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# **Right-Sizing for Student Success: How Districts Can Adapt to Enrollment Declines with a Focus on Students**

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Public school enrollment is declining across the nation (and in many other parts of the world). This decline is largely driven by falling birth rates that have reduced the school-aged population, but also by increased educational options for families, and broader political trends<sup>1</sup>.

These trends show no signs of slowing. Schools and districts must adapt to meet these current challenges while also preparing for future challenges, including expanded government funding for private schools in many states. When left unaddressed, declining enrollment leads to financial inefficiencies such as underutilized facilities and the erosion of programs when schools shrink below their intended size. Smaller-than-planned schools struggle to offer students or staff the opportunities they need and often fall into downward spirals of further enrollment loss.

This report highlights districts that have used declining enrollment as an occasion to take bold action, right sizing their operations while working to better serve students and create more educational equity. It draws attention to the need for creative solutions and provides general guidance on how to pursue them, encouraging stakeholders to explore the topic further through their own lenses and contexts.

### **Enrollment Landscape:**

Declining student enrollment has become one of the most pressing challenges facing public education in the United States. Once concentrated in a small number of large urban districts, enrollment decline now affects *urban, suburban, and even many historically fast-growing regions*. Nationally, public K-12 school enrollment peaked in 2019 and fell by *more than 1.3 million students between 2019 and 2024*. Projections show continued declines through at least the early 2030s. While some states and areas are still seeing growth, particularly in southern states, these declines are widespread even in some states that were growing until recently (some Florida school districts, for example<sup>2</sup>.)

The drivers of this decline are well documented and largely structural. Most notably, U.S. birth rates have fallen by 16 percent since 2007, with smaller kindergarten cohorts each year that have begun to ripple through the entire system<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, rising housing costs have pushed families with children out of many urban and inner-ring suburban communities, while demographic aging has reduced the share of households with school-aged children. Migration patterns accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic have further impacted enrollment. Finally, districts have had to contend with growing school choice, which, depending on the state and community, can include charter schools, open enrollment, private schools, and now an expansion of publicly funded private school choice. As a result of these factors, traditional school districts face a significant challenge in increasing or even maintaining student enrollment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.future-ed.org/k-12-public-school-enrollment-declines-explained/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cga/public-school-enrollment>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.educationdynamics.com/enrollment-cliff-here-now-what/#:~:text=The%20Enrollment%20Cliff%20stems%20from,of%20traditional%20college%20aged%20students.>

In most districts, these forces are structural rather than cyclical. Unlike enrollment fluctuations tied to economic downturns or short-term population shifts, current projections indicate that many communities will not return to pre-2019 enrollment levels within traditional planning horizons, given the multi-year nature of these trends. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District has lost more than 30 percent of its enrollment in district-managed schools since 2002, while Denver, Cleveland, and Chicago have experienced double-digit declines over the past decade alone.

**Enrollment Decline in Major U.S. School Districts Since 2015**

*This chart shows districts with the largest absolute enrollment losses over last 9 years with available (approximately 2015 to 2024 data). Enrollment losses noted are only for school district managed schools,<sup>4</sup> are approximate, and rounded to the nearest 1,000 students per available data. Most district declines are largely a result of declining birth rates; the chart attempts to identify other, more site-specific causes such as public charter growth and student migration<sup>5</sup>.*

District	Approx. enrollment loss since 2015	Dominant drivers (colored dots)
New York City DOE	-85,000	● Birth rate ● Housing ● Out-migration ● Pandemic
Los Angeles Unified	-135,000	● Birth rate ● Housing ● Charter/choice
Chicago Public Schools	-75,000	● Birth rate ● Out-migration ● Charter/choice
Miami-Dade County	-35,000	● Birth rate ● Out-migration ● Charter/choice
Philadelphia	-40,000	● Birth rate ● Out-migration ● Charter/choice
San Diego Unified	-15,000	● Birth rate ● Housing
Houston ISD	-30,000	● Birth rate ● Out-migration ● Charter/choice
Detroit Public Schools CD	-7,000	● Birth rate ● Out-migration ● Charter/choice
Denver Public Schools	-10,000	● Birth rate ● Housing ● Charter/choice
Jefferson County (CO)	-12,000	● Birth rate ● Out-migration

**Key:** ● Birth rate ● Housing ● Out-migration ● Charter/choice ● Pandemic

<sup>4</sup> Focus on district-managed schools given the different nature of charter schools in individual contexts and different financial relationships that districts hold with directly managed schools relative to charter schools

<sup>5</sup> Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [Common Core of Data](#) State education agency and district enrollment reports (some district numbers are more approximate due to inconsistent data reporting).

