Columbus City Schools Observation School Visit Protocol Development Survey Summary Results

Executive Summary

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Acknowledgement and Gratitude

We are incredibly grateful to the Columbus City Schools (CCS) Board, with special thanks to Board President Christina Vera, for championing community engagement in the school closure process. Her leadership in prioritizing these school visits reflects a commitment to community voice that we hope will inspire other school boards across the nation to adopt similar practices from the very start of decision-making.

Our deepest thanks go to the students, families, caregivers, teachers, staff, principals, and all school stakeholders who shared their time and feedback. Your insights have been invaluable in shaping a more thoughtful and informed process, centered on the experiences of those most directly affected. Thank you for your dedication to your schools and community.

Executive Summary: Columbus City Schools Observation School Visit Protocol Development Survey Summary Results

This summary shares the initial findings from a survey of Columbus City Schools (CCS) stakeholders at the nine schools being considered for closure as of October 25, 2024. The purpose of this survey is to help develop a protocol (i.e., School Equity Walks and Learning Guide) for CCS school board members to gather information about schools that may experience closure.

The survey includes four open-ended questions:

- What important things do you think the school board should look for when they visit schools?
- Who should the school board members talk to and listen to when they visit schools? This can include specific people and/or general groups.
- What experiences should school board members have when they visit schools?
- What places in the school neighborhood should school board members visit to understand the role of the school in the community?

The survey also asked respondents to identify their role in the district (such as administrator, teacher, staff, staff, or parent) and the school they work at or where their children attend. We limited the survey to four primary questions to keep it focused and respectful of participants' time. Given the tight turnaround, this approach also allowed us to conduct a rapid analysis of the findings to effectively inform the school visits guide.

Additionally, we administered the survey in English, Spanish, Arabic, French, Nepali, and Somali.

Data and Methods[2]

With support from the CCS Communications Team, the survey was administered to 6,429 employees and parents, caregivers, or parents/caregivers/guardians of children and students in nine schools that are considered for closure, including:

- Broadleigh Elementary School
- Buckeye Middle School, Columbus City Preparatory School for Boys
- Fairwood Elementary School
- Lindbergh Elementary School
- McGuffey Facility (CAHS building)
- Moler Elementary School
- North Linden Elementary School
- West Broad Elementary School

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[2] Given the small sample size, to identify the themes, we reviewed each comment and identified the topic(s) respondents mentioned. Then, we summed the numbers of respondents whose comments included each topic area and used the total count of respondents as a denominator to determine the most common topics by the percentage of respondents who mentioned them. We also identified some comments to illustrate the key topics.

Again, we understand the timeline for this survey was quite short, but we did our best to work within the time we were given. Our goal was to include whatever feedback we could gather to inform the observation tool and share it with the CCS board by October 25, 2024 (Friday). This way, the board would have the weekend to review it in preparation for their first visits on Monday, October 28, 2024.

Given this, from October 21, 2024 to October 25, 2024 (one week), a total of 117 individuals responded to the survey, or about 2% of the sample it was administered to. These included 67 parents/caregivers/guardians, 30 teachers, 9 staff (administrative assistant, paraprofessional, lunch server/cook, custodial worker, teacher assistant, etc.), and three school administrators (See Figure 1). Additionally, three students and four professional staff (nurse, counselor, specialist, etc.) identified their roles using a write-in option.

Over half of respondents were parents (57%) and every two in five responses pertained to McGuffey Facility (CAHS building) (38%).

Nearly all early respondents took the survey in English (115). One individual responded in Arabic and another in Spanish. There were no early responses for the French, Nepali, or Somali language versions of the survey.

Respondents were allowed to skip questions but few did so. There were between 106 and 116 responses to each of the four questions.

