

**Community Meeting for the Proposal to Co-locate James R. Doolittle Elementary School and Chicago High School for the Arts (Chi Arts) in the same facility**

January 20, 2012; 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Location: Dunbar Career Academy High School, 3000 S. King Drive

**CPS Staff in Attendance**

Nancy Bobel; Kathryn Ellis; Janet Fitzpatrick; Gregory Gray; Thomas Maloney; Lindy McGuire; Bridgid McClelland; Michael McGehee; Claudia Quezada; Patricia Taylor; Ashley Voss; Dave Watkins; Johari Wilson; Daniel Zoller; and Andrea Zapp, Board of Education Member

**Brief Summary**

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to co-locate Doolittle Elementary School and Chicago High School for the Arts (Chi Arts) in the same facility in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a presentation regarding to the proposal. There were approximately 65 community members in attendance.

**CPS Presentation**

The start of the meeting was delayed in order to accommodate individuals arriving late due to the inclement weather. At 6:12 p.m., Claudia Quezada welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. She then gave an overview of the proposal and summarized the parental feedback given to CPS at an earlier meeting. Finally, she, along with Patricia Taylor, highlighted the benefits of the proposal. Around 6:27 p.m., the meeting was opened for public comment.

**Public Comment**

**Pastor Steve Jones**

Pastor Jones appealed to CPS to recognize that children in the community have been acknowledge and identified as being in a failing school. Now that these children have the opportunity to be exposed to a high performing school, he encouraged CPS to take the opportunity to create a model that can help elevate other schools to a higher standard. He urged the community and CPS to stand together to take the position that, “we will no longer allow our children to suffer the stigma of being a failure.” Pastor Jones wants to see Doolittle students have the opportunity to enter into Chi Arts so they can stand and be proud of where they come from because CPS made it possible for them to be exposed to the highest standard of learning in their own community.

*Summary of Response from Pat Taylor:*

There is no excluding students from being able to audition for Chi Arts. However, no student gets into Chi Arts unless they audition for placement in that school. It wouldn't be that Chi Arts is doing anything different, the school would just be following the same protocol. But, the benefit is that they are in the same building, and the two principals will be working together during the period in which Chi Arts is housed at Doolittle. CPS encourages Doolittle students to audition to be a part of Chi Arts, as it is a great opportunity.

### **Apostle Steve Jones, Speaking Opportunity #2**

Pastor Jones would like to make it known that the community is very concerned about the rate of failed schools and those schools on probation in the African-American community. He is concerned about the strategies being prepared and discussed by CPS. Pastor Jones expressed that the successful environment of Chi Arts should be used as a measure to bring about change to schools that are failing. In addition, he feels that once Chi Arts moves to its own building, CPS should implement a plan to place a contract school or a school of high academics in the Doolittle building that can also serve as a model school, helping to break the stigma of failure in the community.

#### *Summary of Response from Pat Taylor:*

The administration is truly committed to the exact things you are saying. CPS wants to ensure the things we are offering are right for our students. As far as making decisions as to who goes into what buildings, that is a situation in which CPS would talk to parents and the community and have hearings before final decisions are made.

### **Marissa Brown, Parent**

Ms. Brown spoke on behalf of parents, saying she has four children in CPS and that Doolittle is one of the closest schools to their home. She wanted to know why Chi Arts cannot stay where they are. Her youngest is in first grade, and she is highly uncomfortable with her kids going to school with high school students. In addition, she has not felt as though a lot of community input has been involved in the process, nor does she see how increasing the capacity of the school to more than 700 students will benefit the kids. Ms. Brown also asked how Doolittle can be lacking so much, but be asked to give more by housing another school. In conclusion, Ms. Brown shared that she will be looking for new academic options for her kids because she isn't comfortable with her children attending school with high school students.

#### *Summary of Response from Patricia Taylor and Claudia Quezada*

Chi Arts has outgrown its own space. As a result, CPS renovated Doolittle West, because the administration does not want to disrupt students. For CPS, the easiest decision was to relocate adults (administrative staff) that were in the west facility so that Chi Arts could be in the building without disrupting any students. Next year, Chi Arts will add a class of seniors that is growing. There isn't space for them in their current building. Doolittle is next door, and there is space because they are at 80% utilization.