## The Impact of Declining Enrollment:

- 1) **Finance:** Declining enrollment creates financial challenges for districts not only because of declining revenues but because expenses such as facilities and staffing are not easily scaled down to match. For large districts, a decline of *1,000 students can equate to \$12–35 million in annual operating revenue*, depending on the state funding formula. On the expense side, fixed costs such as facilities operations, transportation, and site-based and central administration do not shrink proportionally with student counts. As a result, districts with sustained decline often operate large numbers of underutilized buildings while simultaneously cutting instructional staff, electives, and student supports. National facilities data suggest that many large districts operate schools at *60–70 percent utilization or lower*, well below efficient operating levels.
  
- 2) **Program:** Scaling down many programs is difficult to do in step with small enrollment declines. Arts, sports programming, specialty classes, and wraparound supports often require a critical mass of students within a school. While schools that are intentionally small by design can be highly effective, schools that are below their target size often leave students with fewer services and less robust programming. Shrinking schools are both more expensive to operate because of fixed costs (principal, facility, etc.) and less able to offer students and staff the opportunities they deserve.
  - *Academic Supports:* Small schools are less likely to have interventionists and other staff to support students who are behind. This could include certified gifted-and-talented or special education teachers, home language speakers, and other resources tailored to specific student groups. Additionally, small schools often have fewer course offerings, which limits students' ability to enroll in courses aligned with their needs and interests, particularly at the secondary level. This could include foreign language, advanced course options, CTE pathways, or other subjects.
  - *Special Education:* Smaller, especially shrinking, schools can struggle to create peer-appropriate learning opportunities and inclusion for students with disabilities. Schools that are shrinking also often have higher-than-average percentages of these students, which can create challenges for inclusion programming.
  - *Model/Program:* Unique school models (such as IB or dual language) can be more expensive to operate and often require a minimum enrollment that districts with declining enrollment are unable to meet. As a result, these models are either eliminated or must be heavily subsidized at the expense of other schools.
  - *Electives and Extracurriculars:* Small schools are unable to staff for multiple electives and often offer students only one or two options (such as art and PE). At the secondary level especially, small schools do not have enough student interest or staffing to support multiple clubs and athletic opportunities.
  - *Wraparound Supports:* Small schools are less likely to have full-time supports for students outside the classroom, including social workers, nurses, and counselors. These roles are often present on each campus only one or two days

a week and therefore not available when needs arise. This also strains staff members who must become familiar with multiple campuses' procedures and student bodies.

### 3) **Staffing Challenges:**

- *Reduction in Force:* Declining enrollment often means districts need fewer teachers and other staff. Sometimes these reductions can be addressed through natural attrition but can also create conflict with labor unions and other staff organizations. Depending on the details of employment contracts, this can lead to layoffs based on seniority rather than effectiveness or fit, which further undermines the district's ability to meet the needs of students.
- *Misalignment:* Staffing patterns become misaligned with student needs, leading to involuntary transfers, layoffs, and persistent morale challenges that make recruitment and retention more difficult.
- *Staff Support:* In small schools, staff members are often the only person in their role (for example, a single third-grade teacher), which limits their opportunities for collaboration. Teachers and staff often must double up on responsibilities as schools shrink, increasing stress and workload. Additionally, small schools often require very lean administrative teams, which leaves less time for administrators to dedicate to teacher coaching and feedback.

4) **Politics:** The political challenges can be enormous if districts act too quickly without community support, or if they push off the need for change into the future. Communities tend to experience the greatest conflict when districts are forced into abrupt closures or consolidations during fiscal crises, particularly when these changes affect high schools, which have large alumni and community bases. Timing and community engagement are critical to any district successfully navigating the changes required to address steady enrollment decline. By contrast, districts that act earlier -- before inequities across schools become unmanageable or deficits become acute -- retain greater flexibility, more time for engagement, and a broader set of policy options.

