

1. Executive Summary

Research and best-practice facility guidance indicate that elementary schools operate most effectively when enrollment falls within a moderate range that balances school climate, staffing, and program offerings. Schools with enrollments below approximately 200 students are typically considered “very small” and may experience limitations in program breadth, staffing flexibility, and operational efficiency.

While low enrollment can pose operational challenges, small schools may also provide benefits, such as closer teacher-student relationships and a stronger sense of community. District decisions about school consolidation or closure should consider multiple factors beyond enrollment, including building condition, projected enrollment trends, academic program impact, transportation, and community equity.

2. Research-Based Thresholds

Threshold Category	Enrollment	Notes / Implications	Reference
Very Small / Low Enrollment	<200 students	Potential constraints on program offerings, staffing, and efficiency. May need multi-factor review.	Howley, 1996; Cotton, 1996; Lee & Smith, 1997
Small / Near-Low	200–300 students	Can support program offerings and student engagement; monitor trends.	Lee & Smith, 1997
Overcrowded	>110% utilization of capacity	May require boundary changes, additions, or mitigation strategies.	Chicago Public Schools, 2013; DOE Facility Planning Guides

3. Recommendations for Committee Consideration

- Use enrollment thresholds as **one component** in evaluating school utilization.
 - Combine enrollment data with building conditions, projected enrollment trends, transportation, program offerings, and equity considerations.
 - Schools below ~200 students should undergo a thorough review before any consolidation decisions are made.
 - Monitor trends over multiple years to account for temporary enrollment fluctuations.
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4. References

- Howley, C. (1996). *Compounding Disadvantage: The Effects of School and District Size on Student Achievement*. Journal of Research in Rural Education.
- Cotton, K. (1996). *School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Lee, V., & Smith, J. (1997). *High School Size: Which Works Best and for Whom?* Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.
- Chicago Public Schools. (2013). *School Utilization Report & Guidelines*.
- U.S. Department of Education. *Facility Planning Guidelines* (various editions).