

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Lafayette Elementary School

April 8, 2013; 7:30-9:30pm

Location: Roberto Clemente High School, 1147 N. Western Ave.

CPS Staff in Attendance: Luis Soria, Chief of Schools, Elizabeth Lopez, Director of the Department of Language and Culture, Shonda Huery, Chief of Schools, and Willy Montes de Oca

Brief Summary: The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Lafayette Elementary School, in accordance with 105 ILCS 5/34-230. CPS officials stated the purpose for today's meeting, introduced the CPS staff at the meeting, and reviewed the handouts provided to the community.

CPS Presentation

Mr. Soria welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. Mr. Soria presented an overview of the proposal to close Lafayette Elementary. He noted that the proposal is to close Lafayette and welcome students at Chopin. He also reviewed the attendance area map, enrollment data, and the transition investments that students at Lafayette and Chopin will receive. Ms. Lopez explained the meeting rules and procedures. She noted that they were there to listen. Further, each speaker will have two minutes to speak.

Public Comment

Alderman Moreno, 1st Ward

Alderman Moreno stated that while technically Lafayette is not in first ward, it had been before the remap. He hoped that CPS was here to listen. He noted that Lafayette was supposed to share its facility with ChiArts Academy High School. ChiArts was supposed to take up space that was underutilized. Through no fault of Lafayette, ChiArts left mid-summer. Alderman Moreno noted that it is unfair to ask a school to make a plan and then punish them when the plan falls through to no fault of their own. Lafayette has new principal and great teachers. Lafayette has an incredible music program. We shouldn't just look at numbers; we should look at the programs. Lafayette has a plan for success; CPS should hear the plan and help them implement it. He will help in any way he can to help implement this plan.

N.B., Lafayette Alumni and Current High School Student

N.B. stated that this proposed closing has impacted and affected her family both emotionally and mentally. She was able to chase musical dreams thanks to Lafayette. She worries that her siblings will not have the same opportunities she did. Her sister goes to Lafayette and plays the cello. In the third grade, she was bullied. The music program became her self therapy and her love. She believes that this proposal "is bullying at its best."

Rosemary Vega, Parent of Two Students at Lafayette

Ms. Vega noted that her daughter graduated from Lafayette and is now attending Lincoln Park High School thanks to Lafayette and their music program. Ms. Vega would like CPS to listen to cries and pleas of individuals of the community. There are promises of great programs at Chopin, but Ms. Vega feels like those already exist at Lafayette. Lafayette has one of the largest string orchestras consisting of 85 children or more. Ms. Vega stated that charter schools are being opened down the street and are enrolling neighborhood students. She noted that her children will need to walk 7 long blocks to attend Chopin.

Ushami Moore, Parent of a Student at Lafayette

Ms. Moore's son is in the low impact autism program at Lafayette and has made strides. Ms. Moore stated that it is traumatic to think that her son's teacher and support staff won't go to the welcoming school. She does not think she will have peace of mind knowing that her son will not have the same experience that he has had this year. She questioned why the other students can't come to Lafayette, so her son can continue to have the experience that he is having. Thanks to the support at Lafayette helped her son open his mouth and converse yesterday. She thinks that it is imperative that her son's teacher and support team go with him to the intended welcoming school. His current teacher and staff know him and he will need them.

J.R., Student at Lafayette

J.R. stated that he has been getting the best education since preschool. When he entered the third grade, he was excited to join the best orchestra. He is going to stay in this school until 8th grade. J.R. stated that closing Lafayette will affect the student's education and the teachers' jobs. He asked that CPS "leave his school open."

Otueros Whibles, Advocate for Lafayette

He noted that Lafayette has the largest string orchestra program in CPS. The students from this program go on to the city's selective enrollment school at a higher rate than the CPS average. These students are unique to the Humboldt park community. He questioned why the music program should be recreated at Chopin when they are already a community. Lafayette already has a pre-k program, air conditioning, and a computer lab.

Jennifer Ziman, Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA) at Lafayette

Ms. Zinman works in an autism room at Lafayette. She stated that structure and order are mandatory for autistic students to make sense of their environment. A small change can set an autistic student back. She asked what this change will cause them to lose. Autistic students express their feelings through behavior. She noted that Chicago locked itself into a high interest rate and that interests rate have dropped and that TIFF money should be utilized.

Joel Rodriguez, Parent of Four Students at Lafayette

Mr. Rodriguez stated that the special education program and music program are incredible at Lafayette. Transferring the special education students would be impactful. There is a high level of learning happening at Lafayette. He stated that schools should be kept open.

J., Student at Lafayette

J mentioned that Lafayette is a great school with great teachers. J asked why Lafayette is on the list when no one has been to the school.

Jose Cambrera

He stated that he wants to keep Lafayette open. There are many great programs at Lafayette, including the all-stars and after school program. The autistic program is a unique Lafayette program. At Lafayette, students aren't put to the side. These students graduate and go to high school and college.

Janie Rosera, Parent

Ms. Rosera former student, parent of three students, music programs and celebrations allow kids to express their happiness. Comments on all school closings not just Lafayette

Helen Mosomora, Supporter of Lafayette

Ms. Mosomora advocated that no school close because of safety and gang concerns. She asked why TIF dollars aren't given to the school. She said that CPS should get rid of senior leaders to save money.

K.M., Student at Lafayette

K.M. noted that she grew up in this neighborhood and that going to Lafayette gives her opportunities. She will be able to have more than one choice for high school. Furthermore, the music program allows her to be different from other students.

