

January 23, 2023

Dear President Sima Sarrafan, Vice President Joyce Shui, and Board members Jane Aras, Christine Chew, and Carolyn Watson,

As a united community, we are sending this letter on behalf of concerned families at Ardmore, Eastgate, Enatai, Phantom Lake, Sherwood Forest, Wilburton and Woodridge Elementary Schools. We would like to acknowledge that the BSD Administration is proposing what they believe is best for our school district and you are in a difficult situation here. We don't envy your position and applaud you for trying to address the budget deficit; it would be irresponsible of you not to do so.

With that said, we have concerns about the proposed school closures and their likely impact on equity as well as fiscal planning. We also have some questions about the data shared to date and the projected impact of the closures. We need to give the community time to understand the issue, and ask that the BSD Board take the time to adequately consider reasonable alternatives to closing schools. We believe we can accomplish this with three actions from BSD:

**Firstly, we request that the individual school forums be set up as open Q&A, and not as individual tables and topics.**

The table format divides our community and only provides some of the people with some of the information.

Unfortunately, the meetings are booked back to back and only last an hour, so there is no way an entire school will get the questions they have answered. Q&A sessions will allow ALL families to ask questions and hear ALL the answers.

While we trust that behind the scenes there has been discussion about school closures for a while, the speed at which these changes are being announced to the community is unnerving. Our communities deserve answers and accountability.

**Secondly, we are requesting a review of [RCW 28A.335.020](#) and [BSD Policy 6883](#) to ensure that proper timelines and policies are being followed.** Both of these refer to a very specific amount of time (90 days) that is required after a written analysis is presented considering school closures. The BSD administration has repeatedly referred to the potential closures as a consolidation, which may be an attempt to circumvent the timelines required in the laws and policies mentioned above. We want to ensure that everything that is requested of the board follows proper policies and procedures so that everything can proceed smoothly.

**Lastly, we request that the district strengthen its proposal with some specific data analysis, more detail on alternatives, and detail addressing disparities (outlined below).** We collectively feel that the current proposal:

- Does not fully explain the impact of neighborhood elementary schools sending students to Advanced Learning and Choice Schools, or the impact of open enrollment, and why those programs are not up for evaluation or input.
- Lacks a multi-tier approach that looks beyond elementary schools.
- Has not been translated into other languages for multilingual families.
- Disproportionately affects Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students, and low income students, as show in the charts below

Rank	School	Low-Income %
1	Medina	3.6
2	Cherry Crest	4.2
3	Somerset	5.4
4	Jing Mei	6.7
5	Clyde Hill	8.5
6	Bennett	8.6
7	Eastgate	12
8	Spiritridge	12.2
9	Puesta del Sol	12.9
10	Woodridge	15
11	Enatai	15.3
12	Wilburton	15.4
13	Newport Heights	20.4
14	Phantom Lake	26.8
15	Ardmore	36.7
16	Stevenson	44.2
17	Sherwood Forest	45.9
18	Lake Hills	56.4

= Proposed for Consolidation

School	Black/African American + Hispanic/Latino (sorted column)	Sum of Black/ African American	Sum of Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)
Medina Elementary School	3%	1%	2%
Jing Mei Elementary School	4%	2%	2%
Cherry Crest Elementary School	4%	1%	3%
Somerset Elementary School	5%	1%	4%
Clyde Hill Elementary	8%	2%	6%
Bennett Elementary School	9%	2%	8%
Woodridge Elementary	11%	5%	6%
Spiritridge Elementary School	11%	3%	8%
Eastgate Elementary School	12%	3%	9%
Newport Heights Elementary	13%	5%	7%
Wilburton Elementary School	16%	5%	11%
Enatai Elementary School	18%	4%	14%
Phantom Lake Elementary	21%	6%	15%
Ardmore Elementary School	27%	7%	20%
Puesta del Sol Elementary School	29%	2%	27%
Stevenson Elementary	41%	5%	35%
Sherwood Forest Elementary	45%	7%	38%
Lake Hills Elementary	46%	9%	37%

School	% English Language Learners
Spiritridge Elementary School	12%
Puesta del Sol Elementary School	12%
Cherry Crest Elementary School	13%
Medina Elementary School	13%
Bennett Elementary School	17%
Enatai Elementary School	19%
Somerset Elementary School	19%
Jing Mei Elementary School	20%
Phantom Lake Elementary	20%
Clyde Hill Elementary	20%
Eastgate Elementary School	21%
Woodridge Elementary	22%
Newport Heights Elementary	24%
Wilburton Elementary School	27%
Lake Hills Elementary	37%
Ardmore Elementary School	39%
Sherwood Forest Elementary	40%
Stevenson Elementary	47%

Furthermore, incrementally closing elementary schools has cascading impacts:

- Disperses neighborhood school communities.
- Has the potential to cause inequities for students who qualify for Free & Reduced Lunch and students with special needs.
- Middle schools are not discussed; however, there appears to be a greater likelihood of impacting the same impacted neighborhoods yet again.
- Places two middle and high schools (Big Picture, International) into elementary facilities when it appears that a more appropriate middle-school facility may need to be consolidated next year.

We believe we share a goal with you to maintain the level of program and service we currently have or do better!

