

Azusa Report of the Qualitative Data of Responses to the Survey

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The analysis of the qualitative responses was divided into the four groups of parents who completed the survey in Spanish, parents who completed the survey in English, certified staff and faculty, and students in grades 7-12. Of the parents who completed the survey in Spanish, 72 of the 135 parents in this group (53%) selected option 3 while 63 of the 135 parents who completed the survey in Spanish (46%) selected option 4.

The number of parents who completed the survey in English was 863. Of these respondents, 523 (60%) selected option 3 and of this group, 340 (39%) parents selected option 4. In both groups of parents who completed the survey in English and of parents who completed the survey in Spanish, the percentage of parents selecting option 3 surpassed the percentage of parents selecting option 4. The differences in the percentages ranged from 21% more of the parents who completed the survey in English selecting option 3 while 7% more parents who completed the survey in Spanish selected option 3.

Of the certified staff and faculty survey respondents, 234 of the 386 individuals completing the survey (60%) selected option 3 while 152 of the 386 staff and faculty respondents (39%) selected option 4. These percentage results were the same as the results of the parents who completed the survey in English.

The grade 7-12 student results were more in agreement with option 4 while the other three groups of respondents were more in agreement with option 3. Only 35 of 86 of the students completing the survey (40%) selected option 3 while 51 of the 86 students completing the survey (59%) selected option 4 of keeping two high schools with grade levels of 7-12.

The parents and staff expressed much greater concern with having grades 7 and 8 on the high school campus than did the students who expressed more clearly the benefits that they saw in maintaining two high schools while changing the grade levels to grades 7-12 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of Qualitative Responses

Group	Total Number of Responses	Selection of Option 3	Selection of Option 4
Parent Surveys in Spanish	135	72 (53%)	63 (46%)
Parent Surveys in English	863	523 (60%)	340 (39%)
Certified Staff and Faculty	386	234 (60%)	152 (39%)
Grades 7-12 Students	86	35 (40%)	51 (59%)

In reporting the analysis of results, the key themes that emerged from the responses from each group will be provided with representative quotes to further illuminate the themes. Key themes that emerged across the data included: age-appropriate beliefs; size of campus and over-crowding; transportation issues; more practical in terms of fewer schools closed and or more cost- effective; improvement of programs; need to unite the community; fear of transferring; and rivalry of the two high schools. The

themes will be discussed relative to each of the four groups who completed the survey with representative quotes provided. All themes were not addressed by each group, but this list includes the themes that emerged from the data of the four groups.

Responses from Parents who Answered the Survey in Spanish

Reasons for Selection of Option 3

Of parents who answered the survey in Spanish and selected option 3 as their choice, the primary reasons for selecting option 3 included concerns about the age appropriateness of having students in grades 7 and 8 with students who are in grades 9-12, the size of the campus, transportation issues, and a desire to see fewer schools closed.

Age-Appropriate Beliefs

The concerns that were expressed against a grade 7-12 campus and in support of option 3 related to issues in the maturity levels of the students and concerns regarding the transition from elementary to the high school without the benefit of the middle school experience. For example, representative comments included:

- Grade 7 [students] are too small to coexist with grades 11 or 12. They would not be at the same maturity level, and this would harm the youngest.
- It is not a good idea to mix small children with older children so early.
- Middle school is the school where they have time to mature, and it prepares them for high school.
- I prefer secondary and preparatory education to be separated. One of the most difficult stages is adolescence and a lot of attention and security is required for the students.
- I do not agree that 11-year-old children should share the same facilities with 18-year-old adolescents.

Over-crowding Concerns

Parents who completed the survey in Spanish and selected option 3 also expressed concerns regarding the size of two campuses with grades 7-12 as potentially being problematic. As a parent shared:

- There is going to be overcrowding [in separating the 7-8 from the 9-12 on one campus], and this would not be good because it would increase violence at an earlier age.

Transportation Issues

These parents also expressed concerns regarding transportation for students if middle schools were closed while others cited appreciation for the idea of one middle school and one high school as reflected in option 3 as beneficial in having students in fewer locations. A representative comment was:

- We need transportation for students if those schools close.
- I have no way of driving to take my children, and it would be too far for them to walk from where I live.
- I am a single mother of three children. It would be too far for them to walk from where I live if the school closes.

Fewer Schools Closing

Another reason expressed by this group of parents for selecting option 3 was that they expressed that fewer schools would close with this option, and several parents expressed not wanting their present middle school closed. A representative comment was:

- I wouldn't want the school where my daughter attends school closed.
- Valleydale is an excellent school that I have confidence in leaving my daughters in that school.

Reasons for Selection of Option 4

Of the parents who completed the survey in Spanish and selected option 4 as their first choice, reasons provided related to themes of opposition to a single high school and support for two high schools and included beliefs that option 4 would lead to less crowding, that option 4 would have a positive impact on instruction, and that option 4 was more practical.

Less Crowding

Reasons provided related to a belief that two high schools would allow more space and less crowding than if there was only one high school. For example, a parent explained:

- I have a student in high school, and I don't think it is a good idea to have many students in a single school.

Several parents expressed the less crowding would impact positively the quality of instruction and learning.

Increased Quality of Instruction

As a parent shared:

- More learning [would occur].

