

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Co-locate James R. Doolittle Elementary School and Chicago High School for the Arts (Chi Arts) in the same facility

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

Location : Dunbar Career Academy High School, 3000 S. King Drive

CPS Staff in Attendance

Tim Cawley; Michael McGehee; Thomas Maloney; Ashley Voss; Dave Watkins; Gregory Gray; Daniel Zoller; Bridgid McClelland; Johari Wilson; Nancy Bobel; Janet Fitzpatrick; Lindy McGuire; Claudia Quezada

Brief Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to co-locate Doolittle Elementary School and Chicago High School for the Arts (Chi Arts) in the same facility in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a presentation in regards to the proposal. There were about 67 people in attendance. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics including: (1) the continued lack of a permanent location for Chi Arts and (2) the concern over putting elementary and high school students under the same roof in that elementary school students may seek to emulate behaviors of more mature high school students.

CPS Presentation

Tim Cawley, Chief Administrative Officer for CPS, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Claudia Quezada then gave an overview of the proposal. Tim Cawley summarized the parental feedback given to CPS at an earlier meeting. Claudia Quezada highlighted the benefits of this proposal. Around 6:20 p.m., the meeting was opened for public comment.

Public Comment

Mr. Bishop Harrington, Parent and faith-based constituent

Mr. Bishop mentioned, among other data points, that less than half of students in impacted schools will graduate in 5 years. He also shared that he and others have heard about all the benefits of combining schools and the many upgrades coming to the school/community, but they haven't heard about the upgrades for our students. They expect the children of Doolittle to have the same upgrades as Chi Arts. "Don't sell us with fresh paint; ensure our children have great education so they can become great."

Mr. Adam Heenan, Teacher

Mr. Heenan shared that where there have been turnarounds, closures, etc., homelessness has followed. He asked that if turnarounds and charters are so great, why aren't they in places like Winnetka. He wants a better plan for reinvesting in our schools. "If all students deserve better schools, let's make it real."

Mr. Anthony Capata, Teacher, Chi Arts and a resident of Chicago and future parent

Mr. Capata said Chi Arts isn't in a building that is fit for high school students; there isn't enough room to move around. He expressed that sharing space with Doolittle was originally proposed as a temporary solution, but that what the parents, teachers, and community has not seen is a long-term plan for CPS.

He expressed that Mayor Emanuel, Ms. Pritzker, and other members of the Board and Senior Leadership would not allow this to happen for their kids – so he expects the same kind of treatment for his kids.

Nona Burney, Bronzeville Community Action Council

Ms. Burney shared that the Community Action Council has spent a year and a half planning for schools in the Bronzeville community. She asked what is it that makes one set of students more valuable than another, because at Pershing West, quite a bit was done to accommodate Chi Arts. At Lafayette, a bit was done. She said that this is not the best way to do facility planning... to keep moving Chi Arts from one place to another; it doesn't make sense for the kids who CPS says it wants to benefit. Doolittle is a school that is moving forward – new principals, social services, and the park district are present to support families... they have walked through and seen the work the children have produced. It seems as if the plans that the community has started with all the schools in Bronzeville should be considered. They would like CPS to reconsider the co-location.

Frederick Kendricks, Community Action Council, alumni of Doolittle East, recent college grad and master's degree student

Mr. Kendricks said that his main concern is that CPS clearly does not have the interest of both parties at heart because of the way the process has rolled out. It has not been fair or transparent. He expressed that the proposal should be rescinded and that CPS should facilitate more discussion on the matter. He said that Doolittle must have plans of its own for the third floor. He said that they keep hearing about improving the building, but not about academic achievement.

Summary of the Response from Tim Cawley: CPS agrees that Doolittle is making progress, and the investment in the facility is a start. There is also an investment in that Doolittle will be chosen to receive funding for after school programs and programming through the Community Schools Initiative. This reflects our desire to make Doolittle strong. We believe this is a temporary situation. We are trying hard to find a permanent home for Chi Arts. We agree moving ChiArts three times is bad. We're working hard. We believe that when Chi Arts moves to its permanent home, the Doolittle community will be stronger.

Rober Elchert, Bronzeville Community Action Council, Education Liaison for Alderman

Mr. Elchert said, "I'm wondering, in the spirit of encouraging maximum community participation, why are all three community meetings impacting Bronzeville schools all held on the same night? Some parents have kids at more than one of these schools."

Bonnie Taylor, LSC Chair

Ms. Taylor said, "I'm very upset about this. Our babies need to grow like the bigger kids. This is not fair. Every high school has a swimming pool. Where will it be over there in Chi Arts? You don't have space for it. This isn't fair to us. Our third floor has a computer lab. Our science room is up there, the art room is up there, and the after school classes... if Chi Arts comes up there, is only the first and second floor good enough for us? I am very upset about that."

Ghakeda Tapes, Parent

Ms. Tapes said that she wants schools to be better. She indicated that some of their kids don't have books, computer labs, and a lot of other things.

Gwynda Jones, President of the Parents Organization for ChiArts

Ms. Jones said that this is news to them in terms of having to share the facility. She feels that the decision is unfair for both schools. She said that Doolittle deserves the improvements to the facility even if Chi Arts doesn't move there. Even if the decision is reversed, she encourages CPS to follow through on those plans.

She also feels as though CPS has failed Chi Arts. They have a vision that is different. It's a high school. Doolittle is a grammar school. Chi Arts has been promised a facility... why hasn't that happened?

Ms. Jones also had concerns about security. She mentioned that there have been a lot of security concerns that have taken place and that it is her understanding that promises were made to make the school and community safer. Parents have taken their own measures. A lot of things they are wanting they don't get until they become a high-incident area. Why is CPS being so reactive as opposed to being proactive? Why do we need to make our schools like a prison after the damage has been done? Why not be proactive and make kids feel safe? She thinks this is something that must be addressed.

