

Does Closing Schools Cause Educational Harm? A Review of the Research

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The aim of this paper is to review the relevant research on the educational impact of school closures on student learning, provide information on criteria frequently used when closing a school, examine the characteristics of what constitutes a “better school” (i.e., receiving school), and identify strategies that can be used to help students and their parents during the transition to a new school.

Closing schools is a politically difficult decision for any district. It has implications for students and families who must be transferred to a new school. It may involve terminating employment contracts with a school’s current employees. There may be legal and/or collective bargaining issues to resolve, and it is likely to be a time consuming, challenging, and complicated process (Steiner, 2009). And unless the new options are better than the current school, closing a school for performance reasons is ineffective (Steiner, 2009).

There are two primary ways that districts have closed schools. Either the district closes the school building and transfers students (and staff) to another public school, or the district closes the school and reopens it under new leadership and staff. The later may include re-opening the school as a charter school if permitted under state law or turning operation of the school over to private management (education management organization (EMO)). It may also include “reconstituting” the school, a process where some or all of the

teachers, administrators, and staff are replaced. Reconstitution, similar to some school closings, is a strategy for providing a “fresh start” by removing the schools incumbent administrators and teachers and replacing them with others who presumably are more capable and committed to reforming the educational program and organizational structures (Malen, et al., 2009).

Why districts close schools: Most of the reasons that districts close schools are either because school buildings are underutilized or for academic reasons, primarily chronic low performance. In some districts, primarily urban, enrollment has declined as population trends have led to a decrease in the number of school aged children. This leaves some schools operating below their capacity. Districts also close schools when buildings are in poor condition or when school districts are consolidated. Increasingly, districts are closing schools as a reform strategy for schools that are chronically low performing. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reinforces this trend. Under NCLB, schools that have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) after four years, as measured on state assessments, are required to implement a restructuring plan, which includes various forms of closing schools. The restructuring options include turning the school over to the state (state takeover of the school), turning the operations of the school over to a private company (private management), reopening as a charter school, or reconstituting the school by replacing some or all of the teachers, staff, and administrators. A fifth option, “any other” form of restructuring, is also available. Among these five options, the fifth option has been the most frequently chosen by schools (Center on Education Policy, 2008).

School reconstitutions and school closures continue to be federally sanctioned under the Obama administration, albeit under different terminology. Three and one half billion

dollars in Title I School Improvement grants were provisioned by the Obama administration to turn around the nation’s lowest performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In order for school districts (LEAs) to compete for the grants, the U.S. Department of Education stipulates that the school district pursue one of four reform models. Among these models is the “turnaround model”—a reform model, which replaces the principal and rehires no more than 50 percent of the staff, while granting the new principal sufficient operational flexibility to fully implement a comprehensive approach to raising student achievement. Though it is being called the “turnaround model”, this reform model is essentially school reconstitution with a new name. The other reform models include adopting a “restart model” (converting a school or closing and reopening it as a charter school), “school closure” (closing a school and transferring students to other schools in the district), and a “transformation model” (replacing the principal and instituting other reform measures). The reform strategies being encouraged by the provision of the \$3.5 billion in Title I grants do not mark any significant break from the restructuring options required by NCLB.

Assumptions behind closing schools: When districts close schools for poor performance, there are usually a number of assumptions regarding the relationship between the policy’s aims, activities, and outcomes. These assumptions include the logic for taking such an action, what closing a school is likely to accomplish (expected outcomes), and why this particular action will lead to the desired outcome. The basic premise for closing a poorly performing school is that students will be better served by transferring to a better performing school. This assumes that the school to which students transfer is academically more successful than their current school.

As with school closure, reconstituting schools is based on several assumptions. First, there is the premise that reconstitution will lead to a more capable and committed staff. This assumes that there are more talented and dedicated teachers and administrators who will be willing to work in the reconstituted schools. It also assumes that teachers are the all-important factor and that the school's social composition (i.e., racial/ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the school) and resources do not matter. Second, there is the assumption that by re-staffing the school, the school will be redesigned in ways that make it more effective. Reconstitution is viewed as an "opportunity" for school staff to adopt innovative responses to school problems, initiate a range of school improvement strategies, and make improvements in school programs and practices (Malen, et al., 2002). Finally, there is the expectation that the redesigned schools will result in improved student achievement. When schools are closed for underutilization, the justification is often based on financial necessity.

