

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Walter Reed Elementary School

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

Location: Antioch Baptist Church, 6248 S. Stewart Ave.

CPS Staff in Attendance

Steve Gering, Latanya McDade, Angela Washington

Brief Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Reed Elementary School in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials made a brief presentation in regards to the proposal. The public comments focused on a variety of topics, including: (1) safety and security concerns; (2) equal access to education and (2) social/emotional supports for the students.

CPS Presentation

Steve Gering, Chief of Leadership and Development for CPS, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Latanya McDade, Deputy Chief of Schools, provided an overview of the proposal, highlighted the benefits of the proposal and summarized the parental feedback given to CPS at an earlier meeting. The meeting was then was opened for public comment.

Public Comment

Reverend Walter Turner

Reverend Turner expressed concern that not only Reed students, but all CPS students need equal access to a quality education. Reverend Turner advocated “education reform across the board” and collaboration among the community, CPS, elected officials and the teachers’ union to address failing schools.

Renee White, Member of the Englewood Organization

Renee White stated that she believed that phasing out, rather than closing a school outright, reduces the impact on students. She further stated that those students remaining at Reed during the phase-out would not be left behind.

Bianca Sanders, Community Member

Bianca Sanders stated that failure should not be an option for the children. Ms. Sanders further stated that if Reed could not provide the tools necessary for success, “let’s make a change for the better sake of our children.”

John White, Community Member

John White stated that that time for failure is over and tough decisions need to be made so the children can have a better chance to succeed in school.

Lou Bardliving, Member of the Englewood Organization

Lou Bardliving expressed concern about the impact that closing Reed School will have the students and stated that programs needed to be in place to lessen their frustration and ensure security. He asked if security and social workers would be available to assist the students with the transition.

Summary of Response from Steve Gering: Steve Gering responded that safety is a primary concern and outlined safety as well as other transition supports that would be in place for the children.

Barbara Whigham, Member of the Englewood Organization

Barbara Whigham asked what supports were in place so the students don't get lost in the shuffle and drop out. Ms. Whigham stressed that parents required support, as well as teachers in helping the children make the transition.

Frank Gardner, Community Member

Frank Gardner indicated that he was in favor of closing Reed instead of phasing it out to improve the situation "as best we can."

Jenevie Ingram, Librarian at Reed Elementary

Jenevie Ingram stated that all of the teachers at Reed were new and were not used to the failure she was hearing about. She further stated that Reed was second in the Englewood/Gresham Network as far as ISAT scores and the students were used to doing work. Ms. Ingram shared pictures she took of the students at the Christmas program and hoped that they would make a good transition.

State Representative Esther Golar

Representative Golar provided some history of Reed based on her involvement with the school in 2007-08 when the phase-out began. She noted that there were over 200 students in 2007-08 and now there were only 44. Representative Golar further stated that public education is under-received not only in the State of Illinois, but all over. She asked if the parents of the 44 remaining students at Reed were given one-on-one interviews. She also asked about the distance students would be traveling to their reassigned school. Representative Golar also expressed safety concerns and told the audience, "we need to be the real gatekeepers of our community."

Vanessa Morgan, Teacher at Robeson High School

Vanessa Morgan stated that it was not fair that "charter schools get the money" and have nice schools. Ms. Morgan gave an example how the South Shore community had to fight to allow the new South Shore International College Prep to allow neighborhood students within its walls. She further stated that black students' self-esteem is at issue here and is suffering because they are left out.

Tyrone Dotsty, Community Member

Tyrone Dotsty stated that parents need to show more love and be better parents.

Devodak Hiley, Community Member

Devodak Hiley stated that she felt like it was right for each and every child to have an opportunity to learn what the next person is learning. Ms. Hiley further stated that a child should not pass to the next

grade when they don't know what they are supposed to be taught. She felt like it was an opportunity for a child to go to a different neighborhood, but we must make sure the children are safe.

Valencia Rias-Winjaad, Former Educator at Reed

Valencia Rias-Winjaad shared about her experiences with students at Reed and stated that “no school fails alone.” She informed that audience that they have rights as parents and community members and not only must they hold CPS accountable, but also parents, community members and elected officials.

Summary of Closing Comments by Steve Gering

Before adjourning the meeting, Steve Gering stated that CPS will look at all the questions at the community meeting, as well as general questions across all the meetings and provide responses to maintain transparency. Mr. Gering noted that clearly there is a concern for the children's safety. He stated that the transition is difficult and CPS wants to make sure that there is transitional support for through this spring, summer and into next year for both the children and for the families of those children. Failure is not an option for our kids. Each and every child deserves a high-quality education and we should hold each other and CPS accountable.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:55 p.m.