



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, 2013

Parent or Guardian of a Student at  
Northwest Middle School  
5252 W. Palmer St

Parent or Guardian of a Student at  
Belmont-Cragin Elementary School  
2456 N. Mango Ave.

Re: **Proposed Co-location of Belmont-Cragin Elementary School with Northwest Middle School**

Dear Parent or Guardian:

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.

Right now, the reality is that too many of our children are not receiving the education they deserve. 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. 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.

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. We believe it is in the best interest of students and the community to identify buildings that are underutilized and to improve the use of those facilities. One way to do this is to transform a single school facility into a shared facility by bringing one or more additional schools into the building.

Make no mistake, this will be hard. As a former teacher and a principal, I've lived through school actions. 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, our children and their futures will pay the price for our delay.

I want to assure you that I have heard your concerns and I have taken them to head and heart: I will never seek to improve education at the expense of our students' safety. 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.

After a thoughtful, rigorous process in which we looked at every individual school and incorporated the feedback we received from more than 20,000 of you – parents across the city and community members in every neighborhood – we are making multiple proposals today. As part of this effort, I am making a recommendation to co-locate the K-8<sup>th</sup> grades from Belmont-Cragin Elementary School (Belmont-Cragin) with Northwest Middle School (Northwest).

There are a series of supports that we will provide in order for your child to have a safe and seamless transition. These include:

- A safety plan for all students and staff at both 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 both schools;
- Supports for students with diverse learning needs;
- Supports for students in temporary living situations;
- Supports for English language learners;
- Facility improvements to allow the successful operation of multiple schools in one facility.

A detailed proposal is outlined below. Please read it and carefully consider the supports we are offering to help your child transition. And please know that our work is still not complete and your continued input will be critical in the weeks ahead. I encourage you to participate in the two community meetings and one public hearing for your school noted in the proposal below. I thank you for your continued feedback as we work to provide your child and all Chicago Public Schools students with the high-quality education they deserve.

### **Our Proposal and Investments**

Our proposal is to co-locate the K-8<sup>th</sup> grades from Belmont-Cragin within the same CPS facility as Northwest, located at 5252 W. Palmer St. The Pre-Kindergarten program at Belmont-Cragin will not be affected by this proposal and will remain at the Socrates building at 6041 W. Diversey Ave. This proposal meets the criteria in the Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for School Actions because the combined projected student enrollment is within the facility's enrollment efficiency range, as defined by the CPS Space Utilization Standards, and the facility can support the academic programming of both schools.

A draft transition plan has been sent home from school with students, which outlines investments that will support a smooth and safe transition for all students.

Furthermore, CPS is committed to providing educational opportunities that fit each student's unique learning needs and each family's priorities, and encourages families to decide if this welcoming school is the best fit for their child. To support families in this decision, information from the Office of Access & Enrollment is available in the draft transition plan.

### **Details for Current Students**

If the Board approves this proposal, it will not affect the enrollment of students who are currently attending or eligible to attend Belmont-Cragin. These students will remain enrolled in Belmont-Cragin. However, students will report to school at 5252 W. Palmer St next school year instead of the current location.

CPS will add supports to ensure that students have a smooth, safe adjustment and to guarantee effective operation of both schools in the same facility. If you have any questions concerning this proposed co-location, please call the CPS Quality Schools Hotline at 773-553-5020.

### **Public Comment on this Proposal**

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

#### **Community Meeting 1**

Saturday, April 06, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Prosser High School  
2148 North Long Avenue

#### **Community Meeting 2**

Thursday, April 11, 2013  
5:00pm-7:00pm  
Prosser High School  
2148 North Long Avenue

#### **Public Hearing**

Saturday, April 20, 2013  
11:30am-1:30pm  
CPS Central Office  
125 S. Clark St.

I invite you to share your feedback on this proposal at the scheduled 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 of Education of the City of Chicago consider and approve the co-location of Belmont-Cragin's K-8<sup>th</sup> grades with Northwest at the 5252 W. Palmer St facility.

**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).

Thank you for your consideration and patience during this time as we work to provide CPS children with all of the resources and supports they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barbara Byrd-Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'B' and a stylized 'H' at the end.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett  
CEO, Chicago Public Schools