Supporting Information

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**Note:** All meeting transcripts can be found publicly at the following web locations: <http://cps.edu/About_CPS/Policies_and_guidelines/Pages/qualityschools.aspx> and CPS, School Quality, Meeting notes and transcripts, https://cps.edu/About\_CPS/Policies\_and\_guidelines/Pages/qualityschools.aspx

(Chicago) <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/f/facilities-master-plan/community-forums> and WHYY. December 13, 2012. https://whyy.org/articles/meetings-list/

(Philadelphia)

The rest of data was generated from work conducted in the field and range from observations of meetings and qualitative interviews. Relevant excerpts that exclude identifying information are made available below as are additional instructions for how the data was coded.

**Community Meeting Descriptions**

A typical meeting was held at a church or a school after work hours, around seven pm, and lasted between two to three hours. Each school on the closing list was given six minutes total to provide commentary; two minutes each for three people total. The meetings were held in two rounds.

Each of the meetings were run by either the chief network officer and/or the Family and Community Engagement officer (FACE) of that network. A group of about five to seven school officials’ generally sat at a table located at the front center of the room, while the person tasked with running the meeting called up community members’ who had signed up to participate on behalf of their school. Each person called upon would then come up to the microphone that stood across from the school officials. For the duration of the meeting, school officials, in addition to everyone in the audience would sit, stand, and/or cheer, as each speaker would speak into the microphone and list several reasons why his/her school should not be closed. The meetings were attended by on average 5 to 800 people per meeting, majority of which were parents across networks. Parents spoke the most at the meetings, followed by teachers. Several officials were in attendance, but only one to two spoke per meeting. At the of the end of the seven-week period, over 5000 people attended at least one of the 28 meetings held across 14 communities.

Each school district holds multiple rounds of these meetings. After the first round of meetings, a shortened school closure list is constructed by the school board or the SRC based on participant feedback. After that, another round of public meetings is held with those connected to schools that remain on the list. After the second round, the school board or the SRC votes. That vote determines the schools on the final closure list for that school year. In Chicago, once the final list is generated, the public can attend a hearing with retired judges, appointed by the school district, to make a final appeal. The judges can recommend saving a school from closure, but the school board officially decides whether to remove the school from the list. Once the series of public meetings is complete, the schools that remain on the list will eventually be closed. The entire process takes at least four months; the announcement of the potential closure list is typically made in December, and final decisions are usually released in March (See Table 2.1 and 2.2. in Appendix)*.*

**Coding for Reasons Raised in Meeting Transcripts (Instruction)**

For the analysis, I began by engaging in an iterative process of coding and recoding (2x) the ethnographic observations taken across the meetings (See Skogan and Harnett 1997, p. 120 for similar process). The first set of codes were developed after attending the first set of community meetings and then recoded and finalized at the second set of meetings attended. The coding was based on the key concerns citizens’ raised for their position on school closure and were counted and categorized by the number of mentions per issue. For example, violence and gangs were both issues that were included under the crime category. Therefore, if violence was mentioned 100 times and gangs mentioned 200 times, each of these issues were added together, thereby resulting in a total of 300 mentions for the crime category. The purpose of counting issue mentions is to gauge which concerns were most commonly raised in relationship to one’s policy attitude, in this case, opposition to school closure, before determining how citizens are activated to participate.

I continued this type of coding with the use of transcripts across 60 meetings. By doing this, I am able to develop a fairly exhaustive set of coding categories. These categories include crime, family, fairness, politics, mistrust, charter, safe havens, resources, stability, race/race coded, listen, community, special needs, and overcrowding. I then group them into which issues were raised the most by those against school closings in order to shorten the list. I come up with the following final codes: crime, community, mistrust and charter schools, politics and race/race coded. These codes/categories reflect the issues that were most salient across all networks.[[1]](#footnote-1)The codes were then triangulated through additional interviews, and local media sources. Most important, all of the transcripts are publicly available on the CPS website and thus can be used to verify the coding scheme.

The **crime** category received one of the highest percentage of mentions of any other category - 26%. Crime mentions included any reference to gangs, violence, guns, safety and similarly related themes. A typical example of what would go into the crime frame includes statements’ such as the following:

You are talking about sending those kids from this side of Austin, I mean, we got to admit, we got wars in the community, we got gangs in our community. They don't become gang bangers in high school. They start from somewhere else. So, these kids are about to go from here to here. So, we're talking about tearing our kids' life. We have the big thing about them being senselessly murdered. So, why we're going to add fuel to the fire and put our kids in harm's way? (community member)

(Man stands up and show gang map) If you send kids from one side of the community to another - you will put our kids in harms way. Our kids safety and education…(parent activist)

It is the safety of our children. The safety of our children is a primary concern. Barbara Byrd-Bennett said this during a conference call with reporters, according to the Sun Times. She also said for children to travel farther, or to put children in the danger of crossing a gang barrier, does not make sense to me. (grandparent)

I'll give you an example. We just had an incident where a young man was killed on … Street, and he was killed by somebody from the … side of the community, and he killed somebody on the [other] side of the community, and these kind of tensions are going on. So, I'm saying that to say if you put these two schools together, it's not going to work. It won't work in our community. You give us some years to work on it, it will work, but it won't work. (community member)

In this statement it is clear that the person is arguing that because of the safety concerns related to gangs that could result the school should not be closed down.