### **Effective District Responses to Declining Enrollment:**

In most cases, declining enrollment will require districts to close some buildings and consolidate students across schools to reach sustainable enrollment. This is not a step to be taken lightly, but it is often the only feasible path in the face of significant enrollment declines.

However, before reaching this point, many districts should consider some or all of the following:

- *Optimize Enrollment:* When schools face declining enrollment, districts should manage school-level enrollment so that schools are at a level that allows full class sizes at each grade rather than multiple half-empty sections. This could require reducing enrollment at certain schools, which can seem counterintuitive but may make programs more sustainable. However, this approach often still does not allow for the full set of student and staff supports that a larger school can offer.

- *Central Office Cuts:* While districts should ensure their central office is right sized for enrollment on an ongoing basis, these cuts are often relatively small and can negatively affect the district's ability to operate schools, including their ability to offer high-quality central supports to schools.
- *Shared Staffing:* Districts often explore shared positions across small campuses, including assistant principals, counselors, nurses, and elective teachers. While this can be an effective financial strategy, it often has a negative impact on the quality of support that staff are able to provide and can hurt staff retention.
- *Delayed Facility Maintenance:* Deferred maintenance accumulates as districts struggle to justify investing in half-empty buildings, leading to deteriorating conditions and rising future repair costs.

While well-meaning, these changes can accelerate enrollment declines in competitive choice environments by making schools less attractive to families. They also are generally not sufficient to stem the tide, and school consolidations are often still needed.

Moving forward with consolidation is challenging, and districts undertaking this process should ensure that it is:

- *Transparent:* Just as districts need to come to terms with declining enrollment and its challenges, they must also be clear with their communities about why action is needed. Once the district has decided to act, it should be transparent with communities about how decisions are being made.
- *Data Driven:* To ensure decisions are not overly political and are equitable, districts should establish a common set of data-grounded criteria. This does not mean decisions need to follow a simple formula; schools and communities are complex. But data should drive both the case for action and the identification of specific steps. The data should reflect a deep understanding of enrollment behavior (choice-in, choice-out, transfers, etc.) and the reasons behind those patterns. Relevant data is context-dependent but can include enrollment trends, facility utilization, program model, school spending, and other contextual factors.
- *Community Responsive:* While districts need to make hard, often unpopular decisions in the face of declining enrollment, they should still ensure they are considering community feedback. This could include co-developing criteria for identifying schools, shaping what remaining schools will look like, and understanding unique community considerations as families select schools for their students. This understanding should inform decisions about consolidation as well as supports for students through the transition.
- *Allow Appropriate Time:* Effective districts typically plan over 18–36-month horizons, aligning enrollment-driven decisions with:
  - School calendars and family decision-making cycles
  - Budget adoption timelines
  - Labor contract provisions
  - Political calendars, including board elections and leadership transitionsPoor sequencing, such as announcing closures late in the spring or after budget adoption, can limit family choice, destabilize staffing, and increase opposition. Allowing appropriate time can also make it easier to stick to decisions aligned with the

- community-developed process, even when it becomes challenging.
- *Are Appropriately Scaled:* Research from large urban districts indicates that incremental, one-school-at-a-time closures often fail to meaningfully reduce excess capacity while generating repeated disruption<sup>6</sup>. Each closure requires a full engagement and political process that exhausts staff and community capacity. Districts experiencing systemwide decline are more likely to stabilize when they pursue multi-school or systemwide consolidation phases, paired with clear criteria and reinvestment strategies. This allows decisions to align with the district's long-term vision and consider the full portfolio of schools.

Districts should also look at school consolidations as an opportunity to improve conditions for students and staff. When consolidation is framed primarily as a cost-cutting exercise, districts miss opportunities to improve academic quality and equitable access to high quality programs. Research on school closures consistently finds that outcomes depend heavily on what happens *after* implementation, particularly how receiving schools are supported<sup>7</sup>. Districts that fail to reinvest a portion of savings into academic programming, student supports, and staffing stability often see limited or negative academic effects, reinforcing community skepticism. At the same time, they do need to achieve sufficient savings. Districts can counteract this dynamic by using the moment to improve access to opportunities for students and staff:

