adjustment, the length of which may vary for the individual student given contextual, personal and developmental variables. The processes in place at the welcoming school to help new students adjust will be critical. Students who have difficulty adjusting may lose ground academically, become withdrawn, depressed or even aggressive.

Welcoming schools faculty, families and students will also experience a period of adjustment. Students in welcoming schools may also experience emotional upheaval and have concerns. For example, they may be concerned about issues of safety, anxiety, vulnerability of friendships, anger and even jealousy related to sharing their school with new students.

**Safety:** Basic safety is a primary need to be met for all children. The closing of schools may pose greater danger for some students who must travel further to get to school or who must travel across known gang lines or through unsafe areas. As a result, students may experience anxiety, fear and thus may be more likely to be absent, tardy, to skip school, receive suspensions or show a decrease in academic performance. In addition, for students entering a welcoming school, even school itself may not be safe if they believe they are in fact, not welcomed by current students. Conflict between students from welcoming schools and students from the closing schools may be likely and should be anticipated.

## **Recommendations**

1. Acknowledge and be familiar with the mental health, social, emotional and academic issues that may impact students who are part of closing and welcoming schools.
2. Develop a transition team of support personnel to address these issues and to put systems in place prior to next school year. School administrators, school counselors, school social workers, parent representatives are some ideal members of this team.
3. Utilize key staff from both schools to facilitate conversations within *and* between each school community about how best to manage transition.
4. Increase the possibility of a smooth transition for students by hiring critical staff from the closing school at the welcoming school and/or by adding additional staff. ISCA believes school counselors from closing schools and/or additional school counselors should be a high priority for this consideration because of their expertise and training in the developmental, social-emotional and academic needs of students.
5. Minimize or eliminate administrative and clerical responsibilities of existing school counselors so that they have time to develop transition and adjustment plans for students from closing and welcoming schools.
6. Implement a variety of supportive measures including but not limited to the following. School counselors are qualified to provide and/or facilitate such services:
  - a. Classroom guidance lessons focused on preparing for and adjusting to the transition for closing and welcoming school students
  - b. Field trips or events to orient students from closing schools to welcoming schools
  - c. Family information sessions and events to address concerns or to interact with the welcoming or closing school community
  - d. Small group counseling and individual counseling for students from welcoming or closing schools who struggle more than most with the transition
  - e. Peer-buddy programs to match closing school students with welcoming school students
  - f. Mediations or mediation programs to address conflicts that arise between students after transition

## Related Articles

### **At schools, an upsurge in mental health crises-Catalyst Chicago**

<http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/2012/12/10/20687/schools-upsurge-in-mental-health-crises>

The authors focus on the need for additional mental health services for children. Driven largely by an increase in calls from schools, the number of calls to the state's mental health crisis hotline for children has soared by 37 percent over the past five years to nearly 42,000 calls in 2011- about 115 calls per day. Last year, at least 10,000 children were admitted to a psychiatric hospital on the same day they were evaluated as a result of a hotline call. About 20 percent of the children were admitted more than once- a sign, experts say, of the lack of follow-up services for children once they are released. The deluge of hotline calls and the increase in hospitalizations is at least partly due to cuts in funding for community mental health services, experts noted. Overall, there is an increase in the need for mental health services for children and there are not enough community mental health agencies to satisfy the need. More children are being referred to the mental health crisis hotline and to hospitalization because of the lack of availability of community mental health agency resources.

### **Investigating Critical and Contemporary Issues in Education/Mobility**

[http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Investigating\\_Critical\\_%26\\_Contemporary\\_Issues\\_in\\_Education/Mobility](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Investigating_Critical_%26_Contemporary_Issues_in_Education/Mobility)

The authors focus on the negative impacts of student mobility as well as some strategies to help mobile students be successful. Twenty to twenty-five percent of students change schools each and every year. Sometimes these students do not adapt well to their changes and it can result in major learning and behavior problems. The authors conclude that all students that move from one school to another have more trouble and more problems than other students. A national study performed by Russell Rumberger and Katherine Larson found that 70% of all school changes between grades eight and twelve were accompanied by a change of residences, which is the leading cause of student mobility. States, schools, and districts need to recognize student mobility as a barrier to success, understand how it impacts academic achievement and must learn ways to address the issues relating to mobility. The negative effects of mobility include: lower test scores, lower grades, decreased level of high school completion, students being more likely to repeat a grade, students having difficulty creating peer relationships, and can cause many behavioral problems. The authors recommend some helpful behaviors for students transitioning to a new school which include: parents can make sure proper school records are forwarded in a timely manner from the previous school, parents and children can also meet with the school counselor and teachers two or three weeks after a transfer is made to see how their child is adjusting to the new school, also implementing a "buddy system" which pairs a new student with an existing student in order to help the new student navigate around school, provide help with scheduling, and learn the rules.