The **community** category tied with crime at 26% and included referrals to schools as safe havens, or places of stability, family, and overall pillars of the community. Yet, this category also included references to special needs students. This is because many of the schools spoke of how closing the school would affect their special needs populations by disrupting the relationship built with these students thereby stagnating progress. A few typical examples of sentiments that were placed in the community category, including one specific to special need students,’ are below:

Goodlow is not just a school, it's a family, it's a home, it's an environment, it's a community. Their passion just runs deep, and I really, really wish that I could say something that would help you truly understand that you can't close this school. (parent)

…My daughter is safe, this school is safe haven, if I'm late, I can call the parents. This impacts the whole community…(parent)

… You need to realize, one out of every three kids in the schools at North Lawndale are special ed children. They are special ed children. So, we have created public schools that are really therapeutic schools. We have to realize that before we make our decisions. (community member)

As we can see, particularly in the latter statement, even if the word community was not used, the overall statement is expressing a concern for the impact closings will have on an established community at that school.

The **charter** category was the second most popular category and included any references to the term “charter” and any general mentions of charter school operators such as UNO, Noble, and KIPP. An example of comments made against school closings using the charter issues include:

I'm here today to bring you a message. Stop our school closings. Stop the proliferation of charter schools. You cannot say you are going to close even one of our public schools; and in the same breath, say you're going to use our resources that belong to our schools to fund privatized schools. Private schools that will be funded with public monies, our money. (parent activist)

120 new schools many of which are charter were open while 100 CPs schools were closed. Why are we here? (community member)

This is about destabilizing communities. This is about failed charter schools. Charter schools are failing, but they want to sell black people and Latino people a dream that charter schools are doing better than the neighborhood schools. (community member)

We are here to say "no" to school closings, not in [Ches], not anywhere. We are here to say "no" to charters, turnarounds, and military schools where they are not wanted. (community members)

In this statement, the speaker is associating the closing of public school with the funding of charter schools, and privatized schooling more generally. The participant is thus using Charter schools’ to explain opposition toward school closings.

The **trust/politics** category received 15% of all mentions and included any referrals to suspicion, transparency and accountability, politics. A few examples of the various statements that were included in this category are below:

… we don't trust you. If you're going to try to start building trust, you got to tell us the truth. (parent)

*…* It's amazing to me how you can find a billion dollars, I don't know if you heard about that, to refurbish Grant Park, but we can't find money to better our schools. It's amazing to me how you can find money to get all these raises to all the politicians, but we can't find money to better our schools.”(parent)

In both of the above statements, the speakers are expressing their suspicion of the reasons put forth by CPS for closings school – to reduce the budget, and general mistrust for CPS more generally.

The **race/race coded** category received 7% of all mentions and included any direct references to *race*, such as racism,” in addition to *race-coded* sentiments, which instead used non-explicit referrals to race such as apartheid, and genocide, and comparisons to non-majority black/Hispanic neighborhoods like Lincoln Park, or the suburbs. An example of the latter concern includes:

… In reading through the history of the schools that you guys want to close, why is it that there's a disproportionate amount of schools that is on the south side and the west side that are closing, and then there are not that many schools in, if any, on the north side that's closing? This is hitting the south side and the west side the hardest of anybody. (community member)

This is about the decline of black and Latino teachers. Black children -- back teachers teach black children. When you close schools that re 99 percent black, you are saying, "Black teachers, we don't want you. You are not good enough.” (community member)

In this typical example, though the term race was not used, the concern has racial undertones given its implicit comparison between the south and west sides,’ which are majority black, and the north side, which is not.

