Equity Audit of San Antonio Independent School District's (SAISD) Rightsizing Process

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Executive Summary of Findings

The San Antonio Independent School District (hereafter referred to as SAISD) is currently in the process of "rightsizing" the district through school closures, mergers, and consolidations. As part of this effort, SAISD partnered with and commissioned Dr. Terrance L. Green and his team, which officially started on October 20, 2023, to conduct the first phase of an equity audit.[2] The purpose of this audit is to provide SAISD with empirical data to inform the district's decision-making processes around rightsizing. As a result, findings from this audit are intended to identify areas of equity and inequity within the district's rightsizing process, plan, analysis, and pending package of schools proposed for closure and/or consolidation. As a result of this audit report, we aim to provide useful data to help inform the most equitable and humanizing decisions possible about the rightsizing plan.

With that said, there are a few important caveats to consider:

1. The current iteration of this report is our best effort given the time allotted to complete the audit. Typically, an equity audit can take between 6-9 months (or even an entire academic year). However, this report is the result of our teams' extremely hard efforts to produce the best possible report in only 3 weeks (from October 20, 2023 when the contract was officially signed to November 10, 2023, when we shared a copy of this document with the district). Typically, our equity audit process would have been more interactive, but given our time constraints we worked around the clock to complete the audit and write the report.

2. This report is not intended to be viewed as a "gotcha" or an attempt to undermine the rightsizing work. Rather, we view our role as: 1) building on the work that the district has already done and 2) We view our role as external collaborators who have been tasked with asking different questions, looking through different vantage points, and considering things that may not have been considered in order to offer the most comprehensive and equity-based analysis of the rightsizing process and potential outcomes (again within the time allotted).

3. Given that SAISD commissioned this report for their use, I (Dr. Terrance L. Green) and my team do not have any control over how the district utilizes the report or the decisions that the district decides to make (or not make) based on this report.

4. From my first conversation with SAISD district administrators, they clearly communicated that some schools will close but also communicated their willingness to make adjustments to the original package that they put forward if there was sufficient data to support such changes. Therefore, the goal of this report is to offer an honest, empirically grounded, and critical perspective of the

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[2] This partnership also includes two other phases: humanizing transition and equitable, community-based uses of closed buildings. However, the data in phase 1 was intended to inform the district's school closure decision-making process.

SAISD rightsizing work in an attempt to do what is most equitable for students, families, and employees of the district.

5. At the end of this document, after you finish reading it for yourself, I (Dr. Terrance L. Green), the lead researcher on this audit, offer my interpretation of the findings.

Overview of Guiding Research Questions & Key Audit Findings

Section 1 Guiding Question: Have past school closures in SAISD yielded better educational outcomes for students in the district?

Key Findings:
- Overall, our analysis suggests that students whose schools that were closed previously in SAISD in the 2014-2015 school year *did not* yield better educational outcomes in attendance, grades, and STAAR test scores, and sometimes yielded poorer outcomes, when compared to their peers in schools with similar demographic composition. Importantly, 3rd and 4th grade students in schools that were closed experienced lower grades for 1-2 years following the closure but their grades improved during middle school years. By 8th grade, students in 5th grade when their schools were closed had the lowest grades. Students enrolled in schools that closed had higher absence rates by 8th grade. These comparative educational outcomes for students were statistically significant, which means it was not random or happened by chance.

Section 2 Guiding Questions: Will the closure of the proposed 19 SAISD schools produce more equity in fiscal resource distributions for all students, especially Students of Color, Students who are eligible for F&RL, and Students who receive special education services?

Will the closure of the proposed 19 SAISD schools provide all students, especially Students of Color, Students who are eligible for F&RL, and Students who receive Special education services with access to schools with higher academic performance and highly effective and skilled educators?

Key Findings:

- Receiving schools should receive more fiscal resources to support students. If per-pupil instructional and instructional support expenses remain constant between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years ($8,577 per student) and if the projected number of students transition to receiving schools, this could make an additional $47,731,005 available to receiving schools.

- On average, the demographic composition of receiving and merging schools remains similar before and after enrolling additional students, but some schools may see large shifts in certain student characteristics.

- School academic achievement performance is similar among receiving schools and schools proposed for closure or merging.

- Disciplinary actions are slightly more frequent at receiving schools than at proposed closing and merging schools. However, this finding was not statistically significant meaning it could be due to chance.

- Total student enrollment among receiving schools is expected to increase by over 150%.

- Student access to experienced, certified educators from a variety of backgrounds and content areas is often similar between receiving schools and schools proposed for closure or merging. However, student-educator ratios are higher for art, music, and reading specialist educators in receiving schools.

Section 3 Guiding Questions: How, and to what extent, if at all, do students, families, and teachers perceive SAISD's school closures decision making process and the process to identify schools on the list for closure as equitable, participatory, and community-centered?

How might SAISD transition students, families, and principals to receiving/consolidated schools in the most humanizing, equitable, and least disruptive ways possible that meets their needs?

Key Findings:
- Teachers, principals and staff had mixed perceptions and experiences about the rightsizing and school closure process and SAISD's communication about the process.

- Some teachers, principals and staff experienced the rightsizing process as clear and honest (this was a minority of participants).

- The majority of participants experienced the rightsizing process as shocking, moving too quickly, and a "done deal."

- SAISD employees have professional, social and emotional, and logistical needs that must be met to have a dignified transition to a receiving school, if their schools are closed.

Section 4 Guiding Questions: How, if at all, might the closure of the proposed 19 schools foster the emergence of "school deserts" in SAISD communities, particularly in areas that have historically experienced the most education burdens, inequities, and oppression?

What neighborhood communities, if any, have experienced the most school closures over the last 25 years?

Key Findings:
- There are three attendance zones that serve SAISD students and families that can become hotspots for school closures if several of the proposed schools are closed.

- The closing of some proposed schools will result in a "school desert" for one neighborhood that serves SAISD students and families. However, the district already has one school desert which is currently existing prior to any of the proposed school closures.

Acknowledgement and Gratitude

We want to express our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Jaime Aquino and Patricia Salzmann, senior administrators at SAISD, the SAISD Board of Trustees, and SAISD students, families, and employees for entrusting us with the important task of conducting this audit. A special thank you also goes to the San Antonio Alliance and Teachers Union for their continuous support and advocacy in prompting the district to conduct an equity audit as part of the rightsizing process. Their humanizing, justice-centered, and participatory perspectives are very important to SAISD. Our deep appreciation also extends to the SAISD Accountability, Research, Evaluation, and Testing team for their generous collaboration and for providing us with the necessary data. We are equally thankful to the Family and Community Engagement Office for their assistance in ensuring uninterrupted teaching for the educators as we conducted interviews and focus groups at the affected campuses. Last but not least, our heartfelt thanks to all those who shared their valuable insights, time, and experiences with us, enriching our understanding of the rightsizing process. We are very grateful for your participation in this study.

Audit Introduction & Overview

Purpose of SAISD School Closure Equity Audit

SAISD is in the midst of rightsizing/closing schools to address its persistent declining enrollment and underutilization of school buildings. To be responsive to the needs of the community and to ensure that the district was proceeding with its rightsizing plans in the most equitable ways possible, SAISD partnered with and commissioned Dr. Terrance L. Green (Associate Professor of Education at the University of Texas at Austin) and his team to conduct the first phase of an equity audit.[3] This partnership officially started on October 20, 2023. The purpose of this audit is to provide SAISD with empirical data to inform the district's decision-making processes around rightsizing, and specifically, the final package of schools that the district puts forward for the Board of Trustees to vote on during their meeting on November 13, 2023.

Defining Components of Educational Equity

Educational equity is a term that is very often used in school settings and has become a buzzword that means "everything and nothing, all at the same time." As a result, we first define how we understand what educational equity means because our audit in SAISD aimed to be mindful of these four intersecting components of equity as articulated in the education research literature.[4][5][6][7] These components of educational equity include:

- **Redistribution of Power, Resources, Access, and Opportunities** that Black and Brown students, adults, and families (and any other group that has been systematically marginalized by schools because of their identities and positionalities) need to be fully human and thrive intellectually, socially, emotionally.

- **Paying on the Education Debt**,[8] which Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings describes the historical, socio-political, economic, and moral injustices towards Black and Brown youth that have accumulated over time.

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3 This partnership also includes two other phases: humanizing transition and equitable, community-based uses of closed buildings. However, the data in phase 1 was intended to inform the district's school closure decision-making process.
4 Calabrese Barton, A., & Tan, E. (2020). Beyond equity as inclusion: A framework of "rightful presence" for guiding justice-oriented studies in teaching and learning. *Educational researcher*, *49*(6), 433-440.
5 Gutiérrez, R. (2009). Embracing the inherent tensions in teaching mathematics from an equity stance. *Democracy & Education*, *18*(3), 9-16.
6 Morales-Doyle, D. (2019). There is no equity in a vacuum: On the importance of historical, political, and moral considerations in science education. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *14*, 485-491.
7 Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational researcher*, *35*(7), 3-12.
8 Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational researcher*, *35*(7), 3-12.

- **Power Sharing Processes** with communities and groups who have traditionally been excluded from decision making that strive for equity of racial opportunities and outcomes.

- **Repairing Racial & Educational Harm, Injustices, Oppression** that has been (and is) waged against Black and Brown youth who have been traditionally marginalized by schools (e.g., this also includes Students who are immigrants, Students from low-income backgrounds, Students who are experiencing housing instability, Students who receive special education services, Students who are bilingual, Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ and their intersections).

Given these components, educational equity begins with a rich understanding of the racial, social, and political realities of the past to more clearly understand the current situations of districts and schools. This is why section one of this audit starts with an analysis of past school closures in SAISD. Indeed, as Professor Danny Morales-Doyle asserts," If equity is our goal, it is important that we understand that inequity is not a problem that developed recently or by accident…[so] without directly confronting the historical development of inequity as component of oppression, how do we address the root causes of inequity?"[9]

Brief Background of Equity Audits

[10]Scholars and practitioners have used equity audits for over five decades in various fields of study, including health care, business, and other sectors.[11] However, in education, equity audits have been most commonly used for curriculum auditing and to enforce civil rights and state accountability policies.[12] For over the past twenty years, educational leadership scholars and practitioners have applied equity audits to assess and achieve equity across a range of school-based outcomes such as student placement, academic achievement, and discipline.[13] Capper and Young traced the history of equity audits in the field and suggest:

> Educational scholars began employing the methods of equity audits long before the process was introduced to the educational leadership community by Capper & Frattura (2000) who offered a Demographic Questionnaire as a key tool in leading beyond inclusion and that included detailed and key components of later equity audits. (p. 187)[14]

Equity audits, however, gained significant popularity in the early 2000s when Linda Skrla and colleagues formally introduced the term and instrument to the field educational leadership. Empirical research on equity audits has mainly focused on the implementation process and the ways that school leaders use the tool. Bleyaert examined the implementation of equity audits across five high schools required to meet a state curriculum mandate in math. She found that collaboration was essential to the equity audit process and that some schools needed external

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[9] Morales-Doyle, D. (2019). There is no equity in a vacuum: On the importance of historical, political, and moral considerations in science education. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *14*, 485-491.

[10] This section is drawn from Green, 2017

[11] Skrla et al., 2004

[12] Skrla et al., 2009

[13] Brown, 2010; Capper et al., 2000; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Skrla et al., 2004; Skrla et al., 2009

[14] Capper and Young (2015)

assistance to adequately apply them. In schools where there was not a culture of collaboration, many school leaders viewed equity audits as another report to complete.[15] Similarly, Brown relied on equity audits to examine patterns of systemic inequity across 24 elementary schools. Aiming to highlight schools that were advancing academic excellence and equity, Brown found that equity around teacher quality, demographics, and programs was fair. However, she also found that student achievement inequities were most salient, particularly between students of color from low-income backgrounds and their White, middle-class peers.[16] Additionally, equity audits have been applied in rural settings[17] and in urban and suburban contexts.[18]

Even though scholars do not fully agree on one single process for conducting equity audits, several key features are commonly employed across equity audit processes. Skrla and colleagues use an equity audit process that analyzes twelve indicators across three categories: teacher quality, programmatic equity, and achievement equity. These scholars advance a seven- step implementation process: (a) creating a committee of relevant stakeholders, (b) presenting the data to the stakeholders and graphing the data, (c) discussing the meaning of the data, (d) discussing potential solutions, (e) implementing solutions, (f) monitoring and evaluating results, and (g) celebrating successes and/or returning to step three of the process.[19] Similarly, Capper and Young offer a six-phase equity audit process: (a) achieving proportional representation, (b) establishing an equity audit team, (c) designing the equity audit, (d) collecting and analyzing data, (e) setting and prioritizing data-based goals, and (f) developing a plan for implementation. One of the major distinctions between Capper and Young's and Frattura and Capper's use of the equity audit is they anchor their work in integrated/inclusive practices, as measured by proportional representation as a way for all students to actualize high achievement and to mitigate further marginalization of students.[20]

Our Approach to Equity Audits for SAISD

Building on the existing research, we conduct equity audits with the aims of furthering racial justice, education and community justice, spatial justice, and generational justice. Our approach to equity audits is customized, research-based, comprehensive, collaborative, and transparent. In addition, our approach is also strengths-based, centered around culturally responsive evaluation, rooted in Paulo Freire's notion of dialogue, and conscious of race, racism, and its intersections with other identities such as social class, gender, gender identity, perceived notions of ability, sexual orientation, religion, and any of other markers of difference that have been used to marginalize children and youth in schools. In conducting equity audits, we are *not* seeking to "catch districts doing something wrong" so that we can make people feel horribly. Rather, our goal is to serve as an external, critical and collaborative partner who can provide community and school-based, empirical data and identify systemic inequities that we can share with the district in order to make it better for the children, youth, adults, and families that they serve. As a result, our equity audit process requires deep and meaningful collaboration with district staff, students,

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[15] Bleyaert (2011)
[16] Brown (2010)
[17] Cleveland et al., 2012
[18] Frattura & Capper, 2007; Green & Dantley, 2013; Skrla et al., 2009
[19] Skrla et al. 2004, 2009
[20] Capper and Young (2015)

and families, caregivers, and community members (especially for community audits). These stakeholders' participation, especially the district's, is imperative to us conducting a successful equity audit that can yield useful recommendations for the district. However, given our limited timeline to conduct the audit, we tried our best to maintain fidelity to these principles.

Our equity audit for SAISD consists of three phases. For phase 1 of the SAISD audit, we focused specifically on providing data to inform their proposed school closure package, which they are planning to take to the board of trustees for a vote on November 13, 2023.

Report Structure

This SAISD audit report is organized into four Sections, which corresponds with the overall guiding research questions and methodological approaches that we took to complete this audit.

- In **Section 1**, we describe our findings related to the historic educational impacts of school closures on student outcomes in SAISD.

- In **Section 2**, we discuss the key findings from our equity audit related to the reallocation of resources and reassignment of students.

- In **Section 3**, we share our findings related to SAISD employees' (who work at the 19 proposed schools for closure) qualitative experiences and perceptions of the rightsizing process.

- In **Section 4**, we describe our findings related to our geospatial analysis of impacted schools' neighborhood communities.

The report concludes with me, Dr. Terrance L. Green, the lead author of this report, sharing my overall takeaways from the audit as well as some final things for the district to consider. Finally, in the Appendix Section, we provide a more detailed and technical description of our methods and the research team's biographical information.

