Community Meeting for Proposal to Close Guggenheim Elementary School
January 20, 2012; 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Location: Shiloh Baptist Church, 7050 S. Racine Ave.

CPS Staff in Attendance
Jamiko Rose, Adrian Willis, Jennifer Rottner, Leonard Langston, and Molly Burke

Community Members in Attendance: 66

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 the proposal. There were approximately 66 community members in attendance and 22 speakers. Public comments focused on a variety of topics including moving Guggenheim students to Bond, issues related to the distribution of a transfer form with unknown origin, and a call to action for the community to help strengthen neighborhood schools.

CPS Presentation
Jamiko Rose, Chief Community & Family Engagement Officer for CPS, welcomed those in attendance and explained the meeting rules and procedures. Adrian Willis, CPS Chief of Schools, then presented an overview of the proposal. At approximately 6:21 p.m., the meeting was opened for public comment.

Public Comment

Marrion Johnson, Reverend
Reverend Johnson stated that as part of the faith community, he came to speak for those who cannot speak and seek education for those that cannot educate themselves. The whole system has failed our children. There is a dire need for the children to go to high quality schools. He wants the community to stand up for their children so they can succeed in school and function in the workforce. He asked CPS to do what is best for our children.

Sonya Hubbard, Assistant Principal of Bond Elementary
Ms. Hubbard welcomed all Guggenheim students to Bond. She explained that part of the vision for Bond Elementary is to accept all Guggenheim students and prepare them for career and college. Bond provides programs that drive high scores, including parent meetings, SES tutoring and Saturday school. She is looking forward to meeting the Guggenheim parents next year and welcomed all families to visit Bond.

Sherri Gabby-Parker, Guggenheim Employee, 26 year CPS employee
Ms. Gabby-Parker highly recommended that the school not be closed. The school was almost closed two years ago. The individuals that fought the closing received approval for an improvement plan. However, the new principal put in place did not implement the plan. A year later, the principal is gone and the school is being closed. She would like to present an improvement plan and asked CPS not to close Guggenheim.
Taneisha Houston, Former Student
Ms. Houston stated that everyone wants a high quality school. She does not want Guggenheim to close. She encouraged the audience to come together to support youth in the community.

Felita Morris, Parent,
Ms. Morris stated “Let’s work together so we can improve the school.”

Terri Robinson
Ms. Robinson stated that Guggenheim is being considered for closing because it is a failing school. But we need to look at everyone when determining the reasons for failure. The school needs to be given the resources to succeed, including low class sizes, more physical materials, parent training (including paying parents $25 for literacy training), and a full-time disciplinarian who can reinforce respect for each other. The school needs the tools to properly educate the children.

Thomas Barklay, Pastor
Mr. Barkley came to the meeting to represent all the children. He is concerned about all school closings, not just Guggenheim. We need to look at who is at fault, not point fingers. We need to take a closer look at the responsibilities of parents and educators across the city and own up to our responsibilities. He is concerned that if a problem is passed to another school, the problem will still be there. He also said that we need to address the real problem. We need to pay close attention to the social-emotional needs of our youth and bring resources to address those needs. We need to take a look at what is happening in our families and communities. We need to come to a mutual agreement of what our youth need; otherwise, we are going to have the same problems at Bond Elementary School.

Mathew Luskin, Organizer for Teachers Union and Parent
Mr. Luskin received calls from parents wondering if the hearing was canceled due to bad weather. He said it was a reasonable question given CPS did cancel afterschool programs and all athletic events for the day. We should not be surprised that the meetings went forward because it seems to be CPS’ intent to have low turnout. He expressed concern that parents and community members were turned away from a parent advisory committee (PAC) meeting earlier in the day. They were told that they could not come into the meeting until the Principal received notification from central office that it was officially a public meeting. According to Mr. Luskin, it is another example of illegal activities at the school. Last meeting, we discussed the effort to illegally force parents to leave school and targeting homeless youth. He wanted to know what type of investigation is being done and what action will be taken. Guggenheim has put together an improvement plan in the past and was not given resources to implement the plan. He also referenced a map showing that the last ten years of school actions have targeted the black community. He stated that “ten years of closing schools in African American neighborhoods is business as usual.”