**Qualitative Interview Coding**

Next, memos summarizing the qualitative interviews were developed and notes were taken on questions that remained unclear (Feldman 1995). Borrowing from the categories above, for example, a memo was developed that grouped community responses into personal and societal concerns related to the consequences of closure. Personal concerns included self-interest as a teacher or parent. An example of a personal concern in the data is articulated in this quote: “Each time you close a school I have to find a new job.” Societal concerns were articulated in statements about the implications of public school closure for larger bodies such as unions, the government, the school system, and race relations. A typical example of a statement that articulated a societal concern is the following: “They [are] not trying to close those schools on the North Side, it’s only the schools on the South Side, where the kids are Black and Brown.” In this quote, the interviewee expressed a concern that the policy targeted people of color concentrated in specific areas of the city. Data from interviews suggest that the development of a shared identity as targets of closure, or what I label as “shared policy targets,” contributes to the unification of otherwise disparate groups, and their greater engagement with the school district and community groups (see also Anderson 2009). This experience of *being a shared targeted of the school closure policy appeared to motivate many poor people of color to participate in the school closure process.*

*Coding their Method for Participating*

While such concerns identify a central reason for the participation of those affected by closure, they do not explain *how* people participated in practice.[[2]](#footnote-2) Accordingly, the data was divided into categories that identified how parents, community residents, and elites described what enabled their participation (and what acted as a barrier to their participation), in addition to the shared target identity described above. The responses for what enabled their participation could be categorized into the theme of “resources” including transportation, meetings, and civic partners.[[3]](#footnote-3) One school administrator in Philadelphia, for example, said that the school had “only three community organization partners prior to the closure announcement but that the number more than quadrupled after the school was threatened for closure.” In fact, across all neighborhoods examined except one,[[4]](#footnote-4) the announcement of a potential closure contributed to an increase in the number of community partners available to assist in the fight against closure.

*Coding the Impact of Participation in the Closure Process*

*Win: Civic Skills and Efficacy*

Finally, in 2014 and again in 2017, citizens were asked to assess the impacts (benefits or disadvantages) of their participation in the closure process. In 2014, affected citizens referred to their experiences of “seeing other schools win” and “learning how to make a case.” These factors were labeled “civic skills.” In addition, they expressed belief in their ability to get policy makers to respond to their concerns even though they maintained generally negative perceptions of the policy process and policy makers. The former responses were classified as “affirmations of internal efficacy” and the latter as negative interpretations of the policy process.

*Loss: Collective Participatory Debt (Deepened Mistrust, Fatigue, and Disillusionment)*

By 2017, it became clear that while a few of those who were new to participation in the early years of the school closures had been transformed into activists and formal political and civic leaders, most people, even those who had won the battle to save their school, had become much less participatory and further disillusioned by the policy and political process. In particular, there were multiple references to the term(s) “fatigue,” “tired,” and “wore out.” These responses were labeled, “fatigue and disillusionment.” Furthermore, citizens expressed a *deepened mistrust* for government (e.g., one Philadelphian stated that “[the school board] had to go back and change based on our actions, but [even so] I don’t have any more faith in government”). From the follow-up interviews, it appears that the policy wins of affected participants did not necessarily contribute to positive attitudes toward the government or future participation. Instead, their experiences appear to do the opposite, contributing to collective participatory debt.

**Responses of Community activists and school officials**

School district officials described the policy as a fair response to a policy problem, citing the fact that schools were under enrolled and “only happened to affect racial minorities because they represented the majority of the district.” They believed that affected communities protested in large numbers because of their emotional connection to the school and their perception that what was happening to them was due to racial bias. Regarding the methods of the affected citizens, the school officials viewed their participation as planned and motivated by only a few activist elites, due to low participation on previous school related issues. The school officials accused the citizens of defending their schools by making “emotional appeals as opposed to hard data.” Regarding the efficacy, or rather impact, of their participation, the school officials believed that a “fair amount of community members’ participated believing that they can get through” and admitted that they had amended policies because of how much uproar the policy seemed to be drawing. Overall, there was a general sense that these communities did not understand why the district had to make the decisions it made, however.

Community elites described themselves as drawn to organizing communities to defend their schools because of their own ties to the institutions. They believed they were able to attract participants because most affected citizens “did not realize their schools were up for closure. Given their history with organizing, they saw this current iteration as another example of the longer racialized policies that the respective districts had implemented, particularly regarding replacing low performing schools. Several references were made to the effects of previous actions, framed as beneficial to the community, that instead resulted in negative experiences for them. Once they were able to make the issue important to the relevant groups, they provide resources and civic skills that affected participants adopted because they wanted to win. After some communities were successful in saving their schools, community elites quickly embraced these victories with refrains such as “when we fight, we win.” It was only in the follow up interviews that community elites began to acknowledge the cracks in the victories they initially claimed.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1A** *Direct and Indirect Mentions in Community Meetings attended by Parents, Community Activists, and School Officials* | | | | | |
|  | Chicago | | Philadelphia | |  |
|  | Direct | Indirect | Direct | Indirect | Sample Quote |
| Type (Reason: Group Cohesion as Shared Policy Target) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Crime (stability) | 25.7 | 22 | 15 | 12.4 | It is the safety of our children. The safety of our children is a primary concern. |
| Increased number of charters (unfair) | 21.5 | 17.3 | 27.4 | 33 | Stop our school closings. Stop the proliferation of charter schools. |
| Politics/Mistrust | 27.2 | 30 | 33 | 34.7 | We don't trust you. If you're going to try to start building trust, you got to tell us the truth |
| Race/Race Coded | 25.6 | 24.7 | 24.6 | 19.9 | Why is it that there's a disproportionate amount of schools that is on the south side and the west side that are closing |
| Type (Method: Mobilizing Resources) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meetings (also protests) | 85 | 53.2 | 85 | 53.2 | To show the district was listening, they arranged a meeting with students and the deputy superintendent |
| Transportation (busses) | 15 | 17.9 | 15 | 17.9 | We went down to rallies, we blocked traffic, went to the SRC [meetings], marched to the school, what didn’t we do? All supported by the district or community organizations |
| Radio, Newspapers, T-shirts, Stipends | 10 | 28.4 | 10 | 28.4 | The radio stations were there . . . a bunch of people . . . a lot of community leaders. . . . Everybody came in to get us the supports we needed |
| *Note. Data collected from original observations of community meetings and meeting transcripts* | | | | | |

