RAVENSWOOD-RIDGE NETWORK

February 16, 2013.
11:00 a.m.

The Report of Proceedings had in the meeting of the above-entitled cause, taken before DENNIS M. HARTNETT, CSR in and for the County of Cook and State of Illinois, at 1145 West Wilson Street, Chicago, Illinois, February 16, 2013, at the hour of approximately 11:15 o'clock a.m.

PRESENT:

Mr. Craig Benes         Chief of Elementary
Schools for Ravenswood-
Ridge Network

Mr. Adam Anderson       Portfolio Planning and
Strategy Officer

Mr. Phil Salemi
Mr. Michael Rendina
Mr. Adam Anderson
Ms. Lynda Williams
Ms. Anna Alvarado
Ms. Leslie Boozer
Ms. Ginsberg
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(Whereupon all English comments were translated into Spanish and all Spanish comments were translated into English by Mr. Ginsberg, the Interpreter.)

MR. BENES: Good morning, we will start shortly. Please be seated. Okay. We will start. Welcome to the Ravenswood-Ridge Network Community Meeting. Welcome students, parents, teachers and community members. My name is Craig Benes, I'm the Chief of Elementary Schools for Ravenswood-Ridge Network.

Today, I'm also joined, I'm pleased to be joined by several other chiefs and deputy chiefs from the Fullerton, O'Hare, and Northwest Network. And please also recognize Alderman Cappleman and Alderman O'Connor.

I want to thank you in advance for coming out today. I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts and your feelings about your school and your community. And I appreciate you taking the time to share those thoughts and for us to have an opportunity to listen to your thoughts and feelings.

We are committed to listening to you and working through these decisions in the best way for your community. I appreciate your passion, I
appreciate that this is a hard subject to talk about, I just ask that as our speakers are speaking, that we all give our attention to them.

Were also enjoyed by other central office of the Chicago Public School employees, Adam Anderson and Mike Rendina of Departmental Affairs. And just to give a brief overview of the agenda, Adam Anderson will give a short explanation of the criteria for why schools are on the list.

We'll ask our aldermen to speak first. And then we will have time for our schools that are under consideration to speak.

And then after that, we have a sign-up for additional public comment. And then we will convene the meeting promptly at 1:00 o'clock for today. And now I would like to introduce Adam Anderson from the Chicago Public Schools.

MR. ANDERSON: Good morning, everybody. It says five minutes, I'm going to be much shorter than that. I'll talk for about two to three minutes, just about where we are in the process.

First and foremost, I want to echo the thanks of everybody that's here today. Parents, teachers, community members, especially the students
that are here today. I know that these
conversations are difficult, but know that everybody
in this room believes that every student can and
should achieve a high quality of education, so
thanks again for the students that are here today.

Everybody should have this hand-out. I'm
going to very quickly talk through it. I'm not
going to read it, but I did want to make sure that
everybody knows the information that's on it.

The front page outlines the updated
criteria by which we're looking at schools that
remain under consideration. These criteria were
formed by meetings we had in the first round with
communities, as well as by the commission.

For example, we heard things like don't
close schools that are large, because of the
population that would be displaced. Or don't close
schools that don't have underutilized schools around
them to send those students to.

So schools such as Gale or McPherson were
removed from consideration based on those criteria.
However, what is more important for today are the
schools, and for all of our meetings that remain,
are for the 129 schools that still remain under
I want to emphasize that all 129 will not 
close, we are simply continuing to have a 
conversation about those schools.

So for the Ravenswood-Ridge Network, there 
are four schools that remain, again, all will not 
close, we are hear to talk more about those schools.

And know that we have heard what has been 
said so far. We have heard about the special 
education programs in various schools, including 
Trumbull, and we want to continue to hear more.

The last thing I want to point out is on 
the back side of the handout, underneath the data 
table, are a list of questions that CEO Byrd-Bennett 
has requested to hear from the community about.

These are intended to move the conversation 
forward and make sure that we hear more and more 
detailed considerations. And also note the very 
last question, we absolutely want to hear anything 
else that you want to share and you think is 
important about your school.

So, again, thank you very much for coming 
today. I'll hand it back to Chief Craig Benes to 
continue the meeting. Thank you very much.
MR. BENES: I just want to reiterate one thing that Adam said, that it would be very difficult to close all the schools, and it just wouldn't be appropriate, so keep that in mind as we look at these actions.

Now, I'm going to turn it over to our Family Community Engagement Manager, Les Kniskern.

MR. KNISKERN: Good morning. I have seen many of you in our schools, and I look forward to hearing from you today. I would like to turn the microphone over to the Honorable Alderman Cappleman.

ALDERMAN CAPPLEMAN: Buenos dias. How many teachers are here? Raise your hand. A room full. Many years ago, when I was in fourth grade, I had a teacher that I loved a lot, her name is Mrs. Dilsky. (phonetic) It was because of Mrs. Dilsky that I went on to college and I became a teacher myself.

So I want to especially recognize the hard work that teachers do. As a teacher, I remember many times not wanting to drink water because I did not have time to go to the bathroom because I needed to teach my kids.

And like many of my teachers, I also spent my own money for classroom supplies. So I want to
say, as a former teacher, that I believe strongly in
the power of neighborhood schools. Thank you.

Because it's the neighborhood schools that
make a community strong. Thank you. That's why I
said there are some tough decisions that had to be
made, but I will say this, and I have made it very
clear to the Chicago Public Schools, and I also made
it very, very clear to the City of Chicago, I do not
want any school closed and have it replaced with a
charter school.

Just one other point. When I taught fifth
grade, I had a student that was 11 years old, who
was picked up on prostitution, and this girl, when
she came to my classroom, she informed me that she
had no intentions of doing any school work, she
didn't want to learn, she didn't care to learn and I
believe it's unfair to judge a teacher based on
students who have extreme issues going on in their
lives.