More Practical

Several parents in this group expressed that this proposal seemed more practical while others expressed that it would be more convenient for families with siblings in grades 7-12 to be at one site. As a parent in this respondent group explained:

- This proposal is more coherent to me.
- I find it more practical.
- Keeping the schools that already exist in the city and not creating new ones makes more sense in my opinion.
- My son next year will be in grade 7, and my daughter in grade 12, so it will be easier to take them to the same school.

It is important to note that many parents who selected the option of grades 7-12 at each of the two sites also expressed the desire that the bell schedules, lunch times, dismissal times be different for grades 7 and 8 and for grades 9-12 to avoid the students of grades 7 and 8 interacting with the students in grades 9-12. Multiple parents reinforced the importance of keeping the two levels separate even though they would be on the same campus.

Modifications Recommended when Options 3 or 4 were Selected

Although many parents who completed the survey in Spanish provided modifications to options 3 or 4, not all parents who responded to the survey provided modifications to the options.

Modifications to Option 3

Results from parents who completed the survey in Spanish concerning what to change about option 3 included ten parents who expressed that option 3 is fine as proposed and four additional parents who completed the survey in Spanish left the response blank in response to the request to list any suggested modifications to option 3. The comments of parents who completed the survey in Spanish did not show consensus concerning advocacy for which school to leave open or whether a new school should be opened although they supported a designated middle school and a designated high school.

Modifications to Option 4

A representative comment from parents who selected option 4 to keep two high school open with grades 7-8 attending included:

- Gladstone and Azusa High School should not close due to facilities, campus size, location etc.

One parent recommended to leave the two high schools open and change all elementaries to K-8 while another parent thought that TK-8 placed younger children with older students and could result in bullying. The grade levels of Ellington as TK-8 were cited as an example of a TK-8 campus. Differing grade level configurations were offered, of middle school as grades 7, 8, and 9 and high schools as 10, 11, and 12.

One parent who selected option 4 recommended the modification to keep all schools open but to re-think the way funds are distributed.

Three parents who had selected option 4 also expressed concern in the size of the school and in classrooms and worried that crowding would impact the quality of education. A parent explained:

- I take this opportunity to express my concern about the number of students in some classrooms. I suggest paying attention not only to the physical structure where the students will receive their cases but also to the amount of children/youth per teacher in order to guarantee the quality of education.

Concerns of configuration varied such as advocacy for the modification to close an elementary school and advocacy to keep another middle school open. The data did not show strong consistency regarding which schools should remain open.

Parents who Completed the Survey in English

Reasons for Selection of Option 3

For the group of parents who responded in English to the survey, the primary reasons for selection of option 3 related to age-appropriate beliefs, less disruptive and more cost effective, improvement of programs, and an opportunity to unite the community.

Age-Appropriate Beliefs

Parents who completed the survey in English and selected option 3 expressed the philosophical belief that middle school should be a time for meeting the needs of the early adolescent, and the multiple middle schools should remain open. Representative parent responses supporting this reason were:

- Model 3 seems like the healthiest transition for our students. I think children need to go to a middle school before going into high school and being among students. There is a major age gap in 7th grade and high school age. For the well-being of students, I ask that middle school (7-8) be kept as a separate school.
- We should not mix middle school age and high school age students. The older kids will be a bad influence on the younger kids, and bullying would likely increase, and middle school is typically a good place for kids while transitioning and going through puberty/physical/emotional changes before entering high school.
- Middle school students should continue learning in a middle school environment around kids their age in a different setting than older students.
- I would like my child to have a separate middle school and high school close to home.
- I prefer to keep middle school aged kids separate from the high school age.
- I think middle school aged students need to have their own space. They do not yet have the maturity and should not have to be subjected to a high school environment, yet. I also think it is best for the high schoolers to have their traditional high school experience.
- I don't want middle school students on the same campus as high school students.
- I don't think middle school students should intermingle with high school students.
- I don't believe that children who are under 14 should be starting in a high school environment.
- I don't feel comfortable with my child (7th) in high school. I know they will be kept separate, but things can still occur. I want my child to experience middle school.
- After living in Azusa my whole life, and my children attending school now, I'm devastated. If model 4 goes into effect, I will be pulling my children out of the district.

More Cost Effective

As many parents explained their personal preference for separate middle schools, some expressed that they believed that option three would be less disruptive in the number of schools closed and more cost effective. A parent argued that restructuring two 7-12 schools would require remodeling and not be cost effective stating, "The cost difference between the two models is so large that model 3 seems to be the more financially responsible option."

Concerns of Over-Crowding

Some parents expressed concerns that over-crowding would occur if grades 7-12 were on two campuses instead of having the separate middle school and separate high school and that interaction between the middle and high school students would occur if they were on a 7-12 grade level campus. For example, a parent explained:

- Grade levels should be kept as is as elementary, middle, and high school because the school will be overpopulated if they decide to go with option 4, and my main concern is younger kids being exposed to other things that are happening in high school like drugs and bullying issues to name a few.
- [I chose option 3 for] a new high school so classes are not overcrowded.

