



DUTCHTOWN SOUTH

COMMUNITY CORPORATION

December 7, 2020

Public Statement

RE: Saint Louis Public Schools Consolidation Plan

DutchTown South Community Corporation (DSCC) calls on the Saint Louis Public School Board, the Superintendent and the Administration to postpone its December 15, 2020 vote regarding the proposed school closures and consolidations. While DSCC supports the Saint Louis Public Schools (SLPS) as a vital and essential public service provider in our community and understands that the SLPS's proposed school closures are in response to a difficult and evolving situation, the time allowed for community engagement and feedback from impacted communities ahead of this vote is grossly insufficient. DSCC's concern in this regard is heightened by the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic which has, on one hand, negatively impacted traditional methods of community engagement and, on the other hand, reminded us of the critically important role neighborhood schools play in our communities. As the local community development non-profit organization serving three schools directly impacted by the plan currently under consideration by SLPS, we respectfully request that SLPS postpone the planned vote by at least 6 months in order to allow:

1. additional sufficient review and commentary from the public regarding the current proposed plan by the public
2. additional public meetings to including those directly impacted by the current plan to shape alternatives
3. The release of a revised plan that details the costs and benefits (fiscal and otherwise) to students and community for each site with a proposed change

Carnahan High School and Monroe Elementary are located in DSCC's service area, and many children who live in our service area attend Fanning Middle School. The proposed closure of these schools would disproportionately impact Black children who live in South City -- a community comprising some of the most diverse neighborhoods in the City. DSCC works with residents and stakeholders to advance racial equity in our community and is vigilant about recognizing new policies and actions that magnify racial disparities and threaten the racial equity in our community. Through the Gravois Jefferson Historic Neighborhood Plan, we disaggregated data on a variety of social and economic indicators and determined that efforts to further youth and racial equity are top priorities for our residents. The neighborhood impact scores presented by SLPS in the methodology and scoring for each school, all listed as a 5, do not adequately capture the detrimental, long term effects of school closures on the economic health of the community, let alone the economic and social outcomes of the children and families immediately surrounding the school. Closure of these schools would be an extreme injustice to our families -- especially our children -- and should only be considered as a last resort (and with a greater understanding on the part of SLPS as to the immense and disproportionately negative impact such closures will have on our Black student's educational opportunities).

Accordingly, we ask that SLPS allow additional time to listen and collaborate with the community and impacted families in an effort to find more equitable solutions. For instance, SLPS and the community should explore ideas such as co-locating social service providers, job training and/or other alternative educational programs in the school buildings to help address issues such as concentrated poverty (which is over 40% in nearby census tracts, and is coupled with a high unemployment rate in DSCC's South City service area). Locating such a center in Marine Villa is already a recommendation in the City's recent Equitable Economic Development Study. SLPS and the City must consider alternative plans such as these in lieu of, or in concert with, the current school closure plan.



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Moreover, DSCC's service area already includes SLPS's largest vacant former school building: Cleveland High School, which has been closed since 2006. Cleveland has suffered numerous break ins and fires, which not only presents an immediate danger to our residents, but also serves as a deterrent against future investment in the community. We invite SLPS to be an active partner in fostering a safe and healthy South City community for all of our children rather than creating yet another obstacle to navigate. We urge the Board to consider alternatives to its plan before carrying out the proposed school closures -- viable alternatives which may present themselves should SLPS agree to allow additional community input before taking such drastic measures. If, after adequate engagement opportunities have been afforded to all impacted residents, SLPS determines that the proposed school closures are unavoidable, we implore the Board to not do so without also providing a detailed plan as to how it intends to support Black youth directly harmed by such closures.

Students, families and faculty from Carnahan, Monroe and Fanning have been doing all they can to support our youth. DSCC and our neighbors stand by them and join with like-minded community partners, InvestSTL, WePower, and others, to ask that you delay this vote until the public has had an adequate opportunity to comment and propose alternatives to SLPS's proposed plan. We trust that SLPS, the Board and Administration, will give this important matter the attention it deserves and we look forward to the opportunity to work together toward finding equitable and empowering alternative solutions for our youth and communities.