Figure 1. Survey respondent sample by school and role
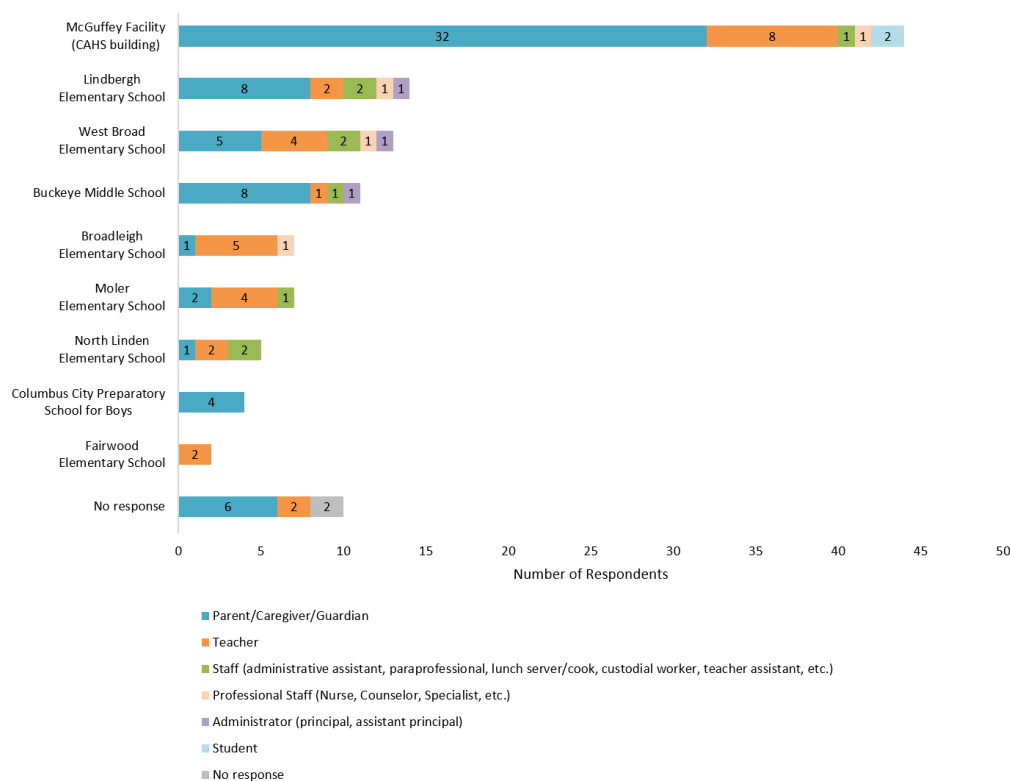
Findings

Key items board members should "look for" during their visits

Respondents often thought that school board members should look for teaching and learning quality, student engagement/discipline, and academic outcomes (38% of 115 respondents). A quarter of respondents (26%) said they should pay attention to the school buildings' appearance, such as the conditions of the facilities and its cleanliness.

Another 25% said that board members should look for school culture and climate, such as the sense of community, how students interact, relationships between educators and students and relationships between families and educators.

Respondents were also interested in enrollment and class sizes (19%), community engagement and impact (14%), school safety (10%) and resources, such as room size, number of rooms, and technology (9%).

Table 1: Look-Fors by Response Percentage

Look-Fors	% of Respondents
Teaching and learning quality, student engagement/discipline, and academic outcomes	38% of respondents
School building appearance, such as the conditions of the facilities and its cleanliness	26% of respondents
Culture and Climate: (i.e., the sense of community, how students interact, relationships between educators and students and relationships between families and educators)	25% of respondents
Enrollment and class size	19% of respondents
Community Engagement and Impact	14% of respondents
School safety	10% of respondents
Room size, number of rooms, and technology	9% of respondents

Some of the comments about what board members might observe included:

"Building culture around academics, character of the building and the way a school has been tailored to the student body. Staff who are really dedicated to their work and to their students. Students who can advocate for themselves and their peers."
—Teacher

"Opportunity for growth, conditions of school, community ownership of school, safety of neighborhood, student/staff attachment to the building/location."
—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

Important groups for board members to "talk to/listen-for" during visits

Most respondents (72% of 116) said board members should talk to students. A similar share (69%) said they should talk to teachers. About two in five respondents (41%) recommended talking with staff, such as custodians, lunch servers, and secretaries, and/or parents/family members (38%).

One in five (19%) said they should talk to administrators. Several respondents recommended seeking out individuals who have worked in or had children attend the school for a long time or hold a leadership role (e.g., student council, department head, parent liaison, PTA member).

They also recommended speaking with individuals who have cross-cutting roles (e.g., teachers who are also club leaders) or see many students throughout the day versus a single classroom (e.g., librarians, physical education teachers).

Other recommendations included professional staff and specialists (12%) and community members (9%).

Table 2: Listen-Fors by Response Percentage

People to Talk to/Listen-Fors	% of Respondents
Students	72% of respondents
Teachers	69% of respondents
Staff (i.e., custodians, lunch servers, and secretaries, and/or parents/families) and people with cross-cutting roles (i.e., teacher, club leader)	41% of respondents
Parents/family members	38% of respondents
Administrators	19% of respondents
Professional staff and specialists	12% of respondents
Community members	9% of respondents

Some of the comments about what board members should listen-for and people to talk too included:

"The teacher leaders who are managing their departments and have likely been at the school, in the community, for a long time. It would be nice to know that everyone involved with the process is not a stakeholder for charter/non-public school interests."
—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

"Of course, students and parents are stakeholders. Long-term staff members have a distinct point of view as well. What factors are present that keep them there?"
—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

"Students, PEAK IA's, Unified Arts teachers that teach every child in the building. Newer staff members, veteran staff members."
—Teacher

Recommended "experiences" during board member visits

About a quarter of respondents (26% of 110) thought board members should observe or participate in a class. Almost the same share of respondents (24%) said board members should experience school culture, climate, and routines.

