



NEIGHBORHOOD CAPITAL BUDGET GROUP

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An “Alternative School Closing Process & Policy:” The Final Recommendations for CPS to Adopt

Submitted by NCBG’s *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force on December 15th, 2004

This document is intended for the Chicago Public Schools Board of Education to use as a **model policy** to adopt in place of its existing School Closing and Consolidation Policy (04–0225-PO2). The advocacy **Preamble** and final **Alternative School Closing Process & Policy** recommendations were put forth by **NCBG’s *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force¹ and partner allies**, including the **South Side United LSC Federation** and **Designs for Change** who provided a great deal of substantive additions and revisions. The original policy document was drafted and circulated in February 2004. NCBG has listened and revised the document since February to **reflect all of the process and policy recommendations that CPS’ current policy fails to accomplish**. This document also serves as an advocacy tool for communities that are concerned with future school closings.

Our Preamble for an Alternative School Closing Process & Policy:

NCBG’s Task Force calls on CPS to not close any more schools until it has amended its existing **School Closing Policy to reflect a fairer, more consistent, and more systematic process and policy** when determining proposed school closing and consolidations. CPS should work with the community to draft a new policy that is consistent with the above and the policy recommendations outlined in this document. CPS should hold public hearings and make use of the feedback prior to approving a new school closing policy.

CPS will make a **conscious planning and decision-making effort to limit the number of school closing** and consolidations, knowing that:

- a. **Schools are anchors and public assets** in our neighborhoods with great potential to serve, stabilize, and revitalize our communities.
- b. **Student mobility disrupts learning**. CPS has created forced and repeated mobility in neighborhoods undergoing rapid demographic changes despite the research that says mobility can set children back two-thirds of an academic school year (4-6 months), and often inhibits learning for students who are in the receiving classrooms². However, when “strategic” and limited, and properly executed, mobility can have positive, long-term effects on students.
- c. **Small class sizes and small schools are better learning communities**, particularly for low-income communities, communities of color, and those that are already academically struggling.
- d. **Many schools will be required to accommodate a re-population** of future families moving into the neighborhoods, so preserving and enhancing our schools instead of closing them temporarily, or even permanently, must be carefully considered. Closing schools and selling the valuable buildings and land to make a profit without a careful projected demographic and fiscal analysis may not be fiscally responsible over time.

In situations where CPS is faced with a decision to close a school, it is the responsibility of CPS to always provide **timely notification to all involved** in any potential school closing decisions. These school closing decisions will be based upon multiple criteria, not one determining factor or number. Whereas in the past, CPS closed schools due to capital repair needs, **CPS will not shut a school down because it chose to not invest in**

¹ NCBG’s *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force consists of Local School Council members, parents, community based organizations, and community leaders from across the City who advocate for high quality schools with adequate facilities that provide the 21st Century educational opportunities for all children, in all neighborhoods. A list of advocacy groups and individuals supporting this is available.

² David Kerbow, *Addressing The Causes And Consequences Of High Student Mobility: The Role Of School Systems And Communities A Forum Brief* (March 1, 2002), Sponsored by the American Youth Policy Forum.

and improve the building's facility. Furthermore, while no schools should pose a legitimate **Health, Life, Safety** threat under any circumstances, **CPS cannot close** a school for this reason and CPS may be forced to find an alternative space so that the school may continue to function without closure during these repairs.

Given that stability, community, and opportunity is very important to learning, all children that were forced to transfer due to CPS' decisions to close a school are entitled to **remain at their school of choice until graduation**, and where applicable, transportation will be provided by CPS.

Thus, as school closures and student mobility should be prevented and pre-empted through improved planning strategies, CPS' newly amended School Closing Policy will require a **long-term, transparent, and strategic plan for identifying in advance potential schools that may be candidates for school closure.**

NCBG's Proposed *Alternative School Closing Process & Policy* Requires that CPS:

1. Provide **public and timely notification** of CPS' proposed school closing decisions with at least **one-academic year's notice** to all stakeholders, including: Local School Councils, parents, principals, teachers, staff, students, school partners, all proposed receiving schools, and the general public. School closure **notification will also be coordinated with application deadlines** for other public school programs (i.e. magnet schools, charters, etc.) and NCLB's School Choice deadlines per AYP status in order to prevent repeated school closures or student mobility.
2. Ensures all **public hearings** are scheduled **at least 3 months** prior to voting on any decision to close or consolidate a school, are **well-communicated** to the all affected stakeholders with at least one-month notification for a public hearing, and serve as **genuine venue** of which testimony may impact CPS' final decision. CPS must further provide public documentation of the hearing testimonies and must respond to all public hearing recommendations, concerns, questions, and comments. All final CPS Board decisions will be **clearly based upon all of the evidence** submitted at these public hearings.