What We Know About Urban School Closures From Research

To situate the findings from this equity audit within the broader research, we briefly review some of the national empirical findings on urban school closures over the last two decades. We specifically examine what we know overall from the research on urban school closures:

1. The justification for why schools close
2. How school closures and rightsizing is commonly implemented
3. The impacts of school closures on students and districts

SAISD is not the only school district experiencing "rightsizing" and closures. In fact, districts across Texas and the United States are experiencing school closures.[21] Many researchers expect

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21 Green, T. L., Sánchez, J. D., & Castro, A. J. (2019). Closed schools, open markets: A hot spot spatial analysis of school closures and charter openings in Detroit. *AERA Open*, *5*(2), 2332858419850097.

this trend to continue for many years as a result of a number of factors.[22] Some of the factors that contribute to school closures are: the lingering impacts of COVID-19 on school systems, shrinking budgets, declining enrollment and overall birth rates, and the rise of nontraditional school options (e.g., charter schools).[23] However, school closures can historically be traced back to racially and economically segregated neighborhoods and schools which were in part created through redlining, racial restrictive covenants, and exclusionary zoning that dictated where Black and Brown people could live.[24]

Nationally, over the last almost 10 years (between the 2013-2014 and 2021-2022 school years) 10, 300 schools have been closed across the United States.[25] Moreover, many major urban districts have closed schools in recent years. For example, Chicago closed over 50 schools (in 2013 alone), Pittsburg closed 22 elementary and middle schools over a two year period (between 2005 and 2007 school years), Philadelphia closed 30 schools since 2012, Detroit closed over 100 since 2009. Houston closed over 11 schools since 2011, Tulsa has closed nearly 15 schools since 2011 and St. Louis has closed over 50 schools since 2009.[26]

Common Justifications for Why Schools Close

Based on research from across the United States there are three main reasons that district officials give for closing schools: (1) academic performance, (2) cost savings and efficiency, and (3) educational equality and equity.[27] I will briefly discuss each of these.[28]

First, one reason why urban district officials offer for closing schools is low academic performance. These schools are often referred to as "failing," "deficient," and "inadequate" because of their low test scores, promotion and graduation rates, and attendance. However, school performance is rarely the only reason for why schools are closed. According to research, school performance is given as a reason for closure along with the other two justifications, which are described below.[29]

Second, another reason that district officials give for closing schools is cost savings and efficiency. The United States is in a national budget crisis as well as many school districts. In fact, many urban school district officials have stated that budget constraints were the primary

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22 Ewing, E. L., & Green, T. L. (2022). Beyond the headlines: Trends and future directions in the school closure literature. *Educational Researcher*, *51*(1), 58-65.

23 Pearman, F. A., & II, L. C., & Greene, DM (2023). *Examining racial (in) equity in school-closure patterns in California*.

24 Hahnel, C., & Marchitello, M. (2023). Centering equity in the school-closure process in California. *Policy Analysis for California Education. https://edpolicyinca. org/publications/centering-equity-school-closure-process-california*.

25 https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=619

26 Journey for Justice. (2014). Death by a thousand cuts: Racism, school closure, and public school sabotage. Retrieved from http://www.otlcampaign.org/blog/2014/05/21/death-thousand
-cuts-racism-school-closures-and-public-school-sabotage

27 Tieken, M. C., & Auldridge-Reveles, T. R. (2019). Rethinking the school closure research: School closure as spatial injustice. *Review of Educational Research*, *89*(6), 917-953.

28 A large portion of this review draws on Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles (2019) research.

29 Tieken, M. C., & Auldridge-Reveles, T. R. (2019). Rethinking the school closure research: School closure as spatial injustice. *Review of Educational Research*, *89*(6), 917-953.

reason for closure. Some of these districts include Detroit, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Washington D.C., Chicago, Pittsburgh, to name a few. For example, when Chicago closed schools they were facing a $1 billion dollar deficit and Detroit was facing a $326 million deficit.

Third, district officials close schools in an attempt to bring about more educational equality and equity. Often, the arguments of cost savings and efficiency and academic performance frequently intertwine with this third, interconnected rationale: the pursuit of equity for all students. In other words, school districts justify closing schools because they believe that it can provide better educational access and opportunities for student groups who have been historically underserved in schools because of their race, economic status, native language, and where they live. For example, district officials in Philadelphia, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh stated that school closures could provide "equal access to arts and athletics, up-to-date science and computer labs, well-maintained buildings, an array of course selections, and support systems such as counseling or tutoring."[30] According to research, district officials have often used the language of "consolidating" and "rightsizing" facilities to offer equality of opportunity and access, and to expand extracurricular offerings to all students regardless of where they live, their race or economic status.[31]

How School Closure and Rightsizing Processes Are Commonly Implemented

According to research from districts across the United States that have closed schools, there is a common process that districts experience as they close schools.[32] First, local or state officials decide that school closures are necessary, often because of one of the three factors mentioned above (i.e., academic performance, cost savings and efficiency, and/or educational equity). Then, to make the case for closure, officials typically use financial and academic indicators such as enrollment numbers, test scores, costs per student to identify potential schools for closure.[33] Next, some schools are entirely closed, phased out, reconfigured into offering more or less grade levels. Districts often provide transportation to receiving schools, and depending on the district, they will sell unused buildings.[34]

Throughout the process, some, not all, school districts hold public meetings to gather community input, create planning committees to shepherd the process.[35] According to research, however, community residents have often stated that community input feels "performative and that closure decisions are made with little regard for the immediate needs of those communities affected."[36] Several studies suggest that families and communities feel unheard and excluded by district officials from the closure processes.[37]

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30 Dowdall, E. (2011). Closing public schools in Philadelphia: Lessons from six urban districts. *Philadelphia, Pa.: Pew Charitable Trusts*. (page 11).
31 Tieken, M. C., & Auldridge-Reveles, T. R. (2019). Rethinking the school closure research: School closure as spatial injustice. *Review of Educational Research*, *89*(6), 917-953.
32 To be clear, my explanation of this process solely to explain what we know from empirical research on the implementation process of school closures to help situate nationally and locally.
33 Ewing, 2018; Gordon et al., 2018
34 Tiken & Auldridge-Reveles (2019)
35 DeYoung, 2000; Ewing, 2018; Good, 2016; Hendrix, 2013
36 Tiken & Auldridge-Reveles (2019)
37 Buras, 2015; Freelon, 2018; Lipman et al., 2014; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017

Impacts of School Closures on Students and Districts

The impacts of school closure on students' academic outcomes is mixed, at best. Closing schools has been shown to negatively impact students' educational outcomes in grade point average, test scores, grades, absences, and relationships with other students and adults, especially during and the year after the closure.[38] However, the longer term impacts of school closures on students' academic outcomes is also mixed, but shows the most improvements based on the "quality" of displaced students' receiving schools. In other words, studies have shown that displaced students have had better educational outcomes if the receiving school is considered a "higher performing school" than their closed school.[39] Most often, however, when students' schools are closed, they are not sent to a "higher performing" school but rather to a academically comparable school, at best.[40] In fact, in a study conducted by researchers at Stanford University they examined school closures across 26 states between 2006 and 2013 and found that less than 50% of displaced students landed in an academically "better" school.[41] The existing research suggests that not only are students who are displaced by closure impacted negatively, but some students who attend the receiving schools are as well. This is what researchers call a "spillover" effect which has been documented to show the students in receiving schools experience lower test scores when their school absorbs students from a school that was closed.[42]

A study of school closures in New York suggested that students who were performing higher on state exams benefited from closures. However, students who were performing lower on state exams experienced decreases in their academic outcomes.[43] Moreover, the impacts of closure on student graduation is mixed as some studies suggest that students experienced district wide increases after closure yet student-level decreases.[44] Other studies suggest that closure can increase student mobility and others find that mobility is not impacted. The research is clear, however, that when schools are closed, some students and families often feel a sense of loss, confusion, emotional complications, and institutional mourning.[45] In addition, students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds may experience longer bus rides and commutes, reduced safety, which in turn limits participation in extracurricular activities.[46]

While fiscal efficiencies and savings are often justifications for closure, a lack of studies have actually documented the actual savings that districts experience after schools are closed. In fact, the research that does exist would suggest that districts *do not* save as much money as they

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[38] Brummet, 2014; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Gordon et al., 2018

[39] Higher performing schools are typically assessed based on their achievement of traditional education markers of success such as test scores. However, metrics as such alone are not sufficient enough to account for the qualitative factors that comprise a quality school such as culturally responsive and humanizing environment, anti-racist school culture, etc.

[40] De le Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Engberg et al., 2012

[41] Han et al., 2017

[42] Brummet, 2014; Carlson & Lavertu, 2016; Gordon et al., 2018; Steinberg & McDonald, 2019

[43] Bifulco & Schwegman, 2019

[44] Kirshner et al., 2010; Luppesu et al., 2011

[45] Deeds & Pattillo, 2015 Ewing, 2018; Gordon et al., 2018; Steggert & Galletta, 2018

[46] Conner & Cosner, 2014; Lipman et al., 2014

anticipate after schools are closed or a very small amount.[47] For example, Philadelphia only saved 1% after it closed 30 schools (10% of its schools) between 2012 and 2013. [48] The research also indicates that school districts do not typically save money from closing schools unless paired with massive layoffs.[49] In addition, districts often incur additional costs to maintain closed buildings. For example, a study that examined the cost savings of school closures in Washington, D.C. found that the district had not accounted for the costs of inventory, relocation, storage, demolition, security, and transportation, which added an additional $8 million costs for closing schools that the district did not account for.[50]

In sum, reviewing the literature on urban school closures provides an empirical backdrop for stakeholders across the SAISD community to understand the national landscape of school closures. In doing so, this literature is useful in helping local stakeholders make sense of and situate the rightsizing process that is occurring in SAISD in constructive and instructive ways.

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[47] Finnigan & Lavner, 2012; Killeen & Sipple, 2000
[48] Jack & Sludden, 2013
[49] Pew Research Center (2011). Closing schools in Philadelphia. Lessons from six urban districts.
[50] Audit of the closure and consolidation of 23 D.C. Public Schools.

Section 1: Historical Impacts of SAISD School Closures on Student Educational Outcomes

Chapter Overview: To historically situate and frame our analysis, we first examined the effects of the most recent round of school closures in SAISD on students' outcomes.[51] By first delving into the historical context of these closures, we aim to provide a longitudinal understanding of how students in SAISD have been impacted in times past by closures in the district. We understand that these closures happened under the leadership of prior district administrators and that past experiences do not determine future outcomes. However, this historical examination serves as a crucial backdrop for understanding the long-term implications of school closures on students to anticipate and mitigate the potential challenges that students might face if their schools are closed during the 2023-2024 school year.

Guiding Research Question: To examine the historical impacts of SAISD school closures on student outcomes, we examined the following research question:

- Have past school closures in SAISD yielded better educational outcomes for students in the district?

We examined this question because of the usefulness of the quantitative principle "statistical dependence." Various statistical methods rely on historical data to make informed predictions or forecasts about future trends or events. By examining patterns, trends, and relationships within the historical data, statisticians can identify potential correlations and dependencies that can help in making reasonable projections for the future. Again, while past events can offer valuable insights, it's important to note that statistical analyses often rely on assumptions and limitations, and the future is inherently uncertain. Therefore, while historical data can provide guidance, it is crucial to interpret statistical findings with an understanding of the associated uncertainties and to consider other relevant factors that may influence future outcomes. With that said, we also examined this question because the impact of prior school closures in SAISD on students is the most concrete evidence for how school closures impact students.

Our Research Approach and Methodology

The Data Used for the Study: San Antonio ISD (SAISD) provided student data on students' background characteristics (race/ethnicity, economically disadvantaged status, gender) and well as their school attendance, grades in their classes, and STAAR test results for reading. This study included students enrolled in two schools that were closed by SAISD in 2014-2015 and four comparison schools:

- The two target schools were closed following the 2014-2015 school year
    - Steele Elementary
    - W.W. White Elementary (hereafter referred to White Elementary)

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[51] The district shared data with us on schools that had closed in the district as far back as 1997.

- The matched comparison schools were selected to be similar to the closed schools based on racial/ethnic composition of the student body, percent of students who were identified as economically disadvantaged, schoolwide attendance rates, and STAAR test results
    - o Ball Elementary
    - o de Zavala Elementary
    - o Storm Elementary
    - o Cameron Elementary

The district provided data for 3rd to 8th grade (as available) for five cohorts of students:

Table 1. School Years and Corresponding Grade Levels for each Cohort.

	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Cohort 1 469 students	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Cohort 2 519 students	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Cohort 3 494 students	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Cohort 4 523 students	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Cohort 5 469 students	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	

Note. Cohort 5 does not include 8th grade data due to data issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2019-2020 school year.

Explaining the Comparison Groups

For all of the results we present, we include results for four different groups of students:

- Group 1: Students who attended Steele or White Elementary (the target schools that closed) but who transitioned to middle school *before* the schools were closed.

- Group 2: Students who were enrolled in Steele or White Elementary and were in 5th grade in the 2014-15 school year (the final year these target schools were open).

- Group 3: Students who were enrolled in Steele or White Elementary and were in 3rd or 4th grade in the 2014-15 school year (the final year these target schools were open).

- Group 4: Students who were enrolled in one of the four comparison schools in 3rd grade.

Each of these groups was important. First, the students who attended Steele and White Elementary Schools but who had transitioned to middle school *before* the schools closed (Group 1 - Cohorts 1 and 2) meant that we had students who attended Steele and White without the

threat of closure. These students would be drawn from the same neighborhoods but would *not* be experiencing the stress of having their school closed while they were enrolled.

We also recognized that students who were 5th graders during the 2014-15 school year (Group 2 - Cohort 3) would be transitioning to a new school whether or not Steele and White Elementary Schools stayed open. Although they experienced the stress of their schools closing, they were already going to be moving to a new school. This is a very different experience than students who were in 3rd or 4th grades during the 2014-15 school year at Steele or White Elementary (Group 3, Cohorts 4 and 5) because these students could have continued in these schools the following school year if SAISD had not closed their schools. This meant that these students had to make an off-time school transition—that is, they had to move schools at a grade level when school moves do not typically occur.

Finally, we included students who were enrolled in matched comparison schools (Cohorts 1 through 5) so that we could compare how students were doing when they were enrolled in schools that were not closed but were similar to Steele and White Elementary in terms of student demographics and academic performance.

Students' Educational Outcomes from 3rd to 8th Grades for each Group

We examined students' educational outcomes from 3rd to 8th grades using these indicators:
- Absences rate – the percent of days students were absent from school each year.
- Grades in school – the average grades students earned across all classes.
- STAAR reading scale scores – the score students earned on the STAAR reading test.

Overall, we see that students who were in the target schools when they closed struggled more in school than students who were in the comparison group schools. The technical information about how we prepared and analyzed the absence, grades, and STAAR reading test scores data are in Appendix at the end of this report. Here, we describe how the four groups differed for each of these student outcomes.

