

**Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Price Elementary School****January 20, 2012; 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.****Location: King College Preparatory High School, 4445 S. Drexel Blvd.****CPS Staff in Attendance**

Noemi Donoso, Chief Education Officer; Eric Pruitt, Deputy Chief of Schools, Burnham Park Network; Latoyla Jones, Assistant Principal, National Teachers Academy; representatives from Communications, Community Relations, Portfolio Office

**Brief Summary**

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Price Elementary School in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a brief presentation regarding the proposal. There were approximately 40 people in attendance and 11 speakers. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics, including the Bronzeville Global Village proposal, the effect that the proposed action will have on Price students, and parents' desire for their children to have a quality neighborhood school within walking distance.

**CPS Presentation**

Noemi Donoso, Chief Education Officer for CPS, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. She explained that, by law, the community meeting could not be cancelled or rescheduled due to the inclement weather. Eric Pruitt then provided an overview of the proposal. At approximately 6:15 p.m. the meeting was opened for public comment.

**Public Comment****Margo Murray, Price Teacher**

Ms. Murray has already been through one school closing; she worked at Casas when it was closed in 2009 and is familiar with school closings – it is not a fun experience. Closing schools tends to separate the school from CPS. She said it is a very hurtful experience. The rest of the school year is almost lost to the students. There may be some good things about NTA, but the children suffer so much pain and anguish that it is not worth it. She has talked with parents and they do not want to put their children on a bus. One of the parents asked her (on the day of the heavy snow), if she thought students would have been able to get to school and home in the snowstorm. Parents want their children in the neighborhood. The support that CPS is offering, such as a full-time social worker, should be offered here in the community. She stated that the proposal was demeaning to the children and teachers. The reality is that a lot of the children are going to end up at Fuller Elementary School, yet Price's test scores are higher than both Fuller and Woodson's. She asked the Board to consider a contract with the Bronzeville proposal that is on the table.

**Katrina Wilson, Price LSC chair**

Ms. Wilson stated that the Price LSC opposed the proposed actions. The LSC is committed to children receiving a world-class education in their own neighborhood and they support the Bronzeville proposal. They feel that their input is ignored. They believe that CPS knows how to create excellent schools – CPS just doesn't want to do it for their children. They worked for 18 months to create the Bronzeville plan and do not have a commitment from CPS to work with them to improve the schools. CPS wants to close

the schools and shuffle around the children like cattle. You would not accept this for your children. Ms. Wilson submitted a letter from the Price LSC identifying its opposition to the proposed action.

### **David Robbins**

Mr. Robbins noted that the CPS presentation talked about safety measures, but sounded like the safety measures would only be for 2012-2013. What happens after that? Is NTA required to accept every student? The slideshow talks about boundaries for the area. What are the boundaries for? The presentation also addressed a culture of calm. He does not see how CPS can take an action like this and view it as doing anything but disrupting a culture of calm.

#### *Summary of Response from CPS Officials:*

The speaker's name was taken by a floor team member and information regarding the safety measures will be provided to him. NTA will be the receiving school for all students currently enrolled at Price; currently enrolled students will be guaranteed a seat at NTA. The boundaries for the area will be in effect going forward; if the proposal is approved, any student that would have enrolled at Price will, depending on their address, have Fuller or Woodson as their neighborhood school.

### **Lorenzo Young, Community Resident**

Mr. Young is a lifelong resident of Bronzeville. He attended the meeting thinking that he would have the opportunity to speak to some school board members, but there were none in attendance. He doesn't see any real creativity coming out of CPS. He acknowledged that there are a number of qualified people in the planning process, but the schools in the area are a very important fabric of our community. By closing the doors, CPS is closing an important part of community development. He feels that CPS has turned its back on the community. Consider the KOCO Bronzeville Global Village Proposal – it is a plan to get parents and community involved in the process of changing the schools.

### **Maurice Jones**

Mr. Jones said that he hears a great deal about the closing of schools. He is not at the meeting in support of CTU or CPS, but rather, he is there in support of students. He believes that if the schools are failing, they should be closed and turned around. Any school that is failing needs to be closed.

### **Shannon Bennett**

Mr. Bennett stated that when people are bussed into the community, they need to check in with people who live in the community. He expressed hope that CPS is not supporting organizations that have been bussed into the hearings for Crane, Dyett and Price. At the last community meeting, people told him that they were paid \$25 to hold up signs supporting the school closing. It is dangerous that people are being paid who have nothing to do with these neighborhood schools. The Bronzeville plan is very real – they have been working on it for 18 months.

#### *Summary of Response from CPS Officials:*

For the record, CPS has nothing to do with such action [paying individuals to attend meetings] and would never condone such action.