1. Does closing a school and transferring students to another school cause "educational harm" and if so, what kinds of situations cause educational harm? What is the effect of "multiple" transfers on students in the case where a district may close a receiving school in a subsequent year and again transfer students?

Educational harm is defined here as policies or practices that negatively impact student achievement or have no effect on improving student achievement (student achievement remains unchanged after the intervention), negatively affect the ability of the receiving school to deliver a coherent and quality instructional program, or negatively affect teachers and the quality of the teaching force. Closing or reconstituting a school can cause educational harm when the school is left without the human, instructional, and social resources they need to deliver a high quality learning program. School closures also have equity implications. School closures fall disproportionately on schools with high percentages

of low-income and minority students, particularly when decisions to close a school are based on performance measures required by NCLB.

There is scant research examining whether closing a school and transferring students to another school causes educational harm. Thus, to investigate this question, this review draws from three research literatures that provide insights into whether closing schools is likely to cause educational harm. First, we review the research on three initiatives that close one or more schools for low-performance and transfer students to another school. The first initiative closed a high school in a Western state and transferred students to other schools in the district. The second initiative closed persistently low-performing schools in Chicago, and the third initiative planned to close 60-70 schools and open 100 new schools by 2010, also in Chicago. Second, we summarize major findings from the literature on student mobility, which takes into account the impact of changing or transferring schools on students, teachers, and schools. The third source is the research on reconstitution, closing a school and reopening it as a charter school or turning the operation of the school over to an EMO. This research examines whether reconstitution or the new schooling option improves the quality of education a student receives and/or has a positive impact on student achievement when compared to comparable students not subject to reconstitution or school closings. The questions addressed are usually: Do these options work? and, What other effects do they have on teachers and the learning environment?

Closing Low-Performing Schools: Few studies examine the impact of closing a school on displaced students. Thus, until there is a body of research on school closures, the findings from the studies reviewed here should be interpreted carefully. Nonetheless, they offer insight into the potential benefits and harms of school closures. These studies suggest that closing a school and transferring students to other schools does not result in improved student achievement

as measured by standardized test scores, and may negatively impact student achievement. School closures may also increase the likelihood of students dropping out and lower graduation rates. Students who transfer are at risk of losing important relationships and the support they need to be academically successful, and receiving schools may have difficulties absorbing the new students without additional resources, support, and adequate preparation time.

In 2007, a large urban district in the western United States (the city and school names are pseudonyms) closed a high school for low performance and students were given a choice of schools to transfer to within the district. Researchers at the University of Colorado conducted a multi-method study to examine the impact of school closure on student experiences and academic performance (Kirshner, Gaertner, & Pozzoboni, 2009). To examine changes in academic performance, they used quantitative data from three sources: standardized test scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates. To understand student experiences with school transfers, they administered a student survey (n=95), conducted interviews with students (n=21), and led focus groups with students who left school (n=12). They also used field notes and interviews with student members of the research team. When the school closed in 2006, there were 558 students eligible to transfer schools. Approximately 175 students exited the district by moving, transferring to other districts, or dropping out. The 380 students who stayed in the district enrolled in 17 schools.

The researchers found that test score trends on standardized tests for transfer students declined after the closure was announced. Two test administrations after the closure announcement test scores for students from the cohort that transferred to other schools continued to decline. The authors conclude that two phenomena comprise the “closure effect”—student reactions to news that the school will be closed and difficulties faced by students transitioning to

new schools (Kirshner, et al., 2009). The authors also found that dropout rates increased and graduation rates decreased following the closure announcement and subsequent school closure, although they note that dropout rates were increasing prior to the closure announcement. Interview and survey data indicated that the closure disrupted relationships students had established with adults and other students at their closed school, leaving the students with few social and emotional supports to help them adjust to the challenges of the new school. The authors conclude that even though the schools which students transferred to had higher mean test scores, this did not translate into a learning environment that met the needs of the transfer students (Kirshner, et al., 2009). The qualitative data suggest that the transition disrupted students' relationships with teachers and that the new relationships were weaker than those they had experienced at the closed schools. Students also reported that academic norms, routines, and expectations were different in the new schools, with about half of the students reporting that the new classes were harder and expectations were higher. A common theme among students was that classes were harder not just because of higher expectations or new material, but because support and help were less available to them than in the closed school. In coping with the new situation, students adopted what the authors called a resilient stance, that is, they narrowed their goals to focus solely on graduating. For students, the closed schools represented a community institution that had provided support for their social and emotional development (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, in press).

