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THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE: WHY NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL CLOSINGS ARE JUSTIFIED

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New York City's leading teachers' union signaled last week that it won't give up its fight to keep the city from closing bad schools. Last year, the United Federation of Teachers convinced a judge that the DOE had offered only a "pretense of compliance" with a state law governing school-closure. UFT president Michael Mulgrew has already warned that the union is prepared to sue again to prevent this year's proposed closures.[1]

Mulgrew insists this is a matter of "due process." In reality, the union is keeping open what all the evidence shows to be terrible schools. Student test scores, the results of parent and teacher surveys, and data from the city's Progress and Performance metrics, give a sense of just what's going on inside the twenty-six schools that the city recently marked for closure. It's easy to see why they are on the chopping block. Students are not learning in these schools. Often they aren't safe, either.

The Department of Education administers voluntary surveys to parents and teachers in each of its public and charter schools. The results of these surveys account for about 10 percent of the accountability score used to grade schools from "A" to "F" each year. The below table reports the answers of city parents and teachers to some pertinent questions about the quality of their schools. The table juxtaposes survey answers from the twenty-six schools designated for closure with those from all other city schools.

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Parent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
The school has high expectations for my child					
City Average	50.1	41.9	3.7	1.1	3.2
Closure School	36.4	48.1	7.5	2.9	5.1
My child is safe at school					
City Average	47.2	45.5	3.6	1.4	2.2
Closure School	27.3	53.7	10.0	4.6	4.3
Teacher					
My school has high expectations for all students					
City Average	52.3	38.0	7.7	2.1	
Closure School	30.9	47.8	14.4	6.9	
Order and discipline are maintained at my school					
City Average	34.0	44.7	14.3	7.1	
Closure School	14.7	38.2	28.0	19.2	
I am safe at my school					
City Average	54.6	38.8	4.7	2.0	
Closure School	30.2	48.0	15.0	6.9	
Crime and violence are a problem at my school					
City Average	4.0	9.8	35.4	50.9	
Closure School	8.6	22.8	47.3	21.3	

The schools designated for closure appear to provide less engaging academic environments than other schools. Both parents and teachers in closing schools are far less likely to agree that their school has high expectations for its students than are their counterparts in other Gotham schools. About 21 percent of teachers in the schools designated for closure reported that their school does not have high expectations for all students.

Perhaps the most revealing differences to emerge from the surveys relate to school safety. Nearly 15 percent of parents in schools designated for closure say that their child is not safe in school, compared to less than 5 percent of parents in other New York City schools. The teachers who work in these schools every day confirm these fears. More than one in five teachers in the schools designated for closure report that they do not feel safe in their own school. Nearly half the teachers in closing schools report that order and discipline are not maintained, and nearly a third of teachers in these schools say that crime and violence are problems.

We can compare the academic performance in the closing elementary and middle schools to that of the city's other schools by looking at their results on the Performance and Progress components of district's accountability metric.[2] The Performance component measures the extent to which students score high enough on the state's math and reading tests to be deemed grade-level proficient. The Progress component, on the other hand, compares student exam-results from year to year, thus providing a measure of academic growth. The accountability system also takes into account the demographic characteristics of the school's students. Thus, the closing schools' scores reflect that they serve populations that are difficult to educate.[3]

It shouldn't be surprising that the schools targeted for closure are performing worse on these metrics than other schools around the city. The DOE has singled them out precisely because they are bad schools. What's notable, however, is just how much worse they are. The average Performance-measure score of these schools is 71 percent below the average

score of other schools in the city. Closing schools performed about half as well as other city schools on the Progress measure.[4]

Taken together, the survey results and test scores paint a clear picture: These are schools that most New Yorkers would not want their kids to attend. Nonetheless, there are those who—out of an abundance of concern for "process"—would prefer to keep them open.

Some argue that these schools lack the resources necessary to educate their predominantly disadvantaged students. The wild success of some charters and traditional public schools serving mostly poor and minority students, and the fact that the schools designated for closure perform dreadfully even on measures that account for student demographics, argues against this theory. However, that there is an explanation for a school's failure is of little comfort to its struggling students.

Every kid in New York deserves to attend an excellent school. The twenty-six schools designated by the city for closure will never meet that distinction. They should be closed, and replaced with new schools that are capable of keeping students safe and helping them learn.

ENDNOTES

[1] "City Targets Laggard Schools" by Barbara Martinez. *The Wall Street Journal*, December 7, 2010.

[2] We exclude high schools in this analysis because their progress reports follow a different procedure.

[3] Through exploratory analysis we confirmed that accounting for the school's peer index—the measure used by the Department o f Education to account for student demographics—in a multiple regression has very little influence on the difference between closing schools and other schools on the progress report scores.

[4] The schools designated for closure received an average Performance score of 2.22 and the average score for other schools was 7.69. The schools designated for closure received an average Progress score of 14.85 and the average score for other schools was 28.72.