Chicago Public Schools
School Utilization Community Meetings
Session Notes

Date/Time of Meeting: Tuesday, February 5

Network: Garfield-Humboldt Park

Schools represented by audience: Beidler, Calhoun, Cameron, Casals, Cather, Delano, Ericson, Goldblatt, Hefferan, Marshall, May, Sumner, Webster

Round: I

Disclaimer: The following are notes of the discussions in the individual break-out sessions. They do not provide verbatim records or a comprehensive summary of what was said. Also, these notes do not represent the point-of-view of the facilitators or of CPS personnel. Any questions about these notes should be addressed to CPS staff.

Notes from General/Main Session:

Alderman Chandler: We should be here talking about how we need more resources in our school; libraries in every school.

Alderman Fioretti: Made three recommendations six weeks ago and they still hold true tonight: 1. We should not close any schools at this time. 2. We should stop the expansion of charter schools until this is resolved. 3. If you go down the perilous path of closing schools: dangerous because of gang lines. example: Sueter – a magnet school at Washington has been on lockdown twice recently.

Alderman --: We should be taking about being under resourced not underutilization

Beidler
• Resident/Product of school; Wife is volunteer at school: goal is to keep a school that belongs in the community open. Our school is academically able to prepare our students.
• Retired principal: Our community; majority of us were born and raised here which is like closing the door on our front porch. Students need local school they can attend daily without worry of crossing gang lines. Leave our children in our community. Beidler has been down this road before. We already took God out of the schools; let's not take our children out of the schools

Calhoun North
• Principal: come on behalf of parents, students, community, and staff. Know what you are interrupting. Past 13 years: we have been growing and meeting standards; above district and the state in reading and math. Consolidation would affect parents; generations of parents are the pillars of the school community; it would interrupt children's lives
• LSC: Kids know the gang bangers in the school. Will have to cross too many gang turfs. Top school here is on the West side. Have already fought back against being underperforming and under
Cameron
• Mother of two students. Level 2 school working toward level 1 school, after being a level 3 school. School has adult education program with 160+ participants. Total, long list of school programs. 80% utilization – how can we be on an underutilization list? There are no empty rooms. School does not need to be closed; school needs for classrooms and offices to support students, more adult classes, mental health support, administrative space, etc. Visit the school before you close it.
• VP LSC: Don’t understand how we are on the list. 80% utilization according to CPS formula. We have a popular parent program. We don’t have a parent space, clinic; parent university. Parents are learning English in offices instead of classrooms. We have one counselor for 800+ students.

Casals: not present

Cather:
• 8th grade teacher: In support of the entire network. Great leadership in network. Cather has had a renaissance over the last 7-8 years. ISAT Composite was 13 and is now 84. Moved from probation to a level 1 school. 250 students currently.

Delano
• (Young boy speaking) Today is my 5th birthday. I wish I could go to the library every day. I like math and I like my teachers. Please keep Delano open so I can learn more with my friends.
• 7th grade student: Many students have been at Delano since kindergarten. Level 3 school on probation to a level 2 off probation and we are working towards a level 1. We have teachers and a principal that actually care about our learning. Concerned about health and safety of students. We strive for perfection. Offer afterschool programs to students who otherwise would not get to participate. Support groups for girls and boys: health education, self-esteem. Celebrating 100th anniversary 2013-2014.

Dodge: not present
Ericson

- Parent/Employee: Now have art, music, computer, gym and library. Only short 270 students according to CPS roster. Those students were taken from us from Charter schools. If we were closed, how many blocks would the schools be from each other and would there be busing? Instead of selling schools to charters for a dollar why don’t they bid on buildings the way other real estate agents do? Put that money into our so-called underutilized schools.
- Program called GEMS – Girls Enjoy Math & Science; learning to be entrepreneurs, only grammar school on the West Side whose principals takes students on college tours. Value technology, parents looking for jobs in the schools. 4 generations of students in the school

[Left main session for breakout session]

General Learning (Breakout session):

Some expressed overall frustrations about **not knowing what the plan is: feel they are being kept in the dark.**
- “We need to know what they’re going to do.”

Feel the utilization figures are a cause for big concern.
- Feel that CPS needs to visit each school personally, in order to see the space and see how it’s being used.
- Feel CPS is inaccurately counting space toward the utilization figure that it shouldn’t be, causing the numbers to be off. “Stop calculating based on square footage.”
- Very confused by the notion that classrooms are overcrowded, but calculations say “underutilized.” **“In a school where there are 45 kids per classroom they are saying are underutilized !!”**

Some are skeptical that there really is a budget crisis.
- Don’t believe CPS doesn’t have the money, just think they aren’t using it appropriately.

Like the smaller, intimate settings of the elementary schools (Cather), but willing to take on more students – especially if it means keeping school open.
- Concerned that this will just cause a different problem in their school: overcrowding.
- Can’t work/learn when the school is overcrowded and kids are piled on top of each other.

For transitioning after a closure or a consolidation, feel:
- CPS should consider having some teachers go with the students – as teachers/students have bonded at their current schools.
- Feel CPS needs to get to know the area and the boundaries
- Transportation is an issue. If they end up bussing kids to a different school, isn’t that just adding expenses?
- Feel teachers will need additional training in order to deal with the behavior-challenged students. Some spoke of the need for alternative schools.

