From "Sasha Schwartz <sasha@scribbleartworkshop.com>" <sasha@scribbleartworkshop.com>
Subject **Mesa Parent Survey**
To "rob.anderson@bvsd.org" <rob.anderson@bvsd.org>, "randy.barber@bvsd.org" <randy.barber@bvsd.org>
Date April 20, 2026 9:42:17 AM MDT

Hi Dr. Anderson and Randy,

Thanks again for taking the time to briefly meet with me on Saturday during the parent engagement session. Attached is the summary of the survey we disseminated to our parent body. We received 121 results.

In addition to teaching in the NYC DOE for almost 20 years and currently working with over 50 schools as a direct student services contracted vendor, I had the absolute privilege of working alongside an amazing principal for over 10 years. This principal later became second in command to NYC's District 6 superintendent. Our District 6 (a small sliver of Upper Manhattan) serves the same number of students as BVSD in its entirety. I share this because my opportunity to work with such an astounding leader has framed my perspective of leadership in public education. It requires the gumption to make hard decisions, engage in authentic and often difficult conversations, and most importantly the ability to understand what you don't know.

While I appreciate BVSD's attempt at parent engagement—one clearly orchestrated by an educational consultant (they are pervasive in NYC)—it is evident that leadership grossly underestimates the critical thinking skills and intelligence of its parent body, especially parents who have the will and the time to dedicate 2.5 hours to the district. As I mentioned on Saturday and will reiterate here, while many of your families are getting up to speed on what's happening, most of us didn't need an orchestrated and contrived ride through these "scenarios" to understand that small schools are unsustainable for the district. For someone in a small school, you could have used this time to learn about our actual experiences instead of telling us what they are or will be in the future. **If small schools are not possible, it would greatly benefit the district to more deeply investigate how to replicate the conditions that small schools create (and in which many students thrive) in larger school settings. THIS is just part of the conversation you should and could be having with schools most likely affected by declining enrollment.**

We hope you'll take the time to review this with executive leadership and ideally meet with the parents who took their time to do the leg work of analyzing BVSD's declining enrollment more broadly, meet with families to engage in authentic conversations about the possibilities for our school and finally developed and analyzed this survey. Here's your chance for actual, authentic engagement with parents. We're waiting and available to meet with any or all of the leadership team when you're available.

Thanks again for your time and your dedication to public school education. As we both know, it is the most worthy pursuit.

--

Sasha Schwartz
Founder & Director
Watch our latest video about The Scribble Art Show!
www.scribbleartworkshop.com

Attachments:

- South Boulder Enrollment and Culture Analysis5.pdf

SOUTH BOULDER EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

Uplifting student experience in South Boulder with specific inputs from Mesa parent-led survey



PREPARED FOR BVSD SUPERINTENDENT OFFICE AND BOARD

INTRODUCTION

As BVSD navigates the complexities of district-wide change, Mesa Elementary has coalesced a parent advocacy group to understand South Boulder's educational ecosystem and Mesa's place within it. This report represents a professional, data-driven effort to map the intersection of school culture, family mobility, priorities and needs. We have synthesized direct community feedback with publicly available data to provide a clear-eyed look at what our families' values, what drives their enrollment decisions, and what they need to thrive through the transitions ahead.



We recognize that BVSD faces a significant inflection point.

The data regarding declining enrollment and budgetary strain is clear, and we do not contest the necessity of change. However, as the district moves from identifying problem to implementing solutions, the focus must shift from convincing the community that a problem exists to collaborating on the most sustainable path forward.

A complex human-centered problem requires layered and transparent decision-making.

Deciding which schools to close or reconfigure is an unenviable task, precisely because the variables extend far beyond square footage and birth rates. To avoid unintended consequences—such as family flight or the erosion of community trust—the decision-making process requires a deeper level of transparency. We seek a clearer understanding of the inputs being used, so that the outcomes reflect the long-term stability of the South Boulder community.

As BVSD makes decisions across the district, we are confident that they need to look at individual schools.

Regional success is built on the health of individual schools, each uniquely contributing to the South Boulder educational ecosystem. To optimize the student experience, decision-makers must move beyond broad-stroke criteria and look at the high-resolution picture: in practice, individual schools are uniquely poised to serve diverse student needs. We believe that protecting these distinct values is the key to a successful district-wide transition.

LEARNING FROM JEFFCO

The Importance of Student Outcomes and Mobility

We spoke with a former Jeffco board member, who warned against using an overly narrow and simplistic set of criteria for deciding which schools to close. They highlighted two key inputs they regretfully ignored during their consolidation process:

- **STUDENT OUTCOMES:** Changes initiated by the BOE and the Superintendents' office should lead with improved outcomes for students over geography, % utilization, real estate value etc. The reality is that not all schools are the same and that some combination of schools will better serve a larger population of learners.
- **STUDENT MOBILITY:** Families vote with their feet. Jeffco underestimated "choice-out" rates, seeing between 5% and 51% of students leave their designated paths after district reconfiguration. This volatility exacerbated enrollment declines, even in schools that had recently received significant investment
- **LEANING INTO EXISTING TRENDS:** Schools with historic mobility rates and declining enrollment were expected to rebound when surrounding schools closed. This did not happen and Jeffco instead saw increased open enrollment and/or people leaving the district all together. Schools with historic downward trends and low enrollment from zoned attendees are an important predictor that wasn't accounted for in their decisions.