**Table 1B:** Sample Coding

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Early Codes (2012–13)** | **Re-code: Reason**  **(2014)** | **Re-code: Method (2015)** | **Re-code: Impact (2017)** |
| **Resources** | “This is about that ninety million they  are giving to UNO.”  *Will lead to the unfair distribution of public resources to charter schools* | Transportation, meetings, and civic partners, “access to school officials,” office of community engagement | “You have to fight the facts with facts.”  *Learning Civic skills*  “They had to go back and change because of us.”  *Affirmations of internal efficacy* |
| **Group Cohesion** | “This not on the North Side. . . . It’s only the South Side, where the kids are Black and Brown.”  *Disrupt family ties and community stability by racially targeting minority communities* | Brought together parents, teachers, and “people of color”  *Defining “Shared Policy Targets” of closure among minorities* | “[we] was worn out”  *Led to fatigue and disillusionment*  *(Collective Participatory Debt)* |
| **Political Trust** | “I can’t tell if you’re really listening to us or if these meetings are a sham.”  *Suspected mistrust between the school district and the community* | Mistrust provided a “fighting stem”  *Mistrust being used as a reason to engage in participation* | “I don’t have any more trust in government”  *Deepened mistrust as a result of participation (Collective Participatory Debt)* |

**Table 1C.** Number of Closures per City, with Percent Black or Latinx and Percent Low Income

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of closures** | **Percent Black/Latinx affected by closure** | **Percent low income (measured by free/reduced lunch)** |
| **Chicago** | 49 | 88 | 94 |
| **Philadelphia** | 23 | 81 | 93 |

*Source*: Chicago Public Schools n.d.; School District of Philadelphia n.d.

**Participant Details (Tables 1.1 – 1.4)**

**\*Indicates re-interview between 2015 – 17**

**Table 1.1**

**Parents Interviewed by Neighborhood and Income in Chicago[[5]](#footnote-5)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Income Classification**  **(High, Med, Low)** | **Neighborhood/**  **Network** |
| **1** | Low | Austin |
| **2\*** | Low | Austin |
| **3** | Middle | Austin |
| **4** | Low | Englewood |
| **5\*** | Low | Englewood |
| **6\*** | Low | Englewood |
| **7** | n/a | Fulton |
| **8** | n/a | Fulton |
| **9** | n/a | Fulton |
| **10** | n/a | Fulton |
| **11\*** | Middle | Kenwood |
| **12** | Low | Kenwood |
| **13\*** | Low | North Lawndale |
| **14** | Low | Garfield |
| **15\*** | Middle | Garfield |
| **16** | Middle | Garfield |
| **17** | Low | Garfield |
| **18** | Middle | Pilsen |
| **19** | Low | Pilsen |
| **20** | Low | Pilsen |
| **21** | Low | Pilsen |
| **22\*** | Low | Pilsen |
| **23** | Low | Pilsen |
| **24** | Middle | Ravenswood |
| **25** | Middle | Ravenswood |

**Table 1.2**

**Parents Interviewed by Neighborhood and Income in Philadelphia**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Income Classification**  **(Self-Reported)** | **Neighborhood** |
| **1** | Low | Germantown |
| **2** | Middle | Germantown |
| **3\*** | Middle | Mt. Airy |
| **4** | Middle | Mt.Airy |
| **5\*** | Low | Northeast |
| **6** | Low | Northeast |
| **7** | Low | Northwest |
| **8** | Low | Northwest |
| **9** | Low | Northwest |
| **10** | Low | Northwest |
| **11** | Low | Northwest |
| **12\*** | Low | Northwest |
| **13\*** | Low | Northwest |
| **14** | Low | Southwest |
| **15** | Low | West Philly |
| **16** | Low | West Philly |
| **17** | Middle | West Philly |
| **18\*** | Low | West Philly |
| **19\*** | Middle | West Philly |
| **20** | Low | West Philly |
| **21** | Low | North Philly |
| **22** | Middle | North Philly |
| **23\*** | Low | North Philly |
| **24** | Low | North Philly |
| **25\*** | Low | South Philly |

