

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Phase Out Dyett High School

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

Location: Charles A. Hayes Center, 4859 S. Wabash

CPS Staff in Attendance

Oliver Sicat, Sean Stalling, Brian Pool, Tanya Branch, Lashali Thomas

Brief Summary

Summary: The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to phase out Dyett High School in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a brief presentation about the proposal. There were 22 speakers during the meeting, and their comments focused on a variety of topics including: requests for more resources, for change in their children's school, why it has taken several years to see increased investments in their schools, support for the phase-out of Dyett but concern over the lack of other high-quality school options, concerns over sending students to Phillips and objections to the action being proposed.

CPS Presentation

Oliver Sicat, Chief Portfolio Officer for CPS, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Sean Stalling, Chief of High Schools for the South Side Network, then gave an overview of the proposal. Oliver Sicat then reiterated the process for making comments before opening up the floor to the attendees who had signed up to speak.

Public Comment

Pastor Pervis Thomas from the New Canaanland Church, Faith-based Constituent

Pastor Thomas was present on behalf of the South Side Ministers and West Side Ministers Conference. He said that elected officials need to stand up for the children and support actions for reforms that will place our children first. He said it is irresponsible for anyone to defend failure in our schools, yet those who oppose taking the next set of actions to help our children are just doing that.

Mr. Erwin, Community Member

Mr. Erwin said that the violence of the children he sees around him frightens him. He also said that he was scared to walk down the street in his own neighborhood.

Mr. Marshall McHall from the KLEO Center, Community Member

Mr. McHall said that if schools have to be closed in order to have reform, then so be it, and that if it will get us better teachers so our children can be equipped academically, then do it. He said that he works with 5- and 6-year-olds who don't know their ABCs and don't even recognize them. He said that it really hits home when you see something like that, and if closing schools is what it takes, then CPS should do it.

Stephen Grazaway from the KLEO Center, Community Member

Mr. Grazaway said he sees children on a daily basis and a lot of them come from Dyett. He admitted that they are ill-prepared. He wants whatever decisions that are made to be in the best interest of the children and not in the best interest of the decision-makers.

Mrs. Linda Lake from the KLEO Center

Mrs. Lake is a volunteer at the KLEO Center. She is retired from the Chicago Public Schools and volunteers in high schools. She supports phasing out Dyett, saying that the record speaks for itself and that the school staff and faculty have lost their enthusiasm to motivate the students. She asked, “How many chances have to be given before there’s improvement?” She said it’s time to try something new, do something new. She said to parents present, “Get your child into a high-performing school. It will pay off.” She noted that she has a child at Morehouse University in his third year, and that he graduated from a school in the Bronzeville community. He won a Bill Gates Millennium Award Scholarship that paid for his PhD. She also said that her granddaughter graduated from Philips as an honor student, and that she has another child at Hope, also in the Bronzeville area. She said, “It can be done, parents. Put your child in a high-performing school, and it will pay off.”

Matt Farmer, Parent of two CPS students

Mr. Farmer lives in Rogers Park. He writes about schools for the Huffington Post. He recently wrote an article about Dyett. He mentioned that on Dec. 1, Dr. Donoso, the Chief Education Officer for CPS, appeared on the Chicago Tonight show to talk about school closings. He heard that that CPS would only move forward on closures in schools where there were better options available. He said that while Dyett is a Level 3 school and has been on probation for 15 years, Phillips has been on probation for 15 years. He said that he is all for quality schools, but that there must be an honest dialogue about where to find those schools.

Ms. Foster, Parent

Ms. Foster mentioned that some schools teach a trade and that Dyett does now. She said that the school doesn’t have shop class. She added that schools should have some time devoted to how to cook, sew and clean as well as basic economics. She repeated that it’s not the schools’ fault.

Keisha Leigh from the KLEO Community Center, Community Member

Ms. Leigh said that came to the meeting to be a voice of the children that were not here. She said that she was fortunate to go to a school where she could get an education. She said that we can spend money on jails or put money into the schools. She said it’s time for change, but that change will take time.

Erica Clark, Dyett teacher

Ms. Clark teaches computers at Dyett. She said that in the three years she has been there she has had resources consistently taken out of Dyett, and that Dyett is not provided with the same resources as the so-called high quality schools. She mentioned that Dyett currently has no assistant principal and that in September one of their two counselors was removed from Dyett. She said that resources need to be given to the schools that are struggling.

June Webb, Dyett science teacher

Ms. Webb is a science teacher at Dyett and a supporter of KOCO. She said that the school lost their art teacher this year, and that students still have to take an art class in order to graduate. She noted that Dyett and Phillips are both Level 3 schools.

Howard Emmer, Former CPS teacher:

Mr. Emmer said that closing schools is an old policy and not a solution. He said that these schools should get more resources, and that CPS should invest in Dyett and schools that are struggling rather than in those that are already well-funded. He also mentioned that students are forced to take too many standardized tests.

Sarah Simmons, Parent:

Ms. Simmons said that having the meeting on a Friday night during Christmas break sent a very strong message that CPS is not looking for real community input. She said that, while it may sound like a lot of money (\$3.3 million) that has been invested in Dyett over five years, she would like to know how much North Side College Prep has received over that timeframe. She said that this smacked of racism and is not fair. She said that class-size ratios need to be improved and that the emphasis on standardized testing should decrease.

Karl Hubert, Student teacher

Mr. Huber has been retired for 28 years, but has decided to come back to teaching to do something good for our kids. He wondered why CPS is offering \$101 million to schools only after they are scheduled for turnaround? He said that turnarounds target communities of color. He said that CPS has failed in its duty to assist all these schools to get off probation. He questioned how CPS can allow a school to be on probation for 15 years.

Anita Linder, Parent and teacher

Ms. Linder has been a parent for 30 years and a teacher in adult education and family literacy for 30 years. She said that when schools don't meet the needs of children, when those schools aren't good enough, then everyone needs to work hard to make them better. She said that closing down a neighborhood public school is a tragedy. She said that the Bronzeville community has done an excellent job of coming up with an alternate plan, but that the Board of Education has ignored it.

Ms. Reggs, Parent

Ms. Reggs said that phasing out her daughter's school is the equivalent of saying that her daughter is a nobody and can't achieve anything. Her daughter came from a school on the North Side of Chicago and transferred to Dyett High School. When her daughter transferred from North Side school to Dyett it was clear that the former school had a lot more resources.

Chanavia Reggs, Dyett student

Ms. Reggs said the teachers at Dyett are incredible and that she feels safe there. She believes that she will receive a worse education and be in danger if she goes to Phillips. She doesn't want her school closed. She thinks it's the best school she ever attended.

Lawonda Rioven, Parent:

Ms. Rioven has children attending Marshall and Delmar School. She said that schools should be fixed, not closed.

Mr. Norwood, Former Student

She wants CPS to look at the big picture.

Kimberly Bonestru, Teacher

Ms. Bonestru said the schools that are closing are under-resourced, and that money is getting allocated to places it shouldn't. She said that everyone needs to work together to improve these schools, and that closing them is not the answer and that they ruin, rather than save, neighborhoods.

Mr. Gibson. Dyett teacher

Mr. Gibson said that the only problem that Dyett has right now is the students they get, that they are three-to-four years behind. So, therefore, it's a struggle and the school's numbers are low. He said that KOKO plan.

Torrey Barnett, Community Member

Ms. Barnett said that Dyett can't continue to operate given the statistics.

The meeting adjourned around 7:00 p.m.