**Here are questions and concerns from our schools, which we respectfully request BSD address publicly before any recommendations are made.**

### EQUITY

- *When Bellevue School District considered adjusting school attendance areas in 2012 and 2016, the District formed committees that included community members to participate in the process. Why has the District not followed these precedents by forming a community advisory committee for this process?*
- *Why does the proposal focus on adjusting attendance areas for specific schools and not on adjusting attendance areas for every elementary school in the district?*
- *At the Board meeting, it was mentioned that Bennett wasn't selected as a school to close because if Bennett students were split in half and sent to Ardmore and Sherwood, these two schools will no longer receive Title 1 funds. It was then suggested that the reason that it would be beneficial to combine two Title 1 schools is that the resulting school would still qualify for Title 1 funds. Consolidating two Title 1 schools is inequitable and creates clear disparities with other district schools. Can you please point to research or data that states that increasing the number of students in a school building who qualify for free/reduced lunch status will benefit educational outcomes for these students in the long term?*
- *The self-contained Advanced Learning programs at Cherry Crest, Spiritridge, Somerset, and Medina have drastically increased the number of students who attend these schools and pulled students out of their neighborhood schools. Consequently, these four schools are not on the list for consolidation and other schools (that have lost*

*neighborhood students to the AL programs) now have fewer students. Can you please talk through your thinking as to why the restructuring of the AL program (so as not to lose neighborhood school students) was not part of the proposal that you shared on January 12?*

- *This looks like the prioritization of choice schools and programs at the expense of the general school population. Our neighborhood schools should be the backbone of the school district, not an afterthought. How do these proposed closures serve the BSD community as a whole?*
- *Melissa deVita specifically mentioned the goal is an inclusion model to have all students be provided with services in their neighborhood schools.. However, there is no mention of moving students who qualify for the Advanced Learning self-contained program to their neighborhood schools to support the inclusion model. Why not?*
- *Will BSD consider moving Cascade, Olympic, or PACIFIC to more affluent schools, or localizing those resources? While these last two aren't directly financial or capacity issues, the location of AL and Olympic/Pacific/Cascade adds to the perception that BSD is "ringfencing" disadvantaged kids and protecting privileged families' interests at a few schools.*
- *What are the plans for accommodation of the Cascade, Olympic, and PACIFIC programs to ensure students are fully integrated in their grades and able to participate with dignity? We fear a step backward in the inclusion they currently have.*

## **TRANSPARENCY**

- *In November, the plan was to assess opportunities AND then develop a multi-year plan. Why fast forward now?*
- *According to Procedure 6883P, if "...the Board decides that a school closure study should take place, the Superintendent will provide the Board with a list of patrons who have volunteered to serve on district committees during the current school year." "The Superintendent will appoint an administrator to serve as district liaison to the school closure committee." Why has the District not followed this procedure?*
- *What is the deficit? How much money do we need to cut back?*
- *What alternatives have been explored instead of disrupting the students and staff who have already been through so much the last 3 years?*
- *How much money does BSD have in reserves, and how has that changed over the last few years?*
- *How are the funds from the 2020 bond money being spent?*
- *To go from decades of building new schools (the latest of which was just completed this month!), to announcing a halt to building in October, to the announcement of closure of three schools just months later, makes us question the quality of the data they are basing their long-term plans on. The closure of three schools based on projections 5+ years in the future will lead to overcrowding at many of the remaining elementary schools, potentially turning the reduced enrollment forecast into a self-fulfilling prophecy.*
- *BSD will go through this same process for middle schools next year. Doesn't it make the most sense to wait a year and place International or Big Picture into a middle school building – a much more fitting facility, with fewer renovation*

*costs – than rushing to put them into an elementary school next year? Will our elementary students have to change schools next year, only to change them again when middle schools are closed? These are students whose education has already been significantly impacted by the pandemic and online learning; knowing that they could have a tumultuous future in BSD will cause many to turn towards private school, further reducing the headcount BSD is concerned about.*

- *We are concerned that the proposed closures may discourage some families from donating to BSF. How can we partner with Bellevue Schools Foundation to address the funding issue and potentially prevent school closures and reduced donations?*

## **DATA**

*We believe specific data points that can help us understand answers to the questions above include:*

- *Costs of running Advanced Learning and choice programs in fewer, centralized locations vs. more, neighborhood locations.*
- *Numbers of students dispersed in AL and choice programs vs. neighborhood schools, and what the demographics look like should one or more of these programs return students to their local schools.*
- *Projections involving equity and educational outcomes, such as those used (and widely consulted by parents) on [greatschools.org](https://greatschools.org) and [schooldigger.com](https://schooldigger.com) - as well as transparency about how BSD is using these metrics. If you are, how? If not, why not?*

### **To reiterate, we are standing together to respectfully request:**

- **Individual school forums are set up as open Q&A, and not as individual tables and topics.**
- **A review of applicable laws and policies/procedures relating to school closures.**
- **Clear communication from BSD with the additional data points and answers to the questions above.**

Our community understands this is a situation where drastic measures may need to be taken. We are asking that the Board hold the district accountable to answer the questions we have, follow the correct legal process, and involve more stakeholders in the decision.

With respect, love, and appreciation for our District, Board, Schools, Staff, Families, and most importantly, our children,

Ardmore PTSA  
Eastgate PTA  
Enatai PTSA  
Phantom Lake PTA  
Sherwood Forest PTA  
Wilburton PTA  
Woodridge PTSA