



125 S. Clark Street • Chicago, Illinois 60603 • Phone: (773) 553-1500 • Fax School: (773) 553-1501

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**Barbara Byrd-Bennett**  
Chief Executive Officer

DATE: March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and LSC Members  
Arna Wendell Bontemps Elementary School  
1241 W. 58th St.

Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and LSC Members  
Nicholson Technology Academy  
6006 S. Peoria St.

**Re: Board of Education Proposed Closure of Arna Wendell Bontemps Elementary School**

Dear Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and Local School Council Members:

As Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), I am committed to ensuring that every child in every neighborhood receives a high-quality education that prepares them to succeed in college, career, and life. To do so, we must make certain that every child can attend a school that has the supports and resources needed to help every student flourish.

But right now, we have a school utilization crisis that is spreading our limited resources too thin. We are funding half-empty buildings that are costly to maintain and repair instead of using those funds to directly invest in our children's education. Combining schools will allow us to use more resources to ensure that every student attends a higher performing, 21st century school with updated amenities, more individual instruction, and the programs they need to compete and succeed. I have made the commitment that every student and parent will have the clear option to attend a higher performing school in the fall and that is a commitment you can be sure I will keep.

From investments in early childhood education and a full school day to ensuring there are strong principals and teachers in our schools, we are working each and every day towards achieving that goal and doing everything we can to make sure Chicago's children will thrive and succeed.

Make no mistake, this crisis did not happen overnight and we will not fix everything overnight either, but our children need and deserve for all of us to work each and every day to improve their chances to succeed. As a former teacher and a principal, I've lived through school closings. They are never easy, no matter where you are. But in my 40 years as an educator, I have never felt more certain that we need to take action now. If we do not take action, it is our children and their future that will pay the price for our delay.

I want to assure you that I have heard the concerns of parents, teachers, and school leaders and I have taken them to heart: I will never put our students' safety in jeopardy in our efforts to improve their education. As we work to improve our children's quality of education, we will also work to ensure they are supported and safe by coordinating and collaborating with city agencies such as the Chicago Police Department and the Department of Family and Support Services, as well as community and faith-based organizations.

With these principles in mind, and after a thoughtful, rigorous process in which we looked at each school and incorporated the feedback we received from more than 20,000 parents and community members, we are making multiple proposals today, including a recommendation to close Arna Wendell Bontemps Elementary School (Bontemps). This proposal helps address CPS' current underutilization challenge, enables us to move

forward in a more sound and sustainable financial state, and allows us to better serve all of our students, both current and future.

And please know that our work is still not complete. Your continued input will be critical in the weeks ahead. There will be two community meetings and one public hearing for your school noted below. I thank you for your continued feedback as we work to provide all CPS students with the high-quality education they deserve.

There are a series of supports that we will provide in order for every child to have a safe and seamless transition to a higher performing academic environment at their welcoming school. These include:

- Access to a higher performing welcoming school equipped with new resources;
- A safety plan for all students and staff at all welcoming schools created in coordination with the Chicago Police Department and other community-based organizations;
- Social and emotional supports based on the specific needs of students at each welcoming school;
- Supports for students with diverse learning needs;
- Supports for students in temporary living situations;
- Supports for English language learners; and
- Facility improvements will be made to enhance the overall learning environment of the new school.

Several supports for teacher and PSRP members of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) are also available through our negotiated collective bargaining agreement. These include:

- **Tenured Teacher Assignment** – If vacancies are created in the welcoming school(s) due to the enrollment of students from your current school, tenured teachers rated in the top two performance rating categories may be assigned to those vacant positions, based upon seniority and certifications.
- **Reassigned Teacher Pool** – Tenured teachers who are ineligible or unable to be assigned to the welcoming school(s) will be placed in the reassigned teacher pool—with full salary and benefits for up to 5 months—while they seek new job opportunities.
- **PSRP Severance** – PSRPs at closing schools who are unable to find new employment by the start of next school year will be paid a \$1,000 severance and are eligible for up to 9 months of paid COBRA benefits.

