I STAND WITH STEPHENSON AND ALL PPS SCHOOLS

STEPHENSON ELEMENTARY Portland, Oregon

Tips on How to Comment on the School Closure Scenarios: A guide for the Stephenson Community

The superintendent will recommend a preferred scenario in November, and the board is expected to vote in December. Community input submitted over the next two to three weeks is especially important, as the district has said that public feedback will help inform the superintendent's recommendation.

Please be sure to:

- Put Stephenson in the subject line.
- Use your full name, your street or neighborhood, and your child's grade.
- Write it yourself, in your own words. Identical form letters get counted once. Different letters making the same points get read.
- Keep it under 300 words.
- Pick two or three points from the list below and add one thing that is true for your family.
- Be polite and specific. Board members and staff are more likely to act on a clear request than on anger.
- Do not argue that a different school should close in Stephenson's place, other schools and parents are our allies and pitting neighborhoods against each other means we all lose in the end no matter what happens.
- Do not criticize Markham or Capitol Hill. They are good schools who also stand to lose with this plan. Our point is that closing Stephenson is bad for their students too.
- Keep a copy of what you send and note the date.
- Plan to write again after the November recommendation comes out.

Our Key Talking Points:

- **Puts federal funding in question locally:** Markham would grow from 312 to 519 students and its poverty rate would fall from 38.3% to 25.7%, below the 33% Title I threshold. Approximately 130 low-income students could see a reduction in Title I-supported services they currently receive. PPS has not explained how it plans to replace the funds specifically to Markham.
- **Ends walking and biking to school:** Nearly 30% of Stephenson students live within one mile today. Under A, most will go to Markham, adding bus costs and traffic near the region's two I-5 on ramps, and conflicts with Resolution 7307 on walkability and safe routes. Why are you moving kids towards more crowded locales than away from them?
- **Removes a community asset with no replacement:** Stephenson is an officially designated **Basic Earthquake Emergency Communication Node** by the City of

Portland, and the neighborhood has no comparable public space, an empty, unkept building will make our neighborhood less safe.

- **Leaves unanswered afterschool care concerns:** For many Stephenson families, the school day does not end when classes are dismissed. The Stephenson Child Care Association (SCCA) provides essential after-school care for roughly 140 families, most of whom depend on two working parents. Closing a school without a clear plan for afterschool childcare has real economic consequences, making it harder for parents to remain employed and reducing workforce participation in our community.
- **Stephenson serves a unique geographic area.** Located in Portland's deep southwest corner, Stephenson fulfills a role similar to Skyline in northwest Portland, providing a neighborhood school for a community separated from much of the city by significant geographic barriers and limited transportation routes in a primarily residential area.
- **Closes a top performing school:** Stephenson ranks 7th of 80 PPS Schools with state test results and holds a 10/10 GreatSchools rating. PPS's own auditors say displaced students benefit most when they move to substantially stronger schools.

Add your own facts. These matter more than any statistic. For example:

- How your child gets to school now, and how long the trip to Markham or Capitol Hill would take.
- Mention whether you would need a bus, and what that does to your work day or to before and after-school care.
- Whether your child receives special education or other services at Stephenson.
- How many more years your children will be in elementary school
- What Stephenson means on your street: walking groups, events, neighbors you know through school.

Sample Intro:

"My name is ___. We live on ___ and my daughter is in _____ grade at Stephenson. I ask the board to consider this additional information before you decide anything."

Still need more help? See below for sample messages to get you *started*, but please make these your own.

I Stand with Stephenson & PPS Schools - Before You Close It, Prove It

Sample Message

I am a Stephenson parent and I oppose Scenario A and all school closures. PPS has not yet met its burden of proving that school closures are necessary. This is bigger than any single school. Closing schools permanently alters neighborhoods, disrupts students, weakens community connections, and creates uncertainty for families across Portland. At the same time, the district has not clearly demonstrated that the projected financial benefits outweigh the costs, particularly when closures may trigger new transportation expenses, funding losses, larger class sizes, and building maintenance obligations. Before any school is closed, PPS should provide clear evidence that students will be better served, communities will be stronger, and taxpayers will receive the promised financial benefits. The burden of proof belongs to the district, not to the families being asked to lose their neighborhood schools.

I Stand with Stephenson & PPS Schools - Neighborhood Schools Matter

Sample Message

I am a Stephenson parent and believe neighborhood schools are one of the few public institutions that bring together families, students, educators, and community members daily. When a school closes, the impacts extend far beyond the students assigned to that building. Families lose opportunities for connection, neighborhoods lose gathering places, local volunteers disappear, and civic engagement often declines. School closures can also reduce walkability and increase transportation challenges for families, which is particularly true for Stephenson, which is surrounded by steep hills and winding roads with few sidewalks. There is simply nowhere for us to go within walking distance. Every community deserves access to a nearby public school whenever possible. Before eliminating neighborhood schools, PPS should demonstrate why closure is preferable to investing in enrollment growth, improving programs, and strengthening existing school communities. Our city deserves better.

I Stand with Stephenson & PPS Schools - Schools Are Community Infrastructure

Sample Message

Schools provide much more than classroom instruction. Across Portland, schools serve as childcare hubs, recreation spaces, emergency preparedness sites, community meeting locations, voting locations, and gathering places for neighbors. When a school closes, an entire network of community support is disrupted. The question facing PPS is not simply whether students can be moved to another building. The question is what is lost when a public institution is removed from a neighborhood. Before any closure moves forward, the district should fully evaluate the broader community impacts and demonstrate how those losses will be addressed.

I Stand with Stephenson & PPS Schools - Don't Create Tomorrow's Vacant Buildings

Sample Message

Portland has already seen the long-term challenges that can emerge when school buildings sit vacant. Empty campuses require ongoing maintenance, security, and operational expenses while providing little benefit to surrounding neighborhoods. Before closing any school, PPS should present a realistic plan for what comes next. Communities deserve to know how a building will be used, how long it may remain vacant, and what costs taxpayers will continue to bear. School closures should not create additional liabilities or leave neighborhoods with empty public assets for years to come. A closure decision is incomplete without a clear future for the building itself.

I Stand with Stephenson & PPS Schools - Right-Plan Before You Right-Size

Sample Message

School closure decisions should be driven by evidence, transparency, and community engagement. Important questions remain regarding transportation, walkability, childcare access, facility reuse, emergency preparedness, community impacts, and the long-term financial consequences of closure. These questions affect families throughout Portland, not just those attending schools currently on closure lists. Before making an irreversible decision, PPS should complete all required analyses, fully evaluate alternatives to closure, and clearly demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the costs. A decision of this magnitude deserves a complete plan, not assumptions.

I Stand with Stephenson & PPS Schools - A School Closure Anywhere Affects Portland Everywhere

Sample Message

While every neighborhood is affected differently, school closures create ripple effects that extend across the entire district. Students are reassigned, transportation systems are reshaped, childcare arrangements change, families reconsider where they live, and communities lose important civic anchors. These decisions influence public confidence in Portland's public education system and shape how families view the city as a place to raise children. School closures should therefore be approached as more than a facilities discussion. They are community decisions with long-term consequences for enrollment, neighborhood vitality, and public trust. PPS should demonstrate not only how a closure helps one school, but how it strengthens Portland as a whole.