G.A., Student at Lafayette

G.A. stated that the Lafayette teachers care about her and their students very much.

P.M., Student at Lafayette

P.M. stated that Lafayette is her home and that the school is like a family to her. She worries that people will lose their jobs.

Beverly Alaback, Teacher at Chopin

Ms. Alaback does not support schools closing. She stated that CPS is experiencing a crisis. Classrooms are disrupted and learning is not happening. Children will have to walk through gang territory. While, she invites children to come to Chopin, if they come over, there will be classes of 30 to 35.

John Jones, Paraprofessional at Lafayette

Mr. Jones has seen the positive effects of Lafayette's programs. He discussed the after school all-stars, sewing club, technology club, photography club, art program, gym program, music program. He noted that all of these programs are important to the children and the community

Joe Hemmendas, Community Member

Mr. Hemmendas taught at Chopin and is now retired. He lives half a block from Lafayette. He does not believe that there is a chance for change. He noted that Chopin school is Level 1 and Lafayette is Level 3.

Kate Martinez

Ms. Martinez does not support school closings. She thinks that there are safety issues. Further, class sizes are important and classes should not be over 30. While money is important, we must think about the children. She appreciates the teachers at Lafayette that take time out of their day to meet with kids. The music program in Lafayette is important to the students of Lafayette

J.R.

J.R. wanted to thank the people at Lafayette because the teachers help us learn

Anna Cologne, Parent of a Student at Lafayette

Ms. Cologne's daughter has special needs and has been in two different schools. If Lafayette closes, her daughter will now have to go to a third school.

Mr. Rivera

Mr. Rivera supports the schools of Chicago, especially Lafayette. He does not support school closings.

Laticia Estrana, Parent of Students at Lafayette

Ms. Estrana has a student with special needs. He needs a school with programs for students with special needs. He needs an excellent teacher and his speech therapy. She questioned whether or not CPS cares about the kids with special needs.

Terran Leftke, Community Member

Mr. Leftke wants affordable housing in neighborhoods, do not close any schools. All of downtown area is TIFTS area, \$401 million dollars will be taken from public schools, kids will be crossing gang lines, and this money could be used to keep Lafayette open

Denise Beasely, Parent and Grandparent

Ms. Beasely does not support school closings.

Martin Ritter

Mr. Ritter stated that the Wal-Mart Corporation paid for community meeting and that they support school closings. Mr. Ritter stated that it is not okay to uproot Black and Latino students.

N.G., Student at Lafayette

N.G. wants Lafayette to stay open because his teachers teach him.

J.G. and G. O., Students at Lafayette

She has baby sister with downs that receives services in the autism room. She participates in the music program, which taught her self-confidence. Lafayette has changed her life.

Alderman Moreno, 1st Ward

Alderman Moreno stated that the emotion is apparent. He will do anything to keep Lafayette open.

Xian Barrett, Teacher at Gages Park HS

Mr. Barrett stated that the spirit of Lafayette is apparent. He does not support school closings.

Loreal Evans, Parent of Students at Lafayette

Ms. Evans has one student with autism. She stated that you can't uproot a child with autism. She wants to keep all schools open.

Starla Knowls, Parent of Students at Lafayette

Ms. Knowls noted that there is too much crime, causing children to get killed. She thinks standardized test scores are culturally bias against African American and Hispanics.

Lauren Caparella, Teacher at Chopin

Ms. Caparella is supportive of all school staying open. Closing Lafayette and sending them to Chopin is not the best choice. There is not enough room at Chopin. She thinks that autistic children should not be uprooted.

J.C., Student

J.C. takes care of his autistic brother when he is at school. If he transfers to Chopin he will have a hard time because he doesn't know the teachers. He can't take care of his brothers if they go to different schools.

Jennifer Ziman, Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA) at Lafayette

Ms. Ziman stated that interest rates have plummeted. If the interest was reduced by 1% it could save \$1 million a year. Using TIFF dollars would eliminate the need for school closures,

Rosemary Vega, Parent

Ms. Vega state that combining a level three school with a level 1 school will result in that school not being level 1 anymore. She does not think that families should be separated.

D.W., Student

D.W. has a brother with autism that he takes care of. Closing Lafayette will make them sad.

Ruby Martinez, SECA

Ms. Martinez stated that Lafayette is family and that she does not support the closing of Lafayette.

Ms. Rielly, Fourth Grade Teacher at Lafayette

Ms. Rielly stated that Lafayette has great programs, including after school programs, music programs, and an autism program. She believes that students are not numbers on a page. She thinks that a one size fits all formula can not be applied to everyone.

Cristina Paacias, Community Member

Ms. Paacias is a graduate of CPS. She has concerns regarding the utilization formula. She believes that it did not take into account special education considerations. She stated that students within the cluster program will not be sent to Chopin, instead they will be sent all over the city. She noted that for students with autism, this is challenging. It is not in the best interest of children to close schools.

J.O., Student at Lafayette

J.O. stated that he is taught by all teachers within school.

M.M., Student at Lafayette

M.M. does not want he and the rest of his classmates to be sent to new school next year.

T.L., Student at Lafayette

T.L. supports her school and wondered how students can learn amidst these school closing proposals.

Jules Mercado

Ms. Mercado represented students from a youth group. She stated that these kids want to grow and go to Lafayette. She noted that education is important, but all people think about is money. She does not support the closing of Lafayette.

Joan Humana

Ms. Humana stated that she does not support school closings.

J.O., Student

J.O. stated that we should learn how to share money because sharing is caring.