It is recommended that **CPS model its school closing public hearing process after the LSC principal contract renewal hearings**³. As such, all school closing public hearings will be held before an **arbitrator** (public hearing officer) **appointed by the American Arbitration Association**. The AAA public hearing officer will be responsible for: (a) reviewing all evidence by the Chicago Public Schools (b) reviewing all evidence submitted by the public-at-large and carefully considering the testimony, recommendations, and cost-benefits to closing a school, (c) remaining neutral, and d) providing an evidence-based recommendation to the Chicago Public Schools in writing and available to the public that transparently outlines how it came to its conclusion. The arbitrator is in no position to make vocal judgments about any spoken testimony.

3. Provide all affected **Local School Councils** an opportunity to **adequately respond** to any school closing proposals, which includes **all LSCs being able to exercise their authority to vote** upon a resolution to pass or reject CPS' proposal. Should the Local School Council vote against a proposed school closing, they and/or the school-community at large must provide a data-driven and research supported *Alternative Educational and Facilities Plan* (see below, Provision #6) that demonstrates and adequately supports the needs of that particular school, and the LSC must vote to approve the *Alternative Educational & Facilities Plan*. Similarly, should the LSC of a **Receiving school** vote against CPS' proposal to accept students, a **data-driven report** that demonstrates how the move would have **negative or harmful impact** on the students is also required. All documents will be submitted and reviewed as evidence at the public hearings to determine whether CPS should proceed with its school closing recommendations or not.

The closing of any school for the purpose of an **educational or programmatic conversion or reconstitution** must have the approval of the Local School Council.

4. Identifies which schools may *potentially* close using a **transparent and systematic School Closings Check-List** (i.e. criteria index) that incorporates a combination of non-academic and academic factors. The *School Closing Check-List* will be **applied uniformly to all 600-plus Chicago Public Schools to ensure that a**

³ *South Side United LSC Federation and Designs for Change* recommend and can provide greater details of this 3rd party arbitration process, which has worked well for principal selection hearings. Contact *Designs for Change* for more information at (312) 236-7252.

fair and systematic process is used in determining **school closures candidates**, and that decisions are not based on one factor. The *Check-List* will **systematically “cut” schools** from the closures list as CPS examines the schools from one factor to the next, leaving a pool of schools that *may* be considered for closure. This *Check-List* will be so transparent that schools would be able to determine where they fall on the candidates list. CPS’ *Check-List* is as follows:

- a. **Space Utilization** - Schools that fall below 50% building capacity. However, CPS’ definition of school building capacity and space must be clearly defined and applied consistently at each school.
- b. **Test Scores** - Schools that are **performing at less than 30%** of the NCLB-recognized test score composites **and have not made any marked progress** over the past 5 years of at least a 10% gain. Schools that are clearly making **steady progress from year-to-year will not be closed**.
- c. **Qualitative Supports** - CPS will examine all educational programs and opportunities, school-community partnerships, and external resources, funds, and in-kind opportunities that may not be available or eligible in the proposed receiving school.
- d. **School Capital Investment over Time** – CPS will assess the capital investments for all eligible schools and as well as the physical feasibility of a school building. CPS will examine which schools are deemed **physically unsafe and outdated** where the building would not last in the years to come. This would apply primarily to annexes or buildings constructed as a temporary structure, not intended to house students for more than 20-50 years.

Long-term, future projected planning will **decrease forced and sometimes repeated student mobility** (often a result of poor planning). A transparent and systematic plan would help to **pre-empt** future school closings by **raising awareness and empowering local schools** to develop an “Alternative Educational and Facilities Plan” that would serve to prevent a school closing.

5. Provide to all impacted schools and the public-at-large a data-driven **“School Closing Impact Study”** that examines and analyzes all of the cost-benefits and impacts that closing a school would have on its students, teachers, and staff, the receiving schools, and the communities of these impacted schools **at the time of the public announcement proposing to close any schools**. A *School Closing Impact Study* will measure the **impact on the educational and social climate, resources, and performance of the receiving schools**. The *Impact Study* will also ensure that the quality of **educational opportunity and breadth** of educational programming and resources at the receiving schools are contrastingly better.

A *School Closing Impact Study* made available to the public will detail **information of all proposed affected schools (closing and intended receiving) that includes data and analyses of at least:**

- a. **CPS’ rationales and supporting data for closing a school**.
- b. **Disclosure of the proposed plans for the facility** once it is closed so that the public can weigh the cost-benefits of closing the school based on the intended future state of the building.
- c. **History of the School** over the past 5 years including leadership, intervention strategies, resources provided (financial and non-financial), partners, Local School Council activity, former and current school plans, and school building investment information.
- d. **ISAT or PSAT test scores over the past 5 years** to ensure that we are not un-doing or disrupting **schools that are beginning to show progress**; and to ensure that children are not sent to schools that perform below or nearly equal to the proposed closed schools.

No receiving schools should be recognized as an NCLB school that **fails to meet “Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP)”** or a school on **probation**. All schools should provide truly better educational and social opportunities for our students.

