En español: Transición de escuelas del cierre, p.10

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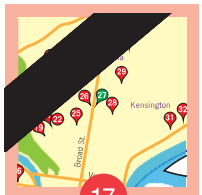
Philadelphia Public School
thenotebook
An Independent Voice for Parents, Educators, Students, and Friends of Philadelphia Public Schools

FOCUS ON
A downsizing district



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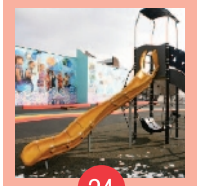
Mapping the 44 schools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Fresh content daily on the Web at thenotebook.org

Emma Lee for *NewsWorks*

"All I see is the possibility of somebody getting killed," says Reggie Hall, a violence prevention expert in Northwest Philadelphia. Shown here on Germantown Avenue, Hall was speaking of the District's proposal to close Germantown High School and send hundreds of students to nearby Martin Luther King.

Playing with fire

Many warn that the plan to close 37 schools could spark violence between youth from rival neighborhoods.

by Benjamin Herold for *NewsWorks*, a *Notebook* news partner

Brickyard. Dogtown. Haines Street. Somerville.

For thousands of teens in Northwest Philadelphia, the names signify a potent mix of neighborhood loyalty, turf rivalry, and gang conflict that has been passed down for generations.

Take Dayton Melton.

The 15-year-old hails from Brickyard, in lower Germantown.

Melton says he's fought kids from Somerville, on the other side of Chew Avenue, dozens of times.

The first fight happened when he was 6.

"Some boy started poppin' fly, like 'Y'all from Brickyard, why you down here?' So my cousin, he just hit him," said Melton.

That's just the way things are, he said.

"Brickyard and Somerville, they been through it, they going through it, and they gonna keep going through it."

For decades, that mindset has helped fuel violent neighborhood beefs across Philadelphia.

Now the District wants to close 37 schools, making those rivalries a major source of concern. Officials say the unprecedented downsizing will save $28 million per year and allow the District to improve the schools that remain. But to make their plan work, thousands of students will be forced to cross turf boundaries, then sit in class alongside neighborhood adversaries.

Critics say the District is unprepared to safely combine students from opposite sides of neighborhood lines.

Many in the city are questioning how school closings will impact academics, budgets, teachers, and surrounding communities. But the overriding concern has been safety.

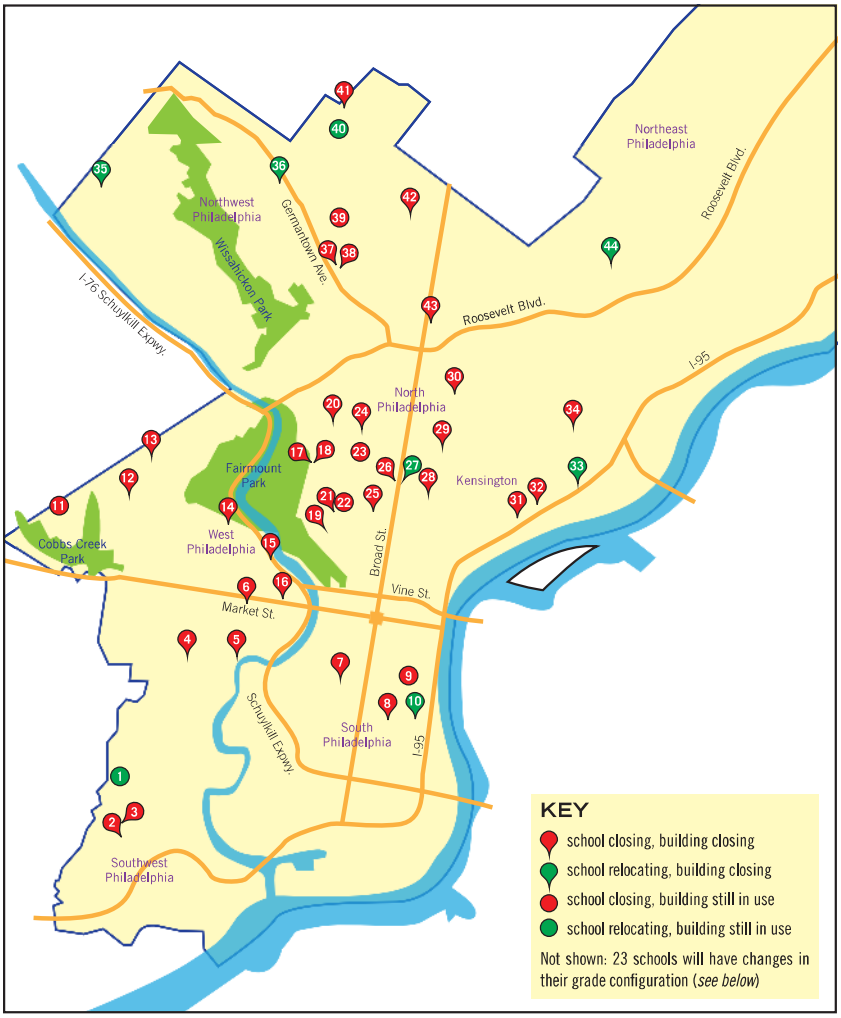
In Northwest Philly, Germantown High would be closed. Hundreds of teens from Brickyard, Somerville, and at least half a dozen other neighborhoods would be thrust together inside Martin Luther King High.