Summary of Response from Chief Willis: Parents were not turned away from the PAC meeting. Any parent had the right to transfer their youth; the issue is still under investigation.

Summary of Response from Chief Rose: In regards to the homeless student issue, we did complete do an investigation. One reason parents were contacted was to explain the Options for Knowledge process that allows students to attend schools across the city. We contacted parents and communicated the deadline for the process was in mid-December. There is still an investigation regarding some parents receiving incorrect information. We have subsequently determined, and we will confirm this, that 95%
of the students that transferred out have returned to Guggenheim. We held the meeting despite the bad weather because according to Senate Bill 630, we are required to provide 30 days’ notice to all parents of the times of these meetings. The law does not provide exceptions, even for inclement weather.

*Summary of response from Molly Burke:* We did contact the parents of students in temporary living situations and explained that the students did not have to transfer out of Guggenheim.

**Hilton Fields,**
Mr. Fields came to the meeting to re-educate himself. He has been told this is a democratic society but it appears it is a dictatorship. He does not understand the objective of closing the school. There is a lack of compassion in what CPS is trying to do. There’s no consideration for parents and the children whose futures are at stake. Nobody understands unless they live in the community. Most of the community is a war zone. Taking students 8 or 9 blocks out of their way to go to another school is a potentially dangerous situation for the kids and the parents. There has been a large degree of disrespect from CPS in terms of communicating with the community.

**Donna Roberts, Local School Council at Hinton Elementary School**
Ms. Roberts stated that the situation in Englewood is going on in all schools on the south side of Chicago. The Englewood area has been neglected. The parents should have a say over their children’s future. There is a no-tolerance policy in the charters and turnarounds that does not fit our children. Her nephew was not allowed in a school due to the no-tolerance policy. According to Ms. Roberts, CPS is just doing what they like to our students. We need to come together as a community to speak for our children.

**Sarah Hainds, Chicago Teachers Union**
Ms. Hainds referenced a University of Chicago study that states that only 6% of students who transferred out of schools closed in the last ten years went to better performing schools or actually achieved academically. You have to go to a significantly better school. And Bond is not a significantly better school. The school action is not about improving education for youth but it is about giving the property to a charter school. She asked for an account of how the $1.5M invested in Guggenheim was spent and how they measured if those supports were adequate to help the students.

*Summary of Response from Chief Rose:* We do not have plans to put another school in the Guggenheim building. In fact, one of the reasons we are considering the school action is because the building has major structural issues. But, we are working with the Alderman to identify possible ways for the school to become a resource for the community.

*Summary of Response from Chief Willis:* The $1.5M invested in Guggenheim comes from the School Improvement Planning process (SIPAAA).

**Dorothy Warren, Grandparent**
Ms. Warren asked if more teachers will be hired with the money being allocated to CPS. What is the purpose of closing one school and overcrowding another school? Will you hire more teachers when you send the 291 students to a new school? What size will the classes be at the new school? Will Bond receive more school books? Is the fact the school does not meet the criteria the only reason you want to merge more students in a classroom? She is concerned about all inner-city schools and their children.
Summary of Response from Chief Willis: There is more than enough space at Bond for all Guggenheim students. CPS will provide teachers and resources based on the number of students in the school, so the classes will not be overcrowded.

Ronald Jackson
Mr. Jackson stated that at the previous meeting, some people supported closing Guggenheim. He is tired of the Mayor’s and CPS CEO’s tricks. The District is not providing the resources that schools need to be successful. CPS cuts programs out of schools and expect students to learn. CPS just wants to close the school so they can sell the building to charter schools and semi-retired business people. CPS is not here to help the residents. The Board gives the Caucasians praise but disrespects the minorities. Give us two years to fix the school. When we ask CPS a question, they say they will get back to you and they never get back to you. We are going to file a lawsuit to keep you from closing the school.