Improvement of Programs

Several of the parents who selected option 3 also thought that having only one high school would improve programs such as band, art, the number of electives offered, and sports. For example, parents expressed:

- I asked my son his opinion. He feels that by combining the schools, all students would benefit. More academically inclined students would be together so hopefully there would be more courses, better athletic teams, a bigger band, and hopefully, better technology and facilities. He also felt middle school should be on a different campus. I have to agree with him. His argument was thought out.
- Model 3 still has a traditional style high school, provides more of an environment that kids are familiar with, and would allow for one high school with a high attendance to fuel programs, activities, and sports, and become a high school with sought after programs and competitive sports!
- [Having one high school] (option 3) would provide better programs at one high school.

Another parent expressed the belief that a separate middle school would provide more opportunities for students, stating: "I prefer the 7-12 grades together. It gives the middle school kids more resources and opportunities." Conversely, some of the parents who selected option 3 were concerned that some programs would suffer if the middle school closed. For example, a parent explained:

- The Dual Language program will be impacted tremendously with another move. As a parent in the Dual Language program, I am very concerned about the integrity of the program with this instability.
- Valleydale has special low vision programs that absolutely need to continue.

Unite the Community

Another parent argued," One high school will bring the whole community together instead of being split in half because we have two high schools [if we had only one high school] while many selecting option 4 argued that not maintaining two high schools with their rivalries and their locations on different sides of town would anger parents and lead to transfers of students to neighboring districts.

Reasons for Selection of Option 4 by Parents who Responded in English and Selected Option 4

Parents who responded in English and selected option 4 provided many reasons for proposing to keep the two high schools including concerns that students would transfer to other districts, beliefs that option 4 would be best for the community in uniting the community, and issues of cost-effectiveness.

Concerns of Transfers

A primary concern was that parents would move their students to other districts if the two high schools did not remain open. Of those parents who completed the survey in English who selected option 4, many expressed apprehensions that students would transfer, and the district would lose additional students if the choice of two high schools was eliminated. Concerns were shared that the district would lose additional students if one of the two high schools were closed, and fears were expressed that students would go to Covina Unified School District or to Glendora School District. For example, representative comments included:

- I heard a mother say that Azusa High should remain because of its name but I'm thinking beyond the name. I think and feel that there would be a lot of anger, animosity between students if that's the school even if it gets revamped. You would be moving an entire community to the other side of town. Yes, they are all from Azusa, but each school has a different community. I also think that in deciding to close Gladstone High, you are and will push our families to move their children, our students, to North View High school and even San Dimas High.

Just as some parents had expressed that option 3 would lead to less crowding, many parents who selected option 4 also thought that option 4 of having two 7-12 campuses at 75% capacity would allow room for growth. For example, a parent selecting option 4 stated, "I would rather have two middle and high schools [with grades 7-12] than have one high school that is overcrowded with lots of children in a small classroom setting." As a parent who completed the survey in English stated, "Having all of the city of Azusa go to one high school would be too many kids in one classroom. Class sizes of 45 students in a class were concerns that parents who selected option 4 also expressed, particularly that over-crowding needed to be avoided by having two high schools for grades 7. A parent stressed:

I would have two high schools. There seems to be too many students for one high school. Allowing there to be two different high schools also allows that cross city "rivalry" which is a huge part of the high school experience. I'm not sure if I feel comfortable having so many students in one school. I worry about the opportunities students would have for extracurricular activities (sports).

Community Issues

Some respondents who selected option 3 expressed the belief that one middle school and one high school would be best for the community, while others who selected option 4 expressed a concern that closing one of the high schools would lead to community and student protests regarding ending the rivalry of the two high schools, issues of transportation, and increased costs of re-branding one high school. A parent emphasized, "I want Gladstone and Azusa High school to stay open. It would be a hardship for some students to travel a further distance. Middle schoolers should be on campus of the two high schools."

Others expressed financial concerns in that the bond that passed was to improve existing facilities, not to close schools or to build a new high school. Another parent simply asked that the financial impact be considered to closing two high schools and stated, "Continue with the Azusa and Gladstone campuses instead of building an all-new high school, unless it is better financially to build new than to refurbish existing schools. A participant explained:

I prefer model 4 because we keep two high schools to serve the different regions of Azusa. I don't like the fact that it combines middle school grades, but I don't like model 3 because of the new high school proposal. Why build something new when you can use that money to continue upgrading the schools with traditions?

Additional Modifications Provided by Parents who Completed the Survey in English

Modifications of Respondents of Option 3

When parents who completed the survey in English and selected option 3 were asked to provide additional modifications, while some parents thought everything "looked good," some parents suggested modifications such as converting additional elementary schools to include the levels of TK-8 or TK-6 and then providing a 7-8 middle school. As a parent stated, "I like the idea of TK to 8th grade in each elementary school. Then, they transfer to high school in 9th-12th grades in a different campus. Another parent recommended making Gladstone High School a middle school, stating, "I would prefer Gladstone High School be used as the district's middle school." Another parent added, "I would move the middle school to the Gladstone High location to be able to utilize the upgraded fields, larger space, and modernized school."

Other modifications included pleas to keep individual schools open, such as "Keep Valleyview open for the vision program and dual language programs." Other parents who completed the survey in English advocated for other schools to remain open, such as, "In Model 3, since Ellington Elementary is already functioning as a K-8 school, I would keep Ellington as the k-8 school and close Valleydale."