Strawberry Mansion, Vaux, University City, and Bok Technical high schools would also be closed, creating similar dynamics in North, West, and South Philly.

"It's a potential powder keg," said Kelley Hodge, Philadelphia's safe schools advocate.

Continued on page 18

A closer look: 44 schools to be closed or relocated



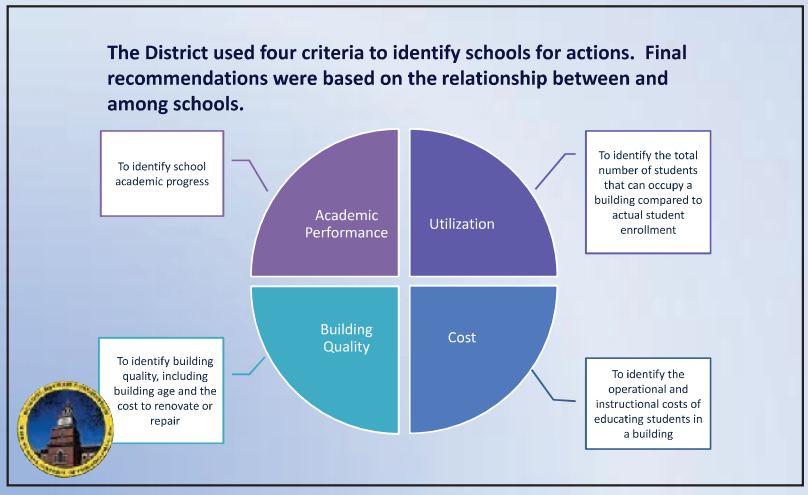
23 schools to have new grade configurations

Elementary - changing to K-5
Carnell
Cassidy
Cramp
F.S. Edmonds
Emlen
Hackett
J.B. Kelly
Lawton
Logan
Pennell
Pennypacker
Wister
Wright

Elementary changing to K-8
Comegys
Harrington
Mitchell
Stearne

Middle adding grades
Leeds (6-8)
Tilden (5-8)

Middle or high school changing to K-8
Clemente Promise Academy
Vaux Promise Academy
E.W. Rhodes
Beeber



A District presentation provides this explanation of the criteria for closings.

Key	School Name	Current Grades	Enrollment	Utilization	Facility Condition	Reading proficiency
1	Motivation H.S.	9-12	242			60%
2	George Pepper Middle	5-8	413			30%
3	Communications Tech H.S.	9-12	293			28%
4	Anna Shaw Middle	7-8	193			35%
5	Alexander Wilson Elementary	K-6	224			46%
6	Robeson H.S.	9-12	265			42%
7	Walter G. Smith Elementary	K-8	397			24%
8	Edw. W. Bok Technical H.S.	9-12	873			31%
9	George Washington Elem.	K-8	278			56%
10	Abigail Vare Elementary	K-8	336			50%
11	Robert Lamberton H.S.	9-12	194			19%
12	Overbrook Elementary	K-5	262			40%
13	Samuel Gompers Elementary	K-6	377			36%
14	Joseph Leidy Elementary	K-8	320			36%
15	Morton McMichael Elementary	K-8	358			20%
16	University City H.S.	9-12	495			22%
17	Leslie P. Hill Elementary	K-8	303		N.A.	21%
18	Strawberry Mansion H.S.	9-12	435			17%
19	Robert Morris Elementary	K-8	334			36%
20	John G. Whittier Elementary	K-6	370			28%
21	Gen. John F. Reynolds Elem.	K-8	364			27%
22	Roberts Vaux Promise Acad.	9-12	279			12%
23	Anna B. Pratt Elementary	K-6	332			31%
24	Thomas M. Peirce Elementary	K-6	384			25%
25	Gen. George C. Meade Elem.	K-8	367			25%
26	Tanner Duckrey Elementary	K-8	279			27%
27	Phila. Military Acad. at Elverson	9-12	205			57%
28	Joseph C. Ferguson Elem.	K-8	322			37%
29	Fairhill Elementary	K-8	476			18%
30	Bayard Taylor Elementary	K-5	552			25%
31	Stephen A. Douglas H.S.	9-12	253			28%
32	Charles Carroll H.S.	9-12	326			21%
33	AMY at Martin Middle	6-8	397			67%
34	Sheridan West Academy M.S.	7-8	102			31%
35	Lankenau H.S.	9-12	321			64%
36	Parkway Northwest H.S.	9-12	260			67%
37	Germantown H.S.	9-12	655			21%
38	Robert Fulton Elementary	K-6	369			12%
39	Theodore Roosevelt Middle	7-8	310			25%
40	Phila. Military Acad. at Leeds	9-12	248			54%
41	John F. McCloskey Elementary	K-6	379			53%
42	John L. Kinsey Elementary	K-8	487			33%
43	Jay Cooke Elementary	K-8	408			40%
44	Laura H. Carnell Annex at Fels	7-8	No data available for annex only			

