

ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
CHICAGO EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES TASK FORCE

State Representative Cynthia Soto and State Senator Heather Steans, Co-Chairs

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING and COMMUNITY HEARING of
Saturday, January 12, 2013, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
NEW MOUNT PILGRIM MB CHURCH, 4301 W. WASHINGTON BLVD, Chicago, IL
Lower Level, Fellowship Hall

I. Call to order

- A. Welcoming remarks: State Rep. Cynthia Soto, CEFTF Co-Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 10:10 AM. She thanked the members of the public for attending, and stated that the Task Force was looking forward to taking public testimonies.
- B. Roll call for attendance: Task Force members present were State Rep. Cynthia Soto, CEFTF Co-Chair; State Rep. Esther Golar; Cecile Carroll, Blocks Together; Rene Heybach, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless; Dr. Clarice Berry, Chicago Principals and Administrators Assoc.; and Michael Rendina, Chicago Public Schools (late arrival).
- C. Establishment of a quorum: There being only 6 voting members present, quorum was not established.
- D. Approval of prior meeting minutes (Oct. 17, 2012, Dec. 13, 2012) - TABLED

II. Reports of Standing Subcommittees

- A. Report on the Joint Meeting of the School Actions and Master Planning Subcommittee
Cecile Carroll, Chair of the CEFTF Master Planning Subcommittee gave a brief report on the Joint Master Planning/School Actions subcommittee meeting of Jan. 11, 2013. She noted that the proposed Survey of LSCs and Principals to get their input for the 10-Year Educational Facilities Master Plan is still "in limbo." She urged LSCs to work with their school communities and principals to start developing their vision for their schools' futures, in anticipation of CPS' survey. She announced that due to the changes in the reform law made in the November 2012 General Assembly Veto Session, CPS must now produce a draft 10-Year Master Plan by May 1st, 2013; and the Board of Ed must adopt a Master Plan by Oct. 1st, 2013.
- B. Discussion - none

III. Public Testimony: The 10-Year Educational Facilities Master Plan and School Utilization

Approximately 55 members of the public attended. Testimonies were presented by 15 witnesses. While the Task Force was not equipped to create transcripts of the verbal presentations, a brief summary of key concerns raised by each school's representatives follow.

- 1) **Joyce Yu, Dett Elementary School**
- 2) **Allison Beaulieu, Dett Elementary School**
- 3) **Jacqueline Ausinier, Dett Elementary School**

The representatives of Dett Elementary School all questioned Chicago Public Schools' utilization efficiency ranking for their school, citing the high percentage of Special Education students whose Individual Education Plans (IEPs) require individualized instruction. Dett has several self-contained SPED classrooms with class sizes in keeping with current ISBE class size limits for students with IEPs. While acknowledged the decline in enrollment that followed the CHA's redevelopment of the Henry Horner Homes, the stressed that their students require smaller class sizes, and have benefitted educational from them. Moreover these SPED students are the ones who would be harmed the most by rupturing the relationships

they have with their teachers and aides and each. Thus they will be highly vulnerable to losing ground academically if Dett is forced to close and the students are sent to another school. The Dett school community disputes the accuracy of CPS' utilization formula since it does not take into account SPED class size limits and the space requirements that educators need to implement IEPs for so many special needs students in a single school.