Beginning in 2001-02, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) initiated an aggressive policy of closing schools that were consistently low performing. Since 2001, CPS has closed 44 schools because of poor academic performance or underutilization (i.e., below capacity). In a study of regular elementary schools that were closed between 2001 and 2006, the Consortium on

Chicago School Research (CCRS) examined whether students who were forced to leave these schools and enroll elsewhere experienced any positive or negative effects from the move (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). This study compared displaced students (N=5,445 students; nine schools closed for underutilization and nine for academic reasons) to a group of students in similar schools that did not close. To estimate the effects of closing schools on students' achievement, the study estimated the "expected learning trajectory" for displaced students and compared this to their actual learning trajectory.¹ The study found that closing schools had a negative impact on students during the year that the district announced the school closings. Test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading and math showed that student scores were about one-and-a-half months below their "expected learning trajectory" during the year that the district announced that the schools were to close. In contrast to the Colorado study, once students moved to their new school, achievement on math and reading tests returned to their expected level. Additionally, there were other short-term negative effects. Students were less likely to enroll in the district's Summer Bridge program and were more likely to change schools a second time.

The authors of the study concluded that there were few effects, either positive or negative. Students experienced some short-term negative effects from closing schools, but neither did changing schools result in any substantial improvement in achievement over the long term (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). The lack of any positive effect is because the schools to which students transferred were no different academically or in student composition. A small number of students (6%) who transferred to academically stronger schools and found supportive teachers made significant gains in learning (more on this in the next section).

¹ The study used test scores from a comparison group of students to estimate how displaced students would have performed if their schools had not closed. The comparison group was similar to the displaced students in terms of background characteristics and attended schools that were similar to those that closed.

In another Chicago initiative called Renaissance 2010, the district planned to close 60-70 schools and create 100 new schools by 2010. A private funder in cooperation with the Chicago Public Schools funds the Renaissance 2010 effort. A study by SRI International examined two cohorts of students attending 23 newly created schools using data collected during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years (Young, et al., 2009). Results from this study found that when the performance of students in the Renaissance-supported schools were compared to a matched comparison of students from their sending schools, there were few statistically significant differences (Young, et al., 2009). Students generally performed at the same levels as a matched comparison of students from the sending schools. The authors attributed these outcomes to the challenges associated with starting a new school and the time it takes to prepare and implement the procedures and structures needed to operate a new school. Another study of the Renaissance 2010 initiative interviewed 20 people (including teachers, students, administrators, and parents) to understand their experience in the receiving schools (Lipman & Person, 2007). While the findings from this study should be interpreted cautiously because of the small sample and less than rigorous methodology, it does suggest that the integration of new students into the receiving schools was hampered by the lack of resources, staff, and professional support, and inadequate preparation to accommodate an influx of new students. Those interviewed expressed concerns that an influx of new students could negatively impact curriculum and instruction when the new students are performing below grade level, exacerbate discipline and safety issues (particularly when students cross gang boundary lines to attend school), and negatively affect the school's achievement on standardized tests.

Student Mobility: While there are few studies on closing a school and transferring students to another school, there is a substantial body of research on the effects of student

mobility on students, teachers, and schools. Student mobility represents a significant challenge to administrators and educators. Research has consistently shown that mobility causes educational harm by lowering the test scores of both mobile students and non-mobile students alike, slowing the curricular pace, and increasing the likelihood that a student will drop out. The incidence of mobility among students is much larger than is typically conceived. According to the NAEP 1998 math assessment, 34% of fourth graders, 21% of eighth graders, and 10% of twelfth graders changed schools at least once in the previous two years (Rumberger, 2003). Furthermore, mobility is especially prevalent in predominantly poor, minority, urban school districts. In such school districts the portion of students who enroll in a school for less than an entire school year can often exceed 30 or 40% (Rumberger, 2003).