NOTES

Proficiency rates in reading are from the PA Department of Education results of the 2012 PSSA exam (see *paayp.emetric.net*).

All other data, including the data on utilization and facility condition are from the School District of Philadelphia. The *Notebook* did not independently verify the accuracy of the School District data on building capacity and condition.

The red-yellow-green rating system is the *Notebook*'s.

Utilization is the building enrollment as a percentage of the building capacity as determined by the District. The District has said its goal for utilization is 85%.

- Utilization is 85% or more
- Utilization is 60-84%
- Utilization is less than 60%

Facility condition represents the data from the District's facility condition index (FCI). The index is a ratio of the cost of needed repairs to the cost of replacing the building. A score of .50 means the cost of repairing the building is half the cost of replacement. Data are from fall 2011.

- Facility condition index is less than .25
- Facility condition index is .25-.49
- Facility condition index is .50 or more

For more information on school closings, go to

- *www.thenotebook.org/school-closings*
- *webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/f/facilities-master-plan*

Playing with fire

(continued from page 1)

District officials downplay such concerns, saying today's neighborhood rivalries don't compare to the gang warfare of the 1970s.

"I am not saying that conflicts don't exist," said Chief Inspector Cynthia Dorsey, the head of the District's office of school safety. "It doesn't mean that we have to accept them."

But in barbershops and rec centers, on street corners and inside law enforcement circles, people in Northwest Philly are nervous.

They warn that almost anything can ignite neighborhood feuds.

And they accuse the District of failing to recognize that it's about to create the biggest spark in decades.

"The School District has not put together a strategy to prevent young people from responding violently to each other," said Malik Aziz, a Philadelphia-based gang specialist and trainer for the National Gang Crime Research Center.

A question of numbers?

Waterview Recreation Center is located a couple of blocks from Germantown High.

On a chilly January evening, the center's 16-and-under basketball team trekked up Haines Street for a game against Simons Recreation Center.

Simons is near King High.

With under five minutes to go, the game was tied. A Simons player leveled a Waterview player with a hard foul.

Nothing happened.

After the game, players casually slapped hands.

Times have changed, said Waterview's Khalil Billa.

"Back then, you could say it was 'hood wars," said Billa, 14. "But now, it's not really nothing."

District officials agree.

William Wade, the second-year principal at King, swears the Brickyard-Haines Street-Somerville battles that scarred Northwest Philly 40 years ago are no longer an issue inside his building.

"When the gang warfare was happening, Germantown probably had close to 4,000 students, and King probably had close to 3,000 students," said Wade. "We just don't have those numbers any more."

Enrollment drain is one of the major reasons the two schools are slated to merge.

Roughly 6,300 public high school students live in the combined attendance zone of Germantown and King. More than 5,000 attend charters, selective admission schools, or schools in other neighborhoods.

Including Dayton Melton.

If Germantown is closed, Melton won't be "reppin' Brickyard" inside King next year. He already opted out of his neighborhood school to attend Roxborough High.

"I just wanted to avoid problems," said Melton.

Under the District's school closing plan, current Germantown students will be given the option to attend either Roxborough or King. Some will likely apply for special admission schools or charters.