Student absence rates. As shown on the next page, **for all groups, we found that students' absences generally increased over time.** Students in each of the four groups had very similar rates of absences in 3rd grade—on average, students missed between 4% and 5% of the total days they could be in their schools. But over time, we see that students in the targeted closed schools (Steele and White Elementary) had the largest increases in school absences from 3rd to 8th grades. For example, across all students in the study, **the absence rates in 8th grade were <u>highest</u> for students who were in 5th grade in Steele or White Elementary during the schools' final year.** On average, these students were absent from school about 9% of the time. **Students who were in Steele and White and were in 3rd or 4th grade when these schools closed had the second highest rates—these students were absent from school almost 8% of the time.** The comparison students, both those who attended Steele or White Elementary before the threat of closure and those who attended the matched comparison schools, were absent around 7% or less, and these students' absences did not increase as much from 3rd to 8th grades.

Figure 1. Percent days absent from 3rd to 8th grades by group
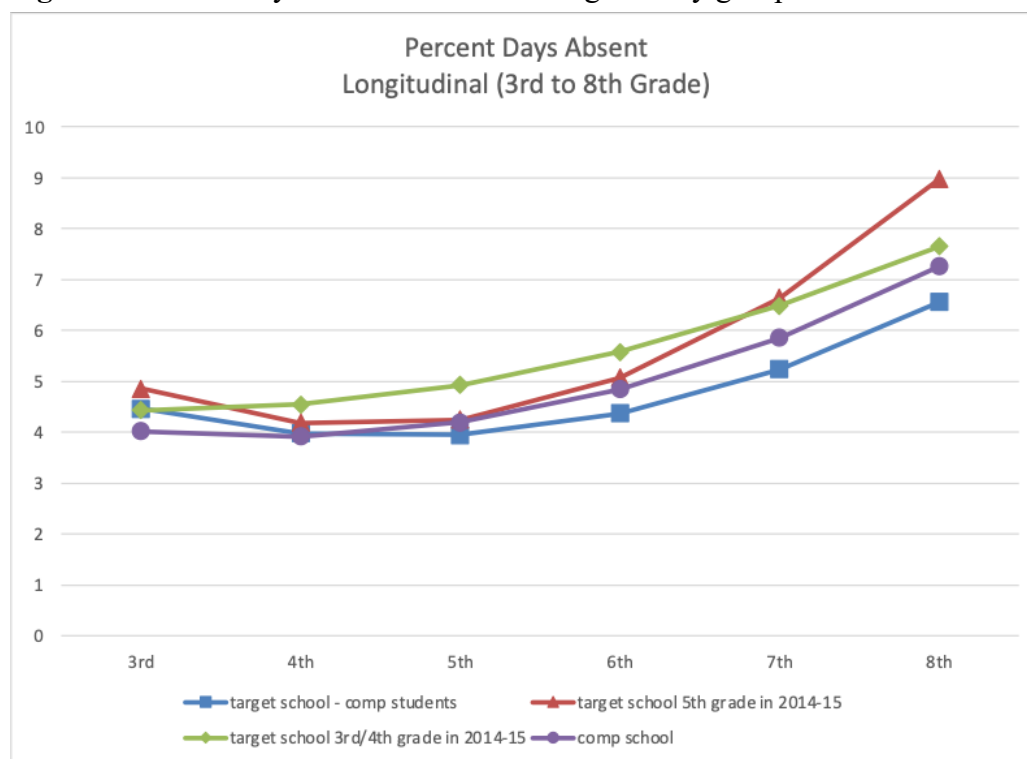
Student grades in school. As shown on the next page, we found that students' grades changed over time, and these changes looked different for each group. In 3rd grade, students in the target schools (Steele and White Elementary) during the year these schools closed had similar grades to students who were in these target schools but who moved to middle school before the schools closed—all of these students had average grades between 83 and 84, which means they were mostly earning Bs in their classes. Students in the comparison schools had lower average grades in 3rd grade, earning grades just below 82, which means they were mostly earning B- in their classes.

While the students in the comparison group schools started out with lower grades, over time these students' grades in classes increased, and by 8th grade, they had average grades of 84 in their classes. **Students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 3rd or 4th grade when the schools closed earned the lowest grades through elementary school, but their grades improved across middle school.** By the end of middle school, these students had average grades that were identical to those in the comparison group schools, averaging an 84 (or a B in their classes). **Students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 5th grade when the schools closed earned the lowest grades by 8th grade, averaging a B- in their classes.** The change in their grades over time was very similar to students who attended Steele or White Elementary but moved to middle school before these schools closed.

Figure 2. Average grades in school from 3rd to 8th grades by group
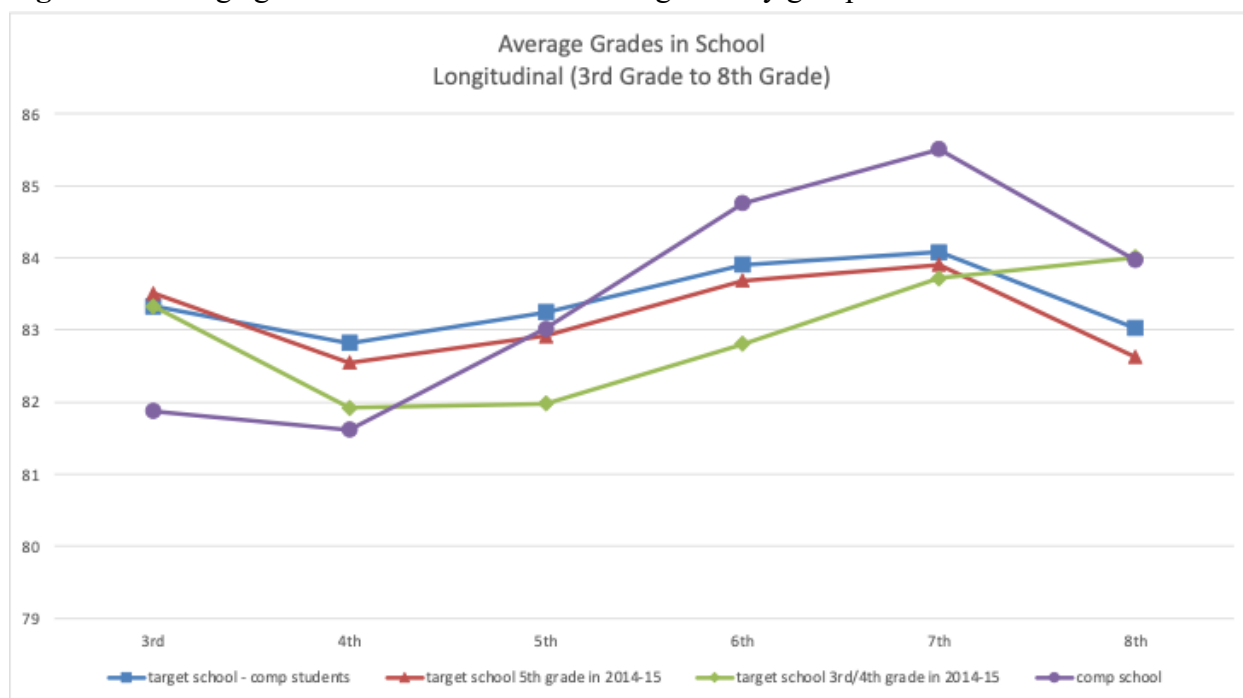
STAAR reading test scores. As shown in Figure 3 below, students in the comparison schools earned the highest STAAR test scores from 5th to 8th grades. **Students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 3rd or 4th grade when the schools closed had similar reading test scores in 5th grade to students in the comparison group schools, but over time, their STAAR reading test scores declined. By 8th grade, students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 3rd or 4th grade earned reading test scores that were almost 75 points lower than students in the comparison schools.** Similarly, students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 5th grade when the schools closed had a drop in their STAAR reading test scores after leaving their elementary schools, and these students test scores stayed very stable over time. **By 8th grade, the gap in reading test scores between students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 5th grade and students in the comparison group schools had widened by more than 100 points.**

Figure 3. Average STAAR reading test scores from 5ᵗʰ to 8ᵗʰ grades by group
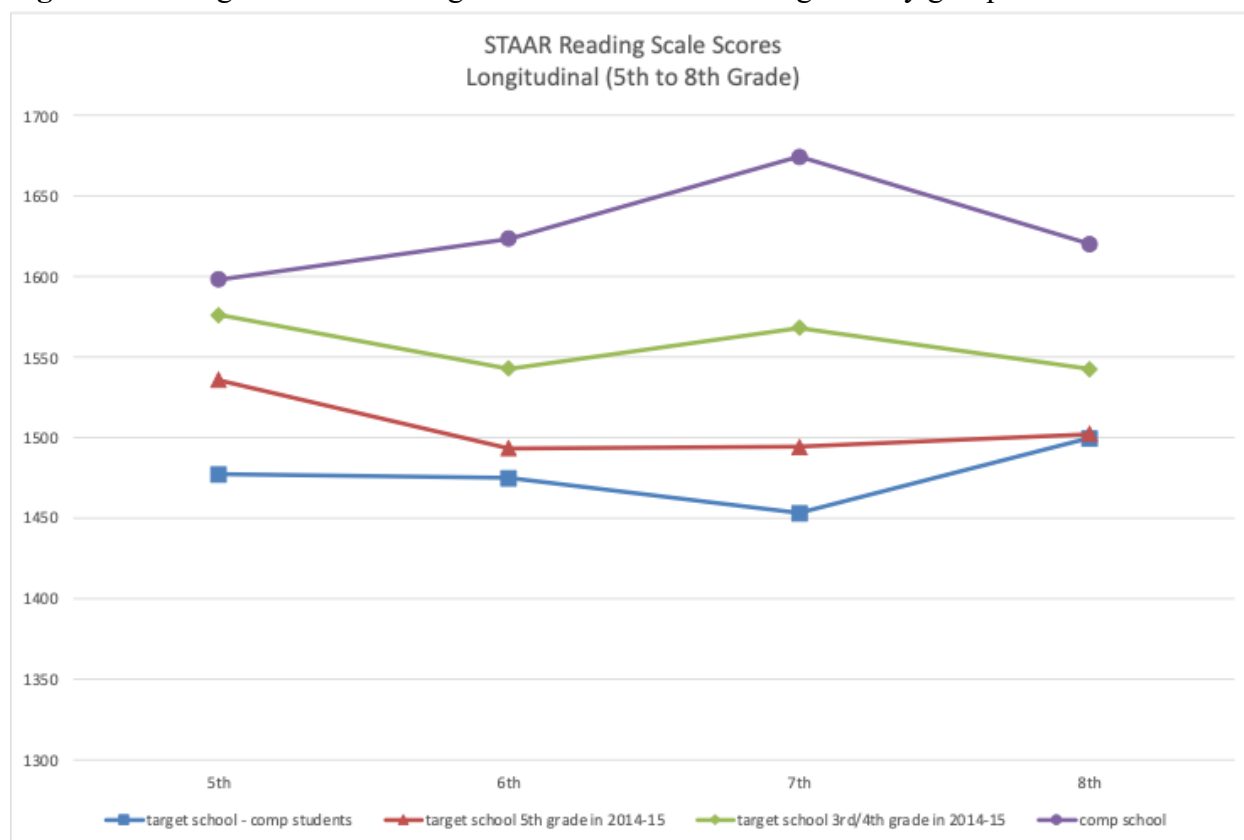
Discussion and Overview of Findings

Based on our analysis, students who were enrolled in Steele or White Elementary in 3ʳᵈ, 4ᵗʰ, or 5th grades when the schools closed had higher absences rates than peers at comparison schools that were not closed. Additionally, students whose elementary schools were closed in 3ʳᵈ or 4ᵗʰ grades had lower grades in elementary school (the first two years after their school was closed) than their peers at comparison schools that were not closed, although their grades improved in middle school. Finally, students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 3ʳᵈ or 4ᵗʰ grade when the schools closed had similar reading test scores in 5ᵗʰ grade to students in the comparison group schools, but over time, the gap in STAAR reading test scores widened. For students who were in Steele or White Elementary in 5th grade when the schools closed, their STAAR reading test scores were lower the year after their school closed, and their test scores did not improve over time. **Overall, our analysis suggests that students whose schools that were closed previously in SAISD did not yield better educational equity of outcomes (and sometimes yielded poorer outcomes) for students as compared to their peers in schools with similar demographic composition in terms of absences, grades, and STAAR test scores.**

Things to Consider and Opportunities

Our recommendations and proposed opportunities are limited because of the truncated timeframe we had for this project. Nonetheless, given that past school closures in SAISD did not result in more educational equity of outcomes for SAISD students, and if the district decides to move forward with its rightsizing plan as currently articulated, then there are some profound opportunities to rethink how students (especially students who have been underserved by schools

because of their race, social class, gender, gender identity, native language, perceived notions of ability and sexual and religious orientations, and who experience housing instability and who are undocumented, to name a few) are supported at the school and district levels. For example, given the national and local teacher shortage, SAISD might rethink its service delivery models to be equitably responsive to the needs of students who receive special education and language services. This may also include thinking more equitably about how teachers are allocated to schools to serve particular students and how those resources are truly aligned to aim to offset the implementation of closures and/or consolidations that may happen.

Moreover, based on these equity audit findings, if the district decides to close schools as proposed, we suggest that SAISD is intentional and careful about the needed equity interventions to ensure that students actually have better educational outcomes in receiving and consolidated schools. To better understand specifically why students did not do well (and in some cases worse) after their schools were closed would require additional qualitative investigation. Given the time constraints and the pending school board decision on November 13, 2023, we did not have time to conduct additional research in this area. However, some questions that the district might consider are:

- If the school closures of the past did not result in educational equity, how can the district ensure that history won't repeat itself with this round of closures?
- How might the district ensure that students who have the greatest needs work with teachers who are the most skilled at offering differentiated support?
- How might the district best support teachers, staff, and administrators in creating the learning and social and emotional conditions for students to thrive in receiving schools?

Section 2: Anticipated Distribution of Resources and Reassignment of Students After Rightsizing

Chapter Overview: With an understanding of how students in SAISD fared in years prior when schools were closed in the district, we next examined the anticipated reallocation of resources and reassignment of students in schools after the rightsizing process, as currently stated, is implemented. This chapter discusses our findings related to our research questions about the potential alignment of resources and equitable educational opportunities for SAISD students in receiving and consolidated schools as a result of the rightsizing plan.

Guiding Research Questions: To examine the intended resources and opportunities that students may have as a result of the district's rightsizing plan, we asked the following questions:

- Will the closure of the proposed 19 SAISD schools produce more equity in fiscal resource distributions for all students, especially Students of Color, Students who are eligible for F&RL, and Students who receive special education services?

- Will the closure of the proposed 19 SAISD schools provide all students, especially Students of Color, Students who are eligible for F&RL, and Students who receive Special education services with access to schools with higher academic performance and highly effective and skilled educators?

Our Research Approach and Methodology

We used descriptive statistics to explore the above questions (below we provide specific details about the methods we used to address this research question). Descriptive statistics are a type of quantitative method that is commonly used for describing important features of a dataset such as summaries of its key features, variability, patterns, and distribution of values. Indeed, descriptive statistics are useful for examining quantitative data to identify summaries, patterns and trends, comparing groups, and decision-making.

