

## **ABSTRACT**

### **When Should a School Close? Questioning Criteria and Analyzing Stakeholder Perspectives**

School closures are always challenging and often tragic processes. Though extensive research has been conducted, there are sizable gaps of understanding. In particular, the perspectives of key stakeholders and the full breadth of externalities to school closure processes haven't been adequately captured. This research seeks to ameliorate those gaps by analyzing how school closures are discussed by different stakeholders and considering externalities of school closures not typically studied. The researchers approach these questions through a mixed methods, explanatory sequential approach viewed from a transformative and critical perspective. The researchers analyzed quantitative data to better understand the magnitude of the issue. Qualitative data collected for the study consists of documents, recorded meetings, newspaper articles and interviews conducted by the researchers from two different cases of school closure within California. The researchers compare attitudes across students, parents, teachers and district administrators then identify key challenges that occur in school closure processes. The findings of the study are threefold: (1) There is a disconnect between how stakeholder groups discuss school closures, which limits the capacity for public debate and decision-making. (2) Both school closure processes had costly externalities which were not not adequately measured or considered in the process including transition costs and decreasing public trust. (3) Both cases were characterized by a lack of transparency. In sum, the researchers suggest officials in future school closure processes co-construct transparent criteria with stakeholders and outline processes designed for public participation in order to make an optimal decision and gain the support of the community.

**KEY WORDS:** School Closures, Public Trust, Stakeholders, Externalities, Declining Enrollment, Neighborhood Schools, Failing Schools, Counterframes, Welcoming Schools, Economies of Scale