[MUSIC PLAYING]

NINA MOINI: Our top story today, Minneapolis Public Schools leaders say they're backing off a plan put forth last month to close up to 16 schools. That decision came during a school board meeting last night. Minneapolis superintendent Lisa Sales Adams said it was based on community feedback.

LISA SAYLES-ADAMS: Based on what we've heard so clearly, so overwhelmingly, and from so many people even with a few days left of the listening period, I must recommend now that the school board does not move forward with any school closures or mergers at this time.

[APPLAUSE]

NINA MOINI: Superintendent Sayles-Adams added that changes still needed to happen in the upcoming budget process might be difficult. Minneapolis school board members say in addition to not closing any schools in the 2027-2028 school year, they're committed to pursuing enrollment growth and considering changes to school start and end times. Board member Sharon El-Amin shared more with *MPR News* this morning.

SHARON EL-AMIN: Well, I think our next step is in the financial area when we get to talking about our financial budget here coming up in March, when we talk about tie outs as a board, again, that we stated that we wanted money to stay in the schools where the most poverty issues are occurring and students receive those dollars. That money should stay with those schools. So as a board, again, we can take actions to make sure that the superintendent when she moves through the budget understands that the dollars that our students in our lower poverty schools stays in those schools so that we're not subsidizing other smaller schools. And that-- again, that's an action that the board has to direct the superintendent on what we want to happen.

NINA MOINI: We'll check back in now with the Minneapolis Public Schools parent who was at last night's meeting Shakiya Carter has two kids in the district. She's also one of the founders of Minneapolis Families for Public Schools. Welcome back to the program, Shakiya. Thanks for your time again.

SHAKIYA CARTER: Hi. Glad to be here.

NINA MOINI: We talked almost exactly one month ago. I'm sure a lot has happened in that month but take me to last night's board meeting if you would. What was your reaction to the news? How are you feeling about the district pulling back on this decision at least for now?

SHAKIYA CARTER: Honestly, it feels like a victory. It feels like a victory won. It feels like as a parent and as a community member that the board members that attended those community listening sessions did listen, and they did hear our-- did hear our-- hear our concerns and that they did hear that we did not want the schools closed and that they listened to the recommendation from the superintendent. And they decided to champion this by adopting the resolution to not close schools for next year.

NINA MOINI: Are there questions, information you're still wanting to learn. Obviously we heard off the top there there are going to be difficult changes that are going to be made. What are you learning about what else might be coming?

SHAKIYA CARTER: I think it's too soon to say exactly. What I can tell you is that from the feedback last night about hearing about the enrollment, growth, and potentially a Afrocentric student pathway for Black students. I'm looking to hear how those plans will be made and how they are looking to roll them out. I'm also looking to see what the racial impact analysis assessment will be that was requested from the Black parent advisory council and how that will inform the decisions that they will choose to make.

NINA MOINI: Shakiya, What was it like for you as a parent, knowing that you're not going to have to make all the changes at least not in the upcoming school year that you would have had to made for two students to perhaps be at different schools with different routines, perhaps different friends. How does that feel?

SHAKIYA CARTER: I actually have three students in the district. I have two at a school that's slated to close, and I have one that is at a middle school that is not slated to close. It really was a sigh of relief to not have to remove my children from their second home because initially that's what the schools are. There are second homes. Those educators are our co-parents, and it feels good to that there will not be a disruption in a pillar of our family stabilization and that there will not be a disruption in our ecosystems knowing that our community schools will remain open.

NINA MOINI: We had school board member Sharon El-Amin on earlier this morning. We heard a little bit from her off the top there, but she acknowledged that district leaders should have involved parents more in the decision making process. What would you like to see change when it comes to that process moving forward?

SHAKIYA CARTER: What I would like to see change in that process moving forward is I would like for the engagement mechanisms to change. We need to be reaching all of the parents, which means that we need to see how we can have universal engagement mechanisms to make sure that we are talking to our highest investors. Another thing that I would like to see changed is that when there is going to be a proposed change and/or said closure that the families are contacted first, that we're getting input from the families first because as she already stated, there has to be family and community buy in order for these things to work. We don't want to be left out, and we don't want to be put on the back burner of changes that we know that are going to impact us without having our input of how we could possibly help in those changes or make those changes better.

NINA MOINI: I heard you saying you want more data backing up decisions as well, more parental involvement if indeed any schools are to close and how that would impact everybody and disparities that already exist. So there are obviously a lot of issues to address. I'm curious to know what is next for you and Minneapolis Families for Public Schools. What else are you focusing on right now? What would you like to see the district prioritizing in the near and the long-term understanding they do have these budget problems?

SHAKIYA CARTER: What I would like to see them prioritizing is first making sure that there is a full financial audit and a complete budget oversight. We cannot continue to operate things the way that they have been going as director El-Amin said. And more importantly I want to see, too, that they stick to the commitment that they made last night, not only in not closing the school but also making sure that we are bettering the schools as far as physical space and how spaces are being utilized and also an academic success. I want to make sure that if those are the commitments that they're making that we're going to be able to stick to those commitments and we are able to visibly see those outcomes.

NINA MOINI: Shakiya, thank you for your time and your perspective. Again, we appreciate it.

SHAKIYA CARTER: Thank you so much.

NINA MOINI: Thanks. Shakiya Carter is one of the founders of Minneapolis Families for Public Schools.