Data, Sample, and Analytic methods

Data. These analyses are based on four data sources. First, SAISD's rightsizing school profiles inform the pairing of schools proposed for closing and their receiving schools.[52] They also offer estimates for enrollment growth at receiving schools assuming students transfer to receiving schools as planned. Second, financial analysis relies on publicly available per-pupil expenditures for the 2023-2024 school year.[53]

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[52] San Antonio Independent School District. (2023). *Study of School Building Capacity: Initial Recommendations*. Retrieved October 30, 2023 from https://www.saisd.net/page/study_sb_capacity_initial_recommendation.

[53] San Antonio Independent School District. (2023). *Budget Summary Report for San Antonio ISD: General Fund, Food Service Fund, and Debt Service Fund.* Retrieved October 30, 2023 from https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.saisd.net%2Fupload%2Fpage%2F1564%2Fdocs%2FBudget%2520Information%2F2023-2024%2FSAISD_Web_Posting_of_PROPOSED_Budget_2023-24_6-9-23.xlsx

Third, the analysis uses summaries of student data in each school, including:
- The number of students in each racial and ethnic group
- The number of students eligible for supports for special education, limited English proficiency and/or identified by the district as economic disadvantage[54]
- The number of students identified as academically at risk
- Numbers of discipline offenses and actions (expulsion, suspension, placement in DAEP)
- Total student enrollment

Finally, the analysis uses educator data in each school, including:
- Certification type, content area and status (i.e., valid, expired)
- Highest degree obtained
- Number of years of experience (total and within the district)
- Race/ethnicity
- Role in the school (e.g., teacher, support staff, paraprofessional, etc.)
- Number of vacancies for teaching positions

Sample. The analyses include 23 schools proposed for closure or merging with another school and 24[55] corresponding schools proposed to receive students (Table 2). Schools that are planned to merge and redesigned schools are not part of this analysis.

Table 2. Proposed closing schools and their receiving schools.

Proposed closing school	Receiving school(s)	Percentage of students moved to receiving school in this analysis[56]
Baskin Elementary	Maverick Elementary	100%
Carroll ECC	M L King Academy	100%
Collins Garden Elementary	Briscoe Elementary	33%
	Kelly Elementary	33%
	JT Brackenridge Elementary	33%
Douglas Elementary	Herff Elementary	100%
Forbes Elementary	Ball Elementary	50%
	Highland Hills Elementary	50%
Foster Elementary	Ball Elementary	33%
	Highland Hills Elementary	33%
	Schenck Elementary	33%
Gates Elementary	M L King Academy	100%
Highland Park Elementary	Highland Hills Elementary	50%

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54 The Texas Education Agency uses the language of "economically disadvantaged" so we use it to remain consistent with the state and district language. We would typically use person-first, asset-based language.
55 Note that Washington Elementary is counted twice—once as a merging school only for grade six students and once as a receiving school for grades PK-5 students.
56 Students are distributed to receiving schools in equal shares when multiple receiving schools are identified for a closing school.

	Japhet Academy	50%
Huppertz Elementary	Fenwick Academy	50%
	Woodlawn Hills Elementary	50%
Knox ECC	Hillcrest Elementary	100%
Lamar Elementary	Hawthorne Academy	100%
Miller Elementary	Smith Elementary	100%
Nelson ECC[b]	Fenwick Academy	33%
	Maverick Elementary	33%
	Woodlawn Hills Elementary	33%
Ogden Elementary	Crockett Academy	50%
	Fenwick Academy	50%
Pershing Elementary	Cameron Elementary	50%
	Washington Elementary PK-5	50%
Riverside Park Elementary	Hillcrest Elementary	50%
	Japhet Academy	50%
Storm Elementary	David Barkley/Francisco Ruiz Elementary	50%
	Sarah King	50%
Tynan ECC[b]	Cameron Elementary	50%
	Herff Elementary	50%
Proposed merging school	**Proposed merging school[c]**	**Percentage of students moved to receiving school in this analysis**
Beacon Hill Academy	Cotton Academy	100%
Gonzales ECC	Twain Dual Language Academy	100%
Green Elementary	Bonham Elementary	100%
Lowell Middle	Kelly Elementary	100%
Washington Elementary Grade 6	Davis Middle School	Grade 6

Source: San Antonio Independent School District. (2023). *Study of School Building Capacity: Initial Recommendations*. Retrieved October 30, 2023 from https://www.saisd.net/page/study_sb_capacity_initial_recommendation
a. Students are distributed to receiving schools in equal shares when multiple receiving schools are identified for a closing school.
b. No receiving school is assigned in published school profiles. Students are distributed to receiving schools within their district in equal shares.
c. These schools are considered "receiving schools" for this analysis.

Source: San Antonio Independent School District. (2023). *Study of School Building Capacity: Initial Recommendations*. Retrieved October 30, 2023 from https://www.saisd.net/page/study_sb_capacity_initial_recommendation

a. Students are distributed to receiving schools in equal shares when multiple receiving schools are identified for a closing school.
b. No receiving school is assigned in published school profiles. Students are distributed to receiving schools within their district in equal shares.
c. These schools are considered "receiving schools" for this analysis.

Methods. The analyses summarize comparisons of school, student, and educator characteristics between:

- Schools proposed for closure or merging and their corresponding receiving school(s)

- Receiving schools in 2023-24 and what receiving schools may look like if they had enrolled students from schools proposed to close.

The analysis describes patterns in the data using means, frequencies, and ranges. It also uses "t-tests" to examine whether differences between groups are likely to be due to chance or if the difference is "statistically significant" and therefore less likely to be due to chance alone.

Limitations. The data limitations and uncertainties about what will happen in the future suggest a need for careful interpretation and consideration of these findings. They rely on SAISD's school profiles that describe intended receiving schools for each proposed closing school. There is some uncertainty about which and how many students from the closing schools would ultimately choose to transfer to each receiving school. In the absence of precise data, students enrolled in proposed closing schools that had more than one listed receiving school were distributed in equal proportions across receiving schools.

It is also important to keep in mind that we do not know how school staffing may change after SAISD's rightsizing. This analysis can only compare schools as they are in 2023 and compare receiving schools' student demographics in 2023 and what they might have looked like if students from closing schools were enrolled in their receiving schools this year.

Finally, these data are not comprehensive. They cannot describe, for example, how school climate and culture vary across campuses, variation in curricular and extracurricular opportunities, and other characteristics that make schools unique. Rather, the findings provide some foundational information to consider during SAISD's rightsizing process and transition.

Total student enrollment among receiving schools is expected to increase by over 150%.

Altogether, SAISD estimates a 152% increase in student enrollment (+5,403 students) among receiving schools. **If per-pupil instructional and instructional support expenses remain constant between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years ($8,577 per student), this could make an additional $47,731,005 available to receiving schools.** On average, individual receiving schools would gain roughly $2 million in additional per-pupil instructional and instructional support funds. Depending on the number of students added to their rosters, schools receiving students from proposed closing campuses could expect additional per-pupil instructional and instructional support funds between $400,000 for an increase of roughly 50 students and $3.9 million for an increase of about 450 students. This does not include supplemental funds based on Title I status or student eligibility for special education, limited English proficiency (LEP), or other program funds.

SAISD's estimated student enrollment across receiving and merging campuses falls slightly short of the total number of students enrolled in all proposed closing, receiving, and merging campuses. If all students from the proposed closing schools were enrolled in receiving schools, receiving schools would need to accommodate an additional 615 students across all campuses. However, some families may decide to enroll their children in a school that is not the district's designated receiving campus, which could explain some of the difference. Declining enrollment for the 2024-25 school year may also account for some of the difference between SAISD's expected enrollment numbers and the total 2023-24 student enrollment among all proposed closing, receiving, and merging campuses.

Figure 4. Potential total increase in enrollment among receiving schools after proposed closure of 19 schools
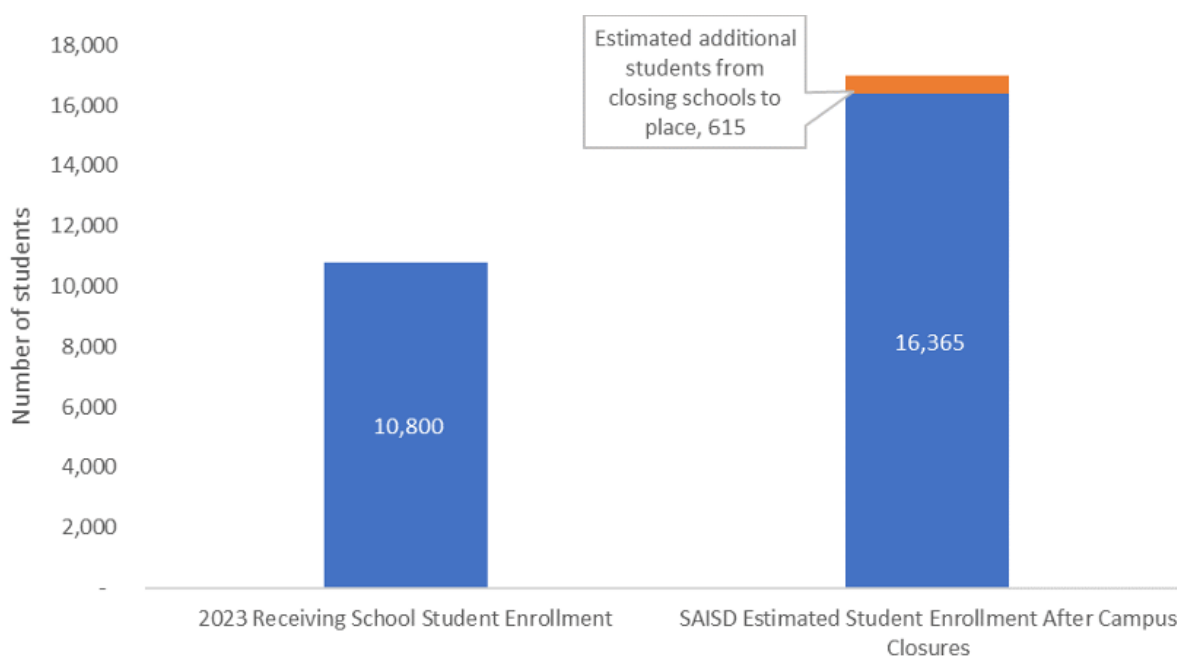
On average, the demographic composition of receiving and merging schools remains similar before and after enrolling additional students, but some schools may see large shifts in certain student characteristics.

On average, the student demographic composition in the proposed receiving schools would be similar to after students transfer to them. However, some students may experience large changes in the demographic composition of their peer group after students enroll in receiving schools. Figure 5 shows the largest differences in student demographic characteristics receiving schools might observe. *Blue triangles* represent schools with the largest increases, *orange squares* represent schools with the largest decreases, and *green bars* represent the average difference among all receiving schools before and after enrolling students from proposed closing or merging schools. For instance, on average, the percentage of students eligible for LEP support will not change after receiving students from closing or merging schools. However, for example, it could increase by 16 percentage points in Cameron Elementary and decrease by 14 percentage points in Herff Elementary after enrolling students from proposed closing schools.

Figure 5. Potential changes in student demographic composition for receiving schools after enrolling students from schools proposed to close
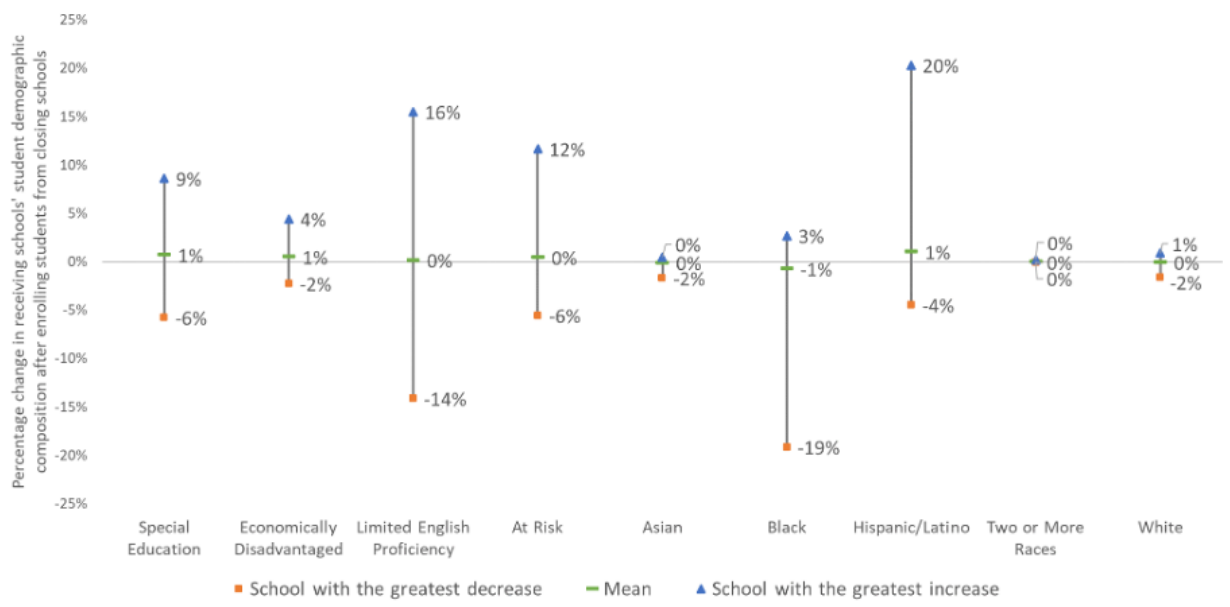
School academic achievement performance is similar among receiving schools and schools proposed for closure or merging.

Receiving schools have similar academic performance measures as schools proposed for closing or merging. On average, school performance ratings are a "B" in each group. The percentages of schools scoring in the state's top 25th percentile of student achievement progress and closing the gap measures are also similar between receiving schools and schools proposed for closing or merging (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Percentage of schools in the state's top 25th percentile on student achievement progress and closing the gap measures.
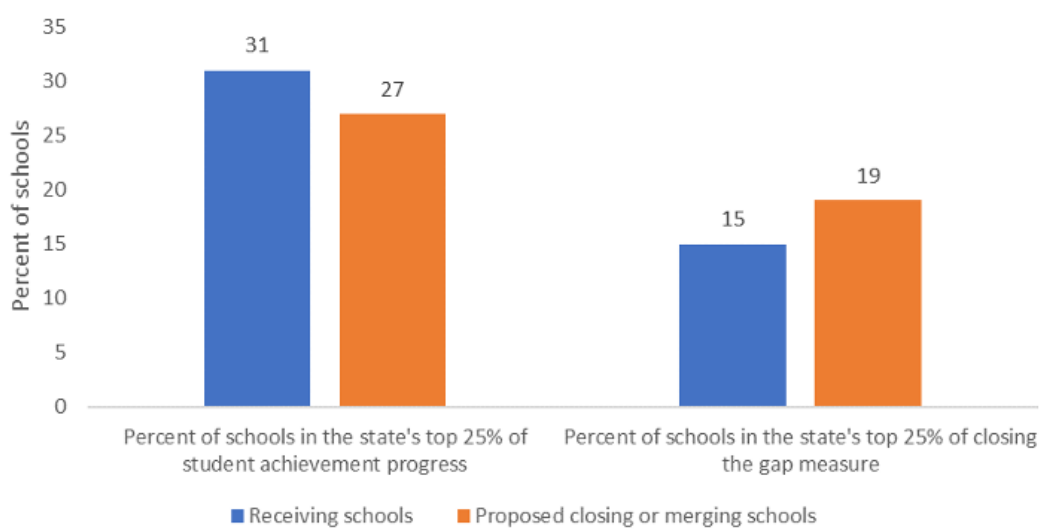
Disciplinary actions are slightly more frequent at receiving schools than at proposed closing and merging schools.