Hueron Wilkes, Community Organizer with Action Now.
Mr. Wilkes grew up in Englewood. Earlier in the day, CPS was not letting parents and community members into a PAC meeting. He was at the meeting. The principal said they needed to get Board approval to let taxpayers into the building; it was very disrespectful. CPS is business as usual. The Mayor said there would be transparency, but, the District has closed-door meetings. CPS is not closing schools on the north side of Chicago. CPS is pouring resources into the north side, but not enough resources are going to Englewood.

Thomas Barklay, Pastor
Pastor Barklay is not attached to a school; he is attached to children. He wants what is in the best interest for the children. The fighting needs to stop. CPS Central Office, the union, and the parents need to sit down and talk about what is in the best interest of the children. Closing one school and opening another is a chess game. We need to figure out what we need to do. If you are going to close the school and the decision has already been made, just tell us the truth. If you are going to close the school, quit planning games with all of these hearings and sit down and discuss with us what the students need.

Summary of Response from Chief Rose: The school action is a proposal until the Board makes a final decision on February 22, 2012. The Board Members are listening to the community and the feedback we are receiving in the community meetings. The school actions hearings will have an independent hearing officer who will oversee the meeting so we can ensure the community’s voice is heard. The hearings will take place in the Board Chambers and CPS will let in as many people as we can accommodate in the Board Chambers.

Mathew Luskin, Organizer for Teachers Union and Parent
Mr. Luskin stated that if the Board was truly interested in input, the community meetings would be held at a school. Stagg Elementary School, which is proposed for a turnaround, had only one hearing at 8PM on a weeknight in a location where parking is expensive. He stated that the Board knows that people have been paid to come out and support the school closings. He wanted to follow-up on the transfer form that was placed on the doors of parents. The form was not an Options-for-Knowledge application, but a transfer form. When the parents spoke up about the transfer situation, the Board called the parents liars.

Summary of Response from Chief Rose: We held a parents meeting at Stagg and Guggenheim. Both meetings were held on a Saturday morning, a convenient time for the families. The meeting was not
required by law. We wanted to hold the meetings in a place that would accommodate everyone and was also in a place within the community because they are community meetings. The person who distributed the transfer forms was not authorized by CPS. We are investigating the situation.

Reverend Marrion Johnson
Reverend Johnson stated the statistics at Guggenheim show that the students are not progressing at the rate they should. The truth is we have all failed the children. The school has not produced successful students because it is a failing school, full of failing teachers. We need to go forward so our students can succeed. What is going to be the outcome for our children? We can’t continue to create a situation of failure for our children. We want our children to have the opportunity to succeed.

Name unknown, Parent
The speaker’s comments were inaudible.

Terri Robinson, Teacher at Guggenheim
Ms. Robinson had two questions: How many classrooms are empty at Bond? Why have you not made sure that there were enough teachers at Guggenheim this year if you are going to have enough at Bond next year? She also stated that you can’t address what is going on in the classroom unless you address the problems outside the classroom with support from the parents and the community.

Summary of Response from Chief Willis:
Guggenheim was afforded additional positions due to school enrollment. There are some rooms at Bond being utilized for other activities that can be used as classrooms next year.

Asiaha Butler, President and Co-chair of the Englewood Community Action Council
Ms. Butler addressed the community, not CPS. The Community Action Council has been working diligently every first Thursday at Robeson High School. No one in the audience has come to the meetings. All elements of the community must come together for a solution. She told the audience that if you are truly concerned about the children, come and contribute to the monthly meetings to support the plan.

Latesha Dickerson, Co-chair of the Englewood Community Action Council
Ms. Dickerson does not feel it is productive to engage with CPS. She wanted to engage the audience instead. She is a product of public education. She encouraged each of the audience members to work with a child and to attend the Community Action Council meetings.

Taneisha Houston
Ms. Houston stated that it is as if CPS is working against us. We have to walk 5 blocks to get to a better school. We need to improve our school and need the commitment of our community to help us.

Public Comments concluded around 7:25 p.m.