Studies have found that student mobility is generally correlated with lower student achievement. The GAO (1994) reported that 41% of third grade students who changed schools frequently were below grade level in reading. Similarly, 33% of students who changed schools frequently were below grade level in math compared to 17% for those who have never changed schools. The report also indicated that mobility is linked to a number of other problems including poor nutrition and health, reading deficiencies, and grade retention (U. S. General Accounting Office, 1994). In another study, data from Chicago Public Schools showed that students who moved only once were 25% of a standard year of achievement behind their non-mobile peers after the move (Kerbow, 1996). It also showed that these mobile students were already 11% behind their non-mobile peers before the move, suggesting that the lower academic achievement is in part attributable to other factors associated with mobile students, namely their lower socioeconomic status (Kerbow, 1996). These findings raise the question of whether the lower performance of mobile students is due to changing schools or to the students' background

characteristics. Studies that control for a student's socioeconomic status and prior academic performance indicate that mobility does have an independent impact on student achievement. A longitudinal study by Temple and Reynolds (1999), which controlled for pre-mobility achievement and socioeconomic factors, found that students who changed schools four or more times between kindergarten and seventh grade were performing a grade level behind compared to their non-mobile peers, and half of this disparity is explained through the mobility itself (Temple & Reynolds, 1999).

Notwithstanding the independent negative impact of mobility, it could be argued that mobile students can benefit from changing schools if they transfer to schools that are more effective. In practice, however, by and large only affluent students take advantage of these beneficial school transfers. Poor and/or minority students, on the other hand, are more likely to transfer to a comparable school within the same district. In fact, there is evidence that in an urban school district there are two very different and distinct patterns of mobility following socioeconomic and racial distinctions. A study of student mobility in Baltimore found that only 28.6% of transfers out of the district over a five-year period were undertaken by African American students; the rest of the transferring students were white. The study also found that 46% of the students leaving the district during this five year period were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, whereas 72% of the students who stayed in the district were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996). These starkly contrasting patterns of student mobility suggest that poor students suffer the negative impact of mobility more than their affluent counterparts.

Perhaps the strongest impact of student mobility is on graduation rates. Researchers have consistently found that mobility throughout high school and elementary grades increased the

likelihood of dropping out. According to the GAO report on mobility, studies conducted by the Department of Education and Denver Public Schools found that students who changed schools four or more times by the eighth grade were four times more likely to drop out of school, even after controlling for the socioeconomic status of the student's family (U. S. General Accounting Office, 1994). Likewise, a study by Rumberger and Larson (1998) found significant linkage between just one school change and the outcome of dropping out. According to the study which tracked a cohort of students from eighth to twelfth grade, "students who changed schools even one time were more than twice as likely as stable students to not graduate from high school, while students who changed schools two or more times were more than four times as likely as stable students to have obtained a GED" (Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

The negative effect of mobility is not just confined to the student who has changed schools; the entire school is impacted, affecting the achievement level of the non-mobile students as well. Teachers from classrooms with a high number of mobile students report that the constant student turnover disrupts the functioning of their classroom. Mobile students are typically already performing below grade level and require more review and attention from teachers. As a result, the pace of instruction is slower and the test scores of both mobile students and non-mobile students tend to be lower in highly mobile schools. One study comparing the curricular pace of stable schools and highly mobile schools in Chicago found that highly mobile schools lagged behind stable schools by one grade level on average (Kerbow, 1996). Another study of student mobility in California confirmed the negative effect of mobility on the non-mobile students in the classroom. It found that stable students who attended schools with mobility rates of 40% scored on average one and a half points lower on a standardized

mathematics test than stable students who attended schools with only 10% mobility (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999).

Reconstitution, charter schools, and EMOs: The research on reconstitution, charter schools, or schools operated by EMOs suggests that the new schools are not necessarily better than the schools they replace (student achievement may improve in some situations, but does not appear to improve across the board) and are often accompanied by negative side effects. For example, in Maryland, some local reconstitutions actually exacerbated schools' capacity problems, reduced schools' social stability, and did not lead to the hoped for improvements (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002). Reconstitution often fails to attract more qualified teachers or to retain the most capable teachers, results in high teacher and administrator turnover, and leaves staff with little capacity to offer a coherent educational program for students (Rice & Croninger, 2005).

In Chicago, which reconstituted seven high schools in 1997, staff replacements were not necessarily of higher quality than the original teaching staff, and staff morale plummeted in many schools (Hess, 2003). Reconstitution made it difficult to hire high quality teachers because good teachers were reluctant to transfer to these schools. Some schools hired teachers that had been rejected by other reconstituted schools or continued with numerous vacancies, which they filled with substitute teachers for several years. Reconstitution was not particularly successful in improving the quality of teaching, in changing the structure or culture of the schools, or improving student achievement, and was dropped by the district after the 2001-02 school year (Hess, 2003). In New York under the "Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) program, almost 50 schools were reconstituted. Results from this program were not particularly successful

either (Brady, 2003; New York State Education Department Office of New York City Schools Improvement and Community Services, 2003).