I also have a niece and nephew with special
needs, and they went their entire education through
public schools. So I'm very grateful for public
schools, what they have done for them.

So I want to close with these are very
tough times, I can't promise you I know all the
answers, but I will do everything I can to be an
advocate for children and their families. And
thanks again to all the teachers and principals, you
do great work, I'm very proud of you.

Thank you. I have to leave for another
event, Chinese New Years, so I wish I can be here,
but I know I will hear more.

MR. KNISKERN: Thank you, Alderman Cappleman. I
would like to now introduce Alderman O'Connor.

ALDERMAN O'CONNOR: Good afternoon. I want to
begin by expressing my gratitude to the Board of Ed
for coming out here today and discuss their concern
over the proposed school closings.

In front of us, at least in the middle
section here, is a sea of purple. Public school is
a unique place. Trumbull School, on the count, may
appear to be an underutilized school, but I have
expressed my concern with the Board previously and
you will get to hear from people from Trumbull
today, how we think that your count is an under
count.

Trumbull is a place with special ed
students and regular ed students articulate
vertically through the school from kindergarten through eighth grade. The interaction, the friendships, the socialization that takes place in that school happens in almost no other school to the City of Chicago to that extent.

This is a very tough period of time for the Board of Ed. It is a tough time for the people of the City of Chicago, parents, students, taxpayers who have nothing to do with the school system.

And it is my hope and I believe that the Board of Education will try and take into consideration all the factors, not just the money factor, not just the number factors, but the qualitative factors that will make decisions, hard decisions, but, hopefully, make the right decision.

I congratulate all of you parents and teachers and students that have come out today, and I encourage you all to make your voices heard. And I encourage you all to participate and I encourage you all to do so in such a way that brings credit to the institutions you're here representing and the children that you are representing today. Thank you for your time.

MR. KNISKERN: At this time, I would like to ask
our guests that are standing on the wall, there are
seats available in the bleachers. We need to keep
the exitways clear.

While they're making their way to their
seats, I would like to ask that the designated
speakers from Brennemann, that would be Kelly,
Morgan, and Mr. Adenuga. Please come down and have
a seat at the table.

Who is speaking first?

SPEAKER: Me.

MR. KNISKERN: Our designated speakers from each
of the schools that are under consideration will be
given ten minutes. As a former stage manager, I
will keep track of time.

Please.

MR. INTERPRETER: With the translation with this
part, I'm going let them speak all the way, and I'm
going to give a summary, to hear from as many
speakers as possible. Is that okay with everyone?

SPEAKER: Good morning, Miss Barbara

Byrd-Bennett, it's with high regard to be in your
presence this morning. I want to use this platform
to honor everyone in attendance today. My name is

Morgan (redacted) I am a sixth grader attending
Joseph Brennemann School. And I am here to support
the cause to keep our school open.

Joseph Brennemann means a lot to me in many
senses. I started as a kindergartener. My siblings
attend the school because my parents have seen the
positive impact our school has had on me. I can
proudly say that my school is a second home.

It will be a promising journey to have my
second grade sister graduate into high school in
many years to come. By doing that, Joseph
Brennemann has to remain open. Words will never
express the educational benefits Joe Brennemann has
provided for me and the other fellow students within
the community.

My principal, Miss Abedelal, has an
open-door to some of the best teachers in the City
of Chicago. I will always give gratitude to my
music, science, and art teachers. Like my math
teacher would say, let's get this party started.

My teachers at Brennemann made studying
fun. The school environment in Joseph Brennemann is
amazing, enough to make our educational experience
exciting.

Wonderful things take place on a daily
basis. Thanks to my beloved principal, we have an amazing library, a music class that looks like a theatre, and an art room that is beyond admirable.

Miss Barbara Byrd-Bennett, I know this is no easy task for you to take on, but on behalf of my fellow students and I, we plead that you keep Joseph Brennemann open for the years to come. It will be an honor to have you visit our school, Joseph Brennamann. Thank you, Ma'am.

SPEAKER: Thank you. My name is Alenuga, I'm a parent, and I have two children at Brennemann. And I want to assure you that Brennemann is a place of comfort for our children. Our children feel secured, they feel safe.

And we think that our voice is being heard at Brennemann. That we are valued as parents, and I want to assure you that Brennemann is a community in a community for many of us, especially for the immigrants. We have a voice, and they recognize us and they know our values.

And I want to let you know that closing down Brennemann is like tearing down a community in a community. And I want to assure you that we are counting on the Board to keep the school open for
many years to come. So that the legacy that has
been entrenched in our children, we value the
school, and can continue and to spread to other
areas of the community. And with all this, we are
pleading with the Board once more, keep Brennemann
open, that is all that we have. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Good morning, my name is Kelly Gandy,
(phonetic) and I am an advocate for all students
within the City of Chicago. More specifically,
today, however, I am here to represent the children
of Joseph Brennemann Elementary School.

Brennemann Elementary School has seen data
that shows students' scores have consistently
trended upward in reading, math, and science, from
2008 through today. And I am extremely proud to say
that the third grade ISAT composite score was 92.5
percent, the highest the students in that grade have
ever tested.

A key component to this success has been
the priority of enriched early literacy. This
priority ensures that literacy is deeply grounded
and rooted in the reading program. In addition,
rigor and robust hands-on learning and reading,
grads K through eight is also a priority and goal.
To reach this goal, Brennemann School has sought out and was awarded a quarter million dollars literacy grant from Target and Heart of America. This grant helped fuel our reading priority.

In alignment with this reading priority, the partnership with Target, Heart of America, and Children's Literacy Initiative provides teachers with professional development that is fused with our priority riches increased literacy grades K through eight.