There is also a feeling that there is too much time spent on testing, which takes away from class time.
- Less time needs to be spent on the testing (online included). Takes away from class time and adds to the stress
Not fair that CPS has students take ISAT but does not support special education students and bilingual students. I have a child who is autistic. He is brilliant in math but he fails the reading because of the lack of the support. Lack other programs that support transition from Spanish to English (especially because the teacher cannot do everything; s/he is one to 30). CPS is trying to take away the bilingual program. There are many that speak Spanish and English and it’s bad.

School Specific Learning (Breakout session):

Cameron:
Gentrification has affected the neighborhood, but the same thing will just happen in other neighborhoods.
- Parent involvement, the same thing can happen in other neighborhoods. People are going to continue to move as a result of gentrification. The population is constantly moving. Poor families are affected in a specific way.

Students and teachers are working well together in the school.
- Students don’t want to leave the school they are at. Like the schools because they receive special help. Students see and feel the difference in the schools and say “at this school it feels like a family”; “I want to be at the school where I learned to read”. They have always been at the school and see the changes
- Teachers treat students well

School is overcrowded.
- Parents are taking classes in an office; students are taking classes in a closet because there is not space. Parents that want to be in the school to help cannot because there is no space.

Other needs of school:
- Money to get another counselor for the school. The counselor does not have the time to tend all of the students
- Nurse available daily
- Clinic
- Security: inside and outside
- Preparation for strong high schools
- Better technology system: computers, smart boards, etc.

Foresees many issues if their school closes:
- Psychological effects on kids: What is CPS going to do to address the psychological effects on students after forcing them to change schools?
- Parents are working and cannot travel across the city to transport children to school -- fight of generations.
**Cather:**

Parents love the intimate environment at school.
- Daughter has seen the same teachers all the way through.
- It’s a safe haven. They know who I am (everyone knows each other).
- Parents come together as a community. If you close schools, you also hurt others in community (restaurants, boys & girls clubs).
- Like that there are fewer kids coming & going.

Feel their school provides the stability that kids need.
- School has a nice, peaceful environment for the kids.

School has many needs:
- Need music programs.
- Feel money should be spent in better ways.
- School needs better security. They have been broken into. iPads stolen and then kids are disadvantaged, fall behind without the technology they need.
- Need more social workers – one social worker per school is ridiculous.

Skeptical of being labeled an underutilized school.
- Urge CPS to stop calculating based on square footage.

Some at Cather would be willing to welcome other kids into their school; feel they can accommodate other kids.
- But there are concerns about losing the intimacy they have.

**Sumner Academy:**

One parent praised the teachers for being very hands on. Knows that teachers handle a lot and do not always get the parental support they need.

This parent recently moved to the area and is concerned about schools closing because she wouldn’t be able to relocate right now.

School is in their comfort zone, but feel they need more challenging academics.

A teacher told her student (which the student relayed here) that Sumner was closing. The student asked why they couldn’t just bring more kids to Sumner – she would be willing to let more kids into her school.

**Goldblatt:**

One parent discussed how several generations of her family have attended Goldblatt. She was very emotionally attached to the school. (Shed tears over the prospect of the school closing). Feel it is an excellent school.
- Is open from 9:30 to 12:30 on Saturdays.
- Has reading and math enrichment.
- Is one of the best schools in that area.
- Needs the drama class back.
Transportation will be a big problem – getting kids to school if they close Goldblatt. Currently parents and grandparents have to leave for work before child goes to school. He would have to take public transportation by himself across the city if Goldblatt (his neighborhood school were to close).

**May School:**
Grandmother of a student who attends spoke to the confusion surrounding May School’s “Underutilized” label – don’t understand how it can be called “underutilized,” but class had 36 kids.
- It’s the staff that’s underutilized.
- Staff cannot be effective when there are that many kids.
- Need more counselors.
- Teachers have created an environment where kids have bonded with them.

Resources that need: kids don’t have enough bonding time with adults.

**Daniel Webster**
Webster is located right down the street from Sumner. Worried that CPS will close both, then kids will have nowhere to go. Confused about the underused label:
- How can they say they’re underused when at first the kids were “on top of each other.” Where is the happy medium?

Feel CPS should be coming up with other solutions than just closing schools. One suggested asking Chicago-based corporations for help/funding. Stressed that the schools need funding and teachers need training (for behavior-challenged kids) and they need resources.
- Comcast, CME

Programs that they want to maintain: music programs, can go up to next grade (advanced kids).

One suggested that to help with the transition (in case there is a closing/consolidation): **have the teachers transition with the kids.**
- Though, some feel this could cause seniority issues within the school.

Will let other kids in, but concerned that it just becomes overcrowded.

**Beidler**
Has music, art, speech.
But, there are too many kids for one teacher. 45 kids in class.

**Ericson**
New principal and assistant principal have made a difference with school turning around. Principal was so personally involved that he came to pick up her son to get him to school after mom had new baby.

Pleading to keep Ericson open – feel that they are doing well there and have a nice atmosphere.
- Parent lab, so parents can be involved in what the kids are doing.
- Feels like a family. Don't want to get separated from the family. (crying). Please just don’t close Leif Erickson.

**Marshall**

They're saying they have no money. BUT... they are spending money on things that are unnecessary.

**Hefferan**

Don't have art or music in our school.