



NEIGHBORHOOD CAPITAL BUDGET GROUP

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

REFORMING THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' SCHOOL CLOSING POLICIES

Our schools do not exist in a vacuum- they are vital cornerstones of our neighborhoods. When a neighborhood school closes, the whole neighborhood is affected. Over the last four years, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has closed or consolidated **22 public schools**. NCBG's *Rebuild Our Schools Task Force* has tracked school closings and their impact on students and communities. The Task Force has been advocating for alternatives to closings and for a more transparent accountable process that empowers parents and school and community stakeholders to have a real voice in these critical policy decisions.

What Is NCBG's Rebuild Our Schools Task Force?

Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG) is a 16-year old advocacy and research organization that supports local grassroots organizing and builds coalitions across race and class lines to address the need for more equitable investment in Chicago's neighborhoods. The Task Force consists of Local School Council (LSC) members, parents, and community based organizations. Together Task Force members and NCBG have monitored CPS' capital spending on school facilities since 1996. Since 2002, we've also been advocating for alternatives to school closings and reform of CPS' school closing policies.

For over three years, NCBG's *Rebuild Our Schools Task Force* has called on CPS to: Inform and involve LSCs, communities and educators about proposed closings; conduct a "School Closings Impact Analysis," treat closings as a last resort, and ensure that students forced to transfer will attend higher-performing schools. On January 28, 2005, NCBG won important victories when CPS included Task Force recommendations in the new CPS school closing criteria.

What Victories Has The Rebuild Our Schools Task Force Seen?

When the Task Force began advocating for greater openness and accountability at CPS, the school district had no published criteria for closing schools or selecting them for "rebirth" under the Renaissance 2010 plan. After NCBG campaigned for reforms for the past 3 years, CPS invited public input on school closing criteria last Fall (2004). In January 2005, CPS announced new school closing criteria, reflecting several of the reforms that our Schools Task Force has been demanding. The Task Force has pushed CPS to consider the disruptions in a students education caused by school closings and has been victorious in gaining the following concessions:

Elementary schools will not be closed when:

- Closing a school would force students to make mandatory multiple moves in two years **or**
- Space is not available in a better performing school within safe walking distance **or**
- The school has not been on probation for at least one year **or**
- Has had a new principal for less than two test cycles (state and federal standardized testing) **or**
- Is participating in the CPS/Chicago Teachers Union partnership

High Schools will not be closed when:

- A new principal has been in place for less than two test cycles (state and federal standardized testing cycles) **or**
- The school is a Chicago Teachers Union partnership school.

CPS has also announced that special consideration will also be given to the number of homeless and special education students were enrolled in the closing schools to ensure that these students get the support that they need.

What Is The Current Chicago Public Schools Closing Policy?

Elementary Schools

- Must demonstrate 0.9 or lower ITBS gains index averaged over four years **and**
- Must fall below 25 percent on all four measures
 - 2004 ISAT composite
 - 2004 ITBS reading
 - Four-year ISAT composite average
 - Four-year ITBS reading average

High Schools

- Must be on probation for at least one year
- Less than 10 percent of students are meeting/exceeding state standards on:
 - 2004 PSAE composite
 - Four-year PSAE composite average (2001-2004)
- CPS **must** have **alternative placement options** for students

How Can The CPS School Closing Policy Continue To Be Reformed?