This professional development of teachers has been the cornerstone of what CLI offers to our teachers, a focus on early literacy. All Brennemann school teachers, grades K through four, are involved in literacy professional development.

Teachers are also provided with 30 hours of one-on-one in-class coaching from Children's Literacy Initiative. This tremendous support strengthens instruction that is provided to our students.

To further strengthen instruction to children, all teachers participate in an annual national model classroom professional development conference. It doesn't stop there. To further
strengthen teachers' practices, Brennemann School's principal was also immersed in this great work.

And like the teachers, she attends monthly professional development and in-school coaching.

Clearly this demonstrates a focus on our priority, which is early literacy and building strong literacy foundations throughout all grade levels.

Similarly, this shows and is evidence of how the professional development is fused with Brennemann School's priority of increasing the academic performance, academic rigor and preparation of our students for high school, college, and beyond.

We understand and we recognize that the Chicago Board of Education is facing huge financial deficits, and it is for this reason that Brennemann School has written, researched, solicited, and secured partnerships with corporate funders to bridge the gap on children's literacy.

We are backed by Target, who is committed to providing millions of dollars to education each year. Brennemann School has already written and received a quarter million dollar library, a $15,000 writers cafe, complete classroom library make-overs
in grades K through three, among many other things.

Through this partnership, Target has also provided the following for our students.

Number one. Literacy rich home environments by giving away seven new books to all students.

Number two. Classroom lending libraries for students in grades K through three.

Number three. Classroom libraries for teachers to use, which provides a variety of print rich literature and genres. As research suggests, this is in alignment with the common core State standards, resultingly, this will prepare our students to meet and exceed the new accountability and furniture for classrooms, libraries, grades K through three.

In addition, there are promethean boards in every classroom. Brennemann School continues to create a technology rich environment for the students by writing and receiving grants for iPads and computers.

Brennemann School welcomes the opportunity for another neighboring school to be blended enrollment into the fabric of who we are. In doing so, this creates a tremendous opportunity to share,
expose, and ignite a love for learning and literacy with other students, through a blended community of learners.

It is through the strong team of teachers of Brennemann School that will create students who cognitive abilities which emphasize higher complex and intellectual outcomes. It is for these reasons that Brennemann School should remain open for our children for we are their future.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continue the great work in the hallways and classrooms at Joseph Brennemann Elementary School. And let me go ahead and correct, we thank you for your cooperation. Thank you.

MR. KNISKERN: I would like to call down the next set of designated speakers from Trumbull School. Principal Venus Shannon, Maria Gaulanes, Ali Burke.

I want to give fair time, let's let them have fair time. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Everyone should have a copy. Now at this time, what I would like to do, first of all, is to say something to you that I believe will resonate in many of our hearts. I am a native New Yorker,
and I moved from Wisconsin because I heard that Chicago needed some help, and my people are the ones who struggle, the ones who need a deeper dime, the ones that need greater support, and I found Trumbull and Trumbull found me.

Irregardless of what happens, yet we shall rise. We believe in our kids. We will not turn our backs, no matter if it comes from the top, from the sides, or from below, we will stand, we will fight, we will rise, and we will help all of our children.

Now, that said, let's talk about the numbers. I am a math and science person, and I thank the opportunity to everyone here, for the opportunity to be able to come and speak. We're very, very, very, grateful. I have had the opportunity to speak several times before the Illinois General Assembly, Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force, and at the last meeting, where there was Mr. Babitt, (phonetic) it's his department that actually formulated the formula for space utilization.

He admitted in open session that the formula does not take into account any school that has over eight percent special education student
population. We have 37 percent.

When he was asked, when he was asked by the task force, why the special education was not included, he indicated that there was no one that was on the committee that was from special education. It also did not take into consideration the homeless population.

So, with that being said, he said that the schools with high special education, they were going to take a closer look at. I heard that again from Mr. Anderson, and I thank you very much.

At this point, what the formula does is take your entire enrollment and divide it by 30. By federal and state law, there are limits to the amount of special education students that can be in there. Like with Trumbull, we have limits of 7 students per classroom. We have another limit of 14 students per classroom. We have yet another one that has 6. We cannot be divided by 30. It will not give you the right number.

So, I provided to the body that has gathered here, I fleshed these numbers out, at your convenience you can take a look at them. You will see that Trumbull stands between 88.6 percent and 90
percent utilized in the building.

We should not be on the list. We should not be on the list, I humbly submit. So now what we have here at Trumbull is a very unique program, as you heard Alderman O'Connor mention, we have got a bilingual, a strong gen ed bilingual program, side by side with the special education program.

The problem with dissolving us and sending 142 special education students at large into the general population, is that most schools have 5 to 7 percent special education. That means one or two programs, period.

So, you get up from Trumbull, where you have an opportunity from pre-K to eighth grade to graduate, go to the school, stay one or two years, stop. Roll it back. Go to another school, stay one or two years, every time you move a special education student, research shows they lose a year. We cannot have that.

Hey, let's talk about money. We saved CPS money. CPS depends on our expert staff to actually come and evaluate kids who don't come to us, that's how good we be. And we evaluate the students and they go off to other schools. And when we do the
evaluation, we save you money there.

When we have a clinician, a psychologist, they're sitting there at $135 an hour, what happens when six students are coming to that student, because they're in the building, you don't have to spend 135 times 6, you can have a little piece circled, you can have a time, meet their minutes, we will save you money.

All right. I'm closing now. And I'm closing with this. We have robust community partnerships. Everything we have at that school, we are sharing with our special education students, but we have Shedd Aquarium, K-5 science. Commonwealth Edison, 6-8 science.

We have got Roosevelt University. Raise your hands Roosevelt. We have got Truman, Truman also. Anderson, West Andersonville together. We have a church that meets in our building, they call Trumbull home for 13 years. And speaking of which, here is the pastor of the school, Pastor King.