**Table 1.3**

**Elites Interviewed by Position and Organization in Chicago**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Position** | **Organization** |
| **1** | Activist | Action Now |
| **2** | Program Development Team | AUSL |
| **3** | Senior Leadership | Chicago Public Schools  Office of Special ED |
| **4** | School Board Member | Chicago Public Schools |
| **5** | Activist | Chicago Teachers Union |
| **6** | Activist/Lawyer | Chicago Teachers Union |
| **7** | Alderman | City of Chicago |
| **8** | Ward Committeeman | City of Chicago |
| **9** | Senior Leadership | CS Foundation |
| **10** | Senior Leadership | Chicago Urban League |
| **11** | Program Development Team | Educational Fund |
| **12** | Regional Leader | E4E |
| **13** | Senior Leadership | FACE, CPS |
| **14** | Senior Leadership | KOCO |
| **15** | Program Development Team | Illinois Charter School Network |
| **16** | Senior Leadership | Stand for Children |
| **17** | Senior Leadership | Teach for America, Chicago |
| **18** | Community Activist | Unaffiliated |
| **19** | Community Activist | Unaffiliated |
| **20** | Scholar Activist | Unaffiliated |
| **22** | Legal Activist | Unaffiliated |
| **23** | Youth Member | KOCO |
| **24** | Activist | AAPS |
| **25** | Activist | Parents for Teachers |

**Table 1.4**

**Elites Interviewed by Position and Organization in Philadelphia**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Position** | **Organization** |
| **1** | Activist | Action United |
| **2** | Member | ATAC |
| **3** | Parent Activist | Stonewall |
| **4** | Senior Leadership | Blaine Elementary |
| **5** | Education Committee Team | City of Philadelphia |
| **6** | Former Mayor | City of Philadelphia |
| **7** | Senior Leadership | Bridgetown Neighborhoods Association |
| **8** | Activist | Lea Elementary |
| **9** | Education Committee Team | NAACP |
| **10** | Senior Leadership | PCAPS |
| **11** | Senior Leadership | Philadelphia Federation of Teachers |
| **12** | Activist | Sayre Elementary |
| **13** | Program Development Associate | School District of Philadelphia - Charter Office |
| **14** | Program Development Team | School District of Philadelphia - Charter Office |
| **15** | Senior Leadership | School District of Philadelphia - Facilities |
| **16** | Senior Leadership | School District of Philadelphia - Parent Engagement |
| **17** | Member | School District of Philadelphia - School Reform Commission |
| **18** | Member | School District of Philadelphia - School Reform Commission |
| **19** | Journalist | SUN Newspaper |
| **20** | Senior Leadership | Universal Charters |
| **21** | Activist | University City |
| **22** | Senior Leadership | Youth United for Change |
| **23** | Senior Leadership | Philadelphia Student Union |
| **24** | Youth Coordinator | Philadelphia Student Union |
| **25** | Youth Member | Youth United for Change |

Table 2.1 Facilities Master Plan Meetings on School Closures in Philadelphia – 2012-13

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Round 1: December (City wide)** | **Round 2: January (community level)** | **Round 3: February (community level)** |
| 15: South Philadelphia High School | 8: Temple University | 5: Temple University |
| 17: Sayre High School | 9: Edison High School | 6: Edison High School |
| 18: Edison High School | 15: Martin Luther King High School | 12: Martin Luther King High School |
| 19: Martin Luther King High School | 16: Bartram High School | 13: Bartram High School |
|  | 22: Overbrook High School | 19: Overbrook High School |
|  | 23: University City High School | 20: University City High School |
|  | 29: South Philadelphia High School | 26: South Philadelphia High School |
|  | 30: Northeast High School | 27: Northeast High School |
| **Total: 4** | **8** | **8** |

Source: WHYY. December 13, 2012. https://whyy.org/articles/meetings-list/

\*Note: The location represents where closure meetings were held not necessarily where they were closed.

