

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

UChicago Consortium Research Report

School Closings in Chicago:

Staff and Student Experiences and Academic Outcomes

Q: What about the school closings was studied?

A: This report is the second study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) on the 2013 school closures in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). It examined two research questions:

1. How did staff and students affected by school closings experience the school closings process and subsequent transfer into designated welcoming schools?
2. What effect did closing schools have on closed and welcoming school students' mobility, attendance, suspensions, test scores, and core GPA?

Q: Why did the UChicago Consortium study the 2013 school closings in Chicago?

A: The UChicago Consortium has been studying education in Chicago for more than 27 years. This study is our second study on the 2013 CPS school closures. (The first study, published in 2015, can be [found here](#). Additionally, the UChicago Consortium study on CPS school closings that occurred between 2001–06, published in 2009, can be found [here](#)).

Across the country, urban school districts are opting to close under-enrolled schools as a way to consolidate resources, and Chicago has announced additional closures and consolidations this year (2017–18). By looking at a wide array of outcomes, and by including the experiences and voices of those people directly affected by school closures, this study seeks to add to the collective understanding of the effects of school closures.

Q: What was the timeline of the 2013 school closures?

2012–13 school year:

- o October 2012: "School Actions Guidelines" released
- o December 2012: Initial list of schools for possible closure released (330 under-enrolled elementary and high schools)
- o May 2013: Chicago Board of Education voted to close 49 elementary schools and one high school program in an elementary school

2013–14 school year:

- o August 2013: School year begins; students from closed schools attend "designated welcoming schools" or other receiving schools

See Figure 1 on p.15 of the report for more details.

Q: How many schools were involved in the closings?

- 50 schools were closed after a May 13 Chicago Board of Education vote:
 - 47 elementary schools and one high school program at an elementary school were closed at the end of the 2012–13 school year.
 - Two other elementary schools were phased out in 2013–14.
- 48 elementary schools served as “designated welcoming schools”
 - 66 percent of students from closed schools attended designated welcoming schools.
 - In fall of 2013, an average of 150 displaced students enrolled in designated welcoming schools, representing 32 percent of the schools’ total population.
- 311 additional elementary schools enrolled students from closed schools in 2013–14

Q: What data did the study use?

A: This is a mixed methods study: one part of the study was qualitative and used data from interviews with students and staff in six welcoming schools, and the other part was quantitative and used administrative data on student outcomes. This design allowed researchers to zoom in to illustrate what it was like for staff and students going through the school closings process in selected welcoming schools, and zoom out to look at the effect of the policy on students in closed and welcoming schools on a variety of outcomes.

- The qualitative portion of the study used data from interviews with staff and students at six designated welcoming schools. Schools were purposely selected to represent a range of transition experiences.
- The quantitative portion of the study used administrative data from 2008–09 through 2016–17 for all students in the closed and welcoming schools. It compared closed and welcoming school students’ mobility, attendance, suspensions, core GPA, and test scores after the closings to their prior outcomes and to those of students in similar schools to understand the effect of the closings.

Q: What did the report find?

A:

➤ **Student and Staff Experiences**

- School staff said that the planning process for merging closed schools into welcoming schools was not sufficient, resulting in staff feeling unprepared.
- Interviewees described the moving process as “chaotic,” saying it was difficult to adequately prepare schools in time to receive students.
- Students and staff appreciated new investments in Safe Passage, technology, and resources.
- When schools closed, it severed the longstanding social connections that families and staff had with their schools and with one another, resulting in a period of mourning.
- Staff wished for more support in merging closed and welcoming school communities because, in many cases, integrating the different school cultures created challenging “us” vs. “them” dynamics.

➤ Student Outcomes

Compared to students from similar schools, the study found:

- Transfers: Students attending welcoming schools that relocated into the building of closed schools transferred out at higher rates in the year of the merger; mobility was not affected by school closures in subsequent years for either group of students.
- Absence or suspension rates: There was no effect on absence or suspension rates for students in closed or welcoming schools.
- Core GPA was not affected immediately after closures, although there were some negative effects three and four years post-closures for students from closed schools who had been in grades 3-5 in the announcement year (2012–13). While these students' GPAs were lower than expected, their GPAs were improving over time.
- Test scores of students in both closed and welcoming schools were negatively affected, with students from closed schools experiencing the largest negative effect.
 - The test scores of students in closed schools were lower than expected in the year of the announcement: roughly 1.5 months lower than expected in reading and 2 months lower than expected in math. Reading scores recovered after one year, but the negative effect on math scores persisted for four years (the last year of data in the study).
 - Students from welcoming schools showed lower reading test scores, about 1.5 months lower than expected, the first year after the merger. This was a short-term effect, as reading scores rebounded the following year (2014–15).

For more details on these and other findings, see the [full report](#), which includes a 6-page executive summary.

Q: What can the report tell me about financial outcomes of the 2013 closings?

A: This study did not address financial questions.

Q: What else can I find in the full report?

- More information about the 2013 CPS school closures process
- A brief overview of the history that influenced the 2013 closures
- Prior research about the effects of closing schools
- More details about the findings above, as well as additional findings
- Interpretive summary with considerations for Chicago and other districts considering school closures
- Commentary from researchers who have also studied school closings:
 - Eve L. Ewing, School of Social Service Administration at University of Chicago
 - Douglas N. Harris, Tulane University

Q: Where can I read the full report?

A: Visit <http://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/school-closings-chicago-staff-and-student-experiences-and-academic-outcomes> to read the 6-page executive summary and full report:

School Closings in Chicago: Staff and Student Experiences and Academic Outcomes by Molly F. Gordon, Marisa de la Torre, Jennifer R. Cowhy, Paul T. Moore, Lauren Sartain, and David Knight.