- 4) **Joy Clendenning, Ray Elementary School:** Ms. Clendenning spoke in support of a delay in any school closings for School Year 2014, based upon the need for long-range planning and greater parent input. She supported other witnesses' concerns about the disruption and destabilization of children's education that school closures and consolidations would cause.
- 5) **Clara Fitzpatrick, Stone Temple Missionary Baptist Church (retired teacher):** Testified that CPS has failed to provide adequate resources, programs, and support to neighborhood public schools in Minority communities, and has over-emphasized standardized testing to the detriment of children's education. Ms. Fitzpatrick testified that CPS has failed to provide empirical evidence to educators and parents that the strategy of closing and consolidating schools has had any educational benefit, or helped to close the achievement gap between African American students.
- 6) **Andre Davis, John Hay Elementary School, "Daddies for Shorties" Project of the Westside Health Authority (a non-profit organization):** Testified that in his community, Chicago's Austin neighborhood on the far West Side, parents oppose all of the proposed School Closures/Consolidations in their area due to concerns about student safety, CPS' failure to get meaningful community and parent input, and the destabilization of the community. He stated that his initiative is made up of Black men seeking to mentor young African American male students, will support Austin's neighborhood schools in fighting to stay open. Moreover, Austin is the only Community Area in Chicago which does not have a comprehensive neighborhood public high school, and proposed that rather than shutting down neighborhood public schools, CPS should invest in a new high school for Austin.
- 7) **Susan Fleming, Chicago Teachers Union:** Also testified to the failure of CPS to provide adequate resources to neighborhood public schools. CPS' emphasis on standardized testing has detracted from actual learning. While CPS says the district uses technology and computers in the schools, she stated that many of the neighborhood schools being considered for closure/consolidation do not have adequate computer resources. Teachers are forced to use ever-changing computer-based pre-tests and testing instruments even when there are not enough functioning computers for the students in the school. She proposed that instead of investing time and money in "downsizing" the district's number of facilities, instead CPS should provide additional staff and investment to strengthen neighborhood public schools.
- 8) **Torrence Shorter, Parent, LSC, Ryerson Elementary School:** Testified that CPS' space utilization formula is flawed and that Ryerson is not under-utilized because the school has converted several classrooms for essential educational programs and community partnerships. Ryerson converted one traditional classroom into a library, and two others into a community health clinic that serves students, their families, and the surrounding community. Mr. Shorter recapped the academic gains Ryerson students have made over the past few years; the strong parental involvement that Ryerson has developed; the numerous partnerships that Ryerson has established; and the need for the health clinic in the community. A consolidation with Laura Ward Elementary School would be detrimental to students' academic progress. The consolidated school would not have adequate space to accommodate Ryerson's health clinic and other current programs. Rather than enriching students' learning, a consolidation would eliminate space for the current programs that have helped Ryerson students improve. Finally, he cited the security and safety issues that would result, as there are longstanding rivalries and tensions between Ryerson and Ward students and the two different school communities.
- 9) **Dwayne Truss, Co-Chair, Austin Community Action Council (CAC):** Presented a PowerPoint presentation of the area-wide plan that the Austin CAC developed in 2011, and is currently updating. Yet CPS has not taken the CAC's plan into account in proposing school closures/consolidations in Austin. Austin's schools

have made continuous, across-the-board significant academic gains since 2010. Mr. Truss stated that CPS does not do enough to promote and market Austin's Level 1 and Level 2 schools, and should work more closely with the Austin CAC to attract students now going outside the community where they reside, to enroll in Austin neighborhood schools. The Austin CAC has a comprehensive plan for continuous improvement of the schools in their area with full "integration" and coordination of education from early childhood through secondary education, and strategies in place to continue the growth in academic scores and increased parental involvement. CPS should not close neighborhood schools but rather do more to support them. The Austin CAC also views CPS' utilization formula as fundamentally flawed, in that it does not acknowledge the different space needs for varying academic programs and the grades and age ranges of children in each particular school. Mr. Truss has gone with LSC members on "walk-throughs" of several schools in Austin and discovered errors in CPS' "room counts" and utilization calculations. Additionally CPS seems to be penalizing schools that have used their Title 1 funds to lower class size, as they have the right to do. Smaller class sizes have been shown to improve academic outcomes for low-income students of color in economically disadvantaged communities, especially those in elementary grades.