The evidence on the effectiveness of restructuring, charter schools, or EMOs suggests that none of these reform strategies show clear advantages over other approaches to school reform. School take-over by EMOs has worked in some cases, but not in others, as research from Baltimore and Philadelphia suggests (Blanc, 2003, Summer; Bracey, 2002; Saltman, 2005; Useem, 2005). While the research base on charter schools is expanding, little is known about charter school conversion as a school reform strategy for low performing schools (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2003). Available data seem to suggest that converting district-administered schools into charter schools has had uneven results (Brown Center on Education Policy, 2003; Gill, Zimmer, Christman, & Blanc, 2007). In a review of the literature on the charter schools, Betts and Tang find “compelling evidence that charter schools underperform traditional public schools in some locations, grades, and subjects, and outperform them in other locations, grades, and subjects” (p. 1). Where they do outperform public schools, the effect size tends to be small (Betts & Tang, 2008). Charter schools also tend to show up on states’ lists of failing schools in larger proportions than regular public schools (Brown Center on Education Policy, 2003). There is also evidence that charters schools are more highly segregated by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status than other schooling options such as magnet schools (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). Charter schools that perform better than regular public schools, such as the KIPP schools or the Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academies, rely on a model based on student self-selection, high attrition rates among students, generous funding from philanthropists, and extraordinary efforts by teachers (Kahlenberg, 2009).

Among the variety of corrective action and restructuring strategies that have been tried, none stick out as universally effective or robust enough to overcome the power of local context. Competence of provider personnel, intervention designs, political power of actors in the system, and district and site organizational capacity to absorb the strategies all strongly influence how a particular strategy will turn out. A recent review of the available research evidence on the NCLB restructuring options study corroborates this conclusion (Mathis, 2009).

To conclude, any one of these options—closing a school and reopening it as a charter school, taking it over by EMO, or reconstitution—could be considered to cause educational harm if students perform worse than they would have in their current school. The literature suggests that this is a distinct possibility since students in the new school do not necessarily perform better. In addition, all of the options disrupt the learning environment and take considerable time and effort to implement.

2. What criteria/characteristics of a “receiving school” indicate that it is “better” than the school that was closed?

Schools that are higher performing (higher achievement and higher graduation rates), more integrated, both in terms of race and socioeconomic characteristics, and better resourced are important characteristics to consider when designating a receiving school. Students receive few benefits from transferring to a new school unless the new option is better than their current school. In some districts, there are few options that are better than the sending school, and schools that are higher performing may have limited space to accommodate transfer students (Kim & Sunderman, 2004).

Research suggests that the social composition of the school—the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic composition—is strongly related to student achievement. Beginning with the Coleman Report in 1966, researchers have recognized that both the individual background

characteristics of students and the composition of the school's student body impact student achievement (Coleman, et al., 1966; Diamond, 2006; Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007; Gamoran, 1992; Jencks & Mayer, 1990). Researchers have found significant improvements in educational outcomes, improved job opportunities, and college attendance when urban poor and minority students attended integrated middle class schools in the suburbs (Rosenbaum, Kulieke, & Rubinowitz, 1987; Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000). The importance of the composition of the school is underscored by a recent reanalysis of the Coleman data using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). This analysis found that both the racial/ethnic and social class composition of the student's school mattered more for student achievement than the race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status of the family for understanding educational outcomes (Borman & Dowling, 2010). That is, schools that are segregated by race and poverty have a greater, negative impact on student achievement than a student's individual level of poverty or minority status (Borman & Dowling, 2010).

In the study of school closings in Chicago, those students who enrolled in schools with higher performing students had higher levels of achievement than students who enrolled in schools that were low performing (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). These schools had students with ITBS scores that were in the top quartile of performance, better attendance rates, higher student stability (less mobility), and were not on probation. Students who transferred to these schools performed about a month above expectations. Students in schools where they received a high level of personal attention from the teacher did well, while students in schools with low levels of personal attention were two months behind expected levels of achievement. However, only 6% of displaced students attended higher

performing schools. Students traveled an average of 3.5 miles to these schools since they were not in the students' designated attendance area.

