



School Closure Questions and Answers December, 2008

Q1: The enrollment projection shows that the elementary school population is beginning a slow increase. So why do we have to close elementary schools?

A: While the long term projections show a small increase in elementary school population, we have too many schools for the number of students in the district. Our student enrollment peaked in 2001-02 and has since declined by more than 4,800 students. When housing prices spiked, some families moved to find less costly housing. The birth rate has also declined in WCCUSD—we have 2,000 fewer children in the 0-to-5 age bracket in WCCUSD than we did five years ago. The trends of high housing costs and lower birth rates also hold true for much of California: more than half the districts in the state are struggling with lower student enrollments.

The problem for WCCUSD is that we already had small schools even when we had nearly 5,000 more students. Now we have 24 elementary schools that have fewer than 450 students with eight of those enrolling fewer than 350. As the chart below shows, when we compare our average school size to other districts, WCCUSD schools are smaller.

Average School Enrollments

District	Elementary	Middle	High
West Contra Costa	429	686	1,298
Mt. Diablo	534	812	1,737
San Jose	551	1,115	1,402
Fremont	602	932	1,944
Long Beach	716	1,114	4,232

Since California funds education based on the number of students, operating small schools is costly. Overhead expenses—such as utilities, cleaning costs and maintenance—are all proportionately greater in smaller schools. Because we have so many small schools, we have higher management costs and more combination classes than schools with greater populations.

In order to remain financially viable, we're faced with closing some schools for 2009-10 and additional schools for 2010-11. In approving the 2008-09 budget, the county and our state trustee are requiring us to cut \$1.5 million from the budget in each of the next two years by closing schools. Public hearings that will help the School Board decide which schools to close will begin in January.

Closing schools and limiting benefits are divisive issues that are emotionally charged for all who are impacted or even potentially affected by the changes. Figuring out a way to make these changes in order to remain financially viable will be painful. But the alternative to accepting our responsibility is a return to state receivership, a path much worse for our students, staff and community.

Q2: When schools close will class size increase?

A: The decision on whether or not to close schools will have no effect on class size. The contractual agreement between United Teachers of Richmond (UTR, the teachers union) and the District addresses class size maximums.

Q3: What happens to teachers when a school closes?

A: The contractual agreement between UTR and the district addresses transfers and reassignments within the district. The teachers who are assigned to a school that closes will have the ability to request transfers to other schools.

Q4: What happens to classified staff and principals?

A: Classified staff: The Education Code and the contractual agreement between Local One and the district addresses transfers, reassignments and reduction of staff within the district. Staff assigned to a school that closes may have the ability to request transfers to other schools.

Principals: Administrators who are assigned to a school may be reassigned to another position within the district within their credential area.

Q5: What are the estimates for operating cost savings for closing schools based on?

A: Operational savings estimates are based on the reduction of staff located within the school office, which includes the principal and clerical staff; the custodians assigned to the facility; and the water, gas and electric bills for a typical facility. The estimates for savings used in the board presentation are the net savings associated with closing a school in the first year.

Q6: What are costs involved in closing schools (moving furniture, supplies, etc.) and where are these budgeted?

A: The activities involved in closing a school include the relocation of teachers (along with their furniture and supplies), and security provisions for the property. These costs will vary depending upon the number of teachers in a particular school and the size of the school itself. It is estimated that an elementary closure would have \$44,000 in one-time costs, with secondary school costs estimated at \$96,000. The budget would be in the general fund; these estimates were included in the overall first-year savings. The following table illustrates year one savings (with the one-time costs taken into account) and year two—or ongoing—savings.

Elementary Year 1	Elementary Year 2	Secondary Year 1	Secondary Year 2
\$300,000	\$345,000	\$800,000	\$915,000

Q7: What are the costs of adding classroom space at small schools that need to be enlarged, and what’s the source of those funds?

A: On average, adding a classroom to a campus costs \$100,000. The actual costs are dependent upon the particulars of the site and location of utilities for the classroom. The source of funds for the classrooms may include developer fees or other building funds. Every effort will be made to fund the buildings outside the general fund.

