

Bond Case Briefs

Municipal Finance Law Since 1971

Subtracting Schools from Communities.

What happens to communities when local schools close?

When schools close for good in Chicago or Baltimore or Detroit, it makes headlines. People stage protests, go on hunger strikes, file lawsuits.

When a school closes for good in Joiner, Arkansas, the national media barely notices—but the community certainly does.

“The impact is felt more quickly in rural areas,” said Tequilla Banks, an executive vice president with TNTF who grew up in Joiner and has worked in nearby districts. “There aren’t other wraparound services, right? There aren’t other venues. Even extracurricular activities—it’s harder to get kids to those if the school isn’t right there.”

Research has shown that although changing schools can negatively affect students, the impact of moving to a better school after a school closure can be positive. Similarly, research in New York City found that closing low-performing high schools benefitted future students, who instead attended other, higher-performing schools. But none of this research accounts for what happens to the community.

“The decisions that we make, when they affect the communities our kids live in, they also affect the kids,” Banks said. “We make these decisions to close schools in isolation, but they have unintended consequences that very well may undermine our efforts.”

To begin to understand those unintended consequences, we must first understand which communities and students school closures affect.

[Continue reading.](#)

The Urban Institute

by Alexandra Tilsley

March 23, 2017