



NEIGHBORHOOD CAPITAL BUDGET GROUP

407 S. Dearborn, Suite 1360, Chicago, IL 60605 P 312.939.7198 F 312.939.7480 www.ncbg.org

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For more information, contact Andrea Lee (cell: 312- 399-0349) or Jacqueline Leavy at 312-939-7198.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS A SHELL GAME FOR POOR, BLACK CHILDREN'S EDUCATION -- COMMUNITIES, PARENTS, & EDUCATORS CALL FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ANSWERS

At a press conference held today in Cabrini Green, parents, teachers, education reform advocates, and community residents from schools and neighborhoods across the city impacted by CPS' fourth consecutive year of school closings publicly denounced the Chicago Public Schools' plans to shutter 10 elementary schools and several Child Parent Centers, and begin controlled enrollment for 2 high schools. Representatives of the threatened schools and proposed receiving schools voiced their opposition to what many, including Deidra Brewster, a long-time Cabrini Green activist, deem "a travesty in the Chicago education system." **The President of the Chicago Teachers Union, Deborah Lynch, joined the community leaders to protest CPS' ill-advised budget and staffing cuts, and its overall top-down, unaccountable decision-making.**

In light of the Modified Desegregation Consent Decree to which CPS is subject, this growing alliance of concerned parents and educators will call on their local and state elected officials, and the U.S. Justice Department, to investigate how the past 4 years of school closings have affected children of color, and whether CPS' school closings policy and practices have had a disparate impact on Minority students.

Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law attorney Sarah Vanderwicken observed, "CPS could, at the very least, provide the general public with this data *before* they hold public hearings. Attention should be given to the projected demographic changes these decisions will bring about. Even though students will move from one mostly-Minority enrolled school to another, it's not a wash. The system must make use of the opportunities these small populations offer to improve educational opportunities for Minority children, and do it with a long-term plan."

The Modified Desegregation Consent Decree states that CPS school closing decisions should not create a disparate impact on children of color. **NCBG's research shows that 96% of the students impacted by CPS' school closings plans are African American. The proposed receiving schools have student bodies which are on average 96% African American as well. Thus students forced to transfer will not be moving to a less segregated environment, and parents and educators are skeptical that the proposed receiving schools can offer displaced students any better educational opportunities than the schools to be closed.**

"CPS' School Closing Plan has little to do with offering kids better academic opportunities. It's not even really about under-utilized buildings. This is a forced transformation of our communities by the City of Chicago, on the backs of low-income, African American students," said Aaron Jitu Brown, an LSC member and Chair of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization. "Meanwhile, our children are being moved around like lab rats in an experiment, while we wait for CPS to get it right."

Also angry and concerned about CPS School Closings Plan is Adourthus McDowell, an LSC member at Smyth School, slated to become a receiving school for Jefferson. "I'm frustrated," Mr. McDowell said. "We keep saying we need fair notification and CPS needs to think more strategically. First it was Riis, now Jefferson. Next it might be Medill or *my* school! And if you look closely at the data, you'll see what we see: CPS is not accountable to the taxpayers for how it's spending our capital dollars on school facilities. CPS is using the excuse that fixing these schools is 'cost prohibitive' to close them, when the designated receiving schools have higher-cost capital needs than the schools Mr. Duncan plans to close."

Julie Woestehoff, Executive Director of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE), an LSC advocacy and training organization, pointed out, "When CPS is willing to put enormous amounts of resources into schools *AFTER* a closing, you're going to have success stories like Williams and Dodge. But if CPS were really thinking about the need of the students and teachers, they should have been investing *before* students were moved out." Woestehoff

continued, “We’re also noticing a trend **that CPS is using school closings and re-openings as a tool to disband LSCs -- after they shame parents for not being involved enough!**”

“CPS’ school closing plan puts our children at risk for learning and safety. CPS isn’t offering these children better opportunities at the receiving schools,” say Ms. Wilson, a Byrd School parent and long-time Cabrini Green resident. Under CHA’s controversial “Transformation Plan,” Ms. Wilson now has 180 days to vacate her unit. **Another long-time Cabrini activist**, Deidra Brewster, explained the dynamic that has so angered parents and community members: “First they push families out of their homes, and now they’re pushing kids out of their schools. CPS promised Byrd School a new school. They spent over \$3 million to purchase the land, and now they pretend the plan never existed. We know our neighborhood is changing, so we proposed that the new school be a state of the art, multicultural, Magnet middle school—one that would include our kids and kids from new families moving in. We think our kids are worth it and deserve it.”

Latina Knight, LSC Chair at Sojourner Truth School demanded an answer from CPS CEO Arne Duncan: “How did you even make these decisions? And how do we know CPS won’t close Schiller or Manierre next?”

The themes uniting the community and the CTU are the lack of open and strategic planning, and the complete lack of transparency and accountability in CPS decision making. Research by the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group shows that children displaced from Jacob Riis Elementary School (closed in 2001) were sent to Thomas Jefferson, and will now be forced to transfer again. Last year, Donoghue students were sent to Doolittle West, and now, with Doolittle West on this year’s School Closing Hit List, students may have to move again.

NCBG found that:

- CPS’ plan would force 3,368 students out of their schools.
- Overall the scheme would impact 10,098 students, including the children at the proposed receiving schools. Among these 10,000 children are many students who have already been pushed out of other schools CPS closed in the past 3 years.
- **8 out of 10 schools to be closed this year are in close proximity to CHA’ Public Housing. (See attached map prepared by NCBG). Overall since 2001, 15 of the 22 schools impacted by CPS School Closings are schools serving public housing neighborhoods.**
- 96% of the students impacted by this year’s CPS School Closing Plan are African-American , and the receiving schools have an average of 96% African American students.
- System-wide, 83 public schools have enrollments below 50% of their buildings’ design capacity, raising grave questions about what criteria CPS really used to single out these schools for closure.
- Based on CPS’ own estimates, 9 out of 14 receiving schools have higher projected cost for needed facility improvements, throwing into question CPS CEO Duncan’s assertion that the schools he wants to close are “cost prohibitive” to keep open.
- CPS has invested over \$30.6 million in the 10 school facilities Duncan wants to shutter. Several received hundreds of thousands of dollars in capital improvements over the past year. CPS has failed to disclose to the public what it plans to do with these publicly owned facilities.

NCBG’s Rebuild Our Schools Task Force has joined with upset parents and educators to challenge CPS’ management of the \$4.7 billion school system. Parents, teachers, school reformers, and community residents agree that CPS has failed to develop and follow a comprehensive facility management plan or to pro-actively work in the spirit of the Modified Desegregation Consent Decree to ensure better educational opportunities for children of color. Without an objective, needs-driven, open and inclusive process for making decisions on facility management and improvements and setting other vital budget priorities, CPS will continue to make arbitrary, unaccountable choices. The alliance wants to create opportunities for parents, teachers, and principals to participate in these key decisions before they’re made. They plan to pursue their advocacy for NCBG’s Alternative School Closings Policy and the adoption of a Facility Master Plan.

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