**Krista Alston, Price LSC Member and Chairperson of the Price PAC**

Ms. Alston stated that if the proposed action is about the children, why move them from the building they are already in? Why move students around when they have a school in their own community? Her son asked her why CPS wants to close his school – he loves Price and doesn't want to go to another school. He asked her, "Why do they feel they need to make a decision about my life and I have no say so about it?" Little people are human beings – they have feelings – they feel that they are under attack, as if they are not worthy to come in to their own school. Put the proper resources into the school. If CPS can do it at NTA, CPS can do it at Price. Price doesn't have music or art. There are so many disparities in CPS. The disparities across the city are unfair and unconstitutional.

**Rikki D. Jones, Community Member**

Ms. Jones expressed confusion about how CPS decides that a school is failing. She is aware of a school with the same scores as Price, but it is not categorized as failing. There should be one set of criteria. Parents need to understand why this school is failing. The Board needs to judge people based on what they put into a school. If CPS does what it does in schools on the north side, and gives the same amount of resources, they will get the same results. It is unfair to expect the same result when different resources are being provided. She wants it to be fair all around; right now it is not fair or equal.

**Maurice Jones**

Mr. Jones spoke again to address some issues that were raised. He is not with CTU or CPS – he is in favor of closing a school, turning it around and getting the right teachers and the right resources inside of the school. Mr. Jones graduated from CVS, and if CVS was going to close, he would agree that it should be closed and turned around. He stated that it is a shame that the community wants failing schools; it's a shame that we continue to say, "Let them fail."

**Krista Alston, Price LSC Member and Chairperson of the Price PAC**

Mr. Alston stated that we are invested in our community and schools and we love our children and we want the best for our children. She wants to make sure that CPS understands absolutely that the parents in this community support the Bronzeville Global Achievement Village. She is aware that some things need to be done to get the community's schools on the right track, which is why parents and the community came together to come up with this proposal. They want the chance to implement the proposal and they want CPS' support. It is disheartening to see people come into this community and speak about things they know nothing about. The solution is not to dismantle our schools and send our children across boundaries. Price is the last public school in North Kenwood. That's a fact. It is important that CPS understand that our children should get the same resources that other children have, so they know that they are loved and have been supported. You cannot hold schools accountable if they don't have the proper resources. Don't transport these students out of their community – they need to know that they have been invested in and not spread out across the community.

**Jerome Altman**

Mr. Altman is a concerned community person who feels that it is time that we stop blaming the teachers, the principals, the board of education, the parents and just fix the problem together.

**Eli Stansberry**

Mr. Stansberry agreed that the problem has to be fixed. He noted that we are losing so many of our children to the streets for lack of what they need in the classroom. He doesn't want these children to go through what he had to go through to become a man.

**LaToyla Jones, NTA Assistant Principal**

Mr. Jones wanted the Price parents to know that if the action is approved, Price's students are more than welcome at NTA – NTA is in the process of making plans in the event the action is approved. She especially wants to address the safety issues – NTA has minimum safety issues inside and outside of their building, and they will work with CPS to ensure safe passage for students on a daily basis. They are also willing to work with families to have shadow days in the spring, team building activities in the summer, and open houses to welcome the families. NTA offers art, music, gym, and swimming. In 2001 when NTA opened, ISAT scores were at 14%. Today, ISAT scores are at 73%. The school has worked very hard to increase their scores. They offer individualized instruction, and will do the same for the Price family. She invited parents to visit the school any time or contact her to ask questions.

**Margo Murray, Price Teacher**

Ms. Murray stated that the community has a very passionate group of people. It is easy for others to sit on the outside and say what should happen when you are not involved. Her child went to Price and she is now a teacher at Price. She is in the trenches with these children every day, and she resents it when someone says that these students need the "right" teachers – is she not the right teacher? She has heard a lot about NTA, and she applauds the assistant principal for speaking at the meeting, but she knows which students are hungry and which students have issues – it's going to take NTA a while to know the Price students because they haven't been there with them. She urged CPS to consider entering into a contract with the community to give them a certain number of years to put the Bronzeville proposal into effect, and if they fail, they will have no excuse.

**Krista Alston, Price LSC Member and Chairperson of the Price PAC**

Ms. Alston stated that Price has been positioned to be phased out, yet the school is getting WIFI installed in the building. The parents know that CPS is going to reopen it as a charter or an AUSL school – AUSL receives a million dollars per school, and that is not fair. She is a homeowner and expects to have a public school in her community where her son can walk to school and not be bussed across town. It's not fair and it's not right. She does not want her son to ask again, "Why don't they care about me?"

**Rikki D. Jones, Community Member**

Ms. Jones said that if CPS is talking about turning around schools that are failing, then they should turn around *all* schools that are failing. The first thing that turnaround schools do is put children out of the school that are a problem. We can't do that. Of course scores are going to go higher when you do that. The assistant principal from NTA proved a point – NTA brought up their scores with resources that Price doesn't have. Give Price the resources that it needs, and if the proposal fails, that's another thing. CPS won't even give them a chance. The community came up with a plan and all that they are asking is that CPS work with them to try and make it work.

*Summary of Response from CPS Officials*

Price is among the top 25 elementary schools in terms of funding and resources. It has had over a million dollars in resources over the last three years.

Public comment concluded around 7:10 p.m.