Some parents expressed the desire for the district to build a new high school that is modern and technologically equipped while others argued that the renovations and improvements to campuses that had started should continue instead of a new high school. As a parent expressed:

If we go to one high school, I hope we can update, modernize, and make it a beautiful school for our students, such as state of the art science labs, state of the art theater, state of the art video production studio, state of the art computer science programs, various music programs, build another gym to support the many sports programs we have to offer, build a new pool, upgrade baseball and softball fields, scoreboard, lights, and bleachers for a new football field, etc. If Azusa High is chosen as the one high school, the center of campus needs to be resurfaced with concrete. Gladstone's center campus is beautiful. These are just some of my thoughts.

Modifications of Respondents of Option 4

When parents who selected option 4 responded to the question of what would be their modification, several parents expressed their opposition to closing any school. Others thought additional elementary schools should close instead. Those selecting option 4 also expressed strong preferences that the two

levels of grades 7-8 and grades 9-12 be kept separate within the one high school facility. As a parent expressed:

- I like Model 4, but it would be awesome if the 7th through 9th graders could be on a separate half or section of campus from the 10th through 12th graders. This would make me feel much better and have more peace about my 12-year-old being on the same campus as 18-19 year old students. Thank you for listening and considering my feedback. I really appreciate it.

Allocation of funds were also expressed, such as, “We voted to pay extra dollars to upgrade our schools not to close them.” Some parents expressed their displeasure that any changes were needing to be made. For example, a parent stressed, I wouldn’t close any schools. Why can’t we just make some classes smaller if we’re losing kids. It would increase their education if the class size is smaller.”

Certified Staff and Faculty Responses

Reasons for Selection of Option 3

Certified staff and faculty members' reasons for the selection of option 3 included primary themes related to beliefs in the importance of middle schools to students' development and beliefs in the benefits of 7th and 8th grade students being on one campus, benefits to programs that would be offered; and fear of students leaving the district to enroll in other districts if middle schools were eliminated as discussed in option 4.

Age-Appropriate Beliefs

Staff and faculty members strongly emphasized the need for middle schools and their opposition to the 7th and 8th grade students being on the same campus as students in grades 9-12 as key in the reason they selected option 3. Philosophical support that middle school is a unique developmental transition for students was frequently expressed that this support would be best provided by keeping these students on a separate campus from students in grades 9-12.

- I think it would be good to have one middle school and one high school rather than combining middle and high school together.
- I think its important for middle school aged students to emotionally and socially develop in an appropriate academic setting. Adolescence is such a crucial time-period, so by forcing them to be in a huge school with a high school setting can be harmful to their development.
- Students entering puberty should have an adjustment period where they are adjusting to the changes happening to them without the pressures placed upon them in a high school environment.
- I believe that 7th graders are not mature enough to be on the same campus as 17/18 year old kids.
- I feel there is validity in having the middle schoolers in their own academic environment.
- Model 3 is best for students.
- I am for one high school for the betterment and future for us and all our students as a united school district. These are my beliefs and reasons. Thank you and good luck.
- I feel that middle school is a great way for students to transition before going into high school.
- I don't believe that middle school and high school students should be on the same campus.
- I think the middle school transition from elementary to high school is an important one. The 7-12 model is not ideal.
- We should not lose middle school. It is important for kids.

Opposition to grades 7-8 being on a high school campus including beliefs expressed of the importance of middle school as a unique developmental time for students as a respondent explained:

- Middle school students shouldn't have to be with high school students. 7th and 8th graders are too young to be in high school.
- 7-12 is not the model any district should change to.
- Middle school students should not be on the same campus as high school students. Even though every attempt would be made to separate students, during school time, you still need to worry

about before and after school. I really worry about the female middle school population if they are placed in a school with high school students.

- I do not like the 7-12 model. The age gap is too great from 7th to 12th.

Differing maturity gaps between a 7th grade student and a 12th grade student were also expressed repeatedly. A representative comment was:

- Traditionally, a school with the large age and grade spread of model 4 is unsuitable for younger students. There is a lot of maturation which takes place in middle school and will be better fostered if students are in middle school rather than be combined with high school.
- I chose this model because I feel this is the best model to serve the students by age groups/grade levels.

Concerns were also expressed over the potential negative influence of high school students on middle school students. As a parent shared:

- 7-12 on the same campus will be trouble.
- I don't think a 7-12 grade school is in the best interest of middle school kids. One middle and one high school is a better alternative and, in the long run, is no different than many cities that only have one high school and one middle school.
- I do not feel that model 4 would be a safe model. I would not feel comfortable having a 7th grader on campus with a 12th grader. The age span has a lot going on developmentally and socially.
- Middle school students would thrive better emotionally when surrounded by students in their age group. As a parent, I would not be comfortable sending my child from an elementary environment to a campus with 18–19-year-old seniors. I would not be convinced that these student populations would be separated enough to ensure their safety.

