Frequently Asked Questions  
(updated February 5, 2013)

Why was my school selected?
- Your school is one of the most severely under-enrolled elementary schools in SCUSD. It serves far fewer students than its capacity. The number of children who attend your school has steadily declined over the past 17 years. Schools such as yours with the lowest enrollment capacity percentages are highest on the closure list.

How did the school district come up with the capacity numbers used in selecting the 11 schools proposed for closure?
- To arrive at a school’s capacity, SCUSD first counts the number of district-owned “teachable spaces” at each school. This includes ALL classrooms, including surplus classrooms currently being used for Child Development/Preschool programs, Parent Resource Centers, supplemental teacher’s lounges or such spaces as speech therapy rooms. It does not include libraries, which are removed from the tally. Next, the number of students that could be housed in each classroom is calculated by using the current maximum teacher-to-student ratio by grade level (smaller class sizes for Special Education classes are factored in). Finally, classroom capacities are added together to arrive at a maximum capacity for the entire school. This same process is used to determine the capacity of every school in the district; all school capacities are measured by the same standard.

Why were some under-enrolled schools removed from the closure list?
- Some schools among the 18 most under-enrolled were removed from the closure list because enrollment at these schools will grow with the closure of nearby under-enrolled schools or because the school is a Superintendent’s Priority School.

What happens to the teachers and staff at the schools being closed or consolidated?
- Teachers will be reassigned to other schools, depending on the seniority of the employee. Staff can also be reassigned, depending on the seniority of the employee and availability. The district is working with our employee groups on the best course of action for kids and employees.

Will students from closed schools have early access to the Open Enrollment process?
- Yes. The Open Enrollment process is an opportunity for each student who resides permanently within the boundaries of the school district to apply for enrollment in participating schools within the district, based on space availability. Parents or guardians will need to complete an application in order for their children to attend the “school of choice” requested. Staff will be available to assist families in this process.

How will students get to their new schools?
- The district is committed to providing crossing guards, walking attendants and bus routes to accommodate students who face hazards getting to their new schools, such as railroad tracks and high-traffic thoroughfares. In addition, safe biking, walking and driving routes will be made available to parents. The safety of students getting to their new school(s) will continue to be the focus of Transition Teams, who will be working with representatives of the Sacramento Police Department.

Are these decisions final?
- The Board of Education will make a final determination on school closures on February 21.
How can I provide feedback or address concerns?
- Community meetings will be held at each school recommended for closure. The full schedule of meetings is posted online at www.scusd.edu/closures.

What happens when a closure becomes final?
- Once the Board of Education takes final action, families and the parents of current students and incoming kindergarteners will be notified immediately. Closure would take place next fall (the 2013-14 school year). Students would remain at their current school for the rest of this year. Next, staff will create new school boundary areas for all affected neighborhoods. Parents will then be notified of new school assignments and of transportation options. Assistance will be offered in the Open Enrollment process for parents who choose that option. A district-wide Transition Team, as well as school site-specific transition teams, is already being formed to help parents and staffs during this time of change. These teams will address every issue relating to the transition for families and staff, including student safety, the movement of programs and resources to receiving schools and ensuring that classroom supplies and teaching tools follow students to their new school(s).

What happens to the schools that are closed?
- Following the closure of the schools, the Board will be appointing a committee to make comprehensive recommendations regarding the reuse of these facilities. Through this process, we will work with our communities to ensure that closed sites are maintained, secured and utilized as needed by the surrounding neighborhoods via district programs and/or community partnerships. While no decisions have been made yet regarding the re-use of these facilities, the district’s goal is to re-purpose as many of the closed sites as quickly as possible.

Will my child’s new school have the same after-school program?
- SCUSD partners with a variety of providers for after-school programs, and they vary by the needs of the school. Although a receiving school may not have the exact program as a school that is closing, the district will ensure that families are aware of the resources available to them and how they can access those resources.

Will my child’s new school have a preschool program?
- SCUSD’s Child Development preschool programs are located throughout the district and all are open to parents who reside within the district and meet eligibility requirements. Although a receiving school may not have the exact program as a school that is closing, the district will ensure that families are aware of the resources available to them and how they can access those resources.

What are the benefits for my child of attending a school with a bigger student population?
- Schools that operate closer to their capacity levels have fewer split-grade classrooms. They also have more resources to support students, such as more interventions for struggling learners and more opportunities for enrichment programs. Teachers have more peers to collaborate with, which improves instruction. Larger schools have a bigger pool of involved parents to support school activities, such as field trips. With fewer schools, SCUSD will be able to concentrate maintenance and safety personnel, making schools healthier and safer for all students.

How are you addressing campus safety concerns?
- With fewer schools, SCUSD will be able to concentrate its resources to improve safety at every campus. In addition, your child’s new school will have the same ratio of adults-to-students on campus as your child’s present school. That means that a school with more students will have more adults on campus as well.