LOOKING AT EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- Understanding the nuance of parent and student experiences is paramount to defining a school's role in an educational ecosystem. The following are results from Parent advocacy group led survey understanding Mesa culture and values n=121

PARENT LED SURVEY

OUR PARENT SURVEY IS DESIGNED TO CAPTURE "MISSING VARIABLES", PROVIDING BVSD WITH THREE QUANTITATIVE INPUTS (N=121):

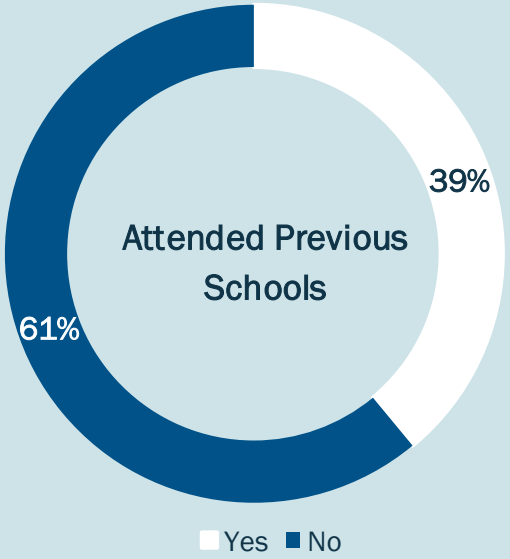
1. **Mesa's Unique Value:** A deep-dive into what Mesa contributes to the South Boulder ecosystem and where Mesa provides exceptional, hard-to-replicate value to students and families.
2. **Mesa's Student Retention:** Direct insight into family enrollment intentions. By capturing caretakers' perceptions of whether a change will "make it better," we can predict and mitigate the risk of district flight.
3. **Conditions for Success:** Defining the specific needs and priorities families require to not just "accept" a transition, but to remain committed to BVSD throughout the process.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Mesa uniquely balances student achievement and social-emotional wellbeing.** This is driven by a truly welcoming culture & community, long-standing institutional knowledge, teacher experience, expertise and care to support and elevate a diverse population of learners. Almost 40% of survey takers attended other schools prior to landing at Mesa.
- **Is there room for improvement with better resources and full-time support staff?** Absolutely. But its culture puts it in a unique position to support a wide diversity of learners through a transition.
- **Questions for Decision Makers arose… If Mesa closes, then:**

  1. What is the detriment to the broader South Boulder Educational ecosystem relative to other options (especially since Mesa has served as a strong retention school for BVSD)?
  2. How are Mesa's strengths and culture preserved?
  3. How will its students be guaranteed a better "student experience" following the change?

MESA IS A SAFE PLACE TO LAND FOR ALL STUDENTS, WITH A PROVEN ABILITY TO ELEVATE LEARNERS WITH A WIDE RANGE OF EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, THAT WERE NOT MET ELSEWHERE.



Families transferring to Mesa (from both in and outside of BVSD) noted the following as primary drivers of their enrollment:

Mesa as Sanctuary: Families report moving to Mesa from environments they felt were unsupportive for their children. They credit Mesa's leadership with creating a welcoming culture where accountability exists.

The Neurodiversity Magnet (RISE & Special Education): Mesa has developed "institutional knowledge" regarding neurodiversity that neighboring schools struggle to replicate. Families move specifically for this specialized expertise.

Physical Environment : For some students—especially neurodivergent- having small class sizes and walls (rather than open spaces) is a necessity, not a preference.

"

I'm not exaggerating when I say that our child did a complete 180 starting day one at Mesa. The teachers and staff are so kind and welcoming that they have won back our child's trust. Before Mesa, we could not say the word teacher without our child getting agitated. Now he tells us how much he loves his teachers unprompted. We have also see our child's confidence, self love, and emotional resilience grow. When he started at Mesa, he was behind academically and now he is ahead of the curve in many areas.

[PREVIOUS SB SCHOOL] was unable to give my son with autism the support that he needs. [At Mesa] he has had significant behavioral improvements thanks to the greater availability of adults.

[BVSD SCHOOL]. More resources at Mesa for my son with Dyslexia. Smaller class sizes. Happier atmosphere and teachers. Better after school activities for kids. Higher standard of learning for my kids.

We had 2 children that went to [OTHER BVSD SCHOOL] before coming to Mesa. They were miserable there. They both were very welcome at Mesa and both had successful experiences. This was especially important for our first child who was on the Autism spectrum and has an IEP.

A number of factors prompted our move to Mesa, smaller class sizes being one. But overall Mesa is just a better fit for our child. The nurturing and welcoming environment suits our child.

We previously attended [OUT OF STATE SCHOOL], made the decision to move to Boulder for greater opportunity and access to high quality public education. Mesa stood out for its strong reputation, close community, and focus on individual student growth. Since enrolling, our child has thrived academically and socially in a way that reflects what makes this school special. Mesa is not just a convenient option, it is a meaningful reason families like ours choose BVSD, and keeping it matters for attracting and retaining families who are committed to the district.

From Mesa Parent Advocacy Survey n=121
Responses of people who switched schools

EVEN FAMILIES DESIGNATED TO THE SCHOOL EXPRESSED THAT THEY “CHOSE” MESA

“Mesa is more than a school; it is a vital space for community, lifelong friendships, and support. We feel deeply privileged to be part of this extraordinary community.

Our child is not just another student in a large system but is known, supported, and challenged in the right ways... a community that would be difficult to replicate in a larger, consolidated school.

Mesa was immediately welcoming to our autistic son. All the teachers had experience with our diverse learner and everyone wanted to ensure he did not start getting a negative impression of himself.