- *Introduction of New Programs:* School mergers and consolidations can be a time to introduce new programs or models that have high levels of parent demand. Because many students will already be changing schools, districts should consider what programs would attract families and whether to place them in receiving schools, newly vacated buildings, or remaining schools that are underenrolled. This can also help recruit new students to the district if the programs are sufficiently compelling.
- *Equitable Access to Course Offerings:* Similarly, the increased efficiency that comes from closing underenrolled schools can allow remaining schools to offer more options, whether electives in elementary school, Algebra I in middle school, or additional AP and career-prep courses at high schools.
- *Community Design:* Regardless of the school and system-level changes districts pursue during these moments of change, they should work closely with communities throughout. This could include front-end engagement around criteria, understanding why families have chosen particular schools, and learning what factors families weigh in selecting schools. Newly merged school communities should also be supported in envisioning what their shared school could look like, how to welcome all students and families, and what elements of closing schools to preserve.
- *Boundary Changes:* In many districts, school boundaries, or attendance zones, largely determine which schools students attend. When schools are closing or merging, it is a time to revisit not only the boundaries directly affected but also broader boundaries, to

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<sup>6</sup> <https://why.org/articles/school-enrollment-students-closures/#:~:text=Here%20is%20everything%20you%20need,leave%20their%20tornado%2Ddamaged%20homes.>

<sup>7</sup> <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/school-closings-chicago-staff-and-student-experiences-and-academic-outcomes>

ensure equitable access to high-quality options. This work should be driven by an understanding of how families make their choices, particularly in high-choice environments. For example, this could be an opportunity to introduce at least one specialized model in each region of the city, ensuring all students have access.

By addressing declining enrollment through consolidations while also using the moment to reimagine opportunity for students, districts can use their resources more efficiently and potentially see long-term benefits if the work is done well. This is not to ignore that there are also very real consequences of this type of action, but benefits can include:

- *Improved Student Outcomes:* At its core, this work is designed to improve student outcomes by enabling schools to offer more supports and to operate at sustainable enrollment levels.
- *Community Trust:* If districts are transparent about the challenges they face and engage communities along the way, trust in the district may increase over time, giving district leaders more credibility when future decisions must be made.
- *Increased Demand from Families:* If schools improve, both academically and in their program offerings, more families may want to attend district schools. While this will not fully stem declining enrollment, it can help districts maintain more predictable enrollment compared with other educational options available to families.
- *Staff Satisfaction and Retention:* While in some cases staff will be reduced as part of this process, these reductions can often be absorbed through natural turnover. If staff feel engaged throughout the process, supported through the transition, and better supported in their new roles, this could improve both satisfaction and retention.

None of this is to say that addressing declining enrollment is easy. There are often severe political consequences (such as board and superintendent turnover), accelerated enrollment declines as families at closing schools seek other options, and the process requires deep capacity. But not acting can have much deeper and longer-lasting consequences, particularly for students, as discussed earlier in this report. If underenrolled schools are allowed to persist, their quality often declines given limited resources, which can lead to even further enrollment losses as families seek higher-quality options.

Some districts have undertaken redesign efforts and closures and seen strong results, though not all of these were done in response to declining enrollment. Mapleton, a small first-ring suburban school district outside Denver, acted on its own after seeing a pending fiscal and academic crisis when one of its two high schools was closed because of declining enrollment. Mapleton spent a year holding community meetings and visiting high-performing schools around the country to build a comprehensive plan to open new schools and programs, stabilize enrollment, and increase achievement<sup>8</sup>.

Other cases have involved state intervention, such as Lawrence, Massachusetts, where a state-appointed superintendent worked closely with local nonprofits, educators, and the community to

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<sup>8</sup> <https://hep.gse.harvard.edu/9781934742464/against-the-odds/>

rebuild a system of schools better designed and connected to the community. Lawrence's set of strategies was similar to Mapleton's in developing new school programs, but it is distinguished by governance structures that tied nonprofits to particular schools<sup>9</sup>.

### Examples of Districts Taking Bold Action:

In recent years, more districts have responded to declining enrollment through bold and urgent action, closing or merging schools while also increasing opportunities for students. What follows is a brief overview of the work in a sampling of these districts, all of which operate in different contexts that shape their approaches, including choice laws, union contracts, and funding formulas. Other examples include Aldine and Lubbock Independent School Districts in Texas, Indianapolis Public Schools, and San Diego Unified Schools. Like the rest of this report, these case studies are not intended to be exhaustive but rather to provide an overview of the actions taken and exemplary practices used. Readers are encouraged to learn more about these examples at their web sites linked in the references.