MR. KNISKERN: We would like to translate first. Trumbull you have four minutes remaining.

SPEAKER: Hi, I'm Ali Berg, I'm a parent and community member at Trumbull Elementary. I just
would like to quickly speak about the strong community that we have growing at Trumbull. We have a new principal, Miss Shannon. And the year that she has been there, our ISAT scores have gone up almost three percent. We're very proud of that.

We have a brand new LSC at our school. We have completely replaced the LSC with really dedicated parents and community members. We have the best teachers in the City of Chicago. We have new teachers, three of the teachers are nationally certified. Through a grant from Roosevelt University, we have Dr. McTigue, (phonetic) who is the literacy coach in our school.

We have worked very hard to partner with our community ad programs. We work closely with Rockwell, Warrent, WFTW, the Qantas Club. You heard Shedd Aquarium, Organization of the Northwest, these are just to name a few. We have added a new computer room in our school. We have iPads that children can take into the classroom. Two computer labs, sorry. We have added books to a once empty library. We're working on a parent workroom. We're working on a lending library for our parents.

Thanks to a generous donation from
Andersonville Chamber of Commerce, our teachers will have a new workroom. We have done numerous improvements to our building and the infrastructure. I believe we're on a strong upward trend at this school, and we don't want to get closed when things are really just getting going there.

Please allows us to stay open. There's no doubt in my mind that we can continue with the support of our parents and your community we can be the next level one sought after school on the north side. Thank you.

MR. KNISKERN: We will extend an additional two minutes to Trumbull. We'll extend our time.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon, my name is Maria Gaulanes, and I am here representing Trumbull for my special needs daughter, who also is bilingual. I want to share a little bit of my experience. When my daughter started about five years ago in Trumbull, when she was being transitioned from Vear, (phonetic) which is an autistic school. I was very nervous, being that Trumbull was so big and I never knew anything about it, but I went in and met the principal at the time, Mr. Wilkins, who kindly took me to the teachers.
At that moment, I discovered that Trumbull is a magnet school, which made me very happy and hopeful, as far as to the success that my daughter will be capable of making.

To my surprise, within months of her being there, family members, as well as friends, noticed a complete change in her, as far as speech, being more sociable, interactive and focusing. She started to do more things with the fine motor skills, and opening doors and turning light switches that she couldn't do.

And as Mr. Alderman O'Connor said, Trumbull is one of the highest schools for social engagement, which is one of the needs very high for our kids. And so at this moment, I also wanted to say for my daughter to be changed to a school where she could only be for a certain amount of years, I don't know how that would impact her progress. She might not make any more progress, and she's doing things that I, as her mother, never thought she could do, as friends and other family members have seen.

But also I wanted to say that we are participated, I don't know if you have all heard, a government program called LORC started in NSLY in
'79, but it's a survey done to know statistics of what people at a certain age, like ours, what their desires are for the future.

My daughter has been able to participate in this program. When she first started, she could not engage to the computer to respond to the problems that they were offering her. She could not signal at the flash cards, nothing.

This year, when (inaudible) Brown came and did it, my daughter had a 99 percent accuracy of response. It was amazing. And I did say this is due to Trumbull School, and she wanted the information, wanted me to offer this to other parents.

She wasn't able to be here today, but she would be willing to offer anything in writing to support the witness that she saw. And so I just want to say, know that we have to think children first, always children first. Keep Trumbull open. Keep all schools open.

MR. KNISKERN: We would now like to hear from the designated speakers for Stewart, Vivian Henande.

SPEAKER: My name is Vivian Henande, (phonetic) I am community member here, but most importantly,
I'm a concerned parent. I stand here representing the Stewart School, and I stand for all schools. Stewart is a place, Stewart is a place where my children have been since pre-school, and it wasn't until a few days ago that I learned about the school's closure.

And it raised alarms to me, because what does it mean for my children. It means that my son, who has ADHD, loses his support system of teachers and staff that has helped him along the way. That has seen his progress and understands his difficulties.

It means that my daughter doesn't get to graduate with her class, her classmates and friends she has known her entire life. I'm deeply concerned about what my children's options are. What schools, what school will they go to. How will they get to another school, when Stewart is just a few blocks away.

I am concerned about the social and emotional stress that is being put on my children and their safety. Despite what the numbers indicate, Stewart is it, is a second home. It is an extended family filled with teachers and staff that
care and love their students as their own. Closing one school affects all the schools in the neighborhood.

If you close Brennemann, it affects Stockton. And if you close Stockton, it affects Trumbull. And if you close Trumbull, it affects Stewart. Don't close Stewart. Don't close any school.

SPEAKER: Dear parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members, my name is Jaylen Williams (phonetic) and I'm a life long student from Stewart Elementary. I'm here to ask you to keep my beloved school open.

For many students, like me, Stewart is the only school I know. Most of our students have grown up in this school as the only place to learn and be successful in life. Students think of Stewart as another home for them. They're able to get a good meal, get supplies, and most importantly, a thoughtful hug when they're feeling down.

Second, our students have transportation and safety concerns if they have to go to another school. A lot of students have problems with schools from other, a lot of students have problems
with kids from other schools. They get bullied most
of the time, and the Stewart kids have their
boundary. To me and other students coming to
Stewart is an easy, safe walk and we can get to
school without any trouble for fear.

Lastly, the Stewart community is a family.
Everyone knows and cares for one another. Students
feel comfortable and safe with their family of
teachers, friends, and staff. The teachers here
have known us since we were very little, and are
always willing to help us with problems at home or
school. Students are able to receive one-on-one
help with their schoolwork and be successful
students.

In conclusion, I really hope you will help
me fight for the closings of all schools, but
especially my school, Stewart. Stewart has given me
a passion for learning, including reading, music,
science, and even math. I want to be able to
graduate from my family at Stewart.