Table 2.2 Community Meetings and Hearings on School Closures in Chicago – 2012-13

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **January** | **February** | **March** | **April – Community Meetings** | **April – Public Hearings** |
| 28: Ravenswood/Ridge | 2: Englewood- Gresham  Village | 2: Midway | 11: Amundsen H.S.  Prosser H.S.  Kenwood H.S.  Harlan H.S.  Lindblom  Young H.S.  Manley  Austin  Total: 8 | 16: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 6 |
| 29: Midway  Ohare | 4: Burnham Park | 4: Pilsen-Little Village | 13: Amundsen  Dunbar  Harper  Harlan  Raby  Manley  Total: 6 | 17: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 6 |
| 30: Lake Calumet | 5: Garfield Humboldt Park |  | 15: Schurz  Harlan  Lincoln Park  Dunbar  Kenwood  CVS  Harper  Raby  Austin  Total: 9 | 18: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 6 |
| 31: Austin- North Lawndale | 6: Austin-North  Lawndale  Pershing  Pilsen-Little |  | 16: Dunbar  CVS  Kenwood  Harper  Raby  Austin  Total: 6 | 19: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 6 |
|  | 7: Skyway |  | 19: Harper H.S.  Total: 1 | 20: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 9 |
|  | 9: Rock Island |  |  | 22: Board Chambers  Board Chambers    Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 4 |
|  | 11: Fullerton  Fulton |  |  | 23: Board Chambers  Board Chambers    Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 4 |
|  | 13: Austin- North Lawndale  14: Lake Calumet |  |  | 24: Board Chambers  Board Chambers    Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 4 |
|  | 16: Ravenwood-Ridge  18: Englewood Gresham  19: Burnham Park |  |  | 25: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 6 |
|  | 20: Skyway  21: Pershing  23: Ohare |  |  | 26: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500  Room 1500  Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 6 |
|  | 25: Rock Island  26: Fulton |  |  | 29: Board Chambers  Board Chambers  Room 1500    Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 5 |
|  | 27: Garfield-Humboldt Park  28: Fullerton |  |  | 30: Board Chambers    Room 1550  Room 1550  Total: 3 |
| **Total: 5** | **20** | **2** | **31** | **65\*** |

Source (s): CPS. Withdrawn School Actions for 2013-14 https://cps.edu/Pages/WithdrawnSchoolActions2013\_14.aspx. CTU Communication. April 5, 2013 at <https://www.ctulocal1.org/posts/cps-school-closings-2013-community-hearing-schedule/>; CPS, School Quality, Meeting notes and transcripts, https://cps.edu/About\_CPS/Policies\_and\_guidelines/Pages/qualityschools.aspx

\*These meetings were scheduled after the first round of meetings and were/are not a

part of the process typically demanded by law.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 2.3 *Average Attendance Across Two Meetings* | | | | | | | |
|  | Austin | Englewood | Fulton | Pilsen | Garfield | Ravenswood | Total |
| Speakers |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Parents | 26 | 30 | 30 | 16 | 28 | 18 | 148 |
| CPS Officials | 9 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 47 |
| Teachers | 12 | 30 | 18 | 30 | 20 | 8 | 118 |
| Politicians | 5 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 24 |
| Total Speakers | 52 | 72 | 59 | 49 | 58 | 37 | 327 |
| Total Attendance | 1000 | 1200 | 800 | 800 | 850 | 500 | 5,150 |
| Total Schools Proposed for Closure | 38 | 42 | 30 | 10 | 32 | 15 | 167 |
| Total Schools Closed | 16 | 19 | 12 | 3 | 14 | 4 | 95 |
| *Note.* | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 2.4 *Issues Discussed at Community Meetings* | | | | | | | | |
|  | Austin | Englewood | Fulton | Pilsen | Garfield | Ravenswood | Total | Percentage |
| Crime | 37 | 35 | 15 | 16 | 32 | 11 | 146 | 25.70% |
| Community | 35 | 29 | 22 | 19 | 29 | 10 | 144 | 25.60% |
| Charter | 22 | 11 | 23 | 15 | 21 | 5 | 97 | 17.20% |
| Resources | 14 | 19 | 24 | 12 | 10 | 8 | 26 | 4.60% |
| Special Needs | 9 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 87 | 15.30% |
| Politics | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 38 | 6.70% |
| Race/Race Coded | 4 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 25 | 4.40% |
| Total | 126 | 111 | 102 | 72 | 106 | 46 | 563 | 99.5% |
| *Note.* | | | | | | | |  |

**Questions for Community Members**

(original) Internal efficacy (political effectiveness) Agree/Disagree

A. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics

B. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people

C. I believe my participation in politics will be effective

D. I understand what is going on in government

(original) External efficacy (system responsiveness) Agree/Disagree

E. Public officials care a lot about what people like me think - group

F. People like me have a say about what the government does -group

G. I trust the government to respond to my needs (accountable)

H. I trust the government to do what is in my best interest

Have you attended/ or participated in a community meeting in the past two years? A public hearing?

Have you written a letter or called your alderman?

Did your experiences with school closings impact your engagement with other activities?

Did your experience with school closings teach you lessons about government you did not

know?

If so, what lessons?

Have you applied them in other situations?

If so, what situations?

Did your experience with school closings teach you skills you did not have (or help you discover

skills you did not know you had)?

If so, what skills?

Have you applied them in other activities?