About one in five (19%) said they should talk and listen to students, teachers, staff, and/or parents. Some respondents (15%) went further to say that board members should spend an entire day at the school, shadowing a student or a teacher. Eleven percent of respondents recommended observing and experiencing non-classroom spaces, such as eating lunch in the cafeteria, watching hallways during transition time, walking the grounds and even using the restrooms.

Several respondents mentioned they wanted board members to have a positive experience at the school. They specifically wanted board members to feel welcome and respected (13%) or safe (4%) during their visits.

Table 3: Experiences by Response Percentage

Experiences	% of Respondents
Observe and/or participate in a class	26% of respondents
Talk and listen to students, teachers, staff and/or parents	19% of respondents
Spend an entire day at the school, shadowing students and teachers	15% of respondents
Observing and experiencing non-classroom space (e.g., eating in the cafeteria, watching hallways during transition time, walking the grounds, using the restrooms)	11% of respondents

Some of the comments about they types of experiences that board members should have included:

"They should feel welcome. They should see students being educated in various settings. They should walk the school grounds and determine if the school is located in a neighborhood that is safe."
—Teacher

"They need to move around from class to class just as the students are doing throughout the day. Go through the cafeteria with everyone else and get a lunch like the students. To get a real feel of the population. Seeing the numbers on paper and glancing at it from an auditorium is one thing but being in the midst of it is what is needed."
—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

"Speak to families about what their school is doing well and what needs to be changed, ask teachers and support staff the same questions. Ask families why they chose the school they chose. Observe recess and other school day events and see how students feel and are treated in their school environment. Look at student growth data and determine which educators/educational environments are effective."

—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

Places board members could "visit" in to understand the role of the school in the community

About a quarter of respondents (24% of 106) recommended board members visit local recreation or community centers.

Some respondents recommended visiting the school outside the school day (17%) businesses in the community (16%), libraries (13%), nearby parks or the school playground outside of the school day (9%), churches (8%), nearby homes or student homes (8%), community organizations (7%) and/or after school program sites or childcare facilities (5%).

Some respondents (16%) recommended board members take a walk through the neighborhood surrounding the school and/or see what transportation is like for students and families, either walking, transit, or driving options (12%).

Table 4: Places to visit by Response Percentage

Experiences	% of Respondents
Local recreation or community centers	24% of respondents
School outside of school day	17% of respondents
Businesses in the community	16% of respondents
Walk the neighborhood	16% of respondents
Libraries	13% of respondents
Experience the transportation for students and families (e.g., walking, transit, driving options)	12% of respondents
Nearby parks or the school playground outside the school day	9% of respondents
Churches	8% of respondents

Some of the comments about the places that board members should visit included:

"The playground, the activity at the school before and after, the bus routes that go to and from the school making it easier for parents to access the school, the role of the school in the neighborhood and vise versa."
—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

"The neighbors around the school. NOT JUST DRIVE BY SOME OF THEM. ACTUALLY WALK THROUGH THEM. AT LEAST THE SAFER ONES."
—Parent/Caregiver/Guardian

"Visit the homes of students and the parks around Lindbergh. Take into consideration how FULL the schools are that are around us and how many walkers we have at our school that would then have to be bussed to another school/area. A lot of our families walk because of transportation issues and closing our school will send many students to South Western schools and lower the enrollment for CCS."
—Teacher

Summary

This executive summary provides a snapshot of stakeholder feedback on key areas that school board members should focus on when visiting schools potentially facing closure. Again, we acknowledge that this is a rapid analysis, and in an ideal situation, this protocol would have been developed using participatory methods that include the voices of the stakeholders who may be most directly impacted by these closures. However, our goal remains to ensure that these early insights help inform a thoughtful and equitable school visit experience for board members.

Finally, this protocol is grounded in a robust foundation, including a review of over 70 research articles on urban school closures from 2000 to 2024, research on instructional rounds and equity-focused school observation protocols, and Dr. Green's expertise and research on school closures. Additionally, we incorporated feedback from stakeholders at the nine schools currently under consideration for closure to ensure the tool reflects their specific perspectives and needs. If more time had been available, the protocol would have undergone a more comprehensive validation process, including piloting in multiple schools, collecting extensive stakeholder feedback, and refining based on iterative rounds of input.

Biographies

Dr. Terrance L. Green is a tenured Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy and Planning at the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Green is a national expert on urban school closures and his research regarding school closures has been featured in some of the field of education's top journals as well as in popular non-academic outlets. He created the School Closure/Rightsizing Equity Audit ©. During his time as a faculty member, 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 from across the United States how to conduct equity audits, and has conducted audits for school districts across the U.S. Dr. Green has been studying, teaching, and working with school districts on school closures for over the last twelve years. 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 4,300 times, cited nearly 180 times and remains one of the most read articles in the field of educational leadership and policy. He teachers a course at the University of Texas on Schools, Gentrification, and Closure. 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, originally from Detroit, Michigan.

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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.