Mesa's inclusivity and embracing of all kinds of learning styles spoke to us. It was important to us that our kids learned in an environment that includes all students.

I realized the teachers were actually happy to be there and that feeling travels to the children... Mesa has a feeling of joy and belonging as soon as you walk in.

Community Anchor (mentioned in 79% of responses)

Mesa acts as the "village" for South Boulder. The walkability and the "Mesa family" feel are seen as non-negotiable elements of their children’s upbringing.

Scale & Intimacy (mentioned in 63% of responses)

The small-school environment was a draw for many, seen as facilitating personalized attention and safety they felt was missing in larger schools.

Walking the walk of inclusion

The school is seen as a sanctuary for neurodivergent students, which in turn fosters empathy in the general education population, whom also see the high value and benefit of these practices.

The "Whole Child" Over "Test Scores"

While Mesa’s high rankings are acknowledged, parents chose Mesa specifically to avoid "extreme academic focus." They value Mesa’s emphasis on social emotional learning, seeing it as the primary driver of student success.

Highly dedicated and experienced Leadership and staff

Principal Josh Baldner and the long tenure of the teaching staff are cited as critical "anchors." Parents view the happiness and stability of the faculty as a direct indicator of the school’s health.



I've heard countless stories from other Mesa parents about how their children were struggling at other schools, and did a complete 180 after enrolling at Mesa. Not only are Mesa teach and staff able to make a personal connection with these students, but they are able to turn them from struggling students to highly successful students. It seems ridiculous to me to consider closing the one school that is helping these students thrive. Instead, Mesa should be held up as an example of how to serve and educate students with diverse needs.

There's a lot of intangibles that are hard to capture that lead to a feeling of welcoming and acceptance; it's hard to pin down. The staff are all very invested in the children

Breaking up the team that makes Mesa what it is would be a devastating loss to the school district.

The sense of community, small dedicated class size, the passionate teachers, the "vibe'

Mesa has a culture of welcoming students and their families that we have not experienced at other schools. This is a culture set from the top by Mr Baldner.

Josh and the tenured staff. While tenure means money, I hope BVSD doesn't sacrifice quality of staff to save a buck.

The community that has been built over decades would take a long time to replicate elsewhere. School culture is not simply wished into existence.

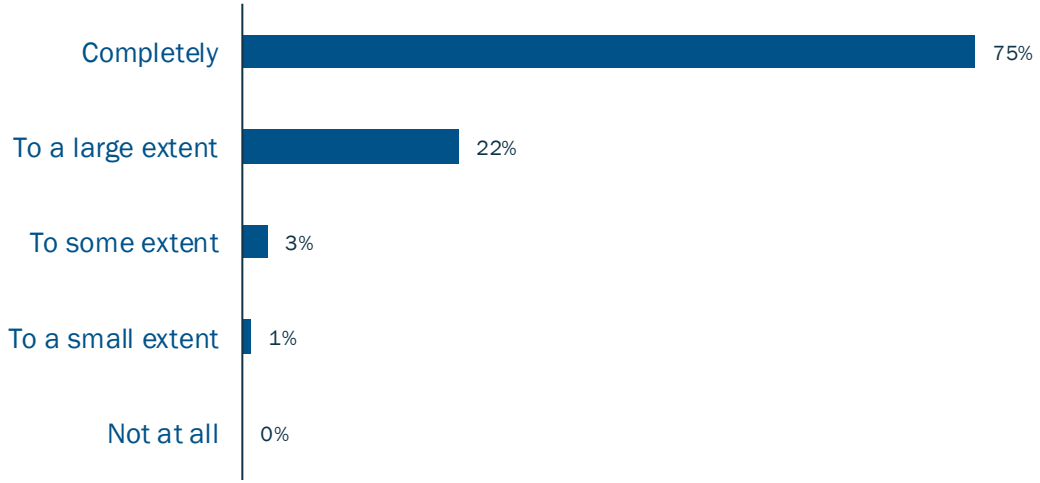
The culture that has been created by Principal Baldner and that has been embraced by his staff of teachers.

We felt well received from the beginning, which was very important as we were moving from overseas. Not only by the Mesa teachers and staff, but by the whole community.

The teaching philosophy that prioritizes social emotional health and community building. It is vital for our child to feel safe and welcome in order for him to engage academically.

MESA HAS A PALPABLE WELCOMING COMMUNITY AND CULTURE, FOSTERED BY LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

To what extent do you feel Mesa is a Welcoming School — fostering a sense of belonging for your family, ensuring that you and your child feel safe and accepted for who you are (e.g., race, gender, culture identities)



Mesa is the only school to have the accreditation:
Human Rights Campaign Seal of Excellence Welcoming School

From Mesa Parent Advocacy Survey n=121 Responses from all

MESA HAS PROVEN ABILITY AND EXPERTISE TO SERVE FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS THROUGH:

Genuine Partnership, collaboration and communication: High level of synergy between special education staff, general education teachers, and parents.

Holistic Growth: Mesa doesn't just focus on "fixing" deficits but on elevating abilities and managing social-emotional health alongside academics.

The "Small School" Advantage: Mesa's small size allows for a "culture of acceptance" where neurodiverse students feel included in the general community rather than "othered."

From Mesa Parent Advocacy Survey n=121
Responses from those needing extra support

50%

OVER HALF OF MESA'S SURVEYED POPULATION INDICATED HAVING SOME FORM OF SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS DESIGNATION (E.G., IEP, 504, GT, ELS)

Mesa truly integrates children with diverse educational needs into the fabric of social and academic life at school. This benefits not just the neurodiverse children but also their neurotypical counterparts, teaching empathy, inclusivity, and compassion.