- 10) **Valerie Leonard, Lawndale Alliance:** Testified that students in the North Lawndale community who have been subjected to repeated school closures, turnarounds, and co-locations have not demonstrated any significant sustained academic gains. Her organization is concerned about CPS' policy of opening Charter Schools in North Lawndale, most of which have not been able to sustain higher academic outcomes, and are also financially unstable. Charters are also not being held to the same academic performance standards as neighborhood public schools. CPS' policy of opening new schools in African American communities with declining populations is a clear demonstration that left on its own, CPS does not plan properly. Instead these decisions have destabilized neighborhood schools, contributed to enrollment shifts, and set the stage for failure. In her written remarks, she cites CPS' inaccurate, incomplete data on space utilization; unmet capital needs; operating costs and projected cost savings and budget deficits; and discrepancies in enrollment data on which CPS is basing its strategy for mass closures. She called for a moratorium on School actions until CPS completes the State-mandated Master Plan. She proposed that the General Assembly should create an Illinois Educational Facilities Planning Board to provide greater oversight over CPS and other schools districts' facility planning and spending for creating and siting of new schools. Such a body would be similar to the State's Health Facilities Planning Board that oversees the creation or closure of healthcare and hospital facilities around the State.
- 11) **Jerry Skinner, Teacher, Kelvyn Park HS:** Testified that educators and families of Kelvyn Park high school students fear that CPS' steps to cut programs and staff, and their neglect of KPHS' facility needs, are destabilizing the high school. The KPHS community fear that these incremental problems will set up their school for enrollment decline and eventual closure. He stated that CPS' current school year enrollment figures for KPHS are erroneous, and that CPS is under-counting the number of students at KPHS, thus exaggerating the degree of "under utilization." He called for CPS to embrace a voluntary moratorium on any further School Actions (closures, consolidations, etc). until a long-range plan is developed.
- 12) **Alicia Mooney, Beidler Elementary School:** indicated that CPS is using inaccurate information to label Beidler an "under- utilized" school and that the School would provide the Task Force with details (School Utilization report submitted electronically following the Hearing).
- 13) **Adorthous MacDowell, parent of CPS students, southside parent leader:** testified that his children had experienced previous CPS school closings and found the experience to be negative and an educational setback. Mr. MacDowell testified that CPS' strategy of mass school closings and consolidations detrimentally impact primarily African American students, and that his community regards this as a discriminatory policy. Schools on the near south side (Bronzeville, Kenwood-Oakland) have been disproportionately impacted, with the largest number of CPS School Actions over the past decade, and with the same students uprooted and re-assigned multiple times. He stated that CPS has not demonstrated any significant educational gains for the students as a result of this constant churning and

upheaval. He said the anger in the community is mounting, that residents of the near south side regard CPS' school closings strategies as a "land grab" and a means of displacing African Americans from those areas.

- 14) **Wanda Hopkins, South Austin Coalition Community Council (SACCC):** Testified that she has been an advocate for better public education and schools in Austin for decades, and prior to her role as Education Outreach staff for SACCC, she worked for many years with Local School Councils through the non-profit organization, Parents United for Responsible Education (P.U.R.E). She stated that residents of the Austin community vehemently oppose CPS' school closing strategy, and demand instead that CPS work with the community and provide increased resources to strengthen neighborhood schools. Austin residents will fight for their neighborhood schools, and will not go along with CPS and City Hall
- 15) **Ronald Jackson, LSC member, Tilden HS:** testified that CPS does not listen to or work with parents and Local School Councils to address the needs of neighborhood public schools. Instead, CPS Central Office and the Tilden principal have repeatedly withheld vital information from the LSC. At Tilden CPS allowed the principal to avoid forming a new LSC and withhold information about outside grants and how they were spent from the LSC. Moreover, CPS has consistently stripped neighborhood public schools of the very programs and course offerings that used to attract and retain students, contributing to enrollment shifts. He called on CPS to provide the administrative support for and cooperation with the CEFTF that the state reform law, SB0630 (P.A. 97-0474) stipulates, and should notify every LSC of the Task Force's meetings and hearings. He also supported other witnesses' call for a moratorium on any further School Actions until CPS works with the public and the Task Force to create the 10-Year Master Plan.

Attached to these minutes are written testimonies submitted to the CEFTF at this meeting.

IV. Next Meeting: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2013, 10 AM; CHICAGO EMBASSY CHURCH, 5848 S. PRINCETON

V. Adjournment: The Hearing was adjourned at approximately 12:45 PM