Chicago Public Schools
School Utilization Community Meetings
Session Notes

Date/Time of Meeting: Wednesday, February 6, 2013
Network: Pilsen-Little Village

Summary reflects Spanish-language discussions

Round: I

Disclaimer: The following are notes of the discussions in the individual break-out sessions. They do not provide verbatim records or a comprehensive summary of what was said. Also, these notes do not represent the point-of-view of the facilitators or of CPS personnel. Any questions about these notes should be addressed to CPS staff.

General learning:

- (Elected Official) We have progressed a lot in this community. We work hard, our kids study hard too. We all work hard to try to advance. In any community, if you say you are going to close, they feel threatened. I believe in public education. For 3 generations we have fought for our schools. We have invested a lot in this community.

- (Elected official): in the 90's five new elementary schools were built because there was an overcrowding problem in this community. We worked hard to get that for our kids. You can't come now and say you are going to close those schools. In 2001 we demanded more schools to be built. We got more High schools. Those schools now not only teach students in our community but they also serve as community centers. We teach English classes, computing, swimming.

- (mother) We are a community. We are all connected. I am part of this community. I have no intention to go anywhere. Please balance us. We need funds, we need money to make our school better. Why hasn’t CPS lower the salaries of their leadership? Why the Board is not being held accountable for failing our schools.

MADERO:

- We have lots of memories from our school. People grew up in this community, attended this school and did great. People got jobs. Our school is great. There is a program called Good Friends. We help each other, everyone gives respect. Activities like culinary arts, learn new skills. Please don’t close our school.
• Student: our school is great. I'm doing great at school. My grades are great. We do good things at Madero. Safety for us is a priority. When teachers teach, students listen. Friends treat me good. Everybody is good to each other. We have after school programs.

• I have been teaching here for 17 years. I know that the formula for underutilization does not work. Come to our school. Look at our schools with your own eyes. I have 32 students in my class. Consolidation does not work. We have an IB program at Madero, so we can't consolidate, it will not work.

• 8th grader: why you are closing schools and saying our school does not perform well when I see teachers staying until late working hard. We offer a lot of things at my school. We have after school programs. We need money. We need new books. I want new books. New Charter schools get new books and we get crappy books. How is that?

• Why are you closing our schools? Immigrants come here to study. Where are they going to go? I am proud of my school. My sister is going to attend this school. I want her to have this school when is time for her to come to school.

• What is going to happen to our kids? If they go to other schools that we don't know of, they can get into gangs. We don't want that. I want all my sibling to graduate from this school.

• (student) despite I've had many problems in my family, I still go to school and study hard, cause I know that my future is there.

• Sun Times lists the schools. Makes panic, not right, panic spreads to kids, everyone is connected. What happens to everyone, affects us. Kids are our future – are part of the community. I never left and don't intend to. Lots of confusion where information is coming from. Need to know where it first came from- community shook.

CORKERY:

• Live in Little Village, proud mom of honor students. It is my house, is where my heart is. I am an active community member. We have many challenges in the community but I’m there, working hard. Saw the school on the list. I'm angry, fearless, take on any challenge. We are furious, heartbroken, can't believe that they are saying they are going to close our school. Our school is 100 years old. One more closing in the community is like knocking our kids down – for our future – never left the community and don't intend to leave. Will do anything to keep school open.

• Schools are pillars. Schools have been used after school, activities. Seeing the concerns of the people. Please listen to our children, nephews, nieces. Grateful to public school – where I learned English and went to school.

• I have 4 kids in Corkery. I couldn't believe it when I heard that they are going to close. The community doesn't know what is happening or why this is happening. I hope that the Board of education listens to our community.

OROZCO:

• Community needs schools that cater to Latinos. Give some culture back. Product of Pilsen.
• I have been a teacher for 8 years. We are a community center, not only a school. We have a community garden. We even have a clinic here, when several clinics across Cook County are being closed. We have parent classes. We provide a lot of services here but CPS does not count that in their utilization formula. We provide services in every possible way.
• I wonder how many charter schools are going to be closed. You can’t close our school. Our school is a powerhouse. We have tons of programs here.

WHITTIER:
• No school should be closed. Underutilization is one more ploy. Schools have been under resourced not underutilized for a long time and this is our reward? Parents competing against each other. Schools becoming privatized.
• Our school is in probation but I am still proud of this school where I work as a teacher. I live north but I come here to teach and my daughters attend this school. I’m a south sider at heart. We feel this as our community.

RUIZ
• Consider what this school represents in our community. What is going to happen to our kids if they go to other schools. There should be fewer kids in our classrooms for them to get a better quality education. How will they be transferred?
• Plans not clear, yet open other schools. Why not make our schools better – it’s about our kids future.
• I grew up in this community. I was there when they closed other schools. I saw parents crying due to closing of schools in the past. You can’t continue doing this to our communities.

TELPOCHCALLI
• This is just a set up. They already know which schools they will close. It is hard to be here and try to do the best. I am a graduate of public schools. I believe in public education.
Where are the decision makers? No board member here to talk to us. No Major, no CPS CEO.
Why are they hiding from us?
The money that they say they don’t have to maintain our schools is going to charter schools. Now they are seeing that Charters are not doing better than us.

WHITNEY
• Please keep in mind that the main goal is to provide good neighborhood schools for our kids. Think long term when you make your decisions.
Focus on assets of our community, in our strengths as a community.
If a school is underperforming, closing it doesn’t solve the problem.
• We have worked hard to make our kids go to school. We need to know if you are closing schools where you are sending our kids. How can we know that are kids are going to a better school? What if they end up in a school that is worse than the current one? What if my child goes to another school that then becomes overcrowded?

PEREZ

• CPS says there is no enough money to keep all schools opened. However CAFR audit report says that there is a surplus of money. They hide money in their budget numbers and say they have to close schools as an excuse. We have seeing CPS to lie again and again. CPS, we are done with your lies.

PILSEN

• My daughters attend Pilsen School and I have seen them grow so much. The school is literally around the corner from our house. It is our school. All parents are working hard. Can you CPS do your work? At school kids study, they work, they don’t do homework, we do homework at home. At school kids really study, learn. We don’t want our school closed. I don’t want to bus my kids to a school one hour away from home. I don’t want that, it is unsafe. I don’t want to live like on a ranch with kids that have to travel to school. My kids will have less time for doing homework. Also we need fewer kids per classroom, not more.

WALSH:

• This school has a variety of programs. We do more than just teaching to our kids. You can't close our school. We need to get more funds, more support from CPS, not closing of schools. We need computers, we need books. How is possible that 98 million dollars are going to UNO charter schools, and you are telling us now that you are closing our school? So you are closing our schools to open charters?