- "My child… was in a lockdown this past Fall with a former classmate at Mesa who is special needs… They were able to help this classmate through their emotions… their experience of how kindness was modeled at Mesa prepared them".

- "I am so impressed with my child's progression on both the academic and social-emotional axes! My child has some behavioral challenges but has gotten the necessary support and has progressed immensely. My child's academic progression (and that of other Mesa students) also seems to be way ahead of that of students in other areas and, in some cases, from nearby schools."

- "At one school we were a discipline problem. At another we had to accept a label to get support. It has been a breath of fresh air having staff who recognize that all humans are on a spectrum and have different needs and all live complicated lives. That awareness and acceptance translates into students who learn (off a computer screen) how other people might behave or react. In turn their reaction, that is, our child's peers, do not to ostracize, but accept. Not necessarily befriend, but accept. That ethos from Mesa has made all the difference.

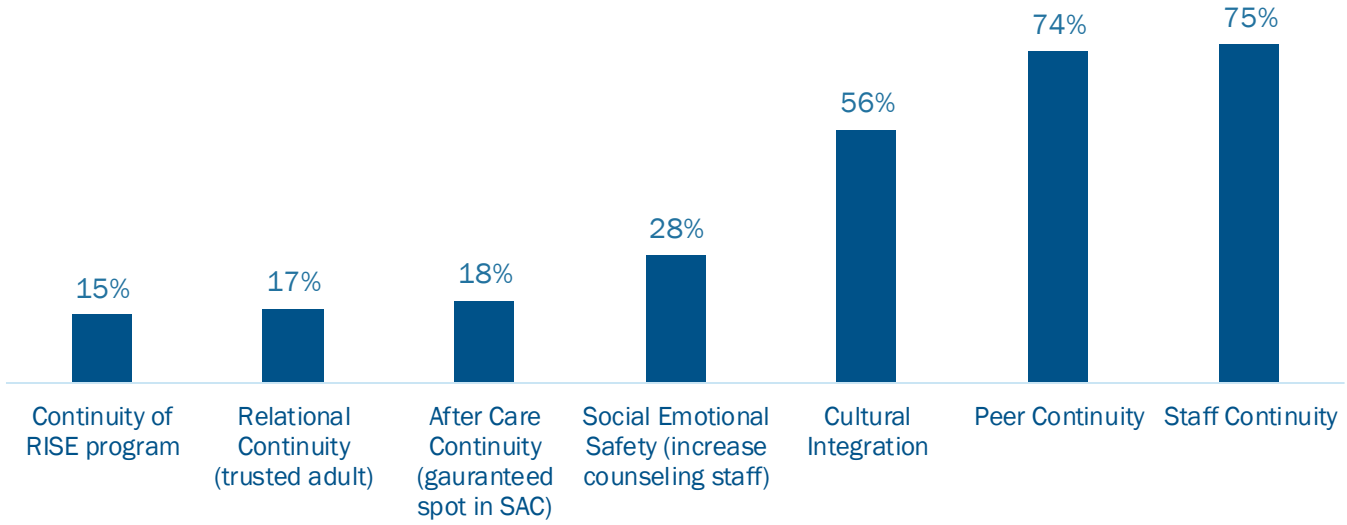
- "Incredibly strong. My daughter has an IEP & is in Gifted and talented. My son has a formal diagnosis for ADHD, dyslexia and dysgraphia. In the 5 years we have been at Mesa my children have received support each year to either address a need or elevate their abilities. From speech & reading support to G&T and a 504; the support has been ongoing & a true collaboration between school and family."

Note: *Some families (8 out of 120) did point to Resource Fragility & Consistency Gaps, highlighting that current success is threatened by "thinly spread" resource and inconsistent implementation among some staff.*

CONTINUITY IS CRITICAL IN ANY TRANSITION

The Mesa community sees **STAFF CONTINUITY, PEER CONTINUITY** and **PROFFESSIONAL CULTURAL INTEGRATION** as critical to a successful transition and as well as a means to preserve Mesa's unique culture. For many families small class sizes and serious plans to transition specialized programs are critical.

Choose Top 3 Transition Supports:



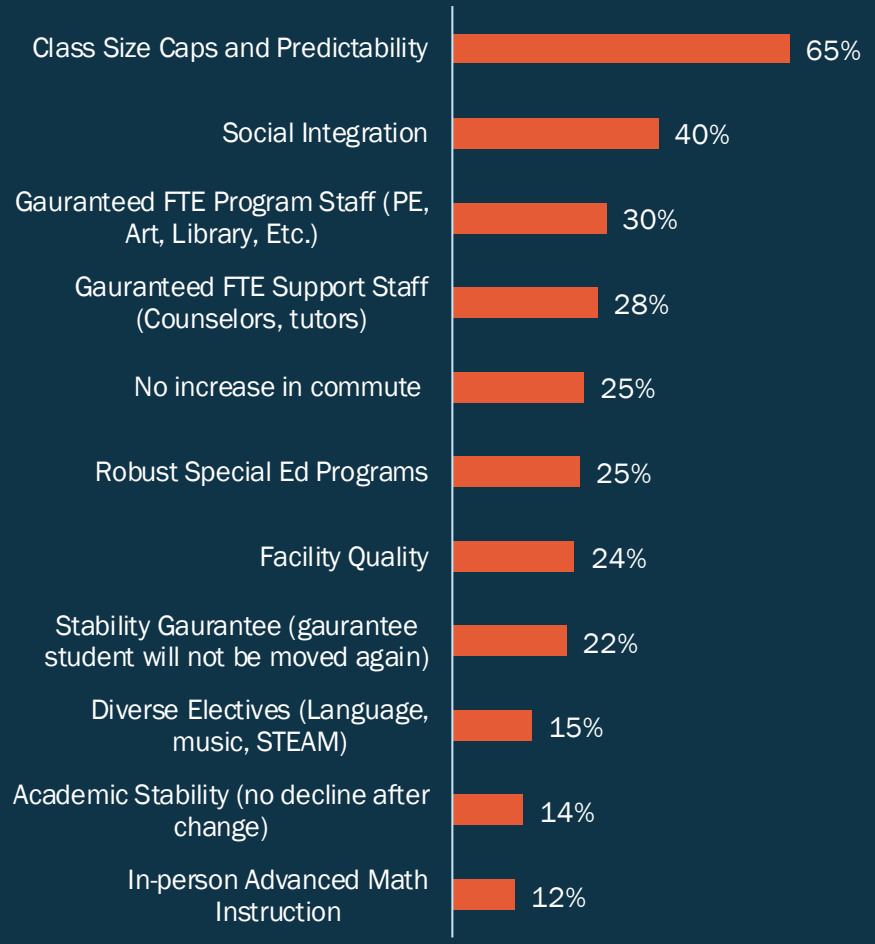
"Staff continuity. Bringing some Mesa teachers and administration (Mr. Baldner) to the new school would be a wonderful way to help Mesa families feel welcome and included in this process."

"The staff, teachers, parents, and students of the 'receiving' school (i.e. if we are absorbed into BC or CR) being coached extensively on how to be welcoming and integrating with our children/families."

"A non negotiable for our family is maintaining a school environment where our child is truly known and supported through small class sizes and consistent, meaningful communication with teachers. If that level of individual attention and partnership is not in place, it would significantly impact our child's experience and would lead us to seek another option."

From Mesa Parent Advocacy Survey n=121 Responses from all

Choose Top 3 Desired Outcomes of Change:



THE MESA COMMUNITY SEES THE FOLLOWING AS TOP PRIORITIES IN OUTCOMES OF CHANGE:

- Class size caps and predictability
- Authentic social integration
- Enhanced programmatic access to full-time onsite specials (PE, Art, Music, Library)
- Guaranteed full-time support specialists (literacy, counselor, math)

"While many of these options would be nice (like full time PE, Music, Art), I don't feel like my kids are missing out or not getting the experience they should be without these. The academic support and differentiation that Mesa offers, which has resulted in great academic success, would be very important, and the ability to work with kids in small groups, as Mesa does now. And, having a welcoming community/focus on social emotional is also so important - having that be the main focus is really what's so great about Mesa. Without these two things, having other nice to have options wouldn't be worth sacrificing these critical things."

"My child needs the limited class size to reduce overstimulated and support access to their education as well as stable access to SpEd, trained paras, interventions and tutors to ensure continued educational growth and executive function development before transfer to middle school."

From Mesa Parent Advocacy Survey n=121 Responses from all

ENROLLMENT DECISIONS IN RESPONSE TO CHANGE:
WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF....

What parents reported as most likely action...

60% of Mesa families think they will choice out of their designated school in the event of Mesa closing and students are dispersed among several schools.

38% will do so in the event of school consolidation.

In contrast, only 15% would pursue other options in the event that Mesa expands or hosts a focus program.

Double-downing on Importance of Continuity

Continuity of Leadership & Staff: A high number of parents stated that their decision to stay within the BVSD system is contingent upon where Mesa's current leadership and teaching staff are placed. Parents view the current principal and tenured staff as conduits of Mesa's unique culture.

Peer Cohort Preservation: If the students are "dispersed" across multiple schools, they will likely open-enroll or move to whatever school the majority of their friends choose, rather than the school to which the district assigns them.

Keep In Mind Non-Typical Learners and Multi-Kid Families

Logistical Viability & Multi-Child Challenge: for families with multiple children The "Grade Reconfiguration" option (PreK-2/ 3-5 split) is seen as a logistical breaking point. Parents noted that split drop-offs, different schedules, and increased commutes would create insurmountable challenges.

Environmental Fit: Class Size & "Walls" families with neurodiverse kids expressed specific "if-then" triggers regarding the physical and social environment of receiving schools. Specifically, parents expressed fear of "open classrooms" and the potential for larger class sizes, which they believe would cause their children to regress.

