

## Closing Bad Schools Isn't Always the Answer



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We've been told for years that failing schools must be shut down. Students do not deserve to attend schools that have consistently bad test scores and low graduation rates. State and federal laws mandate that schools be shut down or revamped if they are persistently low-performing.

The Center for Governmental Research rounded up research on the topic and found that [closing bad schools has very mixed outcomes](#). One need only look at the results in Rochester.

Over the last decade, the City School District broke up Franklin and Edison high schools into several smaller schools. Those new schools proved to be a miserable failure, quickly landing on the state's bad schools lists.

Some new schools are working – Northeast and Northwest College Preparatory schools at the former Douglass High School. Those small schools are quite promising, with higher graduation rates.

One school is in the process of being shut down, despite having made significant progress. Freddie Thomas High School was a disaster when Sandra Jordan took over. She dramatically changed the climate and retained teachers. After six years at the helm, however, she wasn't able to move the needle on the graduation rate. She claims her school took in the most troubled and transient students. [Jordan was removed as principal](#) – and is ironically now in charge of the district's efforts to improve graduation rates.

East High School could be next. The school's graduation rate remains below the state's 60 percent threshold. Like Jordan, principal Aniba Soler is credited with changing the culture. But the grades are the same.

At what point does closing schools become an exercise in reshuffling, one that could be causing real harm?

[CGR studied the new schools](#) opened in the district over the past couple years aren't so stellar:

*"We found the schools, whose students were generally quite similar to the overall district population, had some higher outcomes than the district (including attendance, GPAs, and high school credits) and had established positive climates. But state test results were mixed, with the new schools exceeding district performance in 6 of 12 comparisons, and the schools all have work to do to increase academic rigor and student engagement in learning."*

There's no magic bullet. Closing a school – which upends families and communities – isn't always the best option. Yet the ax has been wielded with ferocity in the City School District. Perhaps it's time to take a deep breath to study what's working – and isn't – before the next experiment.

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