Disciplinary actions, including suspensions, expulsions, and assignments to DAEP, were more frequent in receiving schools than in proposed closing and merging schools. On average, for every 100 students in receiving schools, there were 16 disciplinary actions. For every 100 students in proposed closing or merging schools, there were 10 disciplinary actions. This difference is small enough to be due to chance (in other words, it is not "statistically significant").

Student access to experienced, certified educators from a variety of backgrounds and content areas is often similar between receiving schools and schools proposed for closure or merging, student-educator ratios are higher for art, music, and reading specialist educators in receiving schools.

In 2023, educators in receiving schools generally have similar class sizes or student-educator ratios than the proposed closing or merging schools they would be receiving students from. Excluding merging schools, certified teachers in proposed closing schools have slightly lower student-teacher ratios than certified teachers in their receiving schools (eight and nine students per teacher, respectively). This is not surprising since proposed closing schools often show declines in student enrollment over time.

Access to educators from different racial/ethnic backgrounds is also similar between proposed closing and receiving schools. For example, there are six students for every one Hispanic or Latino educator in receiving schools and five students for every one Hispanic or Latino educator in corresponding closing or merging schools.

Discussion and Overview of Findings

Based on our analysis, the findings suggest that on average, the demographic composition of receiving and merging schools remains similar before and after enrolling additional students, but some schools may see large shifts in certain student characteristics (depending on the final enrollment numbers). Additionally, school academic achievement performance is similar among receiving schools and schools proposed for closure or merging. Research suggests that for students to actually have better educational experiences that they need to go to what are considered as "higher performing" schools.[57] As well, the disciplinary actions are slightly more frequent at receiving schools than at proposed closing and merging schools. Student access to experienced, certified educators from a variety of backgrounds and content areas is often similar between receiving schools and schools proposed for closure or merging. However, based on the data we examined, we anticipate student-educator ratios to be higher for art, music, and reading specialist educators in receiving schools.

Things to Consider and Opportunities

Given the timeline to conduct our study, our recommendations are limited. Based on these equity audit findings and what the research says about students having access to "higher performing

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57 Gordon, Molly F., Marisa de la Torre, Jennifer R. Cowhy, Paul T. Moore, Lauren Sartain, and David Knight. "School Closings in Chicago: Staff and Student Experiences and Academic Outcomes. Research Report." *University of Chicago Consortium on School Research* (2018).

schools," if the district decides to close schools, we suggest that SAISD consider the dynamics of the schools that displaced students will attend. Specifically, consider the academic standing of the school. It is important to note that school ratings are only one, and a very limited metric to use to account for school quality (even though it is traditionally used as the main factor for school quality). While we suggest that the district consider this, SAISD should also consider other factors like the degree to which schools have restorative practices, culturally responsive and differentiated instruction, inclusive education practices, a collaborative and courageous school culture, and robust and equitable partnerships with families and the community, to name a few. Additionally, the district might consider aligning educators' expertise to content areas and grade-level teams so that students are in classrooms with teachers who have expertise, familiarity, and experience with the content and student groups they are working with. Importantly, the district must also consider what it needs to do, beyond reassigning students into environments with more resources, to ensure that those resources will actually improve students' educational outcomes.

Section 3: Experiences and Perceptions of the Rightsizing Process

Chapter Overview: This chapter discusses our findings related to how SAISD employees in some of the 19 campuses slated for closure perceived and experienced the rightsizing and closure process. It is important to understand and center these perspectives because it acknowledges the emotional and practical challenges that students, families, educators and staff experience during school closures. Additionally, it helps to build empathy and provides valuable insights for how to best support people during what can be a tough transitional period.

Guiding Questions: To examine how employees in campuses slated for closure perceived and experienced the rightsizing and closure process, we asked the following questions:

- How, and to what extent, if at all, do students, families, and teachers perceive SAISD's school closures decision making process and the process to identify schools on the list for closure as equitable, participatory, and community-centered?

- How might SAISD transition students, families, and principals to receiving/consolidated schools in the most humanizing, equitable, and least disruptive ways possible that meets their needs?

Our Research Approach and Methodology

We used two common qualitative data collection methods: (a) semi-structured interviews and (b) focus groups. Semi-structured interviews are a type of research method where the interviewer asks a set of predetermined questions but also has the flexibility to ask additional questions and follow-up on certain responses. This approach allows for a more conversational and open-ended discussion between the interviewer and the participant, enabling the exploration of new topics that may arise during the interview. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are important in research because they provide a balance between having a set structure and allowing for the discovery of new insights and perspectives. They help researchers gather in-depth information while also giving participants the freedom to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words.

Focus groups are specifically effective in obtaining a breadth of information related to a specific issue and offers a venue for participants to share their perspectives in an flexible and open process. As a research team, we followed up each interview and focus group with time to analyze the data that was collected and examined the transcripts for emerging themes, patterns, and

topics that consistently emerged.[585960] During the focus group sessions, participants frequently engaged in discussions, sharing their perspectives and recounting various details. These exchanges not only aided participants in remembering specific points but also facilitated the emergence of diverse viewpoints in case of disagreements.

In the interviews and focus groups we asked similar questions. We specifically asked about people's experiences with the closure process, what the district could do to help them transition to receiving schools with dignity (if their school was closed), how the district could heal and repair any harm caused from closure, what types of support they would need a year into the transition, and how their current school building, if closed, could be repurposed in the most equitable and community beneficial way possible.

Data, Sample, and Analytic methods

Data. The analysis in this section is drawn from the data sources of interviews and focus groups. Between October 23, 2023 and November 2, 2023, we visited 6/19 (32%) impacted campuses and spoke with nearly 100 people (96 to be exact) through either interviews or focus groups. The interviews and focus groups lasted approximately between 30 and 90 minutes each. In all, we conducted 41 individual interviews and 11 focus groups. In total, we collected over 100 hours of data via interviews and focus groups. Additionally, since we did not have time to visit each campus, and to triangulate our findings, we also administered a survey for teachers, staff, and administrators in the 19 schools proposed for closure. We also administered a similar survey for parents/caregivers which was both in Spanish and English. The surveys were sent out on November 3rd. We sent out the survey later than we anticipated, however, as of 11/9/2023, we had about a 15% response rate from teachers on the survey. There were 111 responses to the employee survey and 102 responses to the parent/caregiver survey. In the surveys we asked similar questions as we asked during the interviews and focus groups.

Sample. To identify participants for our interviews and focus groups, we used a mix of random and purposive sampling. The SAISD Data Operations team randomly sampled and identified participants at each campus for us to talk to. Once this list of people was generated, the list was emailed to the principal and that person helped us schedule the interviews. We also used purposive sampling, which is a type of sampling method in research where specific individuals or groups are chosen deliberately to participate in a study based on particular characteristics or qualities they possess. Rather than only randomly selecting participants, researchers purposefully identify individuals who are believed to have valuable insights or experiences related to the research topic. This approach helps ensure that the sample chosen is most relevant to the research question and can provide rich and meaningful information for the study. Using these sampling methods, we specifically identified people doing the following steps.

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[58] Madriz, E. (2000). Focus groups in feminist research. In N. Y. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.) Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed., pp. 835–850). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. McLeskey J., & Waldron, N. L. (2000). Inclusive schools in action: Making differences ordinary. Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum Development.

[59] Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M. A. (2000). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

[60] Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2003). Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods (p. 161). Needam, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

First, we notified the deputy superintendent and the director of Family and Community Engagement Programs that at each of the 19 impacted campuses we wanted to speak with the following people:

- Principal (Interview)
- 1 teacher *per* grade level (interview)
- 1 focus group with 4-6 teachers
- 1 focus group with 4-6 staff persons
- 2 focus groups with parents/caregivers[61]

Analysis. To analyze the data, our team of three research associates recorded all interviews and focus groups, and had them transcribed as we were conducting them. We met several times throughout the data collection process to create collective memos about the emerging findings. We also debriefed regularly as a team to generate collective checks-for-understanding, and in places where we had disagreements we looked for confirming, disconfirming evidence, and saturation[62] to decide on emerging themes.

Trustworthiness. To enhance the trustworthiness of our findings we used triangulation, which means we used multiple sources or methods to check and verify information. In other words, we triangulated our qualitative findings with our survey data, quantitative analysis, geospatial analysis, and review of the district's website. We also debriefed with participants. As well, in some cases when clarity was needed, we followed-up with participants to clarify our emerging findings.

Limitations. Like all research, this study has limitations. First, due to time constraints, we only spoke to participants at 6 of the 19 campuses, so we do not have every single perspective, qualitatively, about people's perceptions of the rightsizing process. So our findings in this section are based on the data from the schools that we visited as well as some of the survey data. Additionally, we did not speak with families or caregivers because we traveled to San Antonio from Austin during the daytime, which is typically when most parents and caregivers work. As well, we did not speak with students. Another limitation is that we did not get a chance to speak with participants at receiving or merging schools, which would have helped to provide a more comprehensive perspective around how receiving schools are experiencing the rightsizing process. If we had more time, we would have done this.

Emerging Findings

Teachers, principals and staff had mixed perceptions and experiences about the school closure process and SAISD's communication about the process.

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[61] We did not conduct any focus groups with parents and caregivers because we visited schools during the day which is time that most parents and caregivers may be at work. Our intentions were to come back in the evenings to visit with the parents or to do so via Zoom.

[62] Saturation in qualitative research means reaching a point where new information or data collected from additional interviews or observations doesn't significantly add any new insights or understanding to the research.

Some teachers, principals and staff experienced the rightsizing process as clear and honest. However, this perspective was held by a minority of participants. These participants expressed their appreciation for how SAISD rightsizing process had been handled thus far, specifically when they compared it to prior closures in the district and other experiences with closure in other school districts. For example, one person stated,

> *"The process that we've gone through has been very collaborative with all of the components that have been in place preparing for the closure. We did not experience that when we closed schools in the district before. [In the past] the board stated there would be schools that would be closed…We didn't have all of the series of community meetings that we're experiencing now, and just a laid out plan. I don't recall that. I just remember, it being presented that there would be closures. And then there were some, you know, a few meetings, and then the board approved it."*

Another participant shared a similar experience, that person stated,

> *"The district, they had the plan. I do feel it was communicated. They had, from what I have seen, opportunities in all the areas for school communities to come out and to hear and to talk before the rightsizing list was created. Our school's meeting, we had to go to our feeder pattern High School."*

People who held this perspective also shared that the district alerted them that rightsizing was in its early stages and was going to happen. As another participant shared,

> "*At the end of last year, we kind of got a little bit of like a warning of what was going to happen like the superintendent came and talked to us during one of our staff meetings and he kind of presented that idea that rightsizing was something that would potentially happen [and] that the research was going to start…"*

Several people who experienced the rightsizing process as clear and honest lauded the superintendent for his candor, transparency, and consistency about the process. One participant said,

> *"Jaime [the superintendent] has been very transparent from the beginning when he first got here that you guys have a lot of campuses that are not filled. He went around and visited every single campus and was like, 'some of them are kind of empty.' And so we already knew that in SAISD before because they've tried closing campuses before. It just never went through…"*

Typically, people who experienced the rightsizing process in this manner were less surprised that their school was on the list for proposed closure. Moreover, several participants talked about the less than ideal and inequitable teaching conditions that they were currently experiencing such as:

- A lack of grade-level team members to support their work (only have one or two grade level teachers on a team)
- Classes that were too large as well as some that were too small

- Not enough instructional supports
- Decaying buildings

One person described the situation in their school with class sizes, *"right now a lot of the teachers already have big class sizes. Our kindergarten classes are almost up to 30 kids. I've got like 27 or 28 kids, and that's a lot of kids."*

The majority of participants experienced the rightsizing process as shocking, moving too quickly, and a "done deal."

More commonly, however, participants described the rightsizing process as "dishonest," "disingenuous," "shocking," "rehearsed," and "scripted." Further, people who expressed these sentiments also felt like their voices were not heard despite the district holding community meetings for each campus, Empower Teams that were assigned to each impacted campus to answer questions, and the superintendent meeting with teachers one-on-one, in some cases. For example, one participant commented,

> *"I feel like the answers that they give us, the reasons that they give us, are scripted. I feel like we have concerns and we've elevated our concerns. We've tried to use our voice in many different ways. But the response that we get is an answer. And sometimes we don't. We don't necessarily want an answer. We just want our voices to be heard. But they're quick to give us a response. And that to me feels as if it's rehearsed. As if what we have to say doesn't matter because that choice has already been made. And they've already decided what schools will be closed and what schools will not be affected."*

Similarly, people felt like the decision is a done deal even though the school board has not made an official vote yet (at least by the time of writing this). One person said, *"They keep telling us in our community meeting that they haven't voted but in a way it feels like they already made up their mind."* In part because people feel like the decision is a done deal, they also feel like things are moving very quickly. As one person stated, *"Once we got the information that our school was closing [it was] like so sudden things are happening very quickly. And so the staff, the students, and the families are having a difficult time kind of processing those emotions."*

To be clear, even people who experienced the rightsizing process as disingenuous recognized that something had to be done to address the district's declining enrollment. However, they had questions about whether or not the district could actually deliver on its promises that things would be better for students, families, and district employees. For example, one participant who felt like the district's processes were scripted said,

> *"So I want to say that the whole right sizing process is good. But at the same time, I'm concerned because they're closing so many schools all at once. And I just know that that's going to present a lot of challenges for next school year. They say that they have planned everything out and that they anticipate some of the challenges that we may face with these closures. But I'm not confident that next school year will be as smooth as they say that it will be for us as teachers and other professionals."*

Several participants were uncertain about things being different after the closures because they believed that the closures would create a series of new challenges for the district such as:

- Oversized classrooms with larger student-teacher ratios
- Unmanageable caseloads
- Students being moved from classrooms into portable classrooms to accommodate class sizes (which participants noted brings up safety concerns)
- More than expected student attrition
- More than expected employee attrition (i.e., teachers, staff, and principals)

Other participants described how the process was handled, which made them feel "betrayed" by the district. One participant explained,

> *"I feel, to be completely and totally honest, at this point, I feel very betrayed by the district, but not only because they're closing my school. Like I said, I understand schools need to close because our enrollment is low. I understand that. But how it was handled after the matter just completely put a bad taste in my mouth about the district."*