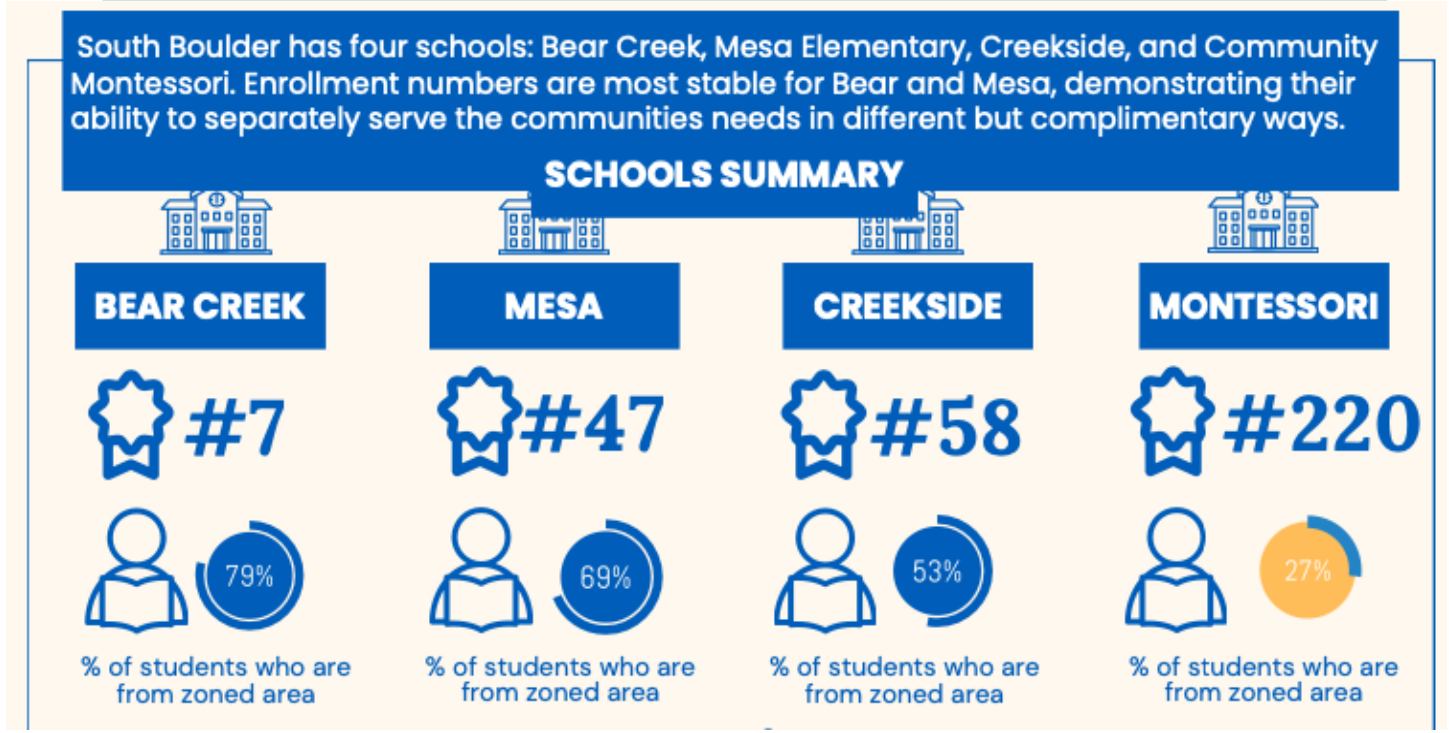
From Mesa Parent Advocacy Survey n=121 Responses from all

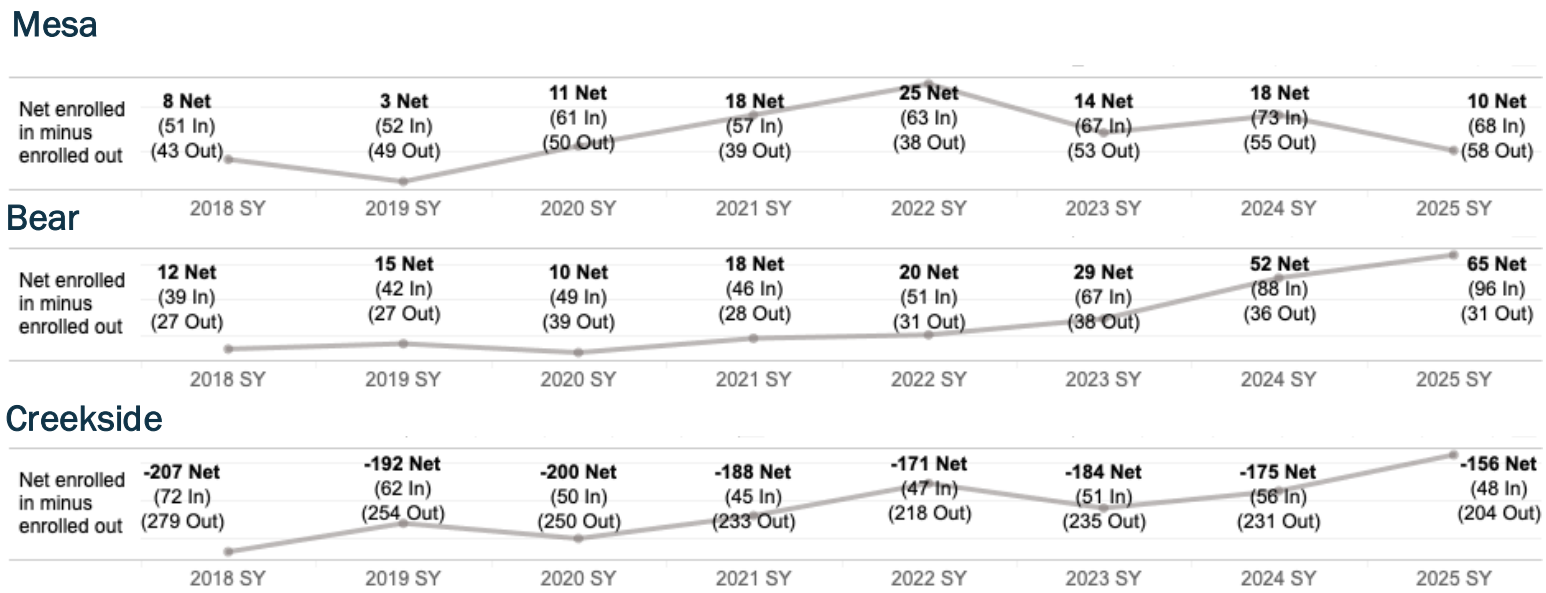
TRIANGULATING WITH PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA

- A single school internal survey is but one data point for consideration. Triangulating this data with other data collected by BVSD regarding enrollment, mobility, stability, academic achievement and student well-being is essential to understanding SB schools' strengths, unique contributions and challenges.