CPS has also implemented an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that provides a safe, confidential environment to access grief counseling with a trained professional. This service is completely free, absolutely confidential, and available to all employees and members of their households, 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. EAP specialists have masters-level training and a minimum of 3 years of counseling experience.

To access EAP services, which also include mediation, and financial services support, please:

- **Call 1-800-711-6087.** When prompted, press '2' for members. You will be asked for your Member ID and you can say "I don't know it" to proceed. Lastly, please press '1' for EAP [(TDD) Dial 711 and enter number above]; or
- **Visit <http://liveandworkwell.com> online.** Web Access Code: 'CPS'.

Lastly, additional transition supports such as dedicated Career Events for teachers impacted by school actions and transition coaching sessions will be available and communicated to you in more detail through the coming weeks and months.

A detailed proposal is outlined below. Please read it and carefully consider the supports we are offering to help students receive a higher performing education in their dedicated welcoming school.

## **Our Proposal and Investments**

Our proposal is to close Bontemps, located at 1241 W. 58th St at the end of the current school year because it is underutilized, based on CPS Space Utilization Standards and student enrollment numbers recorded on the 20th attendance day for the 2012-2013 school year. Specifically, Bontemps had 314 students enrolled on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of attendance, but has the capacity to serve 690 students. Bontemps students will be welcomed by Nicholson Technology Academy (Nicholson), located at 6006 S. Peoria St. While the closure of Bontemps is not related to performance, it is important to note that Nicholson is a higher performing school, according to the [Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for School Actions](#) (Guidelines).

Please take a few moments to carefully review the draft transition plan on this proposed closing that you received at your school. In this draft transition plan you can learn more about why this school has been chosen to be closed and how we intend to make significant investments to help ensure our students' academic success in the transition.

## **Attendance Area Boundary of Bontemps**

I am also proposing that the geographic boundary currently associated with Bontemps will be reassigned to Nicholson. This means that Nicholson will be the new neighborhood school for students living in the Bontemps boundary.

## **Details for the Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and Local School Council Members**

If this proposal is approved by the Board of Education of the City of Chicago ("Board"), the employment status of all administrators, faculty, and staff will be determined pursuant to Board policies, practices, and any applicable contracts and collective bargaining agreements. If you have human resources questions or concerns, please contact us at (773)553-4748 (HR4U).

If the Board approves this proposal, the Local School Council (LSC) of Bontemps will be dissolved at the end of the current school year. If you have any questions about how this proposal affects the LSC, please contact the Office of Local School Council Relations at 773-553-1400.

## **Public Comment on this Proposal**

Public comment can be made during the following two community meetings and one public hearing:

### **Community Meeting 1**

Tuesday, April 09, 2013  
7:30pm-9:30pm  
Harper HS  
6520 South Wood Street

### **Community Meeting 2**

Saturday, April 13, 2013  
12:30pm-2:30pm  
Harper HS  
6520 South Wood Street

### **Public Hearing**

Thursday, April 18, 2013  
8:00pm-10:00pm  
CPS Central Office  
125 S. Clark St.

I invite you to share your feedback on this proposal at the community meetings and public hearing. If you wish to comment at the community meetings or hearing, you must sign up to speak on the day of, at the designated location, beginning one hour before the designated start time and ending one hour after the start of the meeting or hearing. You will have two minutes to speak, unless the hearing officer or meeting organizer provides an extension. The hearing will conclude at the stated end time or following the comments of the last person who has signed up to speak, whichever occurs first.

After the community meetings and public hearing, I will review a written report from the hearing officer. At that time, I may recommend that the Board consider and approve the closure of Bontemps.

**Further Questions and Concerns:**

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call 311 (City Services) or visit [www.cps.edu/qualityschools](http://www.cps.edu/qualityschools).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barbara Byrd-Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett  
CEO, Chicago Public Schools