

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Price Elementary School

January 6, 2012; 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location: King High School, 4445 S. Drexel Blvd.

CPS Staff in Attendance

Noemi Donoso, Chief Education Officer; Eric Pruitt, Deputy Chief of Schools, Burnham Park Network; Principal of Price Elementary School; representatives from Communications, Community Relations, Portfolio Office

Board Members in Attendance

Penny Pritzker

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 in regards to the proposal. There were about 65 people in attendance and 15 speakers. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics including: concern for the safety of their children, questioning whether the input of parents and community members would be taken into consideration, concern that the proposal would not result in improved achievement for Price students and the welcoming of Price students and families to National Teachers Academy.

CPS Presentation

Noemi Donoso, Chief Education Officer for CPS, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Eric Pruitt then gave an overview of the proposal. Around 6:13 p.m., the meeting was opened for public comment.

Public Comment

Deborah Shaw

She questioned how CPS will stop fights in the classrooms at National Teachers Academy (NTA) and expressed concern over fighting between students from different schools. She also asked how many students will be in each classroom.

Summary of response from CPS Officials: NTA can accommodate all 111 students at Price without causing overcrowding. Regarding safety, NTA already has a culture of calm, and supports will be in place to help the transition. The classrooms will not be overcrowded -- there will be at least 28 students per classroom.

Jarmel Weathers

Closing down Price will not necessarily solve the problem; is there a plan in place for longer school hours or hands-on instruction?

Summary of response from CPS Officials: NTA is a level one performing school; over the last three years, NTA has experienced a significant increase in achievement. Regarding instruction time, there will be a longer school day for all CPS schools next year.

Valeria Hanks

She is concerned about children being taken from a school where they have been since kindergarten and that students and teachers have relationships with parents. She is concerned that the students' grades will drop if they are taken out of their school. In addition, she is worried primarily with the relationships that have been developed over the years. She asked what supports are in place for the parents and for their transition.

Summary of response from CPS Officials: CPS is also concerned about the children, which is why the District wants to send them to a Level One school. CPS wants to send children to a school where the majority of the students are meeting/exceeding standards. CPS is making an investment in NTA to ensure that Price students are supported and given additional resources so that they can succeed.

Osha Dancy

An alumnus of Price, he addressed the grade structure changes that were made in previous years to Robinson and Dyett and the increase in violence at these schools when these changes took place. He asked why is CPS still using the same method of sending students to other schools and concludes that it will not work.

Kelrin Sandridge

She asked if the audience was wasting their time here and if CPS was listening. She said that the vast majority of people do not want this, but CPS is going to do it anyway. She said that CPS does not care about what the audience thinks and that it is up to them as the public to talk to our neighbors and friends about this issue. She would like for this to stop.

Norine Gutekanst, CPS teacher

She said that it makes no sense for CPS to come forward with this proposal to send Price students four miles away to another school. Would anyone at CPS want their child to go to another school? She said that CPS is pretending that students will be provided with a decent education. Students deserve a world-class school that they can walk to. She said that CPS will leave the building open for a little while and then put a charter school in the facility. There are no parents from Price who say that they're in favor of this plan. She said that CPS will go ahead with the proposal no matter what the parents say. The parents and the community have put together a plan to improve the schools in the area that has not been considered by CPS. She said that CPS is pretending to listen but does not care about the education of the students at Price.

Jenay Harrison

Her child is a student at Guggenheim. She said that her child will have to walk six blocks to another school. Parents need to be parents and teach their children at home. She wondered what is she supposed to tell her 11-year-old child. She said that Rahm Emanuel promised that he was not going to close Guggenheim and she would like an explanation as to why CPS is moving forward with the proposal.

Jitu Brown

He did not plan to speak, but then he found out that people were bused in for this meeting for a \$25 fee to say, "Close failing schools." If anybody knows how to shut down what CPS is trying to do, it is this

neighborhood. He said that there is no proof that closing schools and sending students to different neighborhoods works. He said that CPS needs to invest in Price Elementary School. He is sick of the District coming in their neighborhood and telling them what is best for their children. He does not think that CPS has any love for the children. The speaker then read a statement addressed to CEO Jean-Claude Brizard regarding the Bronzeville Global Achievement Plan. (He refused to conclude his remarks and, when approached by security personnel, stated that “no one better touch” him.) The plan concerned Price and other schools, including Fuller, Reavis and Dyett. (The speaker was continued to speak despite several requests for him to conclude.)

Shannon Bennett

As an LSC member at Price, he said the LSC is clear on what is wanted for the school. They have a plan to make the school a STEM school; and have worked for 18 months on it. There is only one other STEM school in CPS, and it is in the UIC area. He said that Rev. Leon Finney is dishonest and was involved with paying people to come to this meeting to promote the closing of Price.

Stephanie Robinson

Her concerns are about the educators in the schools that are closing. They are going to be without jobs. If the entire school is going to be closed, the District is not only putting educators out of work, but all other personnel as well, including janitors, kitchen staff, and so on. She remembers, as a student, being bused from Cooley High to another school. Her parents worried about her every day and her fellow students were beat up every day. She is concerned about Price students being taken from their neighborhood and busing them to another neighborhood.

Sherrie Reed

Her children attend NTA and she welcomes Price students. They will treat Price students with love and respect. They have excellent security. No one is going to be injured or beaten up, and they will get the education, attention, and schooling that they need.

Malik Wornum

He is a lifetime Bronzeville resident. He is wondering why CPS is not doing anything to address the systemic issues that make these school closings happen. He would like to know where the outreach to the parents in the last four years has been considering that Price was failing. He requested a breakdown of the \$1.2 million that had been put into Price. From a historical standpoint, the parents and community are always reactive, instead of getting the opportunity to be proactive. What is CPS doing to address the issues going on in the community and he believes that the school closings are going on in communities that are African-American.

Sharon Weathers

She has three family members at Price. She does not have a problem with the school closing, but said that if the school is to be closed, parents should be brought in to work with the students and help them catch up. That way, the parents will not be concerned about their children’s safety because they will be working at the school.

Lois Nelson

She came to speak against the turnarounds. Price was doing well years ago. She asked what had changed—the community, poverty in the area, the attitude of the residents? She wonders if it was that

certain supports were not given to this school by CPS. She has questions about how much has gone into determining what has changed through the years. If you look back, she says that one will find that Price has not always been at the bottom of the totem pole. She would like for everyone to deal with the core issues of the problem, and not a quick fix, because a quick fix has not brought success. She said that CPS needs to re-address the decisions that are being made.

Public Comment concluded around 6:55 p.m.