BVSD ENROLLMENT SOUTH BOULDER COMPARISON

Mesa and Bear Creek boast the most enrollment from zoned attendees as well as most stable net enrollment (all from BVSD enrollment dashboard information). They also are zoned for South Boulder families.

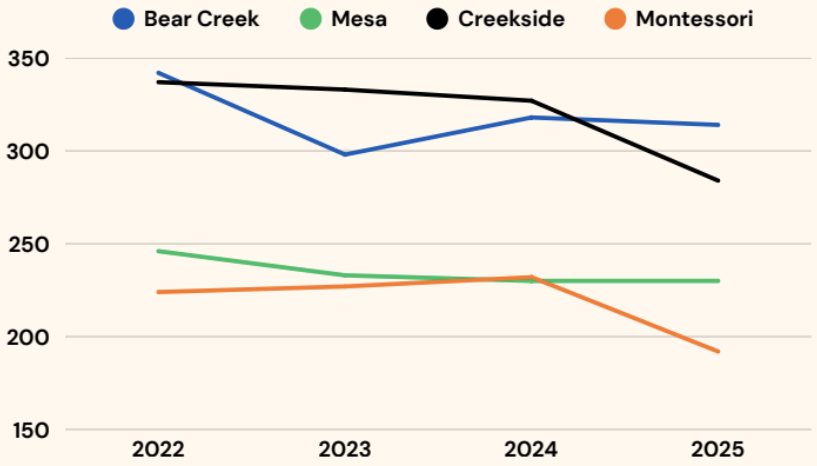




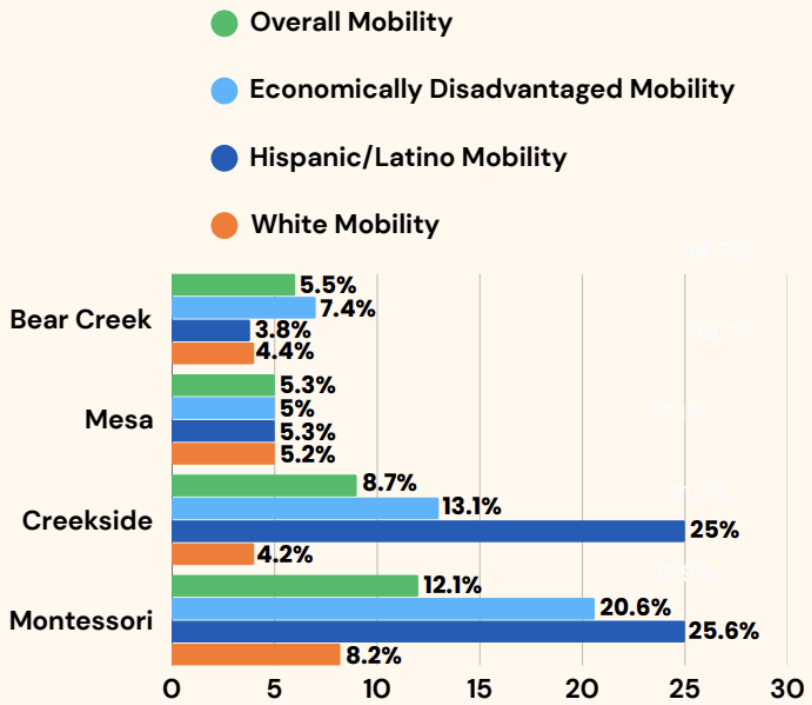
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ENROLLMENT TRENDS

MESA: MOST STABLE IN ENROLLMENT NUMBERS



SCHOOL STABILITY & MOBILITY RATES



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Bear Creek and Mesa have the most stable enrollment year over year. Additionally, they serve their zoned community at the highest rates compared to nearly half of zoned families for Creekside choosing other schools with -175 Net enrollment (and Montessori only serving 27% of South Boulder). Mesa outperforms all South Boulder schools on *all* school-based metrics significantly in caregiver climate survey, while Bear Creek tests highest and is a top performer within BVSD (with Mesa as a second). Mesa is the school for everyone with the lowest overall mobility rates for all, including economically disadvantaged and Hispanic/Latino students.