Program Improvement

A representative response concerning the benefits of maintaining the traditional middle and high school grade level configuration to program improvement included:

- Model 3 offers the most traditional model (elementary, junior high, high school) which I believe will appeal to more parents.
- The high schools have had problems for many years with scheduling and staffing due to their small number of students. It is my understanding that an ideal size for a high school is around 2200 students. AHS and GHS together are close to that. Let's go Canyon City High!
- I would never send my two boys to a 7-12 high school. Also, I believe that one new high school will benefit our district. I believe that one middle school and one high school will unify the students and families in Azusa and not keep this division that has been around for so long.
- I think the option of having one really good high school with great sports teams and band programs would be very beneficial for the district. I feel like it would make us comparable to nearby districts and wouldn't separate our resources between two very large campuses.
- One high school allows for our students to be more competitive in the league and in non-league competition.

- Model 3 keeps students placed with appropriate age groups. The potential to have all electives and programs in one school is advantageous to both the students and the staff. With a larger staff, there is a larger potential pool of staff who could teach specialty classes. Students would no longer need to decide which high school because all the programs would be under the same roof.
- I don't think 7-12 schools are a good idea. It seems to me that model 4 is primarily an emotional solution for those who don't want to see "their" high school closed.
- I believe that having one high school may be beneficial if we are intentional with plans, funding, and programs offered. We can do a few things extremely well as opposed to many things mediocre. In addition, we can use one of the high school campuses to house the middle school campus and be able to use the gym and facilities already in place.
- With model 3, better academics and programs for students and more extracurricular activities can also be offered.
- Middle school students would be focused and prepared for transitioning to high school.

Some of the certified staff and faculty elaborated that if there was one high school, more coherent programs could be provided that all students would have the same access to. Other faculty/staff members stressed that having one high school would benefit extra-curricular programs with a larger band, a larger art program, additional STEM programs, and overall, a greater range of educational programs. As a respondent explained:

- Azusa needs to create one high school and one middle school to strengthen our schools and programs. We lose too many students to surrounding districts because they offer more robust elective programs and better sports programs.
- A single high school is the best solution. It would allow the opportunity to have more students in extracurricular activities, and more educational opportunities, such as, more AP courses, and increase the association with Citrus College and add more electives.
- I, myself, want model 3 as a resident and employee and a parent. It is quite evident there is no other choice but to unite the student body and our campuses as described in model 3 for a stronger education and future for our students from the many positive from all the aspects of education when you are united from the classrooms to the fields, and curriculum to all the positive things that can come about when consolidating campuses. For too long, we've been divided although we have accomplished much with the two high schools, I can't imagine how much more we could have done if we had been united from the beginning.

Fear of Transfers

Some staff and faculty members shared their fears that if students in 7th and 8th grades were to be included on the high school campus, more parents would enroll their middle school students in other districts further contributing to decreased enrollment in Azusa.

- I feel that 7-12 schools will be problematic for our parents as 12-year-old children will be on the same campus with 18-year-old students. I predict that we will lose students to other districts at 7th grade.

More Practical and Less Disruptive

Some staff and faculty members expressed that option 3 seemed more practical, particularly in seeking to not lose students to other districts and promote a positive morale.

- Model 3 is the most feasible model to maintain the number of students we have now and not lose to other districts, and this model will boost morale for parents, students and teachers.
- I think one high school makes the most sense for Azusa, especially when looking at the capacity rates (95% for one high school versus 76% for two high schools).
- Parents and the community might be more excited about sending their child to a middle school that has a gym, field, and additional facilities already in place.

High schools are too small in model 4. It will be more difficult to offer programs.

- I prefer for our high school to stay a traditional 9-12. The 7th and 8th graders are too young to be placed along side high school students. Additionally, in time, the populations of both high schools may diminish below 75%. I would hate to return to this in 3 years and have to consolidate.

Others added that option 3 seemed less disruptive in the number of schools that would be closed.

Benefits of Uniting the Community

A few certified staff and faculty expressed that having one comprehensive middle school and one high school would assist in uniting the community.

- A bigger high school can join the community and have all Azusa students come together.
- Model 4 would close Valleydale and Lee. These two schools have the highest English Learner populations and most at-risk students. It is a disservice to these communities to continue to make education more and more difficult.
- There are two reasons [I support option 3] including that a middle school stays open, and I like the community, staff, and students uniting to support and benefit from one high school.
- I don't think a 7-12 model will attract parents. As a parent, I would not want my child in this model.

Reasons for Selection of Option 4

Reasons that were provided by faculty and staff for the selection of option 4 which would keep two high schools but change the grade level configuration to grades 7-12 included a concern that changing to one high school would cause parents to send students to neighboring districts of Glendale or West Covina Unified resulting in even lower enrollment, the benefits of the school rivalries would be lost, it would lessen opportunities to participate in special programs, there were financial concerns, overcrowding concerning one high school was expressed, transportation issues were shared, a positive would be in alignment of courses, to keep the middle and high school students separate was stressed, and some saw option 4 as more practical.