### **Notre Dame Research Shows Switching Schools Affects Student Achievement**

<http://al.nd.edu/news/13368-notre-dame-research-shows-switching-schools-affects-student-achievement/>

The authors state that student mobility is creating academic problems for students who move, but it's also a problem for those who remain. Picture a kindergarten classroom of 20

students. By the time that class finishes fourth grade, only six students-30 percent- will have been continuously enrolled in the same school. **Students who change schools can suffer psychologically, socially, and academically.** Also, those students who stay in one school are negatively affected by the school's mobility rate. The authors are implementing strategies to reduce student mobility-the first steps being the establishment of uniform withdrawal and enrollment procedures across schools, and the creation of posters and brochures to educate parents, before they decide to move.

**Student Mobility- The Extent of Student Mobility, The Impact of Mobility on Students, Causes of Mobility** <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2461/Student-Mobility.html>

Student mobility is a common feature of American schooling. Although mobility is largely initiated by students and parents due to changing residences, some mobility results from the policies and actions of schools and districts—such as open enrollment, overcrowded schools, and zero-tolerance policies—that can lead to voluntary or involuntary school transfers. Consequently, schools and districts can help reduce the incidence of "needless" mobility and help to mitigate its potentially damaging effects. School reform efforts can help reduce mobility by making schools more attractive to students and parents. Schools can also initiate a number of strategies to help transfer students adjust to their new school setting and to quickly provide the educational and support services that transfer students may require. One-third of fourth graders, 19 percent of eighth graders, and 10 percent of twelfth graders changed schools at least one in the previous two years. **Existing research finds that students can suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from mobility.** In one study parents of twelfth grade students who changed schools over the previous four years reported three types of reasons for changing schools. The most frequent reason was the family moving (58%). But almost half the reasons were because students asked to change schools. The least frequent reason was because the school asked the adolescent to transfer.

**Students as Collateral Damage? A Preliminary of Renaissance 2010 School Closings in the Midsouth** <http://www.uic.edu/educ/ceje/articles/midsouth%20initial%20report%201-31-07.pdf>

In June 2004, Mayor Daley announced Renaissance 2010, a plan to close 60-70 schools and open 100 new schools: one-third charter schools, one-third contract schools, and one-third CPS performance schools. The first phase of Renaissance 2010 was to be the Midsouth Plan. Under this plan 20 of 22 schools in the Midsouth were to be closed. However, in the face of strong opposition from the community and supporters across the city, CPS backed away from this plan. Nevertheless, Renaissance 2010 school closings have had a substantial impact on the Midsouth area. The authors were interested in learning about the effects of school closings on receiving schools in the Midsouth. The authors were also interested in determining if there is enough evidence to warrant a larger and more comprehensive study of Renaissance 2010 in Chicago and to halt school closings until the public can discuss the results of that study. Between April and September 2006, the authors conducted tape-recorded, extended interviews with a total of 20 people. The interviewees were from receiving schools and included teachers, students, administrators, a counselor, security guards, and parents. Six main themes constituted the principal findings of the study: Lack of resources in receiving schools, disruptive and demoralizing climate, negative effect on teaching and learning, problems with safety and

discipline, schools felt they were “set up for failure”, and lack of consultation with the school community/disregard for their knowledge. The authors concluded that the forced student mobility caused by school closings and transfer of students under Renaissance 2010 affected children’s academic progress, safety, and sense of security and well being. The authors also recommend a freeze on all school closings pending the results of a comprehensive impact study.

**When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research by de la Torre, M., Gwynne, J., & Consortium on Chicago School, R. (2009). <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED506954.pdf>**

Since 2001, CPS has closed 44 schools for reasons of poor academic performance or underutilization. This report examines the impact that closing schools had on the students who attended these schools. We focus on regular elementary schools that were closed between 2001 and 2006 for underutilization or low performance and ask whether students who were forced to leave these schools and enroll elsewhere experienced any positive or negative effects from this type of school move. The authors took a sample from 18 schools with 5,445 students who were enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade just prior to their school closing. This study is focused on the academic effects of school closings on students who were forced to change schools. In summary, the authors found few effects, either positive or negative, of school closings on the achievement of displaced students. Although reading and math gains were lower than expected once students found out their schools would soon close, these short-lived deficits were no longer evident after displaced students’ first year in new schools. Changing schools neither resulted in additional negative effects on student achievement nor substantially improved the achievement of displaced students. Only the small number of students who transferred to academically strong receiving schools and found supportive teachers at these schools made significant gains in their learning.