Chicago Public Schools
School Utilization Community Meetings
Breakout Session Notes

Date/Time of Meeting: January 30, 2013, 7:00pm-9:00pm

Network: Lake Calumet

Region/Schools focused on in discussion: Brown, Aldridge, Bright and Altgeld area

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.

General Learning

Public is not ready to talk about “transition” plans. CPS made presentation. The last slide about “transitions” really upset the crowd as they feel it makes it sound like decisions have already been made about closures. Parents/teachers are not ready to discuss ideas about “what if” your school closes. They see these meetings as an opportunity to save the schools.

Crowd would like to see more visits from CPS to get familiar with schools to be able to accurately evaluate capacity/utilization.

- Lots of concerns about how it’s calculated, especially with presence of special needs programs.
- Some feel CPS needs an independent auditor so they can accurately calculate utilization numbers.

Lots of concerns about security of children having to travel farther to get to school. Most children walk to school and having to walk further in a different direction (depending on neighborhood/boundary) puts students at risk of entering gang territory.

- Just as there is a concern about the safety of high schools closing (due to gangs), the same concern is true of elementary schools.
- In addition to gangs, other travel concerns include the need to travel further (crossing train tracks, high traffic areas, very isolated areas, unfenced rivers and/or abandoned industrial areas).

Strong concerns expressed about funding charter schools but not neighborhood schools. Why are charter schools being opened when neighborhood schools are underutilized?

- Also don’t understand why they’re using money to close schools instead of investing in the schools that are open.

Some felt their schools had recently made progress and expressed concerns about whether or not CPS was taking that progress into account.
**School-specific Learning**

**Bright School** – Would like to see programs added instead of closing the school. School is underutilized with small class sizes. Bright is a magnet school for special needs children. Teachers think larger class sizes is not what is best for children. Children can’t travel further away from school as they enter gang boundaries. Programs which school would like to see: ESL resource – lots of new Hispanic students who don’t speak English entering school, case worker, social worker, music teacher, (has art teacher), need cameras in building to cut down on crime (teachers cars broken into/ teachers don’t feel safe/ bb gun holes in buildings). **Bright school is fine with other students (i.e. Lawrence), transferring into their school.**

**Aldridge** – LSC rep presents, Aldridge, in Altgeld area, has a charter school within the area that will not close. The charter school is not doing well academically, either. LSC rep feels that there is nowhere else for children to go, children are safe there, they can’t cross into another neighborhood. Need help with violence in school. Feel that the underutilization is due to the school is being renovated and neighborhood is under construction. Fear that the schools in the Altgeld area will be taken and sold for charters. But, feel that all 8 are needed. Larry Hawkins charter school needs programs... Aldridge will need their building. Concern about teachers’ jobs. Kids are hyperactive and teachers need help – need smaller classes for kids that need special attention. Altgeld Garden Schools (Aldridge/ Carver/ Carver Wheatley/ Carver primary/ Fenger) Redevelopment in Altgeld Gardens. Feel that the community is coming back and the schools will be needed. **Redevelopment in Altgeld Gardens will attract business and families.**

**Brown** – CPS should be worried about high quality teachers that they are going to lose. Brown has excellent teachers with excellent results. **20 days from ISAT and we’re stressing the children and teachers about closing their school.** Brown is trending upwards. Staff and children feels what more can they do if they’ve done all they were supposed to do. If school is closed, wouldn’t CPS have to pay for **bus transportation to move students to school further away.** Brown has mobile units that are not in use and CPS is counting them in capacity. **3 special needs classrooms/ CPS says 90 needed in those 3 classrooms/ concern regarding calculation of utilization.** Concern with safety of students as 2 blocks away is gang territory. (Same issue as with high schools.) Brown was broken into on Saturday; concern with safety. To extend boundaries is a mistake. Brown has highly qualified teachers worth keeping. **Brown school is open to having new students enter their school** as the staff is very strong. There is a concern that increasing utilization means increasing class size even though not best for children. “Talk quality and not numbers.”

**Whistler** – Capacity of buildings not correct as classrooms are used as lunchrooms, etc. Suggested that CPS looks at each building to see how it’s used.

Suggestion – **Independent non-CPS, non-CPS funded organization should to do independent analysis of every school** (Raise Your Hand Illinois has been kicked out of schools), one year moratorium on closing schools and opening charter schools (13 being opened this year). Too
quickly, CPS agenda is to give up on neighborhood schools other than UNO (United Neighborhood Organization).