Q8: The voters just approved the parcel tax. Why didn’t we hear about school closures before now?

A: The School Board has discussed school closures at several meetings prior to the November 12 workshop including study sessions in the fall of 2007 and again in the spring of 2008. The topic of school closure was included in the budget workshops that the district held in each of the high school attendance areas in February and March of 2008. School closures are included in the Superintendent’s [current message](#) on the web site as well as those [archived](#) for [June 2008](#), [October 2007](#) and [January 2007](#).

Q9: How will school closure impact class size reduction for K-3 students?

A: School closures will not have a direct impact on class size reduction for students in grades K-3. It is important to recognize that when schools are closed, the students and teachers will move from the closed school to a school that has the capacity to accommodate more classrooms. Several elementary schools throughout our district have this type of capacity.

Once a decision is made about which schools will be closed, the work will focus on bringing the different staffs together so that they can begin to build relationships and establish a professional learning community that benefits all students.

We will also need to build relationships with all stakeholders (students, parents, communities) involved. This will not be an easy task, but if we keep our students in the forefront of our minds as we make decisions and move forward, we will make it work together.

Q10: Why is enrollment declining?

A: Enrollment decline in West Contra Costa mirrors what districts throughout the region and state are experiencing. The primary cause is the decline in birth rate. Families are having fewer children than they did a few years ago. Between 2001 and 2006, many families moved to central California—and even out of the state—to find more affordable

housing. This has contributed to the enrollment decline in school districts throughout the Bay Area. Enrollment decline is not limited to California. Districts throughout the United States, particularly in urban areas, are experiencing enrollment declines and are closing schools.

Q11: What cost savings measures has the district undertaken? How much money has been saved over the last three years?

A: In 2005-06 the district cut 18.5 positions and reduced other costs for a savings of \$2.0 million. There were no reductions made in 2006-07, and in 2007-08 the district eliminated 15 positions and cut costs to save \$2.6 million. Thus the total reductions in the past three years is \$4.6 million. For this year's budget the district cut an additional \$6.48 million, including 78 positions.

Q12: Has the district implemented all the MGT recommendation?

A: The MGT America performance audit of the West Contra Costa School District was released in April 2007 and is available on the District web site at: http://www.wccusd.k12.ca.us/superintendent/PDF/0607/mgt_report.pdf. That 311-page report included 80 recommendations for improving the performance of the WCCUSD school district and re-directing precious resources into the core functions of teaching and learning. More than 65 percent of those recommendations have been implemented and the district plans to implement 95 percent of the recommendation by April 2010.

Q13: How does the district define a high quality education? What's included in a high quality education?

A: An excellent education includes:

- Equity and access throughout the district
- Appropriate outreach to parents to support and inform them as stakeholders
- Partnerships with institutions of higher education, business and industry so as to market college and career ready students
- Standards-based curriculum and instruction
- Fully credentialed teaching with the appropriate pedagogy for supporting students so as to lessen the drop out rate
- Meeting the A-G and Career and Technical Education requirements so as to be college and/or career ready
- Safeguards offered by support staff so as to avoid students falling through the cracks
- Informed teaching and administrative staff, supported by relevant professional development that leads to improved teaching and improved student outcomes
- The belief that all students can learn, and the accompanying support systems, data analysis, strategies, and outcomes to educate all students inclusively (gifted, special needs, including foster care, homeless, group home, linguistically challenged,

traditionally underserved, disabled and English-only students whose standardized and local scores warrant reform of current programs)