Like the participant above mentioned, numerous people expressed intense dissatisfaction with the district due to their experiences during the rightsizing process. **Our interviews and focus groups shed light on a noteworthy trend: a considerable number of teachers are contemplating departing if their schools are closed.** Beyond their experiences with rightsizing, financial considerations are also at play, with some participants expressing that they are exploring opportunities in neighboring districts where they believe they could earn higher salaries—especially given the current national and local shortages of teachers. We heard these sentiments at nearly every campus we visited. Moreover, our survey data confirms that employees are considering leaving the district if their school closes. While 27% indicated they would not consider leaving, 34% were maybe, 22% were yes, 17% were unsure (n=102) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Percentage of SAISD educators who would consider leaving the district if their school is closed
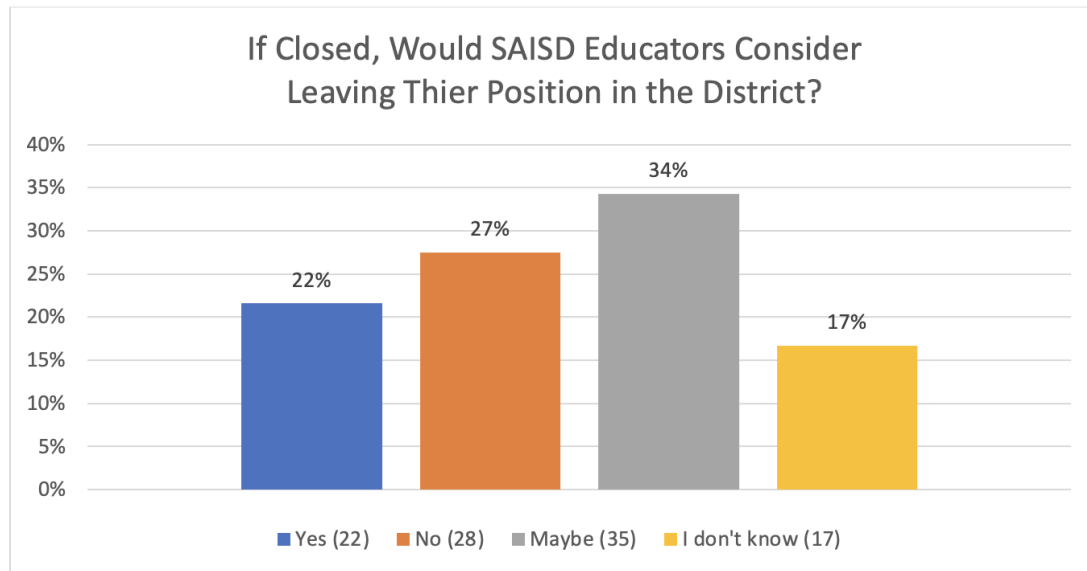
Similarly, our survey data suggests that parents/caregivers would also consider enrolling their children into a school outside of the district if their child/children's school were closed (n=66). Of the parents/caregivers who completed our survey, 70% of them indicated that they would consider removing their child/children from SAISD if their school was closed (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Percentage of SAISD parents/caregivers who would consider enrolling their children in another school if their child/children's schools were close
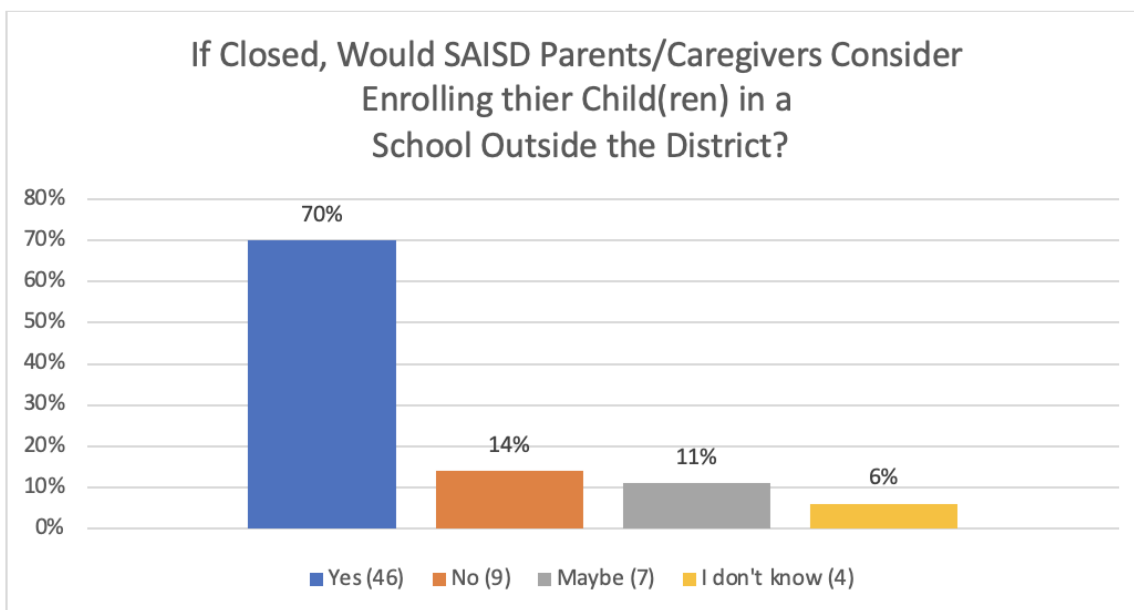
If more families than anticipated actually leave the district, this can cause further student attrition in the district's enrollment and can impact the number of resources that the receiving schools have available to support students.

It is important to note that even the most ardent participants who wanted to keep their schools open at all cost said the school closure process would be "worth it" if they could guarantee that students would have much better educational experiences. In one focus group, participants stated,

> *"If the district could guarantee that we would have smaller class sizes, more resources, and our kids would have better experiences and outcomes, then it would be worth it, but I don't see how they are going to do it."*

SAISD employees have professional, social, and emotional and logistical needs they need met to have a dignified transition.

Across the interviews and in-depth focus groups, participants identified three types of needs that would help them transition with dignity, if their schools were closed: (1) professional needs, (2) logistical needs, and (3) social & emotional needs.

Professionally, participants need job security and stability in their area of expertise, more time to contemplate new work assignments, time to learn about their new school, and opportunities for adults and students in the two schools to authentically become one community.

Many participants expressed gratitude for the district's assurance that they would have a job next year, regardless of their role (e.g., teacher, staff, administrator). At the same time, however, many participants expressed concerns about having their professional needs met by the district. By professional needs, we mean what people need to do their jobs and function effectively as employees of the district. The participants described their professional needs in five primary ways including.

First, participants shared their need to have more time to decide if they were going to remain working in SAISD. As one person said, *"so basically they have a plan that they're making a decision on November 13th [and] they want us to decide by December where we're going, that is less than 30 days. We need more time than that, because that is a major change in our lifestyles and our lives."*

Second, participants shared how they need more job stability and security, at least for the next two years. While, again, people were overall grateful that they would have a job next year, according to what the district told them, people still felt uncertainty and anxiety about whether they would have a job in their area of expertise. Similarly, people felt worried about whether or not they would fit into their new campus or be accepted. One person stated, *"As a teacher…we have a placement like we're gonna have job security no matter where we go. I just feel like it's not gonna be the same…One of the pluses of being here [at the teacher's current campus] is*

feeling like you're really valued and fitting in with each other. So that worries me if it will be the same at my new school."

While the district has promised job security, some employees are worried if there will really be a job for them if fewer students decide to remain in the district. As one person said,

> *"I was told at the meeting by a district representative, 'don't worry, you have a job. You have a job, it's fine. You're gonna have a job.' And I'm like, well, I don't feel like you can say that because if half our kids' parents' say, 'well, we're going somewhere else' Then how can you sit here and tell me that I'm guaranteed a position if you can't promise the population in the new school next year, which nobody? That's been the most daunting thing for me."*

This sentiment was shared by many other participants who are not sure if the district can deliver on that promise of job security. However, people also talked about needing transparency in how people will be placed (e.g., seniority, background, etc.)

Third, participants expressed the need for a "transitional period" that allows them to familiarize themselves with the neighborhood community (e.g., new families, understand the dynamics of the new school environment, and absorb the cultural norms and expectations prevalent in the area). This type of process one participant described should not be superficial. The person shared,

> *"I think you definitely have to address the fact that culture is a big deal. And so when you have merged [or new] campuses, there's going to need to be some work done around bringing families together and students together. And you don't want it to be something as simple as look, we had a festival and everybody came together. There has to be some deep work done around philosophies…"*

Additionally, educators emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive atmosphere within the school by eliminating divisive labels ("us" vs "them," "those kids," "our kids," etc.) and fostering a sense of belonging for students, staff, and families. Several participants suggested an approach involving arranging multiple sessions for receiving schools to interact, observe, and engage in conversations to understand each student's assets, requirements, support systems, and aspirations. This would include even sitting down and discussing each student's strengths, assets, dreams, goals, and how they could be best supported in their new school.

SAISD employees need for their social, emotional, and logistical needs to be met.

Participants talked about the need for their social and emotional realities to be addressed with some empathy from the district. While the district describes itself as a "familia," participants said the rightsizing process does not make them feel like an "authentic familia." However, to work towards that, people spoke about having their social and emotional needs met through some fairly basic means. Very often participants spoke about their need for the district to be honest, clear, upfront, and transparent about what they intend to do, fiscal conditions (both historically and currently), how teachers would be assigned, to name a few. To meet these social and

emotional needs, participants want time and spaces that were facilitated by skilled professionals who have expertise in such work and not as one participant stated, "any person from the district." In addition, participants spoke about the need to have time to grieve and mourn the loss of their schools' history, legacy, and memories and think about ways for the school's legacy to live.

Logistically, participants spoke about the need to have help with moving things from their current school to their new school. These things include having boxes available to pack their things up, movers to actually transport their belongings from one place to another, as well as enough time to get this done and get settled into their new building before the next school year.

Things to Consider and Opportunities

Based on our findings, the district needs to strongly consider and plan for attrition of students, teachers and staff if the proposed closure plan is approved. If this attrition happens, it will impact the amount of resources that receiving schools will have to support students as well as potentially exacerbate the district's teacher shortage. As well, there is a strong sense of distrust that many SAISD employees have with the district and there is misaligned communication between the district, families, and schools. The district should invest in explicit work to mend and heal the distrust which will be extremely important moving forward.

Additionally, the district needs to authentically assess where people are on the continuum of change. Langley and colleagues suggest that when change happens people are at one of several places: apathy, compliance, conformance, commitment. If the disdain that some employees have for the district are not addressed with dignity, compassion, and empathy, then the district will have (and continue to have) some serious morale issues.

Section 4: Geospatial Analysis of School Neighborhoods Proposed for Closure

Chapter Overview: This section of the audit explored the potential geographical effects of school closures throughout the district, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the spatial or location implications associated with the proposed closure of schools.

Guiding Research Questions: To examine the geospatial impacts of the proposed closures on neighborhood communities in SAISD, we examined the following research question:

- How, if at all, might the closure of the proposed 19 schools foster the emergence of "school deserts" in SAISD communities, particularly in areas that have historically experienced the most education burdens, inequities, and oppression?

- What neighborhood communities, if any, have experienced the most school closures over the last 25 years?

Our Research Approach and Methodology

To address our research questions for this section, we used Geographic Information Systems (GIS). GIS is a visual technology that is useful for understanding and analyzing data related to specific locations on maps. It allows us to visually illustrate and examine information about different places and how they are connected. When it comes to understanding school closures, GIS can be incredibly helpful in illustrating where schools are located and what other resources are nearby.

Data and Analytic Methods

Data. These analyses are based on four main data sources. First, we used San Antonio ISD boundary, Attendance Boundaries, Schools (including longitudinal closure data), which were obtained from SAISD. Second, we used addresses (locations) of Texas Public Charter Schools in San Antonio as of 2022, which we obtained from the Texas Education Agency. Third, our analysis includes data from the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates. We specifically used the median Family Income, Families with Children Under 18 years, Families with Income Under 185% Poverty Rate which is commonly used in GIS research in the field of education. In addition, we drew on data from the U.S. Census from 2021 on Bexar County Median household income (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021 = $62,169 (80% of $62,169 = $49,735). Finally, SAISD provided our team with a list and addresses of schools that had closed in SAISD since 1997, the proposed 19 schools for closure, and the current buildings that the district operates.

Method. We conducted a hotspot analysis to identify neighborhoods that had experienced (or could experience) the most closures over time. A hotspot analysis is a mapping technique that identifies the clustering of spatial occurrences and if the concentration is due to chance or if the

difference is "statistically significant." Therefore, a hotspot can be defined as an area that has higher concentration of events compared to the expected number given a random distribution of events. These spatial occurrences are depicted as points on a map and refer to the locations of events.

In order to understand the impact school closures have had on SAISD neighborhood communities or could have, using data from the district, we mapped the school closures that have occurred over the last 25 years in SAISD (since 1997), including the current 19 school closures being proposed. SAISD provided the research team with the 25 years of school closure data, which included addresses. With this data, we conducted a hotspot analysis to identify any areas within the district that had been disproportionately impacted by school closures over the last 25 years or that could with the proposed closings.[63] It is important to note that our analysis is taking into account current elementary and middle school boundaries because we did not have access to the attendance zones of Steele and Paige Elementary Schools.

There are three attendance zones that serve SAISD students and families that can become hotspots for school closures if several of the proposed schools are closed.

Based on the data SAISD shared with us, there are currently no hotspots for closure, that is without the current proposed schools being closed. However, our hotspot analysis identified one attendance zone that has a 95% confidence level of being an area that would be disproportionately impacted by school closures. In addition, the analysis identified two attendance zones that have a 90% confidence level of being areas that would be disproportionately impacted by school closures (see Map 1).

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[63] The analysis takes into account the average distance between each school closure and its nearest neighbor's location (the neighbor can be a school that closed or a SAISD school currently open).

Map 1: SAISD Hotspot Analysis of School Closures Since 1997

San Antonio ISD - Hotspot Analysis of SAISD School Closures (1997-2023)
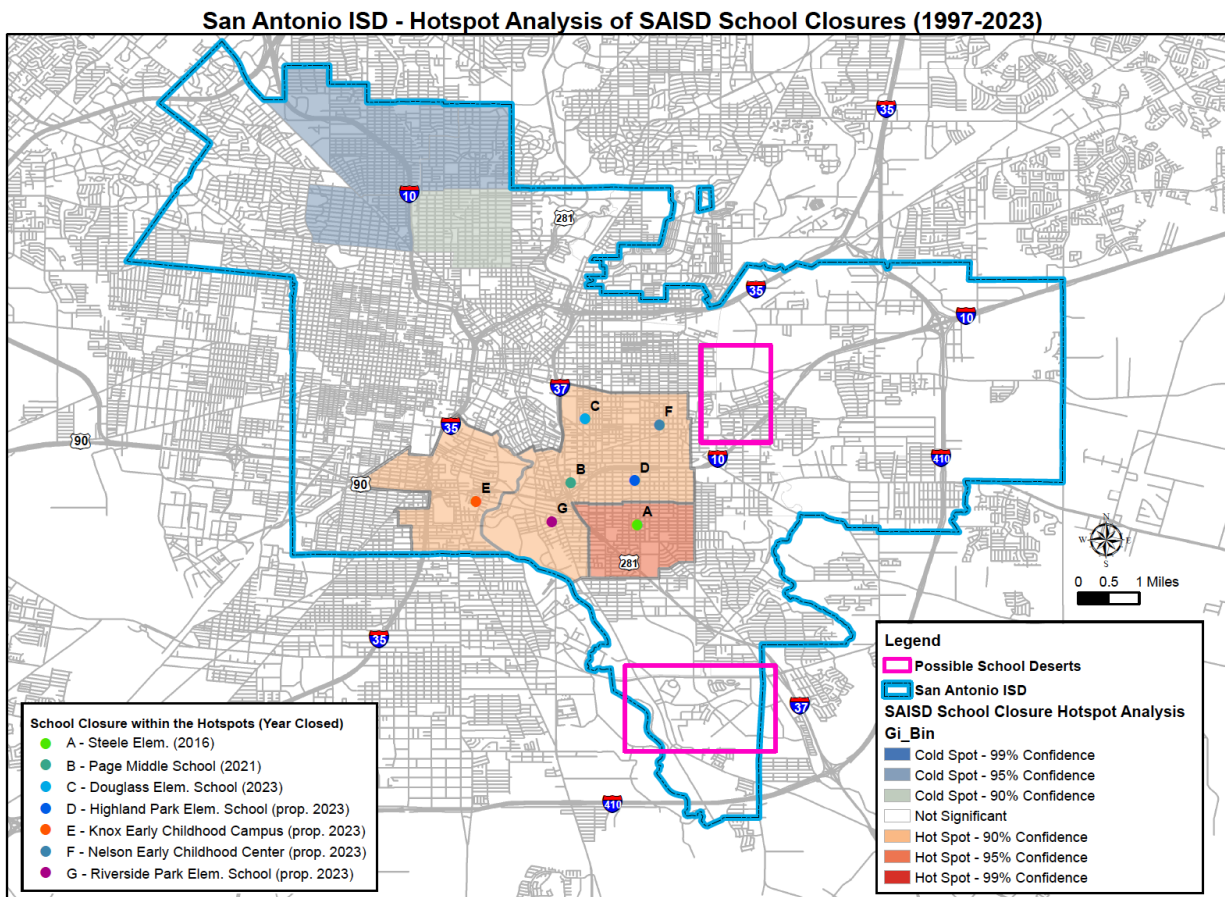
Within those attendance zones, there are 5 SAISD schools that are proposed for closure, which are:

- Douglass Elementary
- Highland Park Elementary
- Knox Early Childhood Campus
- Nelson Early Childhood Campus
- Riverside Park Elementary School.