King's total enrollment probably won't exceed 1,600.

Wade isn't losing any sleep.

"I know we can handle it," he said.

Hatfields and McCoys

Then why are so many others so worried?

Driving through Germantown, Reggie Hall stops on the 5200 block of West Clarkson Street.

He nods toward a boarded-up brick row home.

The letters "TBK" are spray-painted on the wall.

"Terrace Born Killers," says Hall.

It's one of at least eight neighborhood-based gangs in the area.

For almost a decade, Hall has been a community support specialist for the city's Town Watch Integrated Services. He works Northwest Philly, defusing potentially violent conflicts when he can, intervening afterwards when he can't.

Navigating the neighborhoods around Germantown and King, he points out otherwise invisible turf boundaries.

"Once you cross over this stoplight, you're in Somerville territory," Hall says at the corner of Wister Street and Chew Avenue.

"This is the part of the city that I grew up in."

Now 45, it's Hall's job to know what's happening in the streets he used to run.

He says that Terrace Born Killers, Haines Street Hustlers, Dogtown Hustlers, and Brickyard Mafia claim turf below Chew Avenue, in Germantown.

The streets above Chew, in West Oak Lane and East Mount Airy, are home to Somerville, Bad Company, Bad Intentions, Goonies, and 1-4. Somerville itself is comprised of shifting factions like Bottomside, Topside, and Homicide Squad.

It's not like Chicago, where gangs are large and highly organized. To prevent more violence, that city's Commission on School Utilization recently recommended against closing any more high schools.

But Philadelphia's neighborhood-based "cliques" or "crews" will fight – and shoot – to protect their turf and reputation.

"It's like the Hatfields and the McCoys," said Hall.

"A lot of people don't understand. But when you've been in the trenches, you know."

In 2007, a spike in violence hit Roosevelt Middle, right after nearby Ada Lewis was closed.

A precedent at Roosevelt

On the record, police officials in the Northwest discuss the problem cautiously.

"The bottom line is if they identify as a gang, we have a potential issue," says John Fleming, the captain of the 14th Police District.

On background, law enforcement sources confirm that the groups identified by Hall are an active, if disorganized, threat to public safety.

"They deal drugs for sneakers and food," said one source who was not authorized to talk with reporters. "The [kids] still in school are loosely affiliated. They claim the [gang moniker] so no one messes with them."

Everyone agrees the groups are responsible for many of the 339 juvenile assaults and five juvenile shootings in the 14th District last year.

Everyone agrees that things have been pretty quiet recently.

And everyone agrees it won't take much to start up a new round of violence.

"It can go haywire at any time," said Aziz, the gang specialist.

That's why the District's school-closings plan has people on edge.

They worry that sending hundreds of kids from Germantown into King will mean more frequent interactions between the groups.

And they fear the merger will provoke all the groups below Chew Avenue to join forces for protection, prompting the groups above Chew to respond in kind.

Hall says that's what happened in 2007, after the District closed Ada Lewis Middle School.

The majority of the Ada Lewis students were from Somerville.

They were sent into Roosevelt Middle School, where the kids mostly lived in Brickyard, Haines Street, and Dogtown.

That year, Roosevelt's enrollment went up 39 percent.

Reported serious incidents went up 144 percent.

Reported assaults on students and staff went up 143 percent.

"Kids would just randomly walk into classrooms and start fights," said Donald Malcolm, a 15-year Roosevelt veteran and the school's current dean of students.

"A lot of kids got jumped after school. There were large fights in the middle of Washington Lane. It was a big mess."

District light on details

Asked what they learned from Roosevelt, District officials had no answer.

"For that, I wasn't at the School District," said Chief Inspector Dorsey, who has been on the job for three months.

Asked which on-the-ground experts District officials are consulting as they prepare to send roughly 500 Germantown

(continued on page 19)

Emma Lee for *NewsWorks*

William Wade, principal of Martin Luther King High School, says that planning for a potential influx of Germantown students will begin after the March SRC vote on school closings.

Emma Lee for *NewsWorks*

Terrace Born Killers, or TBK, is the name of one of several gangs that claim territory in the neighborhoods surrounding Germantown and King high schools.

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Playing with fire

(continued from page 18)

students into King, Dorsey struggled to give specifics.

"I have reached out to folks. We need to do more of it. Especially in the high schools," she said.

Dorsey, a 28-year veteran of the Philadelphia Police Department, is not unaware of the city's gang problem.