So, from my heart, I hope everyone feels
the way I feel, and will do, and do all they can to
help to make Stewart a place for future students of
our community. Thank you for your time and
SPEAKER: Hi, I'm Jen Lu, (phonetic) and I'm a science teacher, a middle school at Stewart School. And in looking at our performance over the five years that I have been there, we have gone through a new administration, and just like a lot of the schools in the area, we are in an upward trend looking at our reading, math, and science scores. And we've worked extremely hard over the past five years with the new administration to provide professional development for our teachers, looking at needs of our school, our unique situation, and, you know, a lot of times you talk about how small these schools are, but it really benefits our students.

The size of the school that we have now and even looking at individual classes, we have got 31 students in my fifth grade classroom, that's a lot of students to have. In that fifth grade classroom, I have 11 different instructional levels that I have to teach at. And the same thing goes for the rest of the middle school team.

We recently have departmentalized and we have a designated social studies teacher, a
designated math teacher, a designated science teacher, language arts, and we have really been working extremely hard to increase our students' performance and we have been successful in that in the last five years.

Some of the hardships we face is we have a high homeless population. We still have large class sizes for the needs of the students we have. We don't have social services that we need to address our students.

So even though we struggle, we still are supporting our students, making sure that our students have a safe place to come. As Jalen said, and as many of our students who come up here and speak, I wish they all had time to come tell you how great they feel when they come to school.

We have students that have such a hard time in the neighborhood, at home, they have got lots of responsibilities, and we always hear how much they love the instruction, how much they love all the partnerships that we have at our school. The accessibility that they have with teachers. Our administration knows the names of every single student in that building. Our teachers know the
names of every single student. If someone is in trouble, if someone needs help, we're there working together constantly.

We have severe safety concerns for our students. Walking field trips, I try and take my students to the Montrose Bird Santuary, and it can't happen a lot of the times because, you know, gang issues or violence issues.

Our students have trouble as it is coming to and from school. We have trouble keeping the building open long enough to have evening programs to support the community and families because of the safety concerns.

Our students cannot go east, they cannot go west, they cannot go south, they cannot go north without crossing gang boundaries. And then the turf issues in the neighborhood. We have had issues with, you know, students from other schools and, you know, just kind of a tension in the neighborhood constantly. We need to be thinking about these factors on top of all of the other factors that are being taken into consideration school utilization.

So, it's not just the size of our building, it's not just our population, it is the level of
resource that we can provide to our kids. It's the safety and the stability that our kids need every single day.

MR. KNISKERN: Thank you. We now would like to hear from Stockton School.

Jacques Agbedy, Nea Norris, and Minerva Feldman.

Thank you. Please continue.

SPEAKER: Hello, my name is Minerva Feldman, and I am a concerned parent with two children with autism. I cannot emphasize the struggle and anxiety involved when looking for the best education one can afford with a child with special needs.

It has been a long uphill journey and many times at the mercy of CPS. Our children started out at Coonley due to our home base school not offering an autism program. After two years at Coonley, the program was abruptly removed during the end of our summer school session, with parents not given any time to prepare our children for a major transition.

It has made us feel that our children are not a priority and always at the bottom of the list. When, in fact, they need the most support.

We were then notified the children were
being placed at Stockton. I had met some of the
staff at Stockton, when they worked the summer
school program. I was very pleased and felt
comfortable with their knowledge with working with
children on the autism spectrum.

I then decided to visit the school.

Stockton had just gone through a 13 million dollar
renovation, which included central air in the
school, but the most important finding is that it is
one of the only, if not the only Chicago Public
School that provides a Snoezelen room.

A Snoezelen room provides sensory
stimulation and relaxation that children on the
spectrum need. I was amazed that Miss Marilyn
Sandler, the speech therapist at Stockton, was the
person responsible for successfully getting over
$65,000 in grants to have the Snoezelen room built.

And she did this on her own time. It is a
beautiful room, and that is just one staff member of
many employed at Stockton that show a wonderful
dedication to the children of Stockton.

If you are not aware, children on the
spectrum must have stability. Change is not an
option. The autism programs are becoming less
available and more children a year are being diagnosed. Charter schools do not offer autism programs.

Our children have been moved multiple times in their short time with CPS. This year they lost their teacher mid school year, due to the fear of the school shut down situation, with less than a week's notice. Our children are six and under dealing with this inconsistency.

They have finally settled in and are very comfortable. Everyone knows them and are very supportive. They have made leaps and bounds academically.

As a working parent and a community activist, we are imploring you for stability for our children. Stockton has over 35 percent special education. It is not right. These kids are our future.

SPEAKER: Good morning, everyone. I am a 2012 eight grade graduate of Stockton Elementary School, and I currently attend Chicago (inaudible). In the summer of 2007, I moved to America from Toto, Africa with my brothers. I came here without knowing any English. I had dramas that I thought could never be
accomplished. I was overwhelmed. When I came to Stockton Elementary, the teachers and staff members embraced me and helped me achieve my goals and dreams.

They motivated me to go beyond my abilities. Because of the amazing people at Stockton, I was nominated, I was nominated and received an outstanding award for amazing history in ourself. I got the chance to be the key note speaking at a fund raising event.

While attending Stockton, two other students and myself were selected as upstanders. Our photos are in Time Out Chicago and in an exhibit at the Harold Washington library. Through programs such as Heart that Stockton provides, I was able to improve my literacy skills. I learned how to be compassionate towards animals, people, and the environment.

Stockton Elementary is not only a school, we are a family. Closing this school would be like tearing down a family apart. As a matter of fact, closing any of the schools would be like tearing down a family. The staff members treat the kids with respect. They motivate us to go above and
beyond our abilities. They make sure that we are
safe, both at school and at home.

