

## **Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Julia C. Lathrop Elementary School**

January 20, 2012

Location: Collins High School, 1313 S. Sacramento Drive

### **CPS Staff in attendance**

Jennifer Cheatham, Chandra James, Kishasha Ford, Alex Soble, Colleen Broderick

### **Brief Summary**

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Lathrop Elementary School, an existing phase-out school, in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a presentation regarding the proposal. There were 10 speakers. Public comments focused on a variety of topics including whether or not Lathrop had shown signs of improvement. Two CPS principals spoke about the high-quality educational options being offered to families in the area.

### **CPS Presentation**

Jennifer Cheatham, Chief Instructional Officer, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Chandra James then gave an overview of the proposal and highlighted its benefits. Following this presentation, the meeting was opened for public comment.

### **Public Comment**

#### **Rev. Tom Hayes**

Rev. Hayes said that people should stop blaming each other and work together to fix the system. He said that it was important to give the teaching staff support instead of relocating students.

#### **Brandon Johnson**

Mr. Johnson asked Jennifer Cheatham and Chandra James about rumors floating around. He asked if KIPP is moving into Lathrop. Jen Cheatham said in response, "Not that I know of." Mr. Johnson asked, "What's the Board's plan for the building?" Jean Cheatham responded, "I don't know – we'll get back to you." Mr. Johnson said that once the proposal goes through \$3.4 million will be invested in the building. He asked then why can't those kids who are at Lathrop right now have the 3.4 million to fix Lathrop the system.

#### **Jermaine Gause, teacher at Lathrop School**

Jermain Gause introduced himself as an employee at Lathrop Academy. He said that when he first came to Lathrop, it reminded him of the movie *Lean on Me*. He said that parents did not have respect and there was no gym or computer lab. He said that he and the principal spent extra time working with kids after school. Lathrop has shown growth over time. The data can never tell the true story about what goes on from 9:00 to 2:45 and he and the Lathrop community are trying to make something happen with nothing.

#### **Laura Lopez**

Ms. Lopez introduced herself as the counselor and case manager at Lathrop. She said that Lathrop is not a failing school, but a school that was starved to fail. She said that Lathrop outperformed Johnson in 2008, 2009, and 2010. She said that Lathrop had no art, no music and no and that all after school partners discontinued their programs. She asked, what school wouldn't fail under those circumstances?

### **Cynthia Brown, Lathrop LSC member**

Ms. Brown says that she lives, worships and works in North Lawndale. She attended Lathrop, worked at Lathrop for 17 years and currently volunteers at Lathrop and serves on the LSC Board. CPS is changing the rules of the American Dream for the students and staff. Lathrop met the standards and has always been a safe haven for the community. She asked CPS not to change the rules.

### **Alice Henry, Principal of Johnson School of Excellence**

Ms. Henry introduced herself as the Principal of the Johnson School of Excellence. She was at the meeting to address the parents of Lathrop community and community at large. She assured the parents that although she is an administrator, she does not make the final decision about whether schools will close. But she will make sure that when their students arrive at Johnson they will receive the highest quality education she capable of giving. She said that Johnson had zero fights this school year and last year as well as a very high standard of learning. She said that parents are welcome to come visit Johnson at any time to see for themselves.

### **Hector Delgado**

Mr. Delgado said that the failure of Lathrop necessitates its closure. The District should close failing schools like Lathrop and put resources into promising ones.

### **Elvira Alcauter**

Ms. Alcauter said that no parent can accept Lathrop's failure to educate our kids. She said that if the union is against school closure, they should present a workable alternative. He said that change is not going to happen without a serious action, and that includes school closures. Our children's future is at stake and things won't improve unless we do something now.

### **Maria Gasca**

Ms. Gasca said that no one is happy with the citywide graduation rate barely above 50%. She said that the union and others oppose positive changes for our children. They are putting their own self interest ahead of the needs of our children. She said that if CPS makes the best decisions for our children it will close Lathrop.

### **Andre Cowling, principal, Collins academy high school**

Principal Colwing said that we are here for one thing—to ensure that your kids are getting the best education that we can give to them. Because Johnson is a partner school with Collins, we almost call this Johnson Academy High School. Even when students are not at the academic level that we want them to be at, our teachers are trained to get them there. He said that here at Collins Academy, we're the only school on the West Side of Chicago that is not on academic probation. Johnson is just steps away from us.

### **Darlene Willians**

Ms. Williams disagrees with school closings. She said that the school closing were taking our children's education away. It has nothing to do with relationships; it has to do with education. She said that our children are suffering and we need to keep all schools open. She said that our kids need to remain in their neighborhood where they are safe. If we don't speak up, nothing will get done.