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**Barbara Byrd-Bennett**  
Chief Executive Officer

DATE: March 21, 2013

Administrators, Faculty, Staff and LSC Members  
Belmont-Cragin Elementary School  
2456 N. Mango Ave.

Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and LSC Members  
Northwest Middle School  
5252 W. Palmer St.

Re: **Board of Education Proposed Co-location of Belmont-Cragin Elementary School with Northwest Middle 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 in CPS attends a higher performing, 21st century school with updated amenities, more individual instruction, and the programs they need to compete and 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 the concerns of parents, teachers, and school leaders and I have taken them to head and 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 co-locate Belmont-Cragin Elementary School (Belmont-Cragin) with Northwest Middle School (Northwest). This option 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 in the proposal included below. I thank you for your continued feedback as we work to provide all Chicago Public School students with the high-quality education they deserve.

There are a series of supports that we will provide to ensure that every child has 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; and
- 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 children transition.

### **Our Proposal and Investments**

Our proposal is to co-locate Belmont-Cragin's kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grades within the same CPS facility as Northwest, located at 5252 W. Palmer St. 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.

The draft transition plan, which you were provided with this letter, outlines investments that will support a smooth and safe transition for all students and staff.

### **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 Northwest or Belmont-Cragin.

### **Details for Administrators, Faculty and Staff Members of Both Schools**

This proposal will have no direct impact on the employment status of administrators, faculty, or staff at either school. Further, this proposal will have no impact on the powers of the Northwest Local School Council or the Belmont-Cragin Local School Council.

### **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 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 co-location of Northwest and Belmont-Cragin 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).

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