Fear of Transfers

A primary concern that was frequently expressed was “fear of flight” as parents shared:

- I feel it is important to keep the two high schools open, so we do not lose our Gladstone students. I feel by creating one high school, many families will flee to Northview High School. Also, by closing Ellington, many of those families may enroll their students at Las Palmas which is a lot closer than Foothill Middle School.
- I also think the Azusa community won't be happy about closing one of the high schools. So, I don't think Model 3 is even viable.
- I believe we need to keep two high schools. The whole reason to make Ellington k-8 was to keep students from migrating to Covina Unified. Students at Gladstone High School have stated they do not want to go to Azusa High school. That is not their "home". They will feel like guests and have to travel across town where in many neighborhoods, they are not welcome. They do not feel safe. The residents and alumni of Azusa High have strong opinions about renaming the school and changing the colors. The culture and mantra is truly "once an Aztec always an Aztec". Gladstone High parents and students have already stated they can tell the district does not care about whether or not they go to Covina, so they might as well transfer.
- I believe families that are already connected to their high school would be more comfortable sending their 7th and 8th graders to that high school than possibly having to send both their middle schoolers and high school students to new locations. With population in Covina, I believe parents would be more likely to go to Covina Unified instead of staying in Azusa [if Ellington closed]
- If Ellington and Powell close, the district will lose students to the Covina and Glendora School Districts
- I am worried about losing Gladstone and Ellington students to Covina Valley USD.
- I think option 4 is the best plan because Ellington will keep the Covina students in Azusa.
- You would also risk losing the students at Gladstone High to surrounding districts. Closing Ellington in in model 3 would also not make sense. The students from Ellington would enroll in Las Palmas for middle school and then Northview High School. Thinking that the students are going to remain in Azusa Unified shows that the district is not following logical thinking. We need to keep Ellington open and have the middle schools placed at the high school campuses.
- Keeping two high schools would keep our high school students in the district.
- We already lose many students to Northview because of its proximity to Gladstone High School. I do not see parents/ students wanting to commute all the way to Azusa High School when they have a *better-looking* school, which offers more programs, and which is in a better neighborhood closer to their residence.
- I believe keeping two high schools open will benefit the children in our district. I think the students who live close to Covina will end up changing districts instead of going across town to the Azusa campus.
- We need to keep both high schools. We will lose more students to Covina schools.
- If Ellington closes, our district will lose a substantial number of students to the Covina Valley District.
- If you close Gladstone, many students will enroll in Covina. If you close Azusa, many will go to Glendora. It makes more sense to bring middle schools up to high schools.
- I believe we will lose many students if Gladstone High School is closed. Students will leave the district and find a way to go to Northview.

- I feel that closing Ellington would cause all of those students to go to Covina meaning more student loss.
- Keep the two high schools. Seems we lose less students this way.
- Gladstone students WILL leave to go to Northview if the campus is closed.
- I think we would lose too many students if we closed Gladstone High School.
- The main reason I'm choosing model 4 is that having one new high school on Azusa's campus will cause a mass exodus of students living in the southern area of our district who will transfer to Northview.
- I am very concerned about the loss of students at GHS to other districts.

Benefits of Rivalry

Concerns were expressed that the perceived benefits of the rivalry between the two schools to school spirit and morale would diminish if there was only one high school.

- We should keep both high schools because AISD alum have such pride in their high schools. Keeping both high schools allows that pride to continue not to mention the friendly rivalry both schools have. This friendly rivalry actually brings together the alum who do not have their kids in our schools.
- I believe moving to one high school is a mistake. The Gladstone High students will never be welcome on the Azusa High campus, regardless of what you name it. As a result of only having one high school, our district will lose over 1000 students to Covina.
- Selection of option 4 would "avoid the Azusa community civil war that would ensue should you decide to close one of the high schools."

Concern was also expressed that having one high school would lesson the opportunities for students to participate in special programs and extracurricular activities since there would be one athletic team, one band, etc. However, others expressed, "One comprehensive high school will bring great program implementation as well as a powerhouse in sports teams for AUSD high school students."

Cost Concerns

Financial concerns were also provided as the reason to keep two high schools with the addition of grades 7-8 stating that bond money to update the current two high schools would seem wasted if the two schools weren't maintained.

- Ellington very recently added a brand-new wing to its campus to increase its capacity. All of those recent improvements would have been wasted money.
- Our school looks better than it ever has before, and the community will be very upset to see their hard-earned money go to waste if they close Gladstone High School. The community is not going to approve more spending or revamping school campuses to account for all the programs to be at one high school
- Choosing to close Ellington and put students at Valleydale is a waste of money because Ellington has already been updated for K-8 whereas Valleydale would have to be updated.
- The district and city need to respect the needs of the families located near the high schools. Also, funding should not be used for renaming or rebranding a school when it can be used to bring back and update programs. For example, sports that our district used to invest in (water

sports, field hockey, soccer, etc.), art programs our district should fully fund (drama ceramics, art history, music history,) etc.

- [I selected option 4] so both high schools can remain open because of the bond money already spent for the upgrade.
- I don't understand why the district spent so much money to add, for example, a science lab just to tear it down. It is the mismanagement of money.
- I think that if you are saving money, you don't need to build a new school but rather to renovate some of the schools that you already have.
- As an Azusa tax-payer, I don't like seeing money put into Gladstone. If it's only going to be closed.
- The district has invested several millions of dollars in bond money to upgrade the high schools. By closing a high school, it would be like throwing away the taxpayers' money.

Over-Crowding

There was also concern that one high school would lead to over-crowding since it would be at 95%.

Transportation Issues

Some staff and faculty members also expressed concern over transportation issues that would result if there was only one high school.

- Some parents may not live close to one high school. Therefore, the ability to have two high schools would be helpful for parents to transport their students to and from school on time.