- e. **Past, present enrollment trends and future 5-10 year enrollment projections** based on housing patterns, enrollment trends, birth rates, and other indicators of families and school need.
- f. Comparison of services and the affects that closing a school would have on the numbers of **students with disabilities** and **students with special needs**. This includes the impacts at the receiving schools to adequately support these students.

- g. **Transfer placement options** will be summarized to include: CPS recommended **nearby receiving schools, all schools** across the City **with available seats**, distance traveled to the nearby schools, **test scores, educational programs**, safety concerns, **community and after-school programs**, and facility investments. Although nearby schools may be able to accommodate students from a closed schools, parents will be given the option of transferring their child to any school with available seats where **transportation is provided by CPS**.
 - h. **A teachers and leadership** analysis that includes: the number of **high-quality teachers**, teacher **retention** rates, **principal leadership** longevity, and support staff.
 - i. **Comparative class size and school size analysis** of present and proposed receiving schools. CPS will ensure that classrooms and schools will not become overcrowded, or that valuable learning spaces (i.e. art rooms, computer labs, tutoring space, libraries, etc.) will not be forfeited in place of creating additional full-time classrooms.
 - j. **Educational resources, supportive programs and services, and school-student partnerships** at all affected schools that support the well-being of the student.
6. Solicit and embrace an **“Alternative Educational and Facilities Plan”** that may be submitted by the Local School Council and/or school-community at large (external partners and support are encouraged) as an alternative strategy to closing the school. A thorough *Alternatives Plan* would include detailed information such as the current challenges, vision for the school, resources needed, the level of funding required, identification of high-quality teachers, principal leadership, and support staff; facility needs; and research-supported curriculum models and best practices that could be used to accommodate the immediate student population in order to improve schools. Schools may and are encouraged to seek out **external partners** during the community process of **developing a local-driven and detailed Alternatives Plan**. This *Alternatives Plan* could be submitted as the SIPAAA (School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement) and in accordance with the NCLB’s School Improvement Plan. Should CPS not accept the *Alternatives Plan*, CPS must provide a feasibility report made public as to why it cannot support the *Plan*.
7. Work jointly with the **Chicago Housing Authority, City housing agencies, local landlords, and other planning agencies to coordinate planning and minimize school closures**, which are often based on temporary housing and development changes (which in turn creates increased student mobility). CPS would provide transportation to help these students return to their school or origin.
8. Commission **annual independent evaluations of school closures and-re-openings** that have occurred since June 2001 for the purpose of documenting the **costs, benefits, and educational and social impacts that closing schools has had on our children in all affected schools**. The independent evaluation will document **school outcomes** and **student outcomes** due to closure as a means to assess if closing schools is the best long-term intervention strategy, based on qualitative and quantitative data over time.

Individual student evaluations will include⁴:

- a. Evaluations of the educational needs of **each** child displaced by a school closing. CPS will provide all needed services to *accelerate* student learning and mitigate any harm caused by their displacement.
- b. Tracking the performance of each student impacted by school transformations or closings and report annually on their performance and plans to address any identified problems.

Individual school evaluations will include data on the closed, receiving, and re-opened school including: a) School impacts from the closure (transferring and receiving), b) The number of students that were “lost” or chose not to return, c) School resources and resources per students at receiving schools, d) Teachers, staff, and leadership changes, e) Impacts of programs at the receiving schools, and f) Test scores.

For more information or to endorse this document, please contact Andrea Lee, NCBG’s Schools Initiative Program Director, at (312) 939-7198 ext. 27 or via email at alee@ncbg.org. You can also visit NCBG’s website at www.ncbg.org to download a copy of our *School Closing Manual*.

⁴ Recommendations based upon the Chicago Coalitions for the Homeless’ requests in its legal claim filed Sept. 7, 2004.

Endorsements For: **NCBG's Call for an "Alternative School Closing Process & Policy"**

The NCBG Schools Task Force's **call for** an "Alternative School Closing Process & Policy" to CPS' current practices and policy has been an ongoing campaign and dialogue since April 2001. Education advocates representing organizations and schools from across the City have agreed that **CPS needs to re-examine its School Closings and Consolidation Policy** (04–0225-PO2) so that its process and policy is transparent and implemented fairly and systematically throughout Chicago. Since February 2004, NCBG's *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force has solicited ideas and recommendations to achieving a **fairer, transparent, and more systematic approach to closing schools**. All of the **leaders and representatives who endorse a call for an Alternative School Closing Process & Policy have agreed that CPS' School Closing policy and process has not achieved these goals, and have been a part of the dialogue towards offering solutions** as seen in this document to improve the school closing process and policy.

As a matter of good public policy, NCBG's *Rebuild Our Schools* Task Force and partner allies strongly encourage **CPS to convene school reform leaders, parents, and other stakeholders to draft and finalize an amended School Closing Policy** of which this document may be used as a model for the discussion. CPS should additionally obtain **public input prior to voting** upon the amended policy.

Representatives or members of:

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

LSCs, parents, teachers & representatives of:

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