She said the District asked the department's criminal intelligence units to review each proposed school closing, then report on possible gang and neighborhood conflicts that could be sparked.

The District would not release the intelligence report on Germantown and King.

There is little evidence it has informed any nuts-and-bolts planning at the schools.

King's principal said he hasn't had any formal meetings about the potential influx of Germantown students.

"It's on our agenda," said Wade.

When the time comes, said Wade, his strategy will likely focus on academics, including expanded opportunities for disruptive students.

Eventually, his team will suggest how to create safe corridors to and from school. He hopes to contract with outside mentoring groups and hire more conflict-resolution specialists.

Wade doesn't know any details about what resources he'll be provided to make his plan work.

He said preparations will pick up in March or April, after the School Reform Commission votes on the final school-closing recommendations.

"I think it would be very disrespectful to plan full speed ahead when the final decision hasn't been made yet."

How to do it right

As many as 17,000 city students could be assigned to new schools next September.

Thousands more will deal with a wave of new students into their current schools.

Raekwon Canty is a 10th grader at King. He was watching TV when he heard about the District's plan for Germantown.

"They want us to kill each other," he thought.

Canty hopes to go to college. But he expects next year to be lost to fights.

"If people have been going to King for so long, then other people try to come and take over? They're not having that. I know I wouldn't," he said.

Experts say the District must disarm that mindset in order to close schools safely.

"You need to start the conversation and the intervention now, so when September rolls around, you've invested nine months of interaction," said Anthony Murphy.

As the executive director of Town Watch Integrated Services, Murphy oversees 700 town-watch groups and a couple of hundred safe-corridors programs around the city.

He said prevention efforts should have already begun:

Conversations with kids in both shuttered and receiving schools.

A detailed analysis of how student commutes are likely to change.

Training for teachers on how to report signs of trouble.

Increased communications between school officials, police, and community leaders.

And outreach to respected neighborhood "old heads" who can help hammer out truces.

"You have to ask the entire community, 'What are you willing to do to make this OK?'" said Murphy.

"That has not happened yet."

A citywide issue

It's not just the Northwest.

In early January, almost 1,000 people turned out to a public forum on the District's plan to close 12 North Philly schools, including Strawberry Mansion High.

"People are scared to go from one neighborhood to another," said Mansion student Marcquis Graham. "The murder rate is going to be higher, and there are going to be more people dropping out of school."

Similar arguments have been made at forums in South Philly, West Philly, and the Southwest.

Superintendent Hite has responded by pointing out that more than half of the city's high school students already leave their neighborhoods to attend school. He's promised detailed safety plans, extra transportation, safe corridors, and conflict resolution programs.

Aziz, who has been working on the front lines against gang violence in the city for the past 17 years, is skeptical:

"I think their approach is going to be a knee-jerk reaction to somebody getting shot."

Hall has a similar fear.

"All I see is the possibility of somebody getting killed," he said.

If that happens, says Kelley Hodge, the already frayed relationship between the District and city parents may snap.

Like Aziz, Hall, and Murphy, Hodge says she wasn't consulted on the District's school-closings plan. She hasn't been invited to participate in safety planning.

"I presume there has been discussion," she said. "I haven't been privy to the details."

Every day, though, Hodge hears from Philadelphia families.

She says they're scared mass closings will worsen the already pervasive violence in city schools, and they're worried that their warnings are falling on deaf ears.

But their message to the District, said Hodge, is clear:

"We're going to hold you accountable for what happens to our children."

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Multimedia Extra:

40 years ago, Germantown-King pairing marred by violence

Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA. Ligato (*Philadelphia Bulletin*)

On Feb. 8, 1972, students arrived for the first day at the new Martin Luther King High.

Martin Luther King High opened in 1972 as part of an unusual experiment.

Students from across Northwest Philadelphia would attend King for 9th and 10th grades, then move on to Germantown High for 11th and 12th grades.

Within months, a gang fight erupted in King's cafeteria. Three teens were stabbed. The "paired school" model was soon scrapped.

Now, the District is pushing to close Germantown and send hundreds of students into King. *NewsWorks* and the *Notebook* asked members of the schools' Class of 1975 to share lessons from the District's past experiment.

Read/watch/hear more at WHYY-90.1 FM, *newsworks.org*, and *thenotebook.org*.

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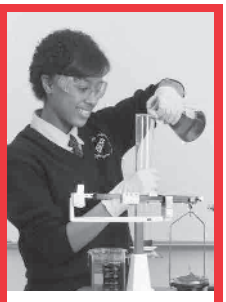
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