If these schools were to close they would create a hotspot for school closure.[64]

Additionally, the proposed closures are located across three congressional districts: 8 within Congressperson Cuellar's, 7 within Congressperson Casar's district, and 4 within Congressperson Castro's (see Map 5 in Appendix in congressional district).

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[64] According to the data that SAISD shared with us, in the last 25 years there were a total of 13 closures. However, with 19 proposed closures in one year it exponentially increased the number of closures thereby creating the potential for hotspots.

The closing of some proposed schools will result in a "school deserts" for a neighborhood that serves SAISD students and families.

We also identified current areas within the district that may become "school deserts" as a result of closing the 19 proposed schools. Currently, the district has one school desert without the closures. To define and identify school deserts, we used similar metrics that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses to identify [65]"food deserts."[66] Similar to the USDA, we used the following process to identify school deserts.

- First, we identified census tracts within SAISD's attendance boundaries with a family median income less than 80% of the median income of families in Bexar County. According to the U.S. Census, the median income in 2021 of Bexar County families was $62,169.

- Second, we identified census tracts with at least 500 families.

- Third, we drew a 1-mile radius around all the SAISD elementary schools not proposed for closure (we omitted the 19 schools proposed for closure from the analysis).

This provided us with a spatial picture of the areas within SAISD that would be more than 1 mile from the nearest SAISD elementary school. The analysis identified two areas that would be considered desert areas utilizing this criterion (see Map 2).

Our analysis identified one existing school desert and another one that would be created if the proposed plan is passed. In regard to the potential identified school desert (areas not covered by the 1-mile buffers around the remaining open SAISD elementary schools), we overlaid the location of public charter schools on the map and found that there are charter schools within or in close proximity to both of the *school deserts*.

Therefore, it is important to note that these charter schools could potentially more aggressively recruit students and families if these schools are closed (see Map 2). It is important to note that the second school desert would not be created as a result of the rightsizing process.

Both school deserts have between 501 and 2,000 families with children per the location of their census tracts and low-income areas. There are no current SAISD schools in the southern/lower potential school desert but there are two in the potential school desert at the top of the map:

- Tynan Early Elementary Childhood Center
- Miller Elementary School.

Finally, if we reduced the radius to ¾ of a mile there would be five potential school deserts (which we refer to as tipping points) (see Map 3 in Appendix B).

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[65] We acknowledge that the terms "school desert" and "food desert" can be viewed as deficit terms that focus on what is not there and obscures the larger systems of oppression that produce these outcomes. We however use the language in this report to remain consistent with existing literature. Some organizers and scholars have used "food apartheid" instead.
[66] https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/45014/30940_err140.pdf

Map 2: SAISD Proposed School Closures with Possible School Desert
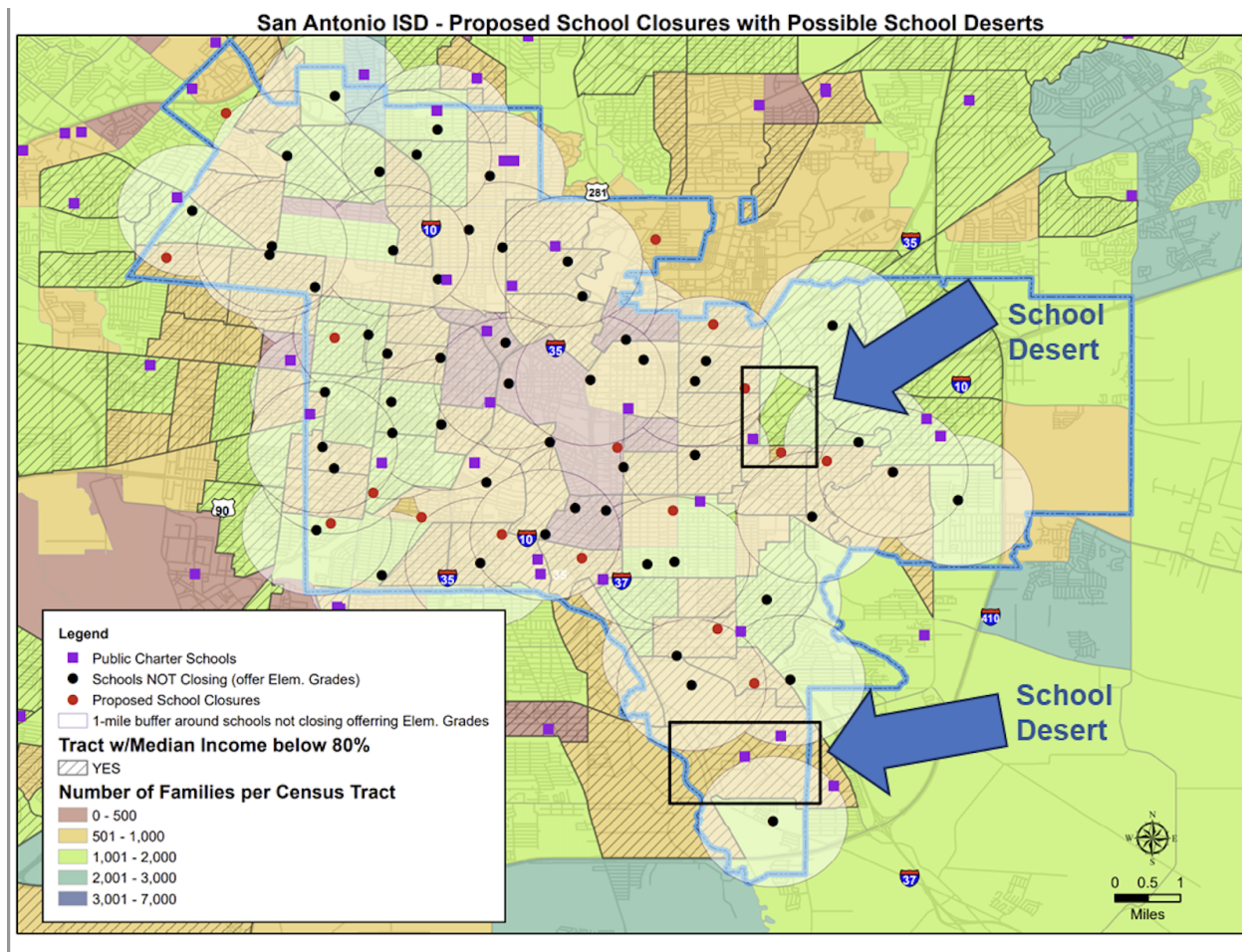
Discussion and Overview of Findings AND Things to Consider and Opportunities

Based on our analysis, SAISD currently has zero hotspots for closures (areas that have statistical significance for a concentration of school closures) and zero school deserts. However, if some of the schools are closed it would create a hotspot for closures for three attendance zones, which would result in a cluster of closures in those areas. In addition, closing of some the proposed schools will result in "school deserts" for one neighborhoods that serve SAISD students and families. However, given the close proximity of schools within the district, the close vicinity of other SAISD schools, the effects of these potential school deserts might be offset or minimized. This would depend on a number of factors: transportation, community support, school reassignments, to name a few. Also, based on the proximity of the charter schools and what we learned in our qualitative analysis about how charter schools have already started recruiting families at schools slated for closure, the district should be aware that they may lose more families to charters. Finally, Consider intentional support of the three attendance zones that may become hotspots for closure to provide needed support, if all of the schools are closed. Think about the implications of the potential school deserts and work to ensure that students have access to public schooling options in their neighborhoods.

Appendix A

Technical Analysis Summary

Data Preparation

For the analyses presented, the data were first restructured in the following manner:

Attendance data. Students potentially attended multiple schools in a given school year, and thus we first aggregated the days absent and days enrolled across all schools attended. We then created a variable by school year to capture the percent days absent (days absent / total days enrolled *100).

Grades in school. Data included students' grades in each class each semester. We first aggregated students' grades in all courses taken each semester, providing an average grade in all courses for semester one and semester two. We then averaged grades across the two semesters to obtain an average course for the given school year.

STAAR reading test scale scores. No transformations were needed for these data.

Attendance, grades in school, and STAAR reading test scale scores were subsequently transformed from year in school (e.g., 2014-15 school year) to grade level (e.g., 3rd, 4th) for each student. To do so, we used the cohort and school year to restructure the data. As an example, for all students in cohort 1, 2010-11 was the year they were enrolled in 3rd grade, and thus the new 3rd grade absence rates, average grades in school, and STAAR reading scale score variables were the values from the 2010-11 parallel variables. We created new variables for 3rd to 8th grades for absences, grades, and STAAR test results for all five cohorts.

Missing Data

All 2,474 students had valid data for their 3rd grade year, but missing data was an issue for all variables under study. The table below details the total number of students included at each grade level. We have discussed the missing data with SAISD, and they note that this attrition rate is likely tied to students moving from the district to other schools. They note that approximately 58% of students remain in the district across six years; however, our missing data exceeds this level, with only 44% to 45% of 3rd grade students having valid data in 8th grade for absences and grades. STAAR test results counts are affected by the fact that the STAAR test was not instituted until 2014, and thus our earlier cohorts do not have STAAR test data for 3rd, 4th, and/or 5th grades.

Table A1. Valid data by grade level

	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Absences	2,473	2,046	1,737	1,491	1,397	1,108
Grades	2,316	1,936	1,666	1,428	1,326	1,050
STAAR	859	1,047	1,246	1,329	1,236	1,028

Note. Includes all 5 cohorts of students.

Data Analyses

All data were analyzed in Mplus v.8.3. For each set of analyses, we conducted latent growth curve modeling, an analytic method for capturing change across time. These models included an intercept (average values for each target variable in 6th grade, the midpoint of the growth trajectory) as well as latent growth factors capturing linear and quadratic change across time. In some cases, a cubic term was included to capture positive to negative shifts over time. All latent growth factors were regressed on a set of covariates that included race/ethnicity (two variables capturing Black and other races/ethnicities, with Hispanic/Latino as the omitted reference group, selected for its size relative to the other groups), gender (binary variable capturing female vs male) and economically disadvantaged status.

Multiple group analyses were conducted to model change across time for four distinct groups of students:

- Students who were enrolled in Steele or White Elementary but who transitioned to middle school before the schools closed after 2014-15
- Students in 5th grade in the 2014-15 school year who were enrolled in Steele or White Elementary
- Students in 3rd or 4th grade in the 2014-15 school year who were enrolled in Steele or White Elementary
- Students enrolled in the four comparison schools (Ball, Cameron, de Zavala, Storm)

Two models were conducted. In the first, we ran unconstrained models for absence rates, average grades, and STAAR reading scale scores separately, allowing all coefficients to vary by group (termed the free model). We then ran a constrained model in which all growth factors were constrained to be equal across the four groups. Chi-square difference tests were then conducted to determine if the growth factors were significantly different across the four groups for each of the target outcomes under study.

For absence rates, we observed mean differences in absence rates across groups (X^2diff (3) = 12.09, p = .01) as well as in the quadratic growth factor (X^2diff (3) = 15.86, p < .001). For grades in school, we observed mean differences in absence rates across groups (X^2diff (3) = 8.74, p = .03) as well as in the growth factors (X^2diff (9) = 28.37, p < .001). For the STAAR reading test scores, we observed no mean differences in overall levels of reading scores across the four

groups (X^2diff (3) = 3.30, *p* = .35) or in the growth factors (X^2diff (6) = 2.69, *p* = .85). The results and related figures are presented in the main text above.

Other Potential Measures of Student Outcomes

In addition to absences, grades, and STAAR reading test results, we initially sought to examine potential group differences for special education status and retention in grade post 2014-15 school year. We created special education status and retention status variables, but the cell sizes were substantially unbalanced (see Tables A2 and A3 to follow), and there was a large amount of missing data. Thus, we did not conduct the analysis of these outcomes due to concerns about missing data and sufficient power.