(original) Have your recent experiences with school closings affected your desire to participate

in your community on issues related to education? Other issues?

If so, how and why?

The follow up component of the paper is largely based on the outcomes of 8 schools and 12 re-interviews across Chicago and Philadelphia. The smaller number enabled a deeper dive of the context surrounding the school closures and its political impacts.

**Additional Considerations**

*The use of case studies and qualitative methods*

As stated by Walsh (2012), “there is a need in our scholarship for listening to the people we study (519),” qualitative interviews, especially, are most useful for understanding citizens’ articulation of their own experiences. Additionally, interviews enabled a better understanding of the specific engagement tactics of elites and organizations. Cumulatively, the methods utilized for the analysis highlight how groups affected by closure are identified and given resources to mobilize, and how the process and experience contributes to their feelings about the value of their participation and their evaluations of the lessons learned thereafter. [[6]](#footnote-6)

*Middle Class Blacks*

Through snowball sampling and focus groups I was also able to speak to citizens who did not participate in the meetings. Most nonparticipant interlocutors said that they believed that those who did participate made a difference in the outcomes, but they were not sure whether they would participate in the future. The only difference I identified among those who participated and those who did not was related to class. While several Black and low-income individuals participated across the community meetings, most middle-class Black people who participated did so only if they were already established activists, particularly in Philadelphia. It was clear that both groups had similarly negative perceptions of the policy process and its outcomes. That said, while I included middle-class participants for the sake of comparison, they are not the focus of this study.

Given that the above analysis is focused largely on the experiences of low-income Black parents targeted for closure and community organizers, the conclusions certainly raise questions about the attitude and participation of those that do not fit into these categories. I find that in the case of Philadelphia, Black middle class parents are less affected and in turn participate the least. For example, one Black middle class parent that did participate agreed that her peers were not as involved, as she explains, “Mt. Airy was like nirvana...the [closings] weren’t in our area so people were not involved.” The parent's description of the middle class neighborhood of Mt. Airy area as “nirvana” complements the experiences of several middle class parents and community members interviewed.

Yet, even when the Black middle-class are involved they view their participation differently than that of the directly impacted. In particular, they focus on their frustration with the participation patterns of those directly affected. As one Black middle class parent in Philadelphia stated,

This is how I felt when I went to that meeting: I am fighting for people who don’t want to fight. I was tired…after that meeting people left and it was like they closed our school, it’s done. For myself, my grandmother does not know how to read but you know what she fought for to make sure my mother went to school. My mother has an Associate [degree], I have a bachelors and I am getting my masters. I was very upset, so emotional. I was to the point of tears. I am coming here to fight for you and it's in your neighborhood.

The above statement demonstrates how Black middle class parents care about closure because of their own education struggles, but perceive those who are directly affected as people that “don’t want to fight.” Unsurprisingly, they do not appear to take from these experiences tangible civic skills and lessons in the way that resource poor groups do. This may be in part due to the fact that many of the middle persons who participated were already activists or involved in the community.[[7]](#footnote-7)

As it relates specifically to Chicago, Black middle class neighborhoods tend to be close in proximity to low income Black neighborhoods more generally. In addition, more middle class blacks live in low-income neighborhoods than middle class neighborhoods **(**Pattillo-McCoy 2013; Massey, 1990). Thus, the sheer number of schools on the original list (330) in Chicago meant that the probability of a school being closed close to a Black middle class parent's home was quite high. As one businessman in North Lawndale community stated, “I’ve been living in the North Lawndale community, K-Town, for 50 years. I’ve seen the changes. You need to stand up, because if your school is not the list now, one day it might be on the list.” The statement demonstrates how middle class Blacks believed they could be affected eventually and indeed these perceptions influence their decision to participate.

Accordingly, several middle class Blacks in Chicago participated in the closure process. To justify their participation several statements such as the following were made: “I am the product of the environment and I have a master’s degree**...**my school will not be closed, I am here to support the schools in this room,” and “I am standing with schools that are facing closings [and the] Black and Latino students that these closings will affect. I realize I am fortunate because I can teach classes with only 20 students.” Both statements demonstrate the extent to which middle class Blacks come out in support of those affected, even if they were not directly affected.While it is not clear that the closure process shaped them in the same ways it did those who were directly impacted, it is clear that both groups hold similar overall attitudes towards the policy and policy process.

