

Urge Impact Evaluations Before PPS School Closure Decisions

A Land Use & Transportation Committee Request for Southeast Uplift Board Action

Portland Public Schools (PPS) is considering closing 11-14 schools and changing school programs and attendance boundaries that would move approximately 8,000 students – about one-third of enrollment – to different schools. These changes could significantly affect how children travel to school, the safety of their daily routes, and the health and livability of surrounding neighborhoods. In District 3, six elementary schools being considered for closure include Buckman, Creston, Lewis, Marysville, Rose City Park and Woodmere.

The full consequences of these proposals are not yet understood. Decisions of this scale should be based on a clear assessment of their effects on students, families, and communities. It should not be solely based on school enrollment or operating costs.

PPS plans to host public forums through November and make a final decision in December. If we believe that the community and the PPS school board members should be better informed about the impact of these decisions, then the time to act is now.

Student Safety and Access to School

Changes to school boundaries and program locations would force children to travel farther, cross major roads, and spend more time commuting.

- At Sunnyside Environmental School, the share of students living within one mile could fall from 96.8% to 65.5% under a proposed scenario. Some students could face longer journeys and cross Interstate 84 to reach school.
- Closing Sellwood Middle School would require students to cross major high-crash roads, including McLoughlin Boulevard (OR 99E) and Powell Boulevard (US 26), on their daily journeys.

Longer trips may also increase traffic congestion near receiving schools while creating additional pressure on school bus services.

Fairness for Families

The effects of these changes will not be the same for every family. Students from low-income households, families without access to a car, and those who already face transportation barriers may have fewer safe and practical ways to get to school.

PPS must account for these differences and ensure that the burden of school changes does not fall disproportionately on families with the fewest transportation options.

Climate, Traffic, and Neighborhood Impacts

Longer commutes and increased car use will increase congestion and greenhouse-gas emissions. These outcomes conflict with Portland's Vision Zero program to reduce traffic

deaths and injuries, the City's Safe Routes to School goals, as well as PPS's commitment to reducing transportation-related emissions.

School closures affect more than students and families. Schools often serve as important "third spaces" where neighbors gather and engage in community and civic activities. Closing schools can also affect the patronage of nearby businesses. In addition, previous public investments in school areas and the effects of vacant school properties on neighborhoods also deserve consideration.

What The Public and School Board Need to Know Before Decisions Are Made

A complete assessment should compare the proposed "Rightsizing Scenarios" with the option of making no changes. This recommendation from the Land Use & Transportation Committee calls on PPS to work with relevant bureaus at the City of Portland to address:

- **Student safety:** Risks along walking, biking, and driving routes, particularly where children must cross major roads.
- **Transportation and traffic:** Changes in travel distances and times, traffic congestion, and demand for school buses and TriMet services.
- **Climate and public costs:** Changes in emissions, transportation expenses, and other costs to the public.
- **Equity and access:** How each scenario affects low-income families, students without reliable access to a car, and communities already facing transportation barriers.
- **Land use and neighborhood effects:** Impacts on local businesses, public safety, community activities, neighborhood cohesion, and previous public investments that contribute to the City's goal of walkable neighborhoods.

Without this information, decisionmakers and the public cannot fully compare the costs and consequences of the proposed changes or determine whether the anticipated benefits outweigh the impacts on students and communities.

Requested Board Action

The Land Use and Transportation Committee has discussed these concerns and voted, without opposition, to recommend that the Southeast Board of Directors endorse its recommendation that:

1. Southeast Uplift urge Portland Public Schools to work with the City of Portland to evaluate the impacts of the proposed school closures on transportation, safety, climate, equity, land-use, public-cost, and neighborhoods before decisions are made about school closures, program changes, or attendance boundaries.
2. Request that these evaluations compare all proposed Rightsizing Scenarios with the option of making no changes and make those findings public.
3. Southeast Uplift communicate this request to PPS, the PPS Board of Education, Portland City Council, Portland Bureau of Transportation, and Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.



OUR MISSION

To collaborate with the District 3 community to build informed, inclusive and participatory neighborhoods that support our social and ecological wellbeing.

OUR VISION

We envision a more resilient future where everyone feels and is welcome, interconnected, and empowered with the resources they need to advocate for change on the issues that impact their lives.

OUR VALUES & BELIEFS

- **Relationship-Building:** that personal connections and networks strengthen our communities.
- **Community Involvement:** that organized neighbors can shape the future of our communities, including envisioning and enacting positive change. Through collaboration, we co-create the communities we want to inhabit.
- **Grassroots Democracy:** that we all have a role in determining the character and future of our city through grassroots, bottom-to-top participation.
- **Sharing, Teaching and Learning:** that with tools, support, and opportunities to connect, we can effect positive change.
- **Diversity and Inclusiveness:** that through an inclusive, multicultural environment we can explore our differences and come together around common interests and goals.
- **Building Capacity:** that we strengthen our communities as we strengthen our neighborhood associations, community-based organizations and business districts.

You can find our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility statements and lenses here: <https://www.seuplift.org/deia-statements-documents>

OUR LAND USE & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Purpose and Scope: The purpose of Southeast Uplift Land Use & Transportation Committee is to promote sustainable, equitable land use and transportation for the SE Uplift Neighborhood Coalition area and to create a place for community engagement and collaboration on land use and transportation issues.

The Committee's Charge: To aid and support SE Uplift in the above purpose, the Committee will provide recommendations to the SE Uplift Board of Directors on land use and transportation issues both in and affecting the District, with a focus on community engagement, policy advocacy, capacity building, sustainability and equity.

[Read the full charter here.](#)