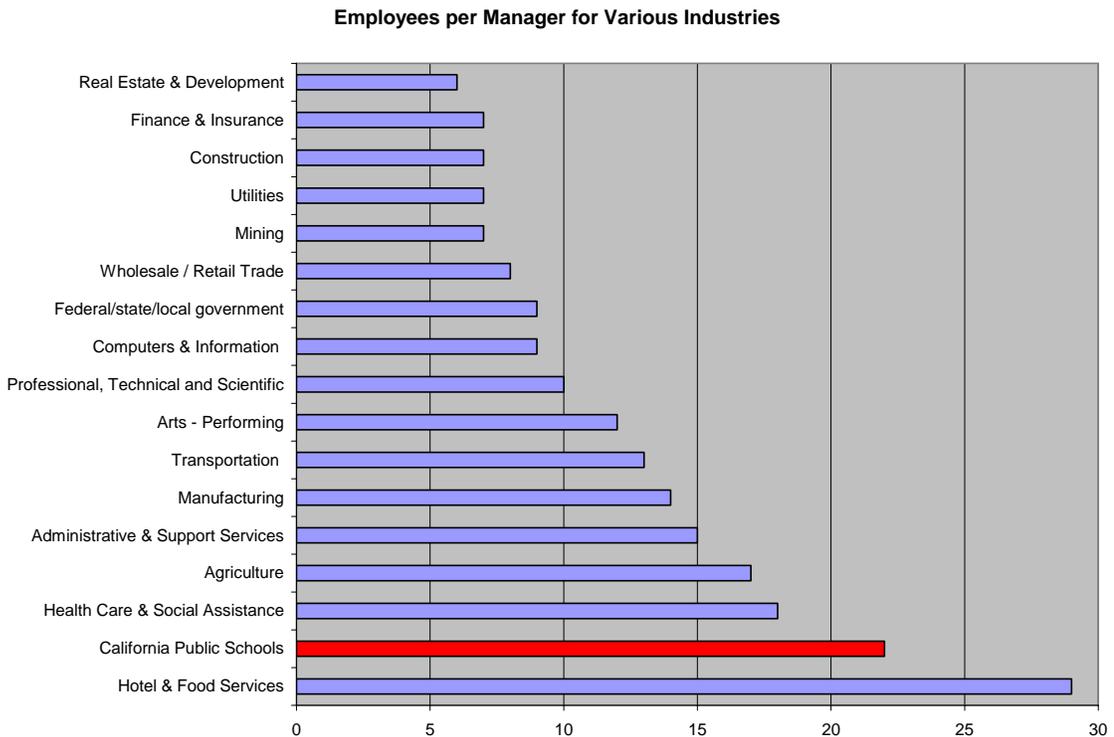
- Stewardship, defined as building and maintaining public confidence through the wise and effective use of public resources.

Q14: What about the bond money? Can it be used to prevent school closures?

A: Bond money can only be used for the renovations and improvements allowable by law, not for the general operations of the school district.

Q15: Why can't the School Board just cut administration to prevent school closures?

A: The myth is that school districts are top heavy with administrators. The reality is that school districts have far fewer managers than just about any other industry. The chart below shows the supervisory ratios or the number of employees per manager for various organizational clusters.



Sources: California Department of Education, Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006

Further, within the California public school business, WCCUSD employs fewer administrators than other school districts. The district spends less general fund dollars on administration per pupil than 19 of 21 of comparable Bay Area school districts, including Berkeley, Oakland, Mt. Diablo and San Ramon. As enrollment has declined over the past five years, the board has cut administration along other employee groups.

Back in the early 1990's WCCUSD assigned principals to cover two schools. We found out in a hurry that approach just didn't work. We need to have principals in our schools and we need some central administrators to provide leadership and coordination in our district.

Q16: What happens to special education programs and services when schools close?

A: Special education services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, adapted physical education and the resource specialist program/learning center model are offered at all schools within the district. Therefore, when a student is assigned to a new school of residence, due to closure, identical services are provided at the newly assigned school.

Special Day classes that are located at a school that is being closed are relocated to the nearest school that has room. In most cases, the teacher, aide(s) and students are moved together to the new site. In some cases, a student may be moved to another existing class due to the location of the class that was relocated. In rare cases, due to a drop in enrollment, the class may be eliminated, and the students are assigned to existing classes within the district.

Full inclusion students who are attending their school of residence are relocated with their peers to the school in which other residents are moved. Full inclusion students who are in a district-wide inclusion program not at their school of residence are moved as a group to another site that meets the needs of the full inclusion students.

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