**Group Consciousness and Linked fate**

Indeed, for Blacks, and to some extent other minority groups, race has played a powerful role in doing the work of building a collective political identity around important political issues through group consciousness (see for ex. Dawson, 1994). Thus, it might also be the case that group consciousness is being activated by the creation of the closing list and the ensuant actions of the district and community groups. Nonetheless, individuals can still decide not to participate regardless of collective identity for a number of reasons, including general disengagement, disaffection and low internal efficacy. Furthermore, group consciousness can wax and wane per policy issue. Like McClain et al**.** (2009) state in their review, “it is important for scholars to understand better the contexts that activate and those that might limit or stymie the development of group consciousness” (471). By examining these contexts, we are able to understand how these moments simultaneously develop and activate, or rather reactivate, consciousness crucial for the collective political action displayed towards school closures. At the very least, the targeted public policies, specifically school closings, provide an opportunity for this type of group consciousness raising to occur. This conscious raising, then, while not exhaustive, can positively contribute to the possibility of participation among typically disaffected groups such as those targeted for school closure.

**Differences Between Chicago and Philadelphia**

In terms of the data, while there were similar trends throughout, Chicago mentions skewed more heavily on the issue of race than Philadelphia, and Philadelphia mentions skewed more heavily on the issue of Charter Schools. The most striking difference was in the respective strengths of the teachers’ unions across these two cities. At the time of the investigation, the Chicago Teachers Union was a relatively stronger union with high levels of social, economic, and political capital. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers was a largely depoliticized union with relatively weaker organizing power but was actively working to strengthen its political power through coalition building. This difference, I suspect, impacted how campaigns to save schools were organized at the school versus the district wide level. In Chicago, even communities that faced far fewer threats of closure joined the coalition to save schools on the premise that “not one school should be closed.” It is unsurprising then that a recently published paper found that Blacks and Latinos in Chicago hold similarly negative attitudes toward school closures despite large differences in experience with the policy. While Philadelphia sought to create a similar collective action strategy through the organization *Philadelphia Coalition in Alliance for Public Schools [PCAPS],* a coalition of youth, parent and union groups working together to combat closures across the city, the union lacked political muscle. This appeared to result in a much more individualized fight against closures, where schools were more likely to work towards saving their own school rather than all schools. For example, in Chicago each community meeting boasted high levels of attendance, because all those affected were asked to attend the meetings of all other schools threatened. In Philadelphia, on the other hand, some community meetings had very low levels of participation, while others stood out for exceptionally high levels of participation.

In the short term, it appeared that the most organized schools were saved from being closed. In the long-term Philadelphians appeared to gain some clear political successes including the election of Democrats Mayor Jim Kenney and Governor Tom Wolf, who both appeared sympathetic to their demands, school advocates elected on the city council, the dissolution of the school board, and a lower rate of new charter school openings. Chicagoans, in contrast, re-elected Rahm Emanuel, despite a significant decline in support for him among those affected by closure, and elected a republican governor, Bruce Rauner, who appeared to be unsympathetic to their demands. Chicago also retained a mayoral appointed school board, rather than an elected school board, and suffered an even higher enrollment decline leading to a proposal by the district in 2017 to close more schools (for more on this comparison, see supporting info).

Regardless of these varied political outcomes, by 2017 the general responses from those interviewed in Chicago and Philadelphia revealed a similar belief in the idea that the adverse effects of the policy are seen once possible school closure is announced and last long after decisions are made. As a CPS official involved in the closures explained, “the minute you tell a teacher that their school is closing in a year is the minute that school becomes unstable, because teachers immediately begin looking for jobs … and it becomes a chaotic school environment … extended across a whole year. … You see a huge uptick in a need for substitute teachers” (interview, school district leader, Chicago Public Schools, 2015). For example, in the case of Steele the “principal was forced out…and then the first year [they] lost 50% of [their] teachers” The example of Steele demonstrates how *just the action* *of putting a school on a closure list can induce setbacks, even if the school ultimately achieves the desired outcome of staying open.* Once this occurs, the same persons that fought the hardest often become too “tired and overwhelmed” to fight again, contributing to the CPD of those communities. In sum, communities learn that, even if they successfully save their school from closure, the damage has already been done.

1. Certainly, decisions had to be made, as often one comment can include references to three different issues. In this case, judgment calls were made based on how much of the comment referenced one issue over another [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more examples see the appendices. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Parents, school officials, and political bureaucrats were categorized by similar codes, when applicable, to examine how each group responded to the same set of issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The work samples communities across fourteen neighborhoods in Chicago and eleven in Philadelphia. See table 1A These neighborhoods largely represent those areas facing the threat of closure. All participant names are pseudonyms. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. No names were collected to ensure anonymity. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As a consequence of overlapping schedules, parent interviews in Chicago were conducted partially as follow-on interviews after community meetings. Parent interviews in Philadelphia were conducted in person and on the phone. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nonetheless, whether middle class blacks participate or not, it remains clear overall that they still consider themselves affected by the issue, albeit indirectly. Multiple parents made comments explicitly stating, “it affected me indirectly because it is hard to find schools…” This perception that they too are affected by the closing of public schools contributes to a desire to keep them open. In the end, there was not a single person I spoke in Philadelphia who believed the school should be closed, irrespective of whether they participated or not. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)