- **Jefferson County Public Schools (CO)**<sup>10</sup>: Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools was Jeffco Public Schools' response to its Board of Education's request for a comprehensive plan to ensure thriving schools and strong student experiences in the wake of declining enrollment. It stands as an example of strong community engagement and intensive supports for transitioning students.

The 2020 Census shows a population increase in Jefferson County of an additional 55,854 residents from 2000 to 2020. However, during this time, the population of people ages 5-19 decreased by 29,918. The population of children five and under also decreased, and 2020 had the lowest number of births in 15 years. There are significantly fewer school-aged children in Jeffco today than 20 years ago.

Since the spring of 2021, Jeffco has taken action to close 19 schools, including closing 16 small elementary schools as part of Phase I of Regional Opportunities for Thriving Schools. Criteria included overall enrollment, facility utilization and availability of alternative options nearby. As part of this effort, the district conducted extensive community engagement leading up to the decisions and afterward, both to inform student and staff transition supports and to conduct after-action reviews that could inform future processes.

One notable decision by Jeffco was to hire a former district principal who had led a school through closure to support other principals and school communities through the process. This helped create buy-in among principals, who often serve as the primary point of communication with families. Jeffco also overstaffed welcoming schools in the first year after the closures to ensure students felt supported.

- **San Antonio Independent School District (TX)**<sup>11</sup>: San Antonio ISD underwent a rightsizing initiative in 2023 that stood out for the degree of community input at each

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/rappaport/files/thirdway%20v5.pdf>; <https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/lawrence-public-schools-case-study/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.jeffcopublicschools.org/about/initiatives/regional-opportunities-for-thriving-schools>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.saisd.net/page/rightsizing-home>

stage. SAISD leadership directed the board to address the issue in 2022, given declining enrollment trends, and the district studied the best paths forward, including community context and the equity impacts of such efforts.

They then published an initial framework for closure decisions and gathered community feedback, which was integrated into the final framework. The framework had primary criteria that were quantifiable and consistent but also created space for contextual factors.

Using this framework, district staff made initial recommendations, followed by another round of neighborhood-specific engagement. The final recommendation package, approved by the board, was transparent about how community feedback did or did not affect recommendations, both in the overall outcomes (such as schools originally slated to close now staying open) and in the transition supports made available to families (such as choice priorities for students from closing schools).

- **Cleveland Metropolitan School District (OH)**<sup>12</sup>: In December 2025, the CMSD Board voted to support the District's Building Brighter Futures recommendations. The initiative took bold action to right-size and stabilize the district. For more than 20 years, CMSD had faced declining enrollment, dropping from 70,000 students in 2004 to just 34,000, while continuing to operate 90 school buildings, many in need of repair. Combined with a looming \$150 million deficit, these challenges demanded decisive action. The BBF package merged 16 K-8 schools with a nearby welcoming school and moved four K-8 schools into improved facilities, moving the district from 61 K-8 schools in 62 buildings to 45 schools in 45 buildings. Notably, CMSD also took on high schools at the same time, moving from 27 high schools across 23 locations to 14.

CMSD is a mayorally controlled district with a school board appointed by the mayor. Close collaboration with the mayor's team and other influential groups was critical to this work. CMSD also spent several months conducting community engagement around the district's declining enrollment and financial challenges, building broad buy-in for the rationale behind school consolidations before releasing any specific school names. The district then released recommendations and allowed a month before the board vote for community engagement and feedback from specific school communities.

At the same time it was proposing consolidations, CMSD was able to make promises to its community about the increased access that students would gain through these tough decisions. These included:

- College-credit-bearing classes at all high schools
- Credential-eligible career pathways at all high schools
- Increased elective offerings at all K-8 schools
- Increased athletics and extracurriculars at all schools

Students impacted by the mergers also received choice priorities when selecting a new school and expanded transportation eligibility.

## Key Questions for Stakeholders:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/building-brighter-futures>

As declining enrollment affects so many districts in different policy and demographic contexts, each one needs to assess its particular situation, look to the experience of districts that have taken on similar challenges, and design plans that can right-size their operations to better serve students.

