

Parent input ignored in school closings

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Officials who close neighborhood schools in poor, urban areas often ignore parents' input, which only reinforces the "institutionalized racism that plagues U.S. schools," a Michigan State University scholar argues.

From Michigan to Texas, superintendents and school boards are closing dozens of [urban schools](#) based strictly on data such as low test scores and [graduation rates](#) and poor student attendance, Muhammad Khalifa, assistant professor of educational administration, found in his latest research.

What the [officials](#) fail to take into account are key factors such as teacher quality and lack of economic investment around the schools, Khalifa said. Further, when parents raise these and other concerns, their opinions frequently are ignored or discounted, he said.

"You can really see a trend across the country – the areas where schools are being closed tend to be poorer areas with more minorities," said Khalifa, a former public school teacher and administrator in Detroit. "And the residents in these areas generally don't have a lot of political clout or money to get their voices heard."

Khalifa studied the proposed closing of a historically black high school in a large Southwestern city, interviewing both citizens and district officials, and found parents were not convinced by the administrators' "data-driven" plan to close the school.

According to the study, published in the research journal *Urban*

Education, parents and administrators had vastly different ideas of what factors should be considered when closing a school.

Parents argued the school was an integral part of their neighborhood and that closing it would cripple an already vulnerable neighborhood. But when the residents expressed their concerns at community forums, district officials simply listened but did not respond, the study found.

Khalifa said the issue has flared in many other poor, urban areas where officials have closed or are trying to close schools with large [minority populations](#), including Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit.

He said he's not suggesting struggling urban schools get a free pass. "You do have to hold schools accountable," he said.

But to do that, he said officials should consider a comprehensive set of factors including the voice of the community.

"When administrative decisions are made, those decisions should include more than just the data that historically has been considered," Khalifa said. "Those community voices – that's also data. The underinvestment in the neighborhood is data. [Teacher quality](#) is data. And so on."

To help address the problem, Khalifa said [school](#) administrators should be trained to plan and communicate in a way that recognizes and respects all vested interests.

"To ignore community voices is to marginalize and delegitimize them," he writes in the study.

Provided by Michigan State University

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