Without the school, I would never have
gotten a $40,000 scholarship to attend the
prestigious art school. The staff at my middle
school teachers helped me to raise over $1,000
towards my transportation and books for the school.

The staff members also make sure that
everyone graduates from Stockton, goes to a school
of their learning abilities. One of my teachers was
the teacher of the week for DNA phone .com. On
behalf of the Stockton family, I am asking you to
please not close the school, or any of the other
schools. Thank you so much.

SPEAKER: My name is Nea Norris, I have resided
in the Uptown community for 36 years and Joseph
Stockton Elementary has educated not only me but my
children as well as my immediate family for the past
33 years.

I would like to start by thanking the
faculty of Stockton School for their ongoing
support, inspiration, motivation, determination for
education. Stockton's effort to provide the best
education for their students, their warm embrace and
acceptance in such a diverse neighborhood and their overall devoted commitment to this community makes them exceptional.

The students get along well, the teachers, administrators, counselors, support staff, and therapists are very friendly and interact with each other on a very professional level. I can't say enough about Stockton.

They believe that every student is unique, and they value that uniqueness. Their goal is to provide the most complete education for the students based on those student's individual needs. They are a school of integrity. The properties of great student achievement are addressed by providing quality professional development.

Although this community is affected by high poverty, gangs and drugs, the Stockton staff continues to empower their students and families through positive and safe tactics. We, as parents, teachers, and students acknowledge what we lack, and we are working together during school, after school, and at home so that Stockton will meet the Federal Education Standards.

Stockton offers programs like after school
tutoring, which my son attends, he is a second
grader, he is in second grade and a little behind in
reading, I assure you, since he started this
program, he is making good progress. After school
Allstars, a program that teaches our students things
like dance, volleyball, games, et cetera. The Heart
Program educates our students on how to become
humane citizens towards animals, people, and their
environment. And Stockton has even formed a
relationship with the Community Counseling Center of
Chicago, commonly known as C4, so that the families
of Stockton School can have access to free
counseling.

Stockton is in the process of working with
the community on a $15,000 garden project. Every
day people in the neighborhood are contacting
Stockton saying how can we help. We have just
received a hundred thousand dollar grant from
hands-on science for grades K through third grade.
The kids will be dissecting sharks. How
exciting is that? I stand here today as a single
mother with children and a Truman College student
with a 3.2 GPA. My major alumni accomplishments are
all due to Stockton, to the staff at Stockton. I
thank you for your help, your advice, your support,
thank you for telling me that I can do it. I truly
believe in the statement it's never too late.
Stockton goes above and beyond in making a
difference in helping not only their students but
their families as well.

And in closing, I am a true believer in
God, and I hope and pray that you all take deep
consideration when contemplating the future of
Joseph Stockton Elementary School.

Closing the doors to Stockton will shatter
the hopes and dreams of these kids and their
families that are faced with the challenges that I
mentioned earlier. Keep in mind that Stockton's
impact on their students is strong. Keep in mind
that the programs and resources offered by Stockton
that is being utilized by the students and their
families every day in hope for a successful
education which will lower or possibly wipe away the
community's drug, poverty, and gang issues.

Most importantly, keep in mind that
Stockton has created a strong foundation that makes
their students eager to learn. Lastly, Stockton
already had one student shot for being on the wrong
side of Broadway, with all the shootings, with all the shootings going on in Chicago, let's not take a chance and have one more student in danger. Students like Hadiya. Students like Hadiya who need a safe environment. Let's not take a chance.

Stockton is a safe haven for students. We are all here to fight for Stockton, but we believe that all schools should remain open. We are one voice for one school and one community and again my name is Nea Norris and I approve this message.

Thank you.

MR. KNISKERN: At this time in our agenda we will continue with public comment for two minutes. I will be strict on this time, for two minutes each. I will call you down in groups, please sit at the table or the chairs on the side.

From Stockton, John Taylor. From Trumbull, Pastor King. From Brennemann, Cisley Celmer. We have Andre Hernandez, a parent signed up from the community, and Derek Bridges from Edgewater. We're limiting you to two minutes.

Please continue.

SPEAKER: Good morning. My name is John Taylor and I am from the Stockton School Community. I am
going to speak as briefly as I can, so that my
grandson can speak. I am a grandparent of Gabriel,
Gab here, and he is in the second grade at Stockton.
I am also a parent, my daughter went to Stockton 30
years ago.

She went there for two or three years,
especially during the Harold Washington
Administration. Right on. About the last time we
had democracy. I want to say this, I was in DC on
Tuesday for the State of the Union message, visiting
a congressman, what we have here is a state of the
onion, because something stinks.

You know about two and a half years ago my
wife was teaching at Myra Bradwell School at 77th
and Burnham, and she had been there about 16 years.
And she noticed that when she came back after summer
vacation that there was a lot of improvements in the
school. New capital structures were built and an
elevator was put in, all sorts of great things
happen. And within one year that school was
shuttered, the entire staff and the teachers were
forced out, and then they brought in a private
contractor to teach at that school.

MR. KNISKERN: 30 seconds please.
SPEAKER: So then we noticed that Stockton, this past year and a half, that they also had capital improvements, and then we get the word, just recently, as we see the list that Stockton due to close. Something stinks in Chicago.

SPEAKER: Hello, I am Gabe (redacted) in second grade at Stockton. I have been there for three years. I really don't want it to close. It is a great school. Don't close Stockton. Don't close any school.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon, I am Cisley Celmer, I graduated from Brennemann and I attended Stewart. If you close Brennemann, Stewart, Stockton and Trumbull, I would like to know where the children of Uptown will go to school? What is left? Will you bus them to other parts of the city? If so, where, what will this do to the community of Uptown. You will ruin it further, instead of helping us turn it around. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon to everyone and good afternoon to the chief, Mr. Craig Benes. And I want to say thank you very much for everything.