The principals of both schools will work together to resolve any issues that may arise. CPS will separate the Chi Arts students by keeping everything they do on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. In addition, anything Doolittle currently has on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor will be recreated on the first floor, so they will lose nothing.

**Marissa Brown, Speaking Opportunity #2**

Ms. Brown asked why Doolittle and Chi Arts don't swap locations – why doesn't CPS put the smaller school into the Chi Arts Building and put the Chi Arts high schoolers into the Doolittle facility?

*Summary of Response from Pat Taylor*

There was a thought process around that, but the real answer lies in finding a long-term solution for Chi Arts, and the District is close to being able to make that announcement. Investments and programs have been made in Doolittle West, and CPS is very close to a long-term solution that would give both schools back their own buildings. It also comes back to not displacing students. CPS didn't want Doolittle to feel pushed out by Chi Arts. CPS understands there may be issues, and internally we have questions as well, and we are trying to find a solution that will not displace students or have a negative effect on students. The bottom line is, why would it be best to uproot students for a short-term period?

The best decisions may not have been made in the past, but CPS can't change that. The best option was to find a home for Chi Arts students while not displacing students. In the next two months, again, CPS will be announcing the long-term plan for Chi Arts.

**Ms. Fanya Berry, Education Organizer for Doolittle**

Ms. Berry shared that some parents have expressed concerns that some of their students are trans-gender, and they are wondering if there will be curriculum regarding LGBT issues. She suggested that perhaps seniors should be on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor instead of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders, given that they may be more mature. Parents from both schools are concerned by this.

*Summary of Response from Pat Taylor*

I can take this suggestion back and have that conversation. That is the point of these meetings. Nothing has been set in stone so we can address issues such as these.

**Otis McNeil, Community Member**

Mr. McNeil shared that police and security forces have known about the troublemakers in schools, that teachers and administrators have known about the problems, and that CPS has been failing schools for too long. He expressed that the community will no longer tolerate students getting a sub-par education, and that the community is for consolidating schools and resources and implement new programs that open kids' minds to learning that brings schools into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He believes that kids can learn anything they are exposed to, and that if kids feel good about themselves, we will have great communities and a great city.

*Summary of Response from Pat Taylor*

The District has taken a very serious look at safety, and there are several programs to support these efforts, such as Culture of Calm, to ensure students get safely from one location to another. CPS' priority is definitely the children, and this administration has committed to looking at the District differently than in the past. CPS is looking closely at how we make decisions, and we are working toward a master education facility plan – what are the right schools and how do we offer the best and greatest educational environment for our children? By the end of this year, we will be able to announce that plan.

**Otis McNeil, Speaking Opportunity #2**

Mr. McNeil expressed that the proposed action makes sense, given that Chi Arts is growing and Doolittle has more than enough room to handle students. He said that recent reports indicated that half of CPS buildings are underused. Students will be gaining more access to resources and information, students from both schools will get more academic support, and no teachers or administrators will lose their jobs.

**Otis McNeil, Speaking Opportunity #3**

Mr. McNeil asked why is it that real estate reflects the resources children have? How do we disseminate books, and who gets what books?

*Summary of Response from Pat Taylor*

I don't have a good answer for you, because I'm not from the education side of CPS. Our team will follow up with you.

**Bernita Bogan, Westside Community Member**

Ms. Bogan shared that she was in attendance to stand up for children in failing schools. She said that when she went to school, it was different; they had parents and organizations behind them, but today, it doesn't seem like people care about children. She expressed concern that students aren't at the level they should be, and that the curriculum isn't meeting their potential. She is concerned that students don't have access to the right curriculum and that they aren't challenged in schools. She believes that parents and relatives must get involved in their children's lives, because they are the future.

**Carlette Watson, West Side Community Member**

Ms. Watson shared that she has nephews and nieces that go to Crane High School, and she doesn't feel they are getting a quality education at the level they should be learning at. She also doesn't feel as though they are being supported by teachers.

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Public Comment concluded around 8:00 p.m.