



# A Community Schools and Neighborhood Preservation Vision For District 8

## Protecting Families, Empowering Youth and Preserving Community Identity

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Orange County is standing at a crossroads. Across District 8, communities like Meadow Woods, Southchase, Hunters Creek, Wyndham Lakes, Sawgrass, Moss Park, and Lake Nona are experiencing rapid transformation at the same time. Families are watching neighborhoods evolve faster than many can financially keep up with. Housing costs continue rising. Transportation pressures continue expanding. Youth opportunity gaps remain visible. Meanwhile, school closures are beginning to reshape the emotional foundation of several communities that have spent generations building their identity around those schools. When I speak with residents throughout District 8, I hear the same concerns repeatedly. Families are not asking for luxury. They are asking for stability. Parents want their children protected. Young people want opportunity. Longtime residents

want reassurance that they will not be pushed out of the very communities they helped build. Residents want leadership willing to prioritize people before profit and community preservation before political convenience. To many residents, the closure of schools like Meadow Woods Elementary represents something much larger than declining enrollment numbers. These schools represent gathering places, youth support systems, emergency shelters, after school programs, recreation opportunities, mentorship spaces, and neighborhood identity itself. A school is never simply a building. It is part of the emotional infrastructure of a community. I believe Orange County has an opportunity to become a national example for how communities handle school closures with dignity, transparency, compassion, and innovation. Growth should never come at the expense of the people already living here. Development should strengthen communities instead of replacing them. That belief is the foundation of this proposal.

*“The goal should never be maximizing land value. The goal should be maximizing community value.”*

## **Community Transparency and Public Trust**

The first step toward solving this issue is rebuilding public trust throughout District 8. Too often, conversations surrounding school closures happen behind closed doors while residents feel excluded from decisions directly impacting their neighborhoods. Families deserve full transparency regarding redevelopment discussions, land use conversations, budget allocations, and long

term planning connected to school closures. I propose creating a District 8 Community Transition Task Force made up of parents, teachers, youth leaders, neighborhood organizations, small businesses, faith groups, mental health professionals, nonprofit leaders, and workforce development advocates. Every proposal regarding school repurposing should be reviewed publicly with multilingual town halls held throughout Meadow Woods, Southchase, Hunters Creek, Wyndham Lakes, Sawgrass, Moss Park, and Lake Nona. This process would ensure residents are included before any redevelopment decisions occur. No hidden negotiations. No backroom agreements. No community displacement disguised as revitalization.

## **Community Opportunity Campuses**

Instead of allowing closed schools to become abandoned infrastructure or luxury redevelopment projects disconnected from community needs, I propose converting these campuses into Community Opportunity Centers focused entirely on serving working families and local youth. These campuses could provide affordable childcare services, workforce training classrooms, computer labs, trade certification programs, after school tutoring, youth sports leagues, mentorship initiatives, mental health support, financial literacy education, senior services, entrepreneurship incubators, and emergency shelter readiness. For example, if Meadow Woods Elementary transitions away from traditional enrollment operations, portions of the campus could become a workforce innovation center connected to Valencia College certification programs, apprenticeship pipelines, healthcare training opportunities, and youth recreation

services. This approach keeps public land serving public needs instead of prioritizing speculative development. This model also creates long term economic stability. Studies consistently show that investment in youth engagement, workforce readiness, and community centered programming reduces future public safety costs while improving educational outcomes and neighborhood stability.

## **District 8 Youth First Initiative**

One of the greatest dangers following school closures is youth disengagement. Across District 8, many working families balance demanding schedules in hospitality, healthcare, logistics, construction, retail, transportation, and service industries. Many parents work long shifts simply trying to keep up with rising costs. That reality leaves thousands of young people vulnerable during critical after school hours. I believe we must invest in prevention instead of reaction. The District 8 Youth First Initiative would guarantee access to mentorship programs, sports leagues, arts and music opportunities, career readiness programs, tutoring services, coding and AI literacy education, transportation assistance, and mental health support. These investments are not charity. They are public safety investments. They are educational investments. They are economic investments. Communities become safer and stronger when young people believe opportunity exists within their own neighborhoods. We cannot continue asking youth to believe in a future that communities fail to invest in.

## **Community Ownership Before Private Profit**

Public land should first serve the public. Before any former school property is sold for private redevelopment, District 8 should establish a Community First Review Process prioritizing nonprofits, educational institutions, childcare providers, workforce development organizations, recreation partnerships, and public health initiatives. Once communities lose public land, they rarely get it back. This policy would help protect affordability, preserve neighborhood identity, prevent displacement pressures, and ensure redevelopment decisions align with long term community needs instead of short term financial gain. Growth should not force longtime residents out of the neighborhoods they helped establish. Growth should create opportunity for the people already here.

## **Connecting Lake Nona Growth To Surrounding Communities**

Lake Nona's expansion presents enormous opportunity, but growth must remain connected to surrounding communities instead of isolated from them. Medical City, healthcare investment, technology expansion, and infrastructure growth should create pathways benefiting Meadow Woods, Southchase, Hunters Creek, Wyndham Lakes, Sawgrass, and Moss Park as well. I propose Regional Growth Equity Partnerships designed to connect local residents directly to workforce pipelines, internships, healthcare certifications, technical education programs, apprenticeship opportunities, and small business support systems tied to regional economic expansion. If Orange County is growing, then the residents who helped sustain this county for decades should share in that opportunity.

Orange County does not need empty promises. Communities need leadership grounded in realism, transparency, accountability, and compassion. I believe District 8 can become a model for what responsible growth truly looks like. A future where neighborhoods remain affordable. A future where youth remain protected. A future where schools continue serving communities even after enrollment changes. A future where economic growth includes the workers, families, and residents who built Orange County into what it is today. Because the future of District 8 should never be built around the community. It must be built with the community.

### **Current Efforts and Sources Referenced**

OCPS School Closure Discussions • [www.ocps.net](http://www.ocps.net)

University of Central Florida Community Partnership Schools •  
[ucfcenterforcommunityschools.org](http://ucfcenterforcommunityschools.org)

National Center for Community Schools • [communityschools.org](http://communityschools.org)

Afterschool Alliance • [afterschoolalliance.org](http://afterschoolalliance.org)

CareerSource Central Florida Workforce Programs •  
[careersourcecentralflorida.com](http://careersourcecentralflorida.com)

MIT Living Wage Calculator Research

Orange County Workforce and Economic Development Reports

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