Mr. Benes has been a very wonderful chief in this area. And I want to thank him for his wisdom, his
knowledge, and everything, and the handling of
events. And I also want to say that he's a key to
education. Thank you Mr. Benes.

I also want to thank the Alderman who spoke
a lot about the importance of education for a child,
as a former teacher. He seems to understand the
plight of all the teachers, that will not only miss
their students, their education and all of that,
what will become of the students that they have come
to love so much. Then they will also be concerned
they will be lining the lines of unemployed, what
will become of the staffs of all these schools.

How difficult will it would be to put food
on the tables, different homes, and let's pause and
think about all of this. In fact, Trumbull School
has been a wonderful place for kids, especially
children with special needs. I have been at
Trumbull School as the pastor of the church, where
we established ministries for about 13 years.

MR. KNISKERN: 30 seconds, please.

SPEAKER: I have seen what has been going on at
Trumbull School. Trumbull School is, it is a home.
And every student there at Trumbull School, they
love what they see. I want to tell you a little
story, there was a man one morning on Sunday morning, hours before service would start, and he came around the place, as I was walking through and he asked me what is going on here. I said we have church here. He said, oh, how wonderful. I was a student in this school 55 years ago. And I am so surprised that this school is still here, which means that this school is a historical place.

MR. KNISKERN: Please conclude.

SPEAKER: Also, I was in a class, the computer class, fully equipped, and the janitor came up to me and said I can teach you how to use a computer. I said how, how? Well, what can you do? I said, he said, she can design the building, she can design the hardware.

Well, looking back at everything, we want to do everything in our power to support our schools. We want to do everything in our power, let's not close down the schools. Let us build together. Let us learn together. All of the schools for the City of Chicago, and if we commend the teachers and staff, especially the principals at the schools, and they are doing wonderful jobs.

Thank you very much. God bless you.
MR. KNISKERN: Thank you for your time.

SPEAKER: My name is Andre, I'm a graduate of CPS schools, a parent and a teacher. Rahm Emanuel once said, let no crisis go to waste. This crisis was created by Rahm and one percent.

You know when I was in school, our classes, of course, went to mobile units, overcrowding, and overcrowding was fine for many years, and now that we have gotten sizes down, which all research and my experience has proven that smaller class sizes are better, suddenly it seems to be a problem.

Money, there's not enough money. Well, if I could have all the money, I would fund public education, because I would make these board members pay their fair shares. I would make the corporations pay their fair shares. I would dip into the TIFF. I would make them pay their fair share. There is money out there, the problem is there is no priority.

But you don't see that. You see numbers. You don't see the possibilities. You don't see the children, the families, the communities, you see numbers. I have students who travel all the way from the boarder of the Indiana boarder right there,
two hours sometimes to get to schools, because you
guys intentionally defunded and took away resources
from communities so they couldn't go to their local
schools.

MR. KNISKERN: 30 seconds, please.

SPEAKER: You would rather fund corporate
interest, because they help political value, not
educational value. Public education is not a
priority, the priority is corporate interest,
political power, and the destruction of organized
workforce. You're willing to sacrifice the kids.
You're willing to pit community against community,
family against family, children against children.
Unacceptable. What is the priority for funding,
find the funding.

(Whereupon the speaker spoke in Spanish.)

MR. INTERPRETER: We already heard from the
different programs, how those programs involve
development and the growth of our kids. Why are
they damaging them emotionally when they close these
schools? I come to represent all the schools as a
parent from our community. It's not fair to close
them. We need them to educate our kids. Why are
they closed. Why don't they help us? Why don't
they help to keep them open? I am a single mother of four kids and just like me there's many others, perhaps this means a lot of expenses to send our kids to. Please, why not, why don't you worry about the education of our kids and why don't the government worry about these young people and sending them to study in schools and instead of trying to close them. Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Hello, my name is Derek Bridges, and although I'm a teacher, I'm here as a member of the community. My bedroom window overlooks Broadway, right down the street here at Edgewater, and I have been hearing a lot about how this needs to be done, but not a lot about how it is going to be done. I'm concerned about the safety in our community. I am wondering how many people here, that are making these decisions, have woken up at 4:00 a.m. with gun fire outside their windows, because I have, and my students have, and these families here have. You all know what I am talking about.

I heard the superintendent of police yesterday saying that they can provide police force to make sure that this happens safely. Right now
they can't stop shootings right here at Sunnyside
Mall and Wilson, how are they going to make sure
it's safe when our students are having to cross gang
boarders to get to school?

500 murders in the City of Chicago, and
you're saying you're going to put some more police
out there and our students are going to be safe? I
don't see that happening. I have a hard time
believing it.

Also, you know I have heard all these
promises from CPS about, well, if you don't want us
to do it this year, we'll put a five year moratorium
on that. I have worked for CPS for two and a half
years now, we have had four CEOs. Four, in two and
a half years working here. What is their promise
worth to me? They're making decisions for students
that they don't know in communities they have never
been to. You're telling me they care more about
these students than I do?

Are you telling me they know what's best
better than their parents here, their teachers here.
They know what's best? Four CEOs in two and a half
years. Somebody needs to get their priorities
straight. Straighten things out downtown, we'll
worry about our schools. Thank you.

MR. KNISKERN: We will continue with public
comment. The next people to come down are Lou
Rosenbaum, a grandparent. Diana Strzalka, a former
high school teacher. Carol Hayse, from Rogers Park
Neighbors. Karen Zaccor, from the Northside Save
Our Schools Organizing Committee. Please come down.
If I call your name.

If I did not call your name, please wait
your turn. Okay.

THE COURT: Lou Rosenbaum.

SPEAKER: Lou Rosenbaum had to leave, and he
asked me to take his place. Would that be okay?

MR. KNISKERN: Your name, sir?