How was my new receiving school selected?
• Receiving schools were selected primarily on geographic proximity. SCUSD also considered capacity at receiving schools and how students will get to a new school, selecting campuses based on the safest routes.

Why are there only elementary schools on the closure list?
• SCUSD operates far fewer high schools (13) and middle schools (8) than elementary schools. Because there are fewer secondary campuses, they tend to be located fairly far apart from each other. Closing a middle or high school would require parents to transport their children long distances to school. SCUSD does not provide bus service for 7th through 12th grade students.

Why use school capacity rather than school enrollment as criteria?
• Schools that are under-enrolled for their capacity are less efficient and more costly to operate than schools with smaller student populations that are more filled up. All of the square footage of a campus must be maintained – roofing, plumbing, floors, paint, wiring, etc. – and bigger schools have more to maintain. Bigger schools also have higher utility bills.

Wasn’t Proposition 30 supposed to help school districts and prevent school closures?
• SCUSD was forced to cut $28 million from its 2012-13 budget to close a deficit caused by state funding cuts, declining enrollment, the loss of one-time federal funds and rising costs. These cuts included the reduction or elimination of teachers, custodians, librarians, nurses and assistant principals. Proposition 30 helped SCUSD by preventing an additional $15 million in mid-year cuts, which would have resulted in the district being forced to cut the school year by two full weeks. While Proposition 30 tax increases will mean more money for California public schools, they do not begin to repair and restore the horrific cuts that our schools have endured over the past decade. Any increased funding for the next school year – or beyond - will not offset our structural deficit created by declining enrollment and rising costs. SCUSD will likely face another budget shortfall for 2013-14.

When will school closures go into effect?
• Schools will close in the 2013-14 school year. Students will remain at their current schools for the rest of this school year.

Why did I support Measures Q and R for our local school if you were just going to close it?
• Measures Q and R will fund upgrades and repairs to schools across the district, including your child’s new school and the middle school and high school your child will eventually attend. Years of budget cuts have led to many deferred maintenance projects throughout the district. Funds generated by Measures Q and R will make schools healthier and safer for students and staff.

How will I get to my child’s new school for parent engagement events, meetings or if there is an emergency?
• The district is committed to maintaining engaged parent communities; it is one of three pillars of our strategic plan. The school site transition teams will be working hard to find creative ways to interact with all parents, including such options as home visits. The team will also examine transportation options for families to get to their new schools.

Why is my school being “blamed” for decisions made by the district in the past to add classrooms or grow campuses?
• Nobody wants to close schools. The unfortunate reality is that we have a district that was built to accommodate a much larger student population than we currently have. In some cases, the growth of the real estate bubble over a decade ago led to aggressive plans for growth and expansion that ultimately did not occur. This stark reality is at the heart of the economic crisis facing our country over the past 10 years. While it’s easy to question decisions made in the past, we must deal with the present-day reality that it is simply unsustainable to continue to support more schools than we have the ability to fill.

English/FAQ Schools Closure Rev.2-5-13/
My child receives IEP recommended services in the form of speech and language support. How will my child continue to receive this service?

- Students receiving speech and language support are considered to be general education students and will be placed in identified receiving school sites. Every elementary campus has speech and language services and will be able to implement current IEPs for students.

My child receives IEP recommended services in the RSP program. How will my child continue to receive this service?

- Student receiving RSP support are considered to be general education students and will be placed in identified receiving school sites. Every elementary campus has RSP services and will be able to implement current IEPs for students.

My child receives IEP recommended service in a Special Day Class (SDC) program. How will my child continue to receive this service?

- The impacted Special Day Class programs will be moved to receiving school sites. Classroom staff will remain with their current class at the new location.

What happens if, after applying for a school through Open Enrollment, my child ends up on a waiting list?

- If your child ends up on a waiting list for a school or program that has more applicants than seats available, you then have the option of sending your child to your new home school and waiting for a seat to open in your program of choice.

Can the district save money in other areas instead of closing schools?

- In the last decade, SCUSD has reduced spending by more than $200 million. Last year alone, the district was forced to cut $28 million – a deficit caused by declining enrollment, state funding cuts, a loss of one-time federal funds and rising costs. Because about 90 percent of the district’s budget is spent on people – salaries and benefits – cuts hit employees the hardest. Over the years, SCUSD had reduced or eliminated custodians, counselors, teachers, nurses, school staff, librarians, central office staff and bus drivers. These reductions are in addition to cuts to textbook funds, Adult Education, beginning teacher preparation programs and other programs.

Next year, the district is predicting another deficit due to declining enrollment and rising costs. Closing chronically under-enrolled schools will save the district $2.5 million in 2013-14.

Why haven’t parents been more involved in the process?