Here are some key considerations for different stakeholder groups:

- *Parents and community:*
  - What do families and communities expect of their schools? What instructional designs, grade configurations and programs beyond classrooms are required for this vision?
  - How do these plans affect facility use and transportation?
  - How are these parent and community desires considered in any district decision-making?
- *Teachers and staff:*
  - How are teachers and staff engaged in processes around district redesign and school development, consolidation and closure?
  - Are there processes to include teacher and staff voices outside of bargaining units?
- *School Leaders:*
  - What is required in terms of staffing and programs to fulfill community commitments and the instructional design within the context of the district's standard budgets for particular school sizes?
  - How can school leaders support community as schools or programs are phased out, redeveloped or consolidated?
- *District Leadership:*
  - What are all the current district and state policy levers to manage changing enrollment patterns?
  - What are the short and long-term enrollment trends? How are neighboring school districts responding to these shifts?
  - What is the five- and ten-year vision for your district's offerings as informed by both community preferences and enrollment trends? This could include enrollment by grade, number of schools, and diversity of offerings.
  - What short term investments need to be made to ensure successful transitions to redesigned programs or schools?
  - How best can staff and teachers be supported in these transitions?
  - What community partners be "critical friends" in support of this work? And how can they best connect to the district's leadership and school board?
  - What processes are necessary for the district leadership to get accurate and timely insights from all of the districts stakeholders as the district manages these changes?
- *School Boards:* School governing bodies (either an elected school board or other structure) are the critical decision maker in setting a vision or approach to how the district deals with declining enrollment.

- How can the board build a compelling vision for how the district will better serve students? And what is this detailed vision and plan?
- How are decisions about district redesign not disproportionately impacting specific groups of students?
- Are decisions data-driven, transparent and responsive to community feedback?
- How can decisions and plans be progress monitored post-decision?
- *State policymakers:* While not directly responsible for making decisions state policy can strongly affect the ecosystem in which decisions are made. Some considerations include:
  - Funding model structure and how it responds to declining enrollment
  - Programmatic flexibilities for small schools
  - Facility reuse policy
  - Staffing flexibilities
  - District consolidation policy
  - Choice policies across district boundaries and within districts.
- *Others:* Community organizations, funders, and city officials can all play an informal and sometimes a formal role in supporting districts in this work. For example, Denver under Superintendent Michael Bennet and Cleveland under the leadership of several Mayors have developed task forces that represent local government, community and school districts as has happened in districts like Denver and Cleveland.

**Topics for Further Explorations:** While this report makes the case for why districts should act boldly in response to declining enrollment, there is significantly more research and guidance that could support districts going through this process. Some topics for further exploration could include:

- *Decision-Making Criteria and Process:* While this report lays out high-level considerations, there are many examples from across the country regarding the factors that should be part of the criteria, as well as processes for selecting, adopting, and communicating them.
- *Community Engagement:* Challenging decisions like school consolidation require extensive community engagement at all stages, and cataloging best practices and common pitfalls from similar processes could produce a beneficial toolkit for districts.
- *Supporting Students Changing Schools:* Any time students have to switch schools, there are inherent challenges. Districts should ensure that students and their receiving schools get additional support throughout the transition. More research on which supports are most effective would allow districts to maximize their investments during this period.
- *High School Specific Considerations:* While fewer districts have taken on high school consolidations, the need will likely grow as shrinking cohorts reach upper grades. While some elements are the same across education levels, high schools bring additional considerations such as transcript alignment, athletic team composition, and career pathway opportunities. More research now would create a starting point for the many districts facing declining high school enrollment in coming years.

- *Staff Considerations:* While much of this report has focused on student-facing issues, staff are also deeply affected by declining enrollment and school consolidation. Additional research on how best to engage and support staff through these processes, minimize the impact, and navigate labor agreements could help districts ensure this important stakeholder group is well served.
- *Facility Re-Use:* A primary concern for many communities facing school closures is vacant buildings, which can become a liability. Districts across the country have used various approaches for reusing buildings, including community organization partnerships, housing conversions, and resale. Research on best practices could help districts proactively address this issue as part of the consolidation process, with the goal of easing community fears and pushback.

School district improvement is challenging under any circumstance, but making gains in the context of declining student enrollment requires a complex suite of strategies unique to every community. As outlined in this report, there are lessons to be learned from a wide range of districts, and much more remains to be examined. We encourage school districts to share their stories with one another and hope to shed further light on lessons about how to improve student outcomes amid declining enrollment in future reports.

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