Benefit to Programs

Some staff and faculty members expressed support of option 4 stating that having grades 7-12 in proximity through sharing a campus could assist in alignment of courses between grade levels and vertical faculty planning.

- I think we could have a lot of opportunity for programming and flexibility with staffing as well as sharing resources. If we combined middle and high school, it also gives us capacity for the future if demographics change and we need more space for more students.
- I have never taught at a 7th to 12th grade school, but I think it would be worth trying a new mindset to help 7th and 8th grade students to be more focused academically instead of just being promoted to high school. We have to work so hard in 9th grade to get students to unlearn the notion that failing classes is a viable option.

Age-Appropriate Beliefs

Although these benefits of having the 7th and 8th grade students on the two high school campuses were cited, many respondents also added that it would be important to keep the two age groups separate due to their differences in maturity level and fears of bullying of the younger students. A respondent explained, "I prefer having the two high schools as long as the 7-8 is on their own sectioned campus on the larger site, not crossing the traditional middle school students and the traditional high school students.

More Practical

Several who responded with option 4 as their choice viewed this option as more practical, sensible and less disruptive although there were many differing views on what middle school should close. As a respondent stated:

- 7-12 makes the most sense for students, staff, and resources.
- I do not think we should close either high school. Overall, it will impact less students as we transition.
- [Option 3 is more practical] to keep all the good programs at the two high schools, to keep maximum high school numbers of students, to maximize the resources of elective teachers/staff available for secondary student by keeping 7-12 together.
- Of the two options, I think option 4 would displace fewer students. I think closing one of the high schools would cause more students to leave the district.

Modifications that were Shared by Respondents to Options 3 and 4

While some staff and faculty who selected option 3 suggested modifications such as different grade configurations for elementary schools of a K-8 or K-5 or TK-6 or middle school as grades 6-8, there was strong disparity in the recommendations of what middle schools were to remain open. Concern that Valleydale and Lee schools are not closed for the special needs that they are meeting through their programs was expressed by some staff and faculty members, but other staff members and faculty members advocated for other schools not to be the ones that were closed when consolidation of schools was decided. For example, one respondent argued that if there was only one high school as recommended in option 3, then that school's name should be Azusa High School after the name of the city while another individual respondent advocated for branding with a new name for the schools of Citrus High School and Citrus Middle School. There were several differences of opinion in the modifications by respondents who selected option 4. For example, while one respondent advocated to keep Valleydale open as their modification to option 3, others argued to keep Ellington open. Some staff and faculty argued for more TK-8 schools such as Ellington's grade level configuration while others argued against this recommendation. Transportation issues were also discussed as a modification to ensure that transportation concerns will be addressed.

Student Responses to Options 3 and 4

Reasons for Selection of Option 3

When asked for the reason they selected option 3, some students expressed their beliefs that middle school should be separate to meet students' developmental needs as adolescents while some shared personal feelings in support of option 3. For example, students stated:

- I don't like the idea of joining middle school to high school.
- I chose Model 3 because as a 7th grader now as frightened as we feel about coming to middle school, I can't even imagine how high school will be.

Some students were concerned that problems could result if middle and high school students were on the same campus.

Support for keeping Valleydale open was supported by several students while keeping Ellington open was supported by others. The reasons listed reflected preferences for the school the students either attended or knew more fully. Some responders provided the reason for selection of option 3 was that it's important to keep one middle school open. As a student who selected option 3 emphasized, "I chose this option because I would rather they close two middle schools than all of them. Also, I don't think it's a good idea to combine middle school and high school."

Reasons for Selection of Option 4

Primary reasons for selection of option 4 by students included pride in the rivalries between the two current high schools, age-appropriate beliefs, transportation concerns, and over-crowding issues.

Pride in Campus Rivalries

Of high school students who responded to the survey and indicated a preference of option 4 that would implement two high schools with grades 7-12 on each campus, many student respondents discussed pride in the rivalry of two schools as their reason to support option 4. As a student stressed, "Having Gladstone High School and Azusa High School combined ruins the whole concept of being rivals."

Age-Appropriate Beliefs

One student expressed skepticism that middle school is needed as a transition saying, "Middle School is the traditional way of transitioning from middle school to high school, but perhaps middle school is not a necessary transitional period." Others expressed the importance of the transition. A student shared a representative comment if grades 7-12 were combined on one campus, "It would be important for the district to plan ways for a smooth transition from middle school grades to high school even if the middle school and high school shared a campus."

Transportation Issues

Having two high schools was important to several students although different reasons were provided of proximity to students' home, options of a choice of schools, and rivalries in sports. As a student stressed,

“I don’t want Gladstone High School to close since it’s right next to my house and I could walk there. Also, I want Ellington to stay open.”

Concerns of Over-Crowding

Concern was expressed regarding crowding that would result if there was only one high school and concern that crowding would put students at risk. Another student expressed a recommendation for option 4 by emphasizing a concern for possible crowding on a grade level 7-12 campus by saying, “Way too many kids to be put into one school.” Another added a concern, “It seems like making a new school with a combination of grades will be overcrowded and faculty won’t be able to monitor and facilitate student needs as closely and effectively.” Concern was also expressed that at least one middle school should remain open. As four students stressed, “Keep at least one middle school open.”