SPEAKER: Tim Furman, I live in Rogers Park. I
represent Rogers Park Neighbors for the Public
Schools. I would like to ask if there are any LSC
members in the building. Would you raise your hand.
Anybody? Thank you. I would like to address my
comments to the elected people in this room, because
nobody over there is elected.

Because we don't have that right in
Chicago, which is why we have to go and beg our
Alderman for support. It isn't perfectly clear from
this meeting that any democracy is taking place, so
let's, let it take place right now. If you are
opposed to any school closing in this network, any
school, would you stand up.

They don't have a plan for special
education students, special education, and there are
thousands of these kids, special education requires
rooms. It requires pullout rooms and resource
rooms, and when they shut down one school, they're
going to lose rooms for that. And if they don't
have a plan for that, and they don't have a plan for
that, you make them explain it in federal court
because it's not right. These kids are American
kids, they're not ancillary kids, they're Americans.
They deserve what American kids get, and some of
them need more and they get less, and it isn't right
and you have got to stop it.

SPEAKER: My name is Carol Hayse, I'm a CPS
social worker. As a social worker, I am deeply
concerned about the mental health of students and
families, but the same forces that close six
community mental health clinics are closing schools
without clinics on the premises. None of the
charter schools have on-site health clinics.
But CPS board's vision is clear, they want
to kill everything in our communities that
contributes to stability, vibrancy, and mental
health. They want private profits, no matter if the
violence in the communities increases. No matter if
conditions of poverty produces generations of
children in despair.

Our vision is as follows, I'm from Rogers
Park Neighbors For Public schools, we see robust
schools as centers of community renewal. We see
schools with mental health centers, health centers,
after schools support, arts programs, music
programs, space for community meetings, science labs
and so on. Much of the stuff that people have
spoken about so eloquently today.

But I must say I feel sad today also
because many of us hear think that if we beg hard
enough, if we beg the board hard enough, they will
keep our school open, but they have almost, but not
quite, succeeded in getting us pitting our schools
against each other. We support all schools. We
cannot be pitted against each other.

And, finally, I want us all to know what I
know as member of the Chicago Teacher's Union, our
politeness today will not save us. Being polite, being articulate, being eloquent, being well researched will not save us. We need to show the anger that we have and what they are doing to us, show your anger, take to the streets.

(Whereupon the speaker spoke in Spanish.)

MR. INTERPRETER: My name is Lara (inaudible). And I think it is not fair, it's not just what they're doing to our kids. These teachers supported our kids, I have, for example, have my child at Stewart and we have seen a lot of improvement, especially under the new principal.

I have seen, personally, that improvement in my son own, and I think a lot of what is happening to us is we lack God in our school. They let him leave the school, there's no parent time, and so without God in our schools, violence has gone up, and that's why we're getting these problem with school closings.

I believe that God is the one who gave us our schools and gave us our teachers to tell them how much we need them, we need them because they're very good teachers, and if we close our schools, schools are homes for our kids. We need them to
think about our kids, not think about themselves.

SPEAKER: My name is Karen and I am with Northside Save Our Schools Organizing Committee. I am wearing my stop the violence T-shirt today because what the Board of Education today is doing is violence against our children.

When they make our children cross dangerous boundaries, it's academic violence. When they talk about closing our schools, instead of how they can make them better, and it's emotional violence when they pit our schools against each other to see whose going to survive in the end.

But we can stop the violence, we're not alone in this. You hear around the city, parents everywhere, teachers everywhere, communities everywhere, is saying don't close any school. Don't close any school. That's right. So in order to keep our schools open, we have to come together. And it's wonderful that many people from schools that are no longer in danger came out today to join us and support us.

But the list is growing in Chicago and we need everyone to join it, today is only the beginning. So I am asking people here if you want
to be part of the movement, please find me at the
end of the meeting. Find the people with clipboards
who are part of Northside Save Our Schools
Organizing Committee. The fight is going to go on.

MR. KNISKERN: We have extended our time for one
final speaker. I would like at this point to say
thank you to Matt Ginsberg, our translator. And
Dennis Hartnett, who is our Certified Shorthand
Reporter. Thank you for being here.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Thank you for
allowing me to speak. My name is Wendy Katten, I'm
the Director of a parent group that helps parents
citywide. I have been to two of the four schools in
this network, and many, many schools around the
city, and I can see for my own eyes that CPS
spreadsheet doesn't reflect the reality of what is
happening in our schools. It's extremely
humiliating that you all have to be here and beg and
plead and provide information that people sitting
right here should have about your schools.

We should be here with transition plans,
education transition plans for your students this
late in the year. We are very concerned about the
6,112 children with IPEs who would be impacted if
the closings took place, and the 2,508 homeless students on this list.

I would like to invite anybody who is concerned, we're having a meeting next week with special education attorneys and other attorneys. There are many attorneys around the city willing to help you. E-mail me if you're interested. Wendy at ilraiseyourhands.org. That's it. Thank you.

MR. KNISKERN: Okay. I would like to turn it over to the chief of schools, Greg Benes, for one final comment.

MR. BENES: Thank you parents, teachers, and students for attending today. Thank you for speaking from your heart. If you would like to submit anything further, comments in writing, we will take them. We are committed to working together for the best interest of all students. Thank you.

MR. KNISKERN: Thanks you.

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STATE OF ILLINOIS     )
COUNTY OF COOK     )

The within and foregoing community meeting
taken before Dennis Hartnett, C.S.R., at 235 East
103rd Street, in the City of Chicago, Cook County,
Illinois, at 11:15 o'clock a.m. on the 16th day of
February A.D. 2013.

The undersigned is not interested in the
within case, nor of kin or counsel to any of the
parties.

Witness my official signature in and for
Cook County, Illinois on this 18th day of February
A.D. 2013.

__________________________
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