Likewise, an evaluation of a program in West Las Vegas, designed to provide the opportunity for African American students in low performing schools to transfer to higher performing schools, found that students who enrolled in schools with better performing students scored higher on reading and math tests than students enrolled in the "sending" schools (Terriquez, Flashman, & Schuler-Brown, 2009). Beginning in 1994, the West Las Vegas school district assigned students from six, predominately African American, low income schools to schools that were more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. The assigned schools had stronger records of academic achievement than found in the six low performing schools. Test scores for students in the higher performing, more diverse schools were higher than the scores of students who remained in the neighborhood school. While students who transferred benefited, the program did little to help students in the six low performing schools, which became increasingly disadvantaged and continued to score below the district wide average. While students who transferred scored at about the district average, students in the six low performing schools scored 10% to 15% below the district average.

To conclude, the social composition and academic performance of the receiving school are important considerations when transferring students. While the academic performance of the receiving school should be better than that of the school that was closed, unless the district also pays attention to the social composition of the school, the benefits of moving to a higher performing school may not materialize.

3. What supports can be implemented for transferring students to promote success in a new school?

As the research previously mentioned suggests, the quality of the receiving schools, including the social composition of the student body, is an important factor to consider when closing schools and transferring students. If the receiving schools are no better than the one the student left, additional resources and supports are unlikely to overcome either the negative effects of attending a poorly performing school or the effects of changing schools. In addition to paying attention to the school composition, research suggests a number supports and procedures that can help facilitate student transfers.

The research on student mobility suggests several measures that school administrators can implement to mitigate the negative effects of changing schools. First, since student records can take weeks or months to be transferred to the receiving school, school administrators should ensure that a student's record moves with the student to the new school in a timely manner. Having a student's records will allow teachers and administrators at the receiving school to quickly and accurately place the student in the appropriate level of instruction. Standardized test scores and formal assessments often lack enough detail to inform instructional decisions. As such, the student's record that arrives at the receiving school should include information about the curriculum of the previous school and the student's prior performance (Kerbow, 1996). Secondly, to meet the needs of transfer students who are performing below grade level when they arrive at the receiving school, a school-wide tiered instructional program should be implemented. An initial assessment should be carried out to identify weaknesses or gaps in a student's comprehension of subject matter, and then differentiated instruction can be offered to both students who are moderately behind grade level and to students who are significantly behind grade level (Smith, Fein, &

Paine, 2008). To catch up students who are significantly behind grade level, support can take the form of individualized tutoring or more personalized attention in classroom instruction such as decreasing group or class sizes, increasing the amount of instructional time, or providing other proven supports. Students benefit when the school provides a personalized environment with supportive teachers. Lastly, since the disruption and discontinuity caused by mobility adversely affects high school completion rates, administrators should take care to see that mobile students are immersed in a school atmosphere that is conducive to student engagement and a sense of membership in the school community (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). What is important to remember about any of these measures is that it takes a concerted and systematic effort on the part of administrators and teachers to boost the achievement of transfer students who are struggling.

The research on school closures suggests that districts need to pay attention to the decision making process, allow for adequate preparation time at the receiving school, and provide additional resources and support for transferring students. To minimize the political and emotional impact of school closure, the process should be fair, transparent, and engage the students and community in the decision making process. This includes providing adequate notice about the decision and information on the criteria used to make decisions. Engaging students and the community in the decision making process can help to articulate interests and views of the school's strengths and weaknesses that are often overlooked or discounted by administrators making closure decisions. Second, the receiving schools need adequate time to prepare for an influx of transfer students and additional resources and professional and support staff to meet the social and academic needs of incoming students. Important resources include, in combination, the quality of the teaching force and the quality

of the curriculum. Research has found that on every measure of teacher qualification—certification, subject matter background, pedagogical training, selectivity of college attended, test scores, or experience—schools serving low-income and minority students, those schools most vulnerable to school closure for low-performance, have less qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Likewise, students in high-minority schools have limited access to high-level courses and a challenging curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2007). These resources are needed both to support the transfer students and to mitigate the negative effects on teaching and learning in the receiving school. Finally, to facilitate the adjustment of transfer students to new schools, research suggests that students need to feel connected to the school and known by school personnel. Factors that facilitate the personal attention a student receives include school size and class size, and should be considered when designating receiving schools. In addition, the receiving school should help transfer students establish personal relationships with an adult in the school and provide one-on-one support to students experiencing difficulties.

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