Summary of Response from Tim Cawley: There is no question that violence affecting our students is a tragedy. We are working hard with CPD and others to address this. We had already been making investments in the 31st street corridor to work to keep that area safe. Safe Passage workers and police are involved. We have limited resources, and so sadly we can't make every campus ideal. Candidly, we didn't think the Doolittle campus would be so unsafe. It tends to be some of the high schools where we make investments. However, when there were incidents, we immediately put resources there and began a program to install security cameras.

William Weaver, Chicago Native, has a Junior at Chi Arts

Mr. Weaver said, "All we want is a home. You have a house (points at all individuals on stage). We rent. I'm tired of our kids renting. What's interesting is that our kids are more resilient than us. I'm up here for the third or fourth time. My daughter is a junior. She wants to go to college, but she doesn't know what college she is going to because she doesn't know what school she is going to be at. The kids in the community (Doolittle kids) look up to and like the kids at Chi Arts. But the way you have gone about it is totally wrong. Poor planning creates a [expletive] program. What I implore you is to please give us an opportunity to own a home, but not at the expense of Doolittle."

Vera Gibson, former parent

Ms. Gibson shared that she has lost children to gangs and violence. She wants kids to have somewhere to go after school. She wants them to have the opportunity to do something with their lives besides gangs, drugs, and violence.

Fanya Berry

Ms. Berry asked, "If Fuller and Price close, will there be an overflow of students into Doolittle? Have you taken that into consideration in your plan? Also, have you taken into consideration that Doolittle's space is not built for high school students? I can't see why there weren't any other options for a high school for them to be in besides a grade school. For Chi Arts to be a performing arts high school, they need an excellent space. Naperville has sound booths and stages. That's how they win Grammy's. Do you have ground to build them a space? You should be announcing that they will have a space in two years." Ms. Berry also asked about SB630 and how CPS was addressing that.

Summary of Response from Tim Cawley:

- We agree Chi Arts needs a terrific permanent home. We are working on that and have some alternatives that will be great that they could move into in two years. I can assure you we are working on that. We are hoping we can announce something on that very soon, like in the next month. Their families want to know that too, especially for their younger children.
- As I mentioned, we inherited this problem at the end of May; that was too late to look at other high school facilities and move them there. The reason they went into Doolittle as a first step was because there weren't students there.
- SB630: Ten-year facilities plan: Frankly, we should have been doing this all along, and that law now makes that a requirement. Must be out by end of 2012, and it will be out.
- As for overcrowding, I know for a fact that the primary plan for Price is to go up to National Teacher's Academy. That school has a lot of extra capacity, and CPS will be providing bus service for those families to go up to NTA (less than 4 miles). NTA is a higher performing school, so we think that is a good move. Fuller children aren't being moved... it's an AUSL turnaround, so they will stay in that building. We don't believe there will be overcrowding. We went through this and counted the classrooms; we'll move a computer lab to the first floor. Once Chi Arts moves out, we'd like to see Doolittle grow.

Billy Schwab, Junior at Chi Arts

Mr. Schwab said, "When I heard about the school, I was amazed. Chi Arts is a school like no other. We were told we'd have two years of sharing a building, and then have our own building. We've been told we're important, but we keep getting pushed off the agenda. Our school year is already stressful enough... and we didn't know where our home was going to be. Add that on to 9 hours of school a day... that's too much stress for teenagers to handle. I wish I could feel like CPS actually did care what they were going to do with us, because it doesn't feel like that."

Summary of Response from Tim Cawley: The mayor is personally involved in finding Chi Arts a permanent home. The past indecision on where Chi Arts will be located is disappointing, to say the least. As I said earlier, we can't change the past. We can just make the best decisions going forward.

Rashad Thomas, Student

Mr. Thomas said, "They are trying to close schools, right? Why? Because the teachers aren't doing their job. They aren't teaching us what we need to learn. So, if they take the old teachers out and put new teachers in, maybe we'd learn something. I'm at a turnaround school, and they took the old teachers out and put new teachers in, and we're doing better. That's it."

James Williams, Student

Mr. Williams shared that he has heard Chi Arts is having a problem because they keep being moved. He said that he attends South Shore and that they had to deal with a similar situation and that it was very frustrating.

Pesha Davis, Parent

Ms. Davis said, "I don't have children that go to Doolittle or Chi Arts, but I do have a baby in grammar school. I would be disappointed having a high school inside a grammar school. Kids should be kids at that time. They are going to be looking at high schools girls and what they do, and they'll think that it's okay for them to do it to. You all had all this time to do something for Chi Arts to ensure they have their own space. Why should the grammar school students have to share their space? It's inconsiderate and selfish."

Jesse McAdoo, Community Member

Ms. McAdoo said, "The city of Chicago is facing mass cuts across the board. The city is able to find resources for tax breaks, big business, and NATO summits at the cost of tax payers. I still can't connect the dots."

Lynn Burmeister, Parent of Junior at Chi Arts

Ms. Burmeister expressed frustration that Chi Arts is being moved again and not being given a permanent facility. She asked CPS to provide her with information regarding other school options for her daughter.

Verdell Smith, Dance Teacher

Mr. Smith expressed that closing schools down doesn't make sense because it causes confusion and overcrowding.

Chan'tai Chew, Student

Ms. Chew expressed concern at combining an elementary with a high school, because she thinks it will negatively impact young girls. They will emulate the older girls and want to do what they do. She also indicated that she felt some students are treated better than others, perhaps because of race.

Public Comment concluded around 7:20 p.m.