Chicago Public Schools
School Utilization Community Meetings
Breakout Session Notes

Date/Time of Meeting: January 29, 7:00-9:00pm

Network: O’Hare

Region/Schools focused on in discussion: Edison, Marshall, Gray, Murphy, Smyser, Scammon

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

Certain aspects of the CPS presentation, done in breakout rooms, were met with occasional questions/skepticism (in subsequent moderated conversation):

- the Vision statement – “is it a plan, or just an ideal?”
- Deficit number ($1B) – “how can it be erased? By having schools at full capacity?”/Others question the accuracy of no.
- Plan – where and what is the five year plan?

Charter schools issues and questions mainly from teachers/union members center around:
- Who chooses where they go?
- Will the underutilized charter schools be closed as well? (Only one in district)
- Mayor’s support and rumors that they will close 100 CPS schools yet open 600 Charter schools further fuels the flames
**Overcrowding concerns:**

- Potential reduction of services/support for Special Needs program with increased overcrowding (TAFT; schools in general)
- Hard to enroll in many of the neighborhood schools because they are at capacity
- Use of trailers to accommodate enrollment is unacceptable to some even though many see it as a temporary fix.
- Class size – at some point it gets unmanageable and is disservice to children
- Why can’t more CPS schools be opened to address this? And, who is in charge of opening schools (getting back to the distrust of system issue).

**Distrust of CPS system:**

Teachers display a clear distrust of the CPS system, regarding how decisions are made and who is making them. They question how specific school service/resources are allocated, even the stated deficit numbers.

- Both parents and teachers question the accuracy of the ideal capacity and utilization rate, i.e. Edison has an enrollment of 269 with capacity of 330 and some parents question how the school can absorb more.
- Audience wants to know that CPS is indeed using the feedback from the meetings to base decisions on (this one and other community meetings as well).
- Parents would like more timely notice if their child's application was accepted so they have time to find alternative solutions instead of several days before applications are due.
- Audience feels that promises are not kept due to the revolving door at CPS and the new person is unaware of the decision.
What CPS must do to help potential transitions/overcrowding?

- Give parents a choice of schools, if theirs will be affected. And give choice well in advance so that they can prepare/apply/etc
- Make sure parents and teachers are involved in the process – and be prepared to “deal with the fallout”
- Communicate consistent information in a timely fashion
- Provide the basics – current technology

**School-specific Learning**

**Building on Success**
Edison and Murphy
- Strong LSC/PTO community
- Strong administrators and teachers
- Parents who get involved in fund raising, grant writing with teachers
- An atmosphere of socialization, events like “Community Sing” – so it’s not just about “testing” students
- Curriculum produces well rounded students in a holistic environment

**Lack of essential facilities**
- All - Inadequate technology – computers are 10 years old and CPS requires tests to be taken on computers so the parents raised funds and wrote grants
- Scammon, Smyser Schools -- The lack of playgrounds creates a potentially dangerous environment (kids playing almost “in the street”)
- Scammon – Lack of a gym

**School status confusion**
Marshall School – Unclear what is going on – is the school going to become a charter? Mixed discussion on whether the school is “being starved” of resources to allow a charter school to take over. Few aware of any neighborhood children that attend and feel that many of the students come from outside the community