- The conversation about declining enrollment, rising costs, the district’s financial distress and the need to close schools has been ongoing for the past decade and has involved parents, community partners, labor partners, city and county officials, students and SCUSD staff. School closures, in particular, have been a topic at community budget forums – well attended by SCUSD families – for the past three years. In response, in 2011-12 the Board appointed a citizens committee to examine school closures and make recommendations. The district discussed the committee’s report last spring and held another series of well-attended meetings on the subject. The work of that committee informed these recommendations and illuminated the need for clear fiscal criteria for identifying schools to be closed.
Why didn’t you use the 7-11 Committee recommendations and CDE’s best practices guide to closing schools?

- The Board-appointed 7-11 Committee conducted substantial research into school closures last year, examining such factors as enrollment and condition of facilities. The committee’s recommendations were presented to the Board of Education and prompted discussion among trustees and the public. The criteria was reviewed again this year and considered prior to any recommendations being made. However, as the district’s financial crisis worsens, a decision was made to recommend schools based solely on financial criteria. In years prior, the 7-11 Committee served a role similar to its part in the recommended process this year: making recommendations regarding the re-use and repurposing of closed facilities after Board action.

CDE’s best practices document provides broad guidelines on the subject of school closures. Though the guidelines are suggestions only, it is critical that we engage all of our community during this process. That is why we have committed to having a public forum at each of the 11 campuses slated for closure prior to Board action on February 21.

How many Elk Grove Unified and San Juan Unified elementary schools are year-round?

- Year-round schools allow school districts to serve more students on fewer campuses, providing a cost savings to the district. Elk Grove Unified has 12 year-round schools. San Juan Unified has none. For year-round elementary schools to work in SCUSD, where elementary schools operate at just 56 percent of capacity, many campuses would have to be closed or consolidated.

What is the impact of moving students from a smaller to a larger environment? Effects on behavior, test scores, etc.?

- Schools that operate closer to their capacity levels have fewer split-grade classrooms. They also have more resources to support students, such as more interventions for struggling learners and more opportunities for enrichment programs. Teachers have more peers to collaborate with, which improves instruction. Larger schools have a bigger pool of involved parents to support school activities, such as field trips. With fewer schools, SCUSD will be able to concentrate maintenance and safety personnel, making schools healthier and safer for all students. Test scores and behavior issues vary from school to school, and are not dependent on the size of a school. Some of SCUSD’s largest elementary schools have the highest test scores. Because closing schools is a financial decision, test scores were not part of the criteria used to identify schools for closure.

How much supposed savings gained from closing schools is from people and how much from facilities?

- Almost 90 percent of the district’s budget is spent on people – salaries and benefits. So the majority of the savings from closing schools comes from eliminating positions.

Why are Priority Schools not being considered for closure?

- Two Priority Schools – Oak Ridge and Father Keith B. Kenny – were removed from consideration because they would be receiving students from other schools slated for closure that are more dramatically under-enrolled. Therefore, enrollment at those schools will grow. Leataata Floyd was not recommended for closure because the district has invested significant resources in turning around Priority Schools in our highest-need neighborhoods.
Why does SCUSD support magnet schools that can kick kids out and whose parents can drive across town?

- SCUSD offers a range of schools and programs for parents, including criteria-based schools and programs for advanced learners, Waldorf-inspired schools, dual-language schools and programs, Integrated Thematic Instruction schools and others. Offering a portfolio of schools and programs for families is one strategy to grow enrollment and increase SCUSD’s budget, as many of these programs attract families from outside the district.

Where is SCUSD getting predicted 2013-14 deficit numbers?

- Last month, Governor Brown released his January budget proposal, which included a modest increase in school spending and a proposed new school funding formula, titled the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). However, due to declining enrollment and rising costs, the district is still projecting a substantial deficit for 2013-14.

Under Governor Brown’s proposal, LCFF would overhaul school funding by reducing mandated and categorically funded programs and shifting money to districts that serve the highest populations of low income and non-English speaking students. The proposal is expected to face opposition as it is reviewed in legislative committees. The district is keeping close tabs on the funding issue, which likely will continue to be discussed throughout the spring. Without knowing how much money schools will receive, financial experts are advising the district to set its budget – due to the county on March 15 – on conservative estimates, which leaves SCUSD with a significant deficit.

Why is the decision to close schools an all or none decision?

- The recommendation is to close 11 schools, which will match the number of elementary schools in SCUSD to the number of students we serve and take into account further declines in enrollment.

How can we have “priority” in the Open Enrollment process if it begins before Board action on right-sizing?

- At the end of the Open Enrollment window, which lasts from February 19 through March 8, students from the sites slated for closure will be placed in a special lottery available only for students from these 11 schools. Then, and only then, will other applicants from around the district be considered for any available spaces. This NOT a first-come, first serve process. Placement begins at the end of the Open Enrollment window after all applications are received, ensuring the priority status for the schools slated for closure.