Cost-Effective

Concern was also expressed that “equipping a school or playground and closing the school was wasteful.” The concern for use of funds was a more predominant concern expressed by the parent group results discussed earlier, but it is important to note that a student was concerned about this also.

Student Modifications for Option 3 and Option 4

It was notable that when asked what they would change about the option 3, ten students listed no ideas and four left this question blank. For those students who selected option 4, it is also noteworthy that 12 students specified no changes, and two students who responded left the answer blank. For those students who responded that model 3 was the best option, several students spoke to schools that they wanted to remain open.

Several students expressed a recommendation to keep one middle school open. For those students who responded that model 3 was the best option, several students spoke to schools that they wanted to remain open. Others recommended closing more elementary schools as the solution. For example, a student stated, “I feel like we can close one elementary and leave another middle school open or since middle schools have more capacity, we can move two elementary’s into a middle school.” Another student added as the reason for selecting option 3, “I chose this option because I would rather that they close two middle schools other than all of them. Also, I don’t think it’s a good idea to combine middle school and high school.” A student pointed out, “There is psychological development in middle school. It dilutes the academic and social aspects of going to high school. Schools are meant to prepare students to be their adult lives, and that would be different if we ignore students’ psychology.”

Recommendations varied, but three students voiced recommendations for different grade configurations such as grades 6-8 instead of grades 7 and 8. One student recommended elementary keeping K-7 with the reason expressed that 8th grade student are more mature: “I would add 7th grade to elementary and keep the high school grades 8-12 since 8th graders are maturing.” Another student recommended that grades 7, 8, and 9 stay together and 10, 11, and 12 be on one campus.

In support of option 4, a student stressed, “I would just say that it would be an idea to separate the 7th and 8th graders [if they were on the high school campus] so that they may have their own designated area on campus as well as the traditional high school grade students.” Another student provided a representative comment:

- Middle school is essential for the development of our students. I'd suggest keeping a middle school on the same campus as each high school but having a clear distinction between the students and the classes they attend."

Concluding Comments

The qualitative data results were not definitive in consensus concerning issues. Most consistent across the four groups of respondents was the importance of age-appropriate practices for early adolescents and the need to work toward keeping middle school students in grades 7 and 8 and high school students of grades 9-12 separate due to differences in maturity levels and developmental needs as well as concerns of problems that might arise if they were attending classes in the same area of the school. Regardless of the option that is adopted, understanding the depth of these concerns through the responses that were provided in the narrative that follows may be helpful in planning for separation of the two groups and in designing programs to meet early adolescents' unique needs.

Understanding cost issues and the depth of some respondents' concerns about costs and use of bond money can also be useful in communicating with respondents concerning the plan that is selected. Explaining the cost analysis could prove beneficial in lessening concerns raised in acceptance of either of the plans.

Recognizing the legitimate transportation issues that each plan could entail is important in making plans to mitigate the impact. If the distance between students' homes and school increases, explaining ways that transportation issues will be addressed could alleviate concerns.

Understanding the depth of feelings concerning the rivalries of the two high schools, the needs within the neighborhoods they serve, and the strong sense of tradition of the schools can also be important in working to overcome the concerns.

Responses to option 3 and to option 4 both included concerns about possible transfers from the district due to the option that is implemented. More intense comments were expressed for the fear of increased transfers if the two high schools were eliminated as separate campuses, and often this passion seemed related to the proximity of the high school to the students' neighborhoods. Until the location of the one high school is determined, if this is the option that is selected, the concerns may or may not remain. It is beneficial to understand the concerns in seeking to mitigate against these issues regardless of the option that is selected.

Possible over-crowding was a concern regarding option 3 with the possibility that the one school might be at 95% capacity and with option 4 of the 75% capacity of the high school, but possible crowding in that the grades 7 and 8 would need to be in a separate area, if possible. Explaining plans to keep class size manageable and sharing projections of enrollments for the forthcoming years may be helpful in responding to these concerns.

That many respondents expressed that they selected the plan they thought was most practical or feasible in their viewpoints suggests that communication of ways the selected plan is practical and cost effective could be important in whatever plan is selected. Particularly, discussing the budgetary impact and ways that the renovations would remain beneficial from the updates through the bond money could be useful in alleviating concerns regarding costs.

From respondents to both options, communication with the parents and community to alleviate fears, build support and create understanding will be important. It is also unlikely that all will be pleased with either solution. Keeping at the forefront ways that the selected option will be beneficial for student learning could be instrumental in furthering support for the option that is selected.

A key theme in respondents' comments to option 3 and to option 4 included discussions of ways the option could lead to improved instructional programs and enhanced student learning. For the selected plan, emphasizing the beneficial aspects to student learning that will be promoted through the plan can be helpful in lessening the resistance of those who supported the option that was not selected.

It is noteworthy that many modifications of the grade levels to include on a campus were provided as well as the recommendation to close more elementary schools instead, but the analysis of the qualitative responses did not show a clear consensus on any modification of grade levels per campus. Regarding each option, several respondents also said that the option was acceptable as proposed or made no comment. The suggested modifications for options 3 and 4 provide further perspectives to explore such as closing more elementary schools or different grade configurations on a campus. The suggested modifications also provide recommendations for further consideration as decisions are made of the best way to proceed.