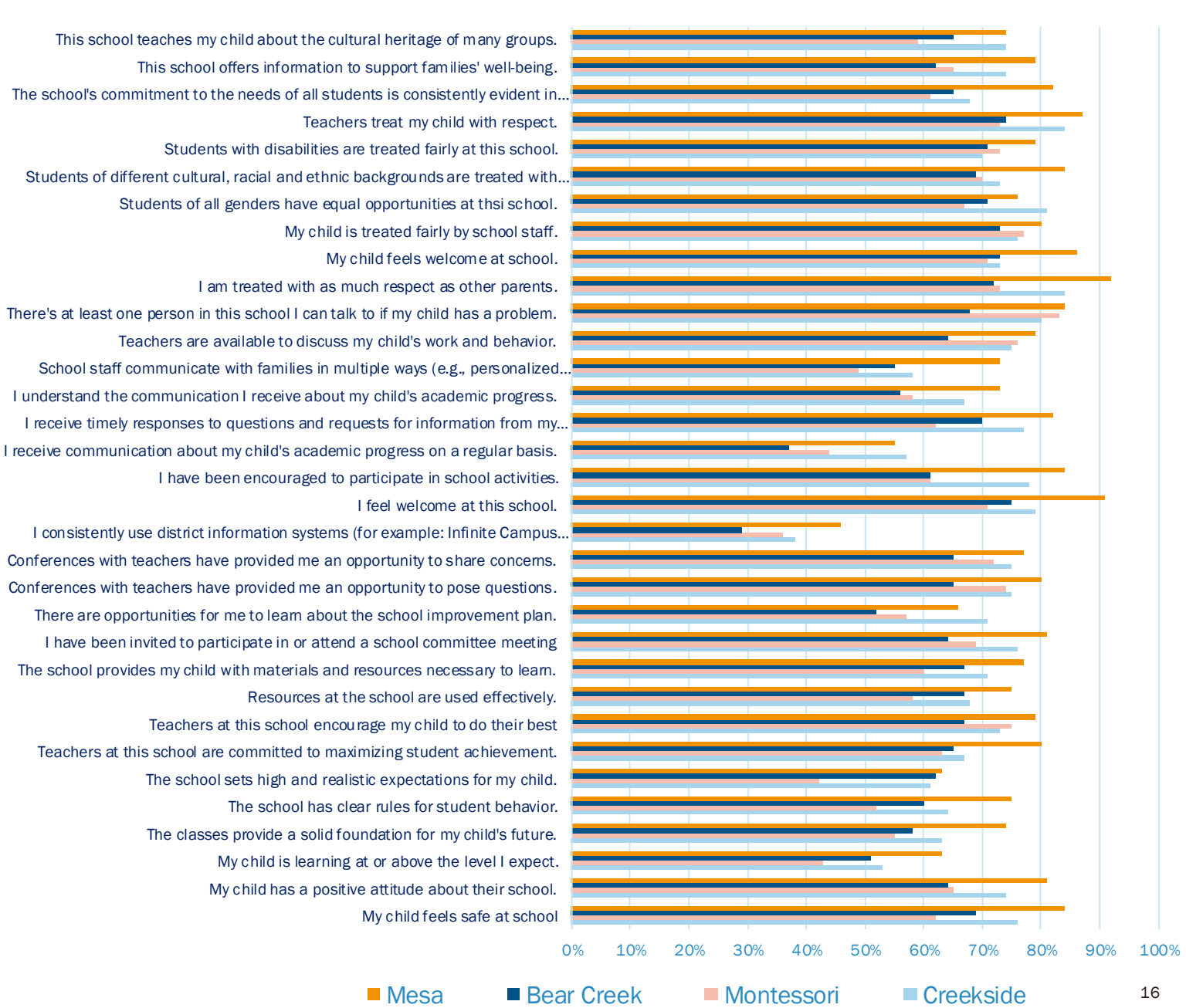
Creekside net enrollment and mobility rates are concerning and Montessori is serving more students outside of South Boulder than within it. Bear and Mesa are well positioned to serve the South Boulder Community's needs.

To serve diverse families, the community needs both separate but complementary approaches to education: Bear Creek AND Mesa.

MESA OUTPERFORMS ON ALL 33 METRICS IN SOUTH BOULDER

In BVSD's annual Parent Caregiver survey, Mesa outperforms other South Boulder schools significantly on all 33 metrics. While scores in the 60th and 70th percentiles may look good in isolation, benchmarking against other schools is essential.

Mesa should be the prime benchmark for BVSD school performance on these metrics, as Mesa has a significant advantage on all as a direct result of the leadership, culture, and exceptional student experience.



CONCLUSION:

- Advocating for South Boulder Elementary landscape

ECOSYSTEM

The takeaways for successful South Boulder Programming

- **Individual schools matter to a successful school ecosystem**. While BVSD is blessed with some fantastic schools, the reality is that they are not the same, or "equally good". Some have unique strengths, knowledge and experience that puts them in a differentiated position to support change and elevate students. These show up in behavioral data like lower mobility rates and steady enrollment, which are important to retain in these decisions to minimize BVSD attrition. Ignoring these differences does a huge disservice to communities impacted. Analyzing each school's potential contribution and what resources will dissolve with it should be a key step in any decision making.

- **Mesa's welcoming culture is paramount.** The Mesa community is truly here because of the warm, welcoming, and student-centered environment. Maintaining a school environment where all kids have the opportunity to succeed is essential to the success of South Boulder elementary programming.

- **The culture tone is set by staff and leadership.** Leadership is essential in setting the tone. Mesa has an amazing parent and student community BECAUSE this culture is cultivated at the top. Our PTO events were referenced many times (fall fest, culture fest, etc.) as being top notch compared to previous experiences, and it's because our school leadership inspires community participation and involvement.

- **Mesa has stand-out ability to address neuro-divergent students.** Many parents of special needs students view Mesa as their last stop before private school or home school. Ensuring these needs are successfully addressed is paramount to maintain an equitable school system.

- **The Class Size Conundrum.** For many families, small classes and schools are the solution with their ability to offer individualized support and a family like community. BVSD has made it clear that small schools are no longer a sustainable option. However when size is a fundamental necessity for certain learners and a boon to others, serious consideration needs to be put into maintaining benefits and differentiation for students in the new school environments.