SE Uplift
NEIGHBORHOOD COALITION

Collaborating with the District 3 community to build informed, inclusive and participatory neighborhoods that support our social and ecological well-being.

Mayor of Portland
Portland City Council
Portland Bureau of Transportation and PBOT Safe Routes to School
Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Members of the Portland Public Schools Board of Education
Portland Public Schools

November 4, 2026

Dear Portland leaders:

We are writing to express concerns about potential transportation and land use impacts of the Portland Public School (PPS) District's proposed "rightsizing" plans on communities, and to request a transportation and land use impact study that assesses and compares the impacts of these different plans before moving forward.

The PPS scenarios shared on October 5, 2026, involve closing either 11 or 14 schools across Portland, and changing programs at many additional schools. PPS shared these scenarios with the intention to have the School Board vote on a final plan just two months later, in December. The proposal could cause nearly 8,000 students across Portland to change schools.

Given this short timeline for decision-making, we are concerned that the broader impacts of this sweeping change on communities, land use, and transportation across the city have not been fully taken into account. Below we outline some key concerns and unanswered questions.

School closures will impact transportation for students and families, and traffic patterns for Portland communities.

By definition, closing schools will mean that students must travel further to get to their schools. Larger catchment areas will mean longer commutes for children and families. An estimated 1,174 students would newly live over one mile from school. Students who are forced to travel further will be more likely to drive instead of walking or biking, which could cause an increase in single occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips. This could lead to more cars on the street, more traffic, more congestion, and more crashes.

Traffic increases could impact transportation and traffic all over the city, but of particular concern is increased traffic directly adjacent to schools, which makes it more dangerous to walk or bike to school and could further disincentivize active transportation. More driving to school also means more exhaust and pollution exposure impacting children's lungs.

These impacts present potential equity issues. Families without cars, low-income families, and those already facing transportation challenges will also be disproportionately affected. Concentrating Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs into fewer "hubs" will mean further commutes for bilingual students, in particular. The concentration of DLI programs has also raised concerns that concentrating immigrant families may make them more susceptible to ICE enforcement.

Increasing the distance to school for students hinders walkability and bikeability, and goes directly against the goals of Portland's Vision Zero, Safe Routes to School and PPS's own Climate Policy.

Vision Zero has a goal of eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries, with a specific action of making school zones safer. Adding more cars to school zones works against this goal.

Safe Routes to School is a statewide program which is implemented in Portland by PBOT. The goal of Safe Routes to School is to help kids and families walk, bike, and roll to and from school and around their neighborhoods. Again, forcing students to travel longer distances and adding more cars to the street runs counter to this goal.

Goal 1.4 of PPS's Climate Policy states that "PPS will minimize greenhouse gas emissions from student and staff transportation." A scenario in which more students live further from school and fewer students live within walking and biking distance moves us further from this goal.

Averages don't tell the whole story.
Impacts of increased trip times to school will be concentrated in pockets. Some students and neighborhoods will not be highly impacted, while others will have to travel miles, facing deep increases in travel times. For example, students currently at Rose City Park face the largest added travel time, with the share of students walking more than one mile soaring from 0% to 85%. Students currently at Buckman would travel up to 3 miles to attend Sunnyside– a walk of over an hour or a 20-minute bike ride for an adult. More students will have to cross busy, dangerous streets like Powell, one of the city's top high-crash corridors.

Many transportation and land use questions remain unanswered:

- Across Portland, in each scenario, how will transportation patterns shift due to increased numbers of students living more than 1 mile from school? Beyond averages, how will these shifts be felt in specific neighborhoods and communities around Portland?
- Will there be a shift in SOV trips and/or congestion around schools? What is the anticipated traffic impact of parents who will drive their students to school instead of walking or biking? What is the impact of more buses in the neighborhoods every day?
- Will there be impacts to demand for school buses or TriMet buses? What costs will accrue to the City, School District and/or TriMet, and how will the District pay for these additional costs?
- What is the environmental impact of these additional car and bus trips?

- What is the safety impact? Will there be additional crashes based on travel changes? What about safety directly near schools?
- What are the equity impacts? What communities will be disproportionately impacted?
- What is the impact of closed school buildings on property values, local businesses, and neighborhood safety?
- How will PPS and the City of Portland prevent closed buildings from becoming a nuisance or hazard? What will this cost?
- Which schools and surrounding rights-of-way have already been heavily invested in by the City (Transportation, Water & Sewer, Parks, and other bureaus)? How is this investment being taken into account?
- What are the community impacts of closed school buildings & loss of community hubs?
- How does the PPS school closure planning process take into account planned or ongoing investments in housing and other investments at the neighborhood level?

Decisions of this scale should be based on a clear assessment of their effects on students, families, and communities. Given all of the above, **we request a thorough comparative transportation and land use impact study on PPS's proposed Rightsizing scenarios,** including the no-change scenario, so that the impact of these different scenarios can be compared and assessed in a data-driven way by decisionmakers and the public before moving forward.

Given that it is unlikely this study could be completed before the current December deadline, **we request a pause in this planning process** until such a study can be completed. This proposal will irrevocably change Portland's communities for the long term. As such, it should not be rushed before the impacts are more fully understood.

Thank you for your consideration,

SE Uplift Neighborhood Coalition (District 3 Coalition)