This year's changes in CPS' school closing criteria represent a **MAJOR** victory for the *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force, and have put the brakes on wholesale school closings. School advocates can continue to reform CPS school closing criteria by calling on CPS to incorporate the following recommendations into their policy:

- **Mandatory written notice to Local School Councils** at least one academic year in advance that CPS is proposing to close a neighborhood school
- **Mandatory written notification to parents** of children in schools at least one academic year in advance CPS is proposing to close your child's school
- **Mandatory inclusion of LSCs in a required "School Closings Impact Study and Alternatives Analysis" with the full participation of the LSCs** at each school under consideration for closing and at each school projected to receive students. This means that **schools should have the chance to develop an ALTERNATIVE PLAN to closing**, and that parents and educators at both the closing and receiving schools would be fully aware of how the closings will impact the students, schools, and communities.
- A commitment from CPS to **work with principals, teachers, parents, and communities to improve each and every neighborhood school**, and
- **The adoption of a Facility Master Plan** that addresses issues of facility repair and construction, school closings, overcrowding, and creative use of underutilized schools in a systematic, strategic, open, and fair manner.

What Can Communities Do?

Develop your own School Improvement Plan- Communities can influence school closing policies by developing a school improvement plan with their Local School Council that applies to the unique educational goals of their students and community. ***Propose you OWN ALTERNATIVES to closing!***

Contact your elected officials- Work with your City and State elected officials to develop alternatives to school closings. Hold them accountable to help leverage the resources your school needs to improve educational outcomes in the classroom and improve your school's facilities to support learning and teaching.

Endorse NCBG's Facilities Master Planning Framework- Endorse NCBG's Educational Facilities Master Planning Framework that calls for long-term and strategic educational and facilities planning for CPS schools. Facilities matter to the educational success of our children. CPS estimates that our school system still needs \$6 billion to bring our facilities up to 21st Century education standards. Work with your LSC and other community stakeholders to insist that our schools have the kinds of facilities that will attract the highly qualified teachers our children deserve. .

For more information, or to join the NCBG Schools Task Force, contact Jacqueline Leavy or John Paul Jones at the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group: (313) 939- 7198; email at: jleavy@nsbg.org or jpjones@ncbg.org

**To learn more about our Rebuild Our Schools Task Force and Campaign,
Visit us online at: www.ncbg.org**

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**THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS HAVE ENDORSED NCBG'S CALL FOR
REFORM OF THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' POLICIES & CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL CLOSINGS:**

Representatives or members of:

1. NCBG's *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force
2. Designs for Change
3. South Side United LSC Federation
4. Austin POWER PAC
5. Bethel New Life
6. Cabrini Green RMC
7. Chicago Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
8. Chicago School Leadership Cooperative (Formerly of)
9. Chicago Teachers Union
10. Chicago Principals & Administrators Association
11. Community Organizing and Family Issues
12. Garfield Area Partnership
13. Grand Boulevard Federation's Education Committee
14. Greater Englewood Task Force
15. Greater Roseland CDC
16. Kenwood Oakland Community Organization
17. Law Project for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
18. Mary McDowell /Chicago Commons New City Branch
19. NCLB Title I Citywide Parent Advisory Council
20. North Lawndale Commons
21. North Lawndale LSC Federation
22. Parents United for Responsible Education
23. Southwest Community Congress
24. Teachers for Social Justice
25. Telpochcalli Community Education Project
26. West Town Leadership United

LSCs, parents, teachers & representatives of:

27. Andersen School
28. Ashe School
29. Attucks School
30. Barnard School
31. Bennett School
32. Boone School
33. Burnham Anthony School
34. Byrd School
35. Carter School
36. Carver Military Academy
37. Donoghue Elementary (formerly of)
38. Duke Ellington School
39. Ella Flagg Young School
40. Englewood High School
41. Fenger High School
42. Gage Park High School
43. Goldblatt School
44. Hartigan Elementary (formerly of)
45. Hearst School
46. Inter-American Magnet School
47. Julian High School
48. Kelvyn Park High School
49. LeMoyné School
50. Lowell School
51. Morrill School
52. North Grand High School
53. Peabody School
54. Price Elementary School
55. Raymond Elementary (formerly of)
56. Reed School
57. Reavis School
58. Sawyer School
59. Smyth School
60. Spalding Elementary and HS (formerly of)
61. Spencer School
62. Tilton School

(Draft – Feb. 2005)

