

**Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Guggenheim Elementary School**

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

Location: Shiloh Baptist Church, 7050 S. Racine Ave.

**CPS Staff in Attendance**

Jamiko Rose, Mike Rendina, Adrian Willis, Latonya McDade, Jennifer Rottner, Leonard Langston, and Molly Burke

**Brief Summary**

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Guggenheim Elementary School in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a presentation regarding this proposal. There were about 134 community members in attendance and 31 speakers. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics including: the lack of support for failing schools, an explanation for the low reading scores, concern over lack of funding for the school, the perceived promotion of the Guggenheim principal and concern that students were being asked to transfer schools despite parental objection to the transfers. The meeting ended with Alderman Latasha Thomas asking for the school to be included in the turnaround program instead of being closed.

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**CPS Presentation**

Adrian Willis, CPS Chief of Schools, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Jamiko Rose, Chief Community & Family Engagement Officer for CPS, explained the meeting rules and procedures. Willis then presented an overview of the proposal. Around 6:13 p.m., the meeting was opened for public comment.

**Public Comment**

**Reverend Marion Johnson**

Rev. Johnson said that Guggenheim is just one of many of failing schools in the community, and that upholding the status quo is not enough. He said that bold action is required to bring about change; the statistics are unacceptable, and everyone must change, and change now. No one group has put us in this situation; now is the time for us to stand together to meet the needs of our children.

**Joyce White**

Ms. White said that Guggenheim is one of CPS's failing schools, and that they do not support failing schools.

**Larry James**

Mr. James said that if the proposal goes through, students will go to Bond. He said they do not support failing schools.

**Peggy Turner**

Ms. Turner said that CPS cannot continue to set up our students for failure. She said that the community needs better options for the students and does not support failing schools.

**Marilyn Bryant**

Guggenheim is in the bottom five percent of schools. She does not support failing schools.

**Latoya Durden**

Ms. Durden said that students at Bond will receive summer programs and that they do not support failing schools.

**Traci Davis**

Ms. Davis said they do not support failing schools.

**Latanya Hines**

Ms. Hines said that what is most important to her is that students get to and from school safely. She said does not support failing schools.

**Loraine Tolbert**

Ms. Tolbert said that the time for supporting failure is over, and that they do not support failing schools.

**Cassandra Vaughn, middle school teacher**

Ms. Vaughn said that when looking at the statistics, CPS needs to look at other things. Half of the third graders had a substitute teacher for half of the year. She said that not everything is the fault of the teachers. Students should get a quality education; but, they should be able to get the all of the support students in other communities receive.

**Rene Heyback, Attorney for The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless**

Ms. Heyback said that many parents were concerned about getting letters about transferring their students to another school, and that she wanted CPS to state for the record that all students are welcome to return to school after the holiday break and can remain in school for the rest of the school year.

*Summary of Response from Chief Adrian Willis*

Chief Willis confirmed that all students may return to school after break and remain enrolled until the end of the school year.

**Bernard Hagler, future father**

Mr. Hagler does not feel it is right to close the school, saying that every child is different and that if students are not getting education, to look at the curriculum. He said that CPS needs to make sure it is funding the school correctly. In the suburbs, students have computers. A student in his neighborhood cannot do her assignments. The technology has not been updated since his mother was in school.

*Summary of Response from Mike Rendina, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs*

CPS agrees that school funding is a huge issue. Illinois is 49<sup>th</sup> in terms of state funding. The District needs to work with the community and law makers to increase school funding.

**Janice Beckham, LSC member, PAC member, parent**

Ms. Beckham does not want to see Guggenheim close. If \$1.5M was spent, it should have been better guided. There are no failing schools but failing students. The kids are used as political pawns. There is nothing she would not do, teachers volunteer their time. They want to see students get a good education. Don't offer me a different school, offer me a better school.

**Matthew Luskin, Parent and community organizer**

Mr. Luskin spent time with families during the past week. He said that the Board talks about a proposal, but then the Principal gets promoted and sent to another school. Homeless parents are being called and told they must transfer, being lied to and told they cannot remain in the school. He said that it seems like it has been business as usual for the past 10 years – targeting schools in African-American communities for closings and turnarounds. Ms. Luskin believes that bold action would be giving funds to the community, not putting money into TIF funds. He asked that CPS not close Guggenheim.

*Summary of Response from Chief Willis*

The Principal did not receive a promotion. The Principal in place now has been in the school for two years so there will not be a disruption for the students. In addition, if the proposal goes through there will be a new academic leader added to the building.

**Unidentified Community Member**

Speaker stated his hope that all of the children of Englewood would receive an excellent education.

**Ronald Jackson, LSC member, parent**

Ms. Jackson said that the CPS Board representatives have not been honest, that the school has been on probation because of the business people and the Board. She expressed unhappiness with the Mayor and CPS CEO. She also said that once students transfer, they can never come back.

**Kimberly Walls, 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher at Guggenheim**

Ms. Walls provided several test score results she believed supported leaving the school open. Scranton scores beat out 15 other schools in the area. Kids called crying because someone from the school told them that the teachers were not coming back. She did not see any one in the audience in her classroom. Do your homework. There are some teachers that don't work hard, but that is when the parents need to go advocate for their children.

**Jessica Flynn**

Ms. Flynn said that the school called her on January 2, 2012, and told her students needed to be transferred. She said that the principal is passing along students that can't read to other schools, and that they should have fired the principal, not promoted her.