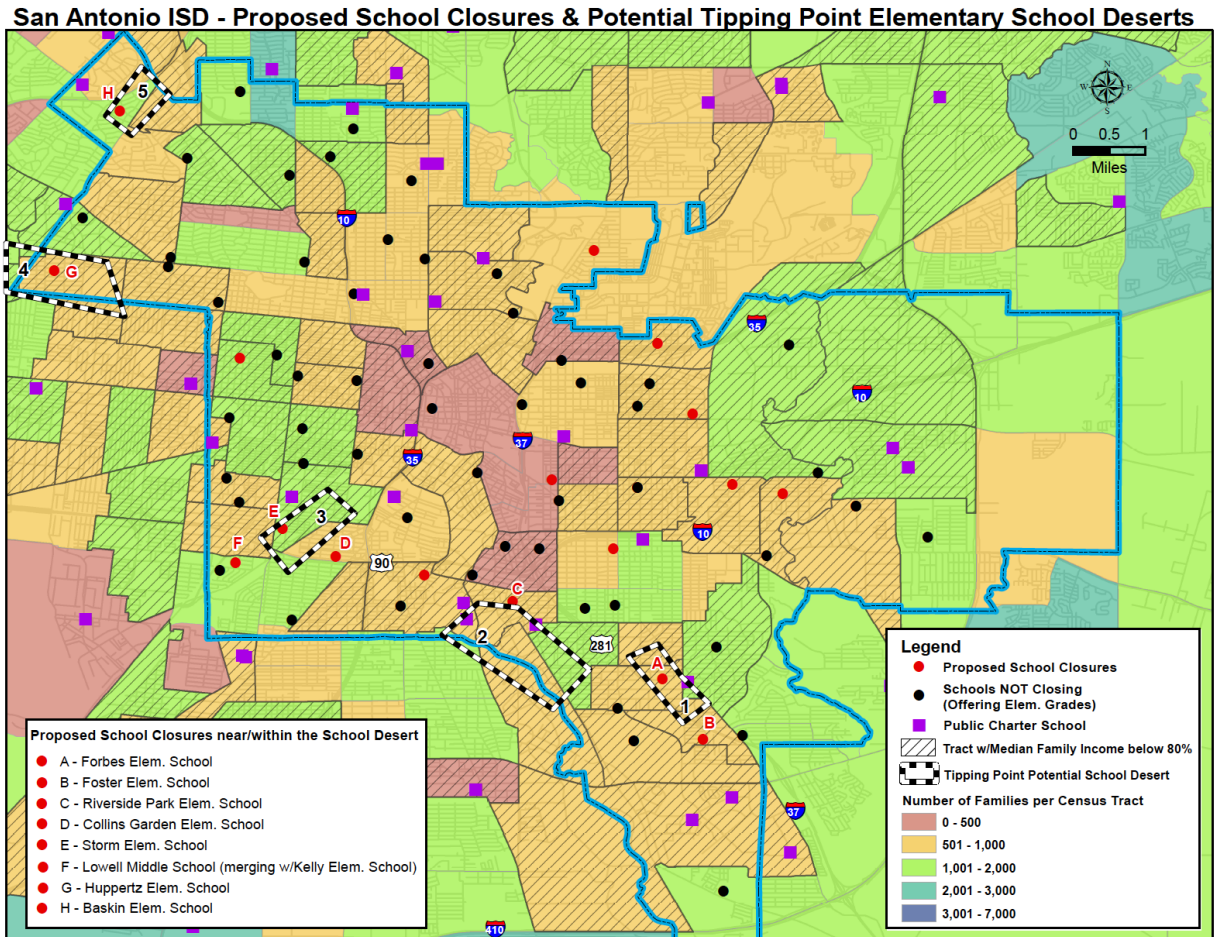**Table A2.** Students retained in grade pre- vs post-2014-15

	Number of Students
Never retained in grade	1,340
Retained in grade in the 2014-15 school year or earlier	136
Retained in grade after the 2014-15 school year	51
Retained in grade in the 2014-15 school year or earlier *and* after the 2014-15 school year	9

Table A3. Students' special education status pre- vs post-2014-15
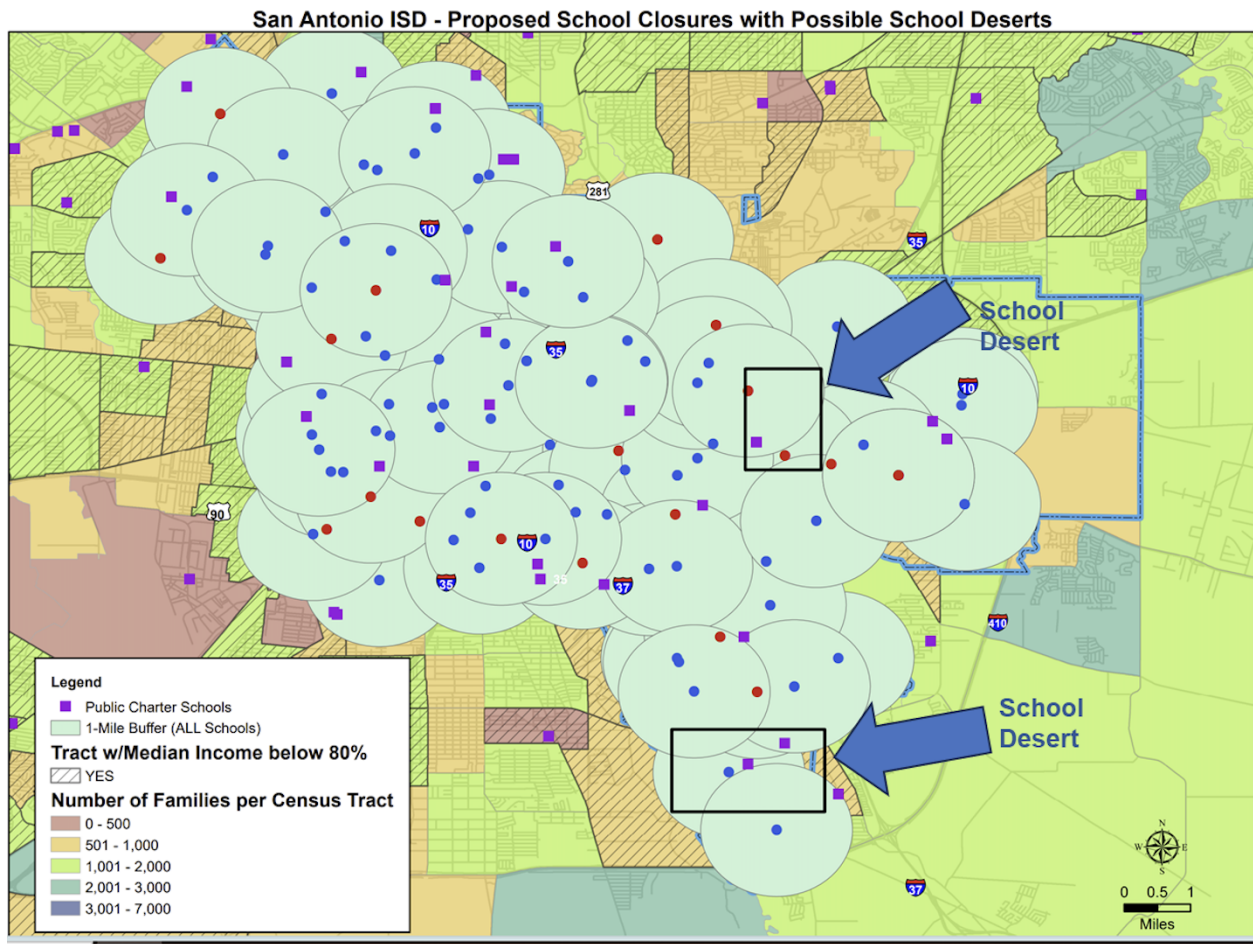
|	Number of Students
Never in special education	986
Received special education services in the 2014-15 school year or earlier	18
Received special education services after the 2014-15 school year	22
Received special education services in the 2014-15 school year or earlier *and* after the 2014-15 school year	138

Appendix B

Map 3: Proposed School Closures & Potential Tipping Point Elementary School Deserts

San Antonio ISD - Proposed School Closures & Potential Tipping Point Elementary School Deserts

Proposed School Closures near/within the School Desert
- A - Forbes Elem. School
- B - Foster Elem. School
- C - Riverside Park Elem. School
- D - Collins Garden Elem. School
- E - Storm Elem. School
- F - Lowell Middle School (merging w/Kelly Elem. School)
- G - Huppertz Elem. School
- H - Baskin Elem. School

Legend
- Proposed School Closures
- Schools NOT Closing (Offering Elem. Grades)
- Public Charter School
- Tract w/Median Family Income below 80%
- Tipping Point Potential School Desert

Number of Families per Census Tract
- 0 - 500
- 501 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 2,000
- 2,001 - 3,000
- 3,001 - 7,000

Map 4: SAISD Proposed School Closures with Possible School Deserts

Map 5: SAISD Proposed School Closures and U.S. Congressional Districts
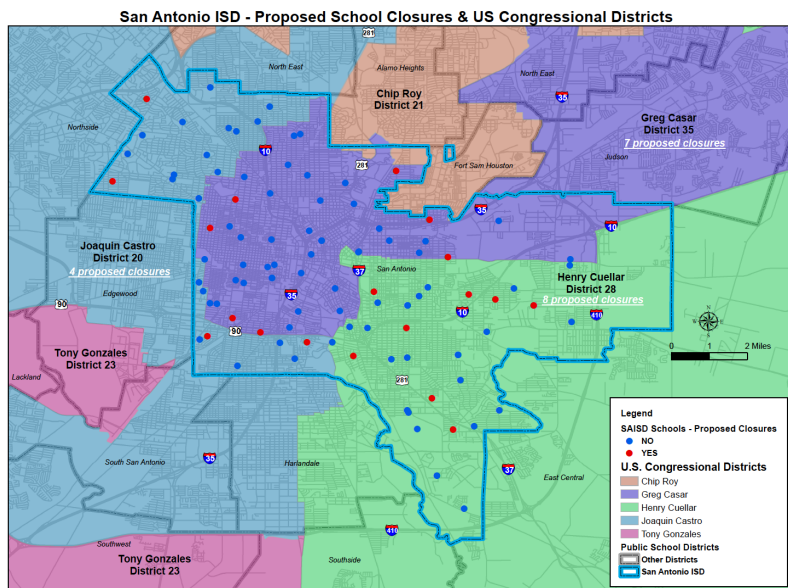
Dr. Green's Overall Takeaways of the Findings from the Report
As an educational researcher, I realize that empirical findings can be interpreted in multiple ways, especially given how people view them and given such a contentious topic as school closures. In the event that I won't be able to attend the November 13, 2023 meeting, I, Dr. Terrance Green, offer my interpretation of the findings as the lead researcher on this project.

1. Based on data, prior school closures have not worked in SAISD in terms of providing students with better educational equity of outcomes, and in some cases, students whose schools were closed did worse in absences, grades, and state test scores. As stated previously, prior closures were done under a prior district administration. While history often repeats itself, it does have to, but the district needs to make some deep commitments and guarantees to ensure that things will be better for children if their schools close. Therefore, I have the following lingering questions in light of this finding:

   - **How can the district ensure that school closures this time around will yield better and equitable educational outcomes for students?**
   - For whatever schools end up closing, I would encourage the district to identify and monitor some key metrics (beyond the traditional measures) to ensure that students are having better educational experiences and outcomes academically, intellectually, culturally, racially, and in ways that are humanizing.

2. The receiving schools will receive additional funds, which is expected if schools close and students go to receiving schools. It is important to note that the funds schools will receive will be based on the number of students who end up enrolling in the receiving schools. As well, class sizes are expected to increase, which is expected in receiving schools. **However, even with the additional resources, I am left wondering, is that enough?** In other words, **will the aligned and additional resources to receiving schools be enough to deliver on the promise of educational equity that the district has committed to and that SAISD students, families, staff, and communities deserved?** I am also left wondering, how will SAISD equitably transform its systems at the district and school-levels (e.g., school culture, instructional practices, teacher collaboration, etc.) in order to support students in culturally responsive, differentiated, and intellectually relevant and stimulating ways? Also, **what if the number of anticipated students don't go to the receiving schools, then what does that mean for providing the needed resources to support students?**

3. There are conspicuous gaps in the ways that the district has communicated about the closures and how people understand, perceive, and have experienced the process. As a result, the district will have to deal with some deep morale and distrust issues and address the harm that school closures can produce for teachers, staff, administrators, students, families and communities. While the district administration has held community meetings for all of the impacted schools, and the superintendent has even had one-on-one conversations with employees, there is still a noticeable portion of employees (that we spoke with) who are not clear on the district's financial decisions, how it got here, etc., and simply does not trust the district (for whatever reasons). Also, the closure of schools

may result in teachers leaving the district for other opportunities. This is an important concern to keep monitoring.

4. If the 19 proposed closure of schools as currently set forth, it will create another school desert in some neighborhoods and hotspots for school closures. This would give me pause to look further into the histories of these communities. If we had more time, we would conduct a historical analysis to understand whether or not those communities have experienced historic disinvestment.

A Few Final Things To Note About The Audit

If our team had more time, we would have investigated some additional key areas which are pivotal for understanding the entire rightsizing process within context, including:
- The maintenance and operation costs at each building proposed for closure and the money that is generated from the study body. From that, we'd want to determine if the school is running at a net positive or negative. As well, we'd want to do a cost savings analysis of the buildings proposed for closure.
- Leave the surveys open for 2-3 weeks, at least.
- Conduct an analysis of how the framework and criteria were used to identify schools in the list to ensure that it was applied consistently and equitably.
- Visit and conduct interviews and focus groups with all 19 schools proposed for closure and the receiving schools.
- Set up metrics to track what happens to students in the closed schools if/when it is closed.
- How the per-pupil expenditure cost is calculated and why these numbers are so inequitable across schools.

Project Team Bios

Dr. Terrance L. Green has assembled an exceptionally qualified team to carry out this work. Our team has deep experience in K-12 education, culturally responsive evaluations, collaborative evaluation, and equity audits.

Contributing Authors & Analysis Team

Terrance L. Green, Ph.D. (he/him)
Terrance L. Green, is a tenured Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy and Planning at the University of Texas at Austin, where he has taught over 100 school leaders how to conduct school and community-based equity audits of their local campuses. He has also served as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Teachers College Columbia University where he taught over 50 school and district leaders how to conduct equity audits. Additionally, in 2017, he published the groundbreaking article on Community-Based Equity Audits, which was the field of education's first attempt at making equity audits inclusive of schools' neighborhood and community contexts. Dr. Green's Community-Based Equity Audit paper has been downloaded nearly 9,000 times, cited over 130 times and remains one of the most read articles in the field of educational leadership and policy. Dr. Green is nationally recognized as a leading expert on racial equity and justice in schools, equity audits, and school closures. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is a former high school science teacher.
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Aprile D. Benner, Ph.D.
Aprile Benner is a developmental psychologist and professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin. Her studies have examined adolescents' perceptions of discrimination, their experiences of numeric marginalization tied to both race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, experiences of school transitions across the early life course, and how schools, families, and peers matter for young people's well-being. Instructionally, Dr. Benner teaches introductory statistics and structural equation modeling for the graduate curriculum, and she teaches adolescent development and health and behavior across the lifespan at the undergraduate level. Dr. Benner holds a Ph.D.in Psychological Studies in Education from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)..

Havala Hanson, Ph.D.
Dr. Havala Hanson began her career as a teacher and has 15 years of education research and evaluation experience. She specializes in advanced quantitative analytics and mixed-methods research to integrate "the story" of qualitative data with "the facts" of quantitative data to transform complex data into helpful, actionable findings for improving equity and educational outcomes. She has supported equity audits for school districts in the Pacific Northwest. Dr. Hanson holds a Ph.D. in Statistics, Policy and Education from the University of Alaska and a master's degree in Urban Education Policy from Brown University.

Data Collection Team

Tabitha Reynolds Hoang, Ph.D.
Tabitha Reynolds Hoang earned a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy from The University of Texas at Austin, a master's degree in Educational Policy from The Ohio State University and bachelor's degree in Psychology from Arkansas State University. Before moving to Austin, Tabitha worked as a public school social studies teacher in Louisiana. Tabitha's interests center around using research to pursue educational equity and amplify the voices of communities and people.

Kimberly Clarida, M.Ed.
Kimberly Clarida works as a full-time P-20 researcher and policy analyst to assist in creating a more equitable education system for all students and school leaders. She is a doctoral candidate in the Educational Policy and Planning (EPP) program at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research agenda focuses on 1) the role of organizations and policy implementation in (re)producing educational (in)equity for Black and Brown school leaders and 2) how district, state, and federal policies impact racial and educational equity for Black and Brown students. Her passion for students and communities is visible in her previous work with access and outreach organizations, equity and social justice-oriented organizations, county government agencies, and statewide policy organizations. Kimberly received her B.A. in Public Policy from UNC-Chapel Hill and her M.Ed. in Educational Administration and Policy from the University of Georgia.