**Donna Roberts Williams, President of Imagine Englewood, 50 year resident**

Ms. Williams said that Englewood is a forgotten place; the schools in the area have been closed down, but CPS is not offering any other options. She expressed concern that CPS is going behind the parents' back and saying that students have to be transferred. She also wondered why CPS takes music out of school. She said that Action Now is going to put action on the school district.

**Jeanette Parker**

Ms. Parkers said that No Child Left Behind was a set-up, and believes that kids don't have a chance. She feels that only when kids are dead do people care. She expressed concern that only kids going to public schools are getting killed; why are the kids not getting what they need to go far in life?

**Charles Brown, resident for 40 years**

Mr. Brown feels the community gets the basics from the Board of Education, and that the Board determines what to do to save money. He expressed concern over the lottery, saying that the lottery money is going downtown; Illinois is the 48<sup>th</sup> funded state but among the highest taxed states. He is frustrated that CPS is not closing schools on the north side because they are receiving the funding, and said that if they could receive the funding, they could run a school.

**Joseph Curtis, comes from Englewood**

Mr. Curtis doesn't like what people are saying about Englewood. He went to college and was a gang member; he said that it is not the kids. He said that he's 70, and that it is not the kids fault, it is the fault of the mother and father.

**Shirley Mack**

Ms. Mack said that her three grandchildren go to Guggenheim and that she received a phone call on 1/2/12 about transferring the students. She did not know why the school was saying the students had to be transferred. Her grandson was crying because he did not want to change schools.

*Summary of Response from Adrian Willis*

Clarified that Guggenheim students can go back to school on Monday.

**Rebecca Marble, from the west side of Chicago**

Ms. Marble said she was in attendance to speak up for the children. She has been a volunteer at several schools, and doesn't want CPS to close the schools. Rather, she said they need CPS to fund schools. She asked CPS to think twice and put the money back into Afterschool Matters instead of closing the schools.

**Betty Claire, her 9 children have attended Guggenheim**

Ms. Claire has no problem with charter schools, but she said she has a problem with the fact that CEO Brizard came to the school and did not speak to the parents to find out their concerns. She does not agree with the closing. She said that CPS could not fund the school, and that there was no gym teacher and no counselor. She is concerned that every school that is closing is in an African- American community.

**Vivian Wallis, Stagg elementary school, Special Ed teaching assistant**

Ms. Willis said that more than half of CPS schools have only 50% of students achieving targets. She works long days and is upset about Stagg being a proposed turnaround. If the issues are with the administration, don't attack the staff in the schools. She does not want Stagg be a turnaround.

**Huerron Wilkes, Community organizer with Action Now**

Mr. Wilkes said that it is so important to meet so that the public can express how they feel. He feels that the Board gives community organizations a bad name and that they don't tell folks about the TIF money going to all the large corporations instead of the schools. He is concerned that students have to travel all over in unsafe neighborhoods. He also expressed that CPS isn't closing schools in Mr. Emanuel and Mr. Brizard's neighborhoods. He said that Action Now is here to stay, and that they are going to fight for schools.

**Terry Robinson, Teacher at Guggenheim for five years**

She challenged Adrian Willis's claim that the Principal did not get a promotion. The staff received an email from the former Principal saying she received a promotion and said that there is a huge discrepancy between the email and Mr. Willis's statement. Recent 3<sup>rd</sup> graders failed to meet reading standards, but the school was

overcrowded and the students had more than one teacher during the year. The district has spent \$1.5 million in the past five years and that education takes money. Seventy students are homeless. Teachers are committed and fund personal items for the classroom.

*Summary of Response from Adrian Willis*

He restated that the former Principal did not receive a promotion.

**Steve Gibson**

Mr. Gibson said that Guggenheim has good teachers and that he fought for the school two years ago. He expressed frustration that the Board representatives are sitting in suits, but that kids don't have schools. He said that Mr. Willis is helping our students fail, and that it is up to the parents to change the school for the students. He said that if he wants to transfer, it is because he wants to transfer, not because CPS tells him to.

**Ronald Bryant**

Mr. Bryant said that when he went to school, he had black teachers, and is grateful he found similar teachers that helped out his kids. It is his understanding that it is mandatory that schools have 60 to 75% white teachers. He feels that "if you don't look like us you won't love us." He said that CPS has a large white teacher base and wonders why the students don't learn. He found tutors for his kids because the white teachers were not doing what they needed to do.

**Alderman Latasha Thomas**

Ald. Thomas said that no one should be acting as if the school action is a done deal. But, she received calls from parents complaining about their students being transferred. Two years ago, she fought really hard to keep the school open. She understands the frustration. She is against disrupting students. It is true that failing students fall into distressed categories and horrible circumstances, but closing the school will cause students to travel through multiple gang territories. Forcing students to adjust to strange environments creates more challenges for already challenged students. Taking action without comprehensive evidence-based solutions is spinning our wheels. She proposed the school be turned around and not closed. She urged CPS to support, listen to and empower the community action council. She said that parents can't stand by while students fail. We cannot assign blame; we must drive real change in our homes and schools. Otherwise we are failing our kids. For these reasons, we should turnaround Guggenheim. She has been pushing for a turnaround for some time. CPS's explanation for why they cannot turnaround Guggenheim has not answered her questions. Don't move the children - deal with the adults.

Public Comment concluded around 7:17 p.m.