

## **Community Meeting for the Proposal to Co-Locate Belmont-Cragin and Northwest Middle Schools**

April 6, 2013 10:00AM – 12:00PM

Location: Prosser Career Academy High School, 2148 N. Long Avenue, Chicago, IL 60639

**CPS Staff in Attendance:** Lynda Williams, Felicia Sanders, Peter Rogers, Grace Rappe, Jane Norton, Isabel Tellez, Rohit Paul, Lela Majstorovic,

### **Brief Summary:**

The purpose of the meeting was to hear public comments regarding the proposed co-location of Belmont-Cragin Elementary School and Northwest Middle School, in accordance with 105 ILCS 5/34-230. There were 13 speakers, of whom 7 spoke multiple times. The comments included issues related to transportation of students, safety concerns, after school programs, CPS' future plans for both schools, as well as other concerns mentioned below. The meeting ended with Mr. Peter Rogers thanking the audience and reminding them of the date and time of the next meeting regarding this proposal.

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### **CPS Presentation**

Mr. Peter Rogers, Chief Financial Officer of CPS, took the podium and addressed the audience, explaining that the meeting was taking place to hear from the audience regarding the co-location of Belmont-Cragin and Northwest Middle School. He explained that CPS was here to hear the comments and take them back to Barbara Byrd-Bennett, the CEO of CPS. He introduced the people on the stage, the Chief of Schools, Lynda Williams, and the Deputy Chief of Schools, Felicia Sanders. He explained the process for the meeting - that each speaker will have a time limit of two minutes. He also introduced the Principals of Northwest Middle School (Marilyn F. Strojny) and Belmont-Cragin School (Stacy Pauline Stewart). Mr. Rogers also gave notice that the second meeting regarding this co-location is scheduled to take place on Thursday, April 11, 2013. Mr. Rogers then introduced Grace Rappe, who will facilitate the meeting. Ms. Rappe explained that a court reporter as well as a CPS note taker will be recording the meeting and reporting back to the CEO of CPS. She also stated that anyone who had any written material or testimony that needed to be copied could do so with the court reporter. Ms. Rappe restated the process for speaking as well as reminded the audience about the next meeting scheduled for April 11, 2013 at 7:00pm. At 10:24AM, the meeting was opened up for Public Comment.

### **Public Comment**

**Blanca Melendez, a parent of students at Belmont-Cragin**

Ms. Melendez has two children and works eighty hours per week. Her main question to CPS was if there would be transportation and security provided for the children.

*Summary of Response from Peter Rogers: Mr. Rogers told the audience that they could call 311 or visit the CPS website to receive further details regarding the proposed co-location.*

Ms. Melendez spoke again and stated that during the time her children have been enrolled in Belmont-Cragin, she has received a lot of support from the school. She wants those services to continue when the two schools co-locate. She stated that the neighborhood the Northwest Middle School is located in is a very bad neighborhood, and she wants a good education and safety for her children.

Ms. Melendez spoke a third time and asked if the after-school programs will continue at the new school. She would like for her children to continue to participate in after school programs and hopes that this change is for the better.

**Mirian Batrez, parent of students from Northwest Middle School**

Ms. Batrez had a question regarding her children who attend a different elementary school and whether or not her child would be able to get accepted to Northwest Middle School?

*Summary of Response from Peter Rogers: Mr. Rogers reiterated that the best thing to do would be to call the phone number provided as well as visit the CPS website to receive more information.*

Ms. Batrez spoke again to assure parents of Belmont-Cragin that Northwest Middle School is very safe and that in the past six years that she has been there, she has never had a safety concern.

**Jose Figuero, LSC Chairperson of Belmont-Cragin**

Mr. Figuero stated that CPS needs to provide transportation for all students. This is not a request. This has to happen so the kids will be safe.

Mr. Figuero spoke again and asked what the future of the schools will be. He would like to know if the co-location will be long-term and what the new enrollment will be? Will there only be one grade per year or will the school get bigger and have more grades per year with the potential for overcrowding?

**Pierina Deuringues, Parent of Belmont-Cragin, Member of PAC**

Ms. Deuringues expressed that the Belmont-Cragin School community is stressed. They need more communication about the transition plan, including information about transportation. Parents are concerned about how students will get to school; they are willing to help but also need CPS to provide transportation. Transportation is the main issue. The parents would like

specific answers because they are very concerned about transportation as well as how the Belmont-Cragin building will be used. They will be coming to the next meeting hoping to hear answers.

She later spoke again to apologize to the parents of Northwest Middle School because she knows they work hard to address security and safety; however, she would like to see more security now that there will be more students in attendance.

Ms. Deuringues spoke a third time to ask CPS to discuss the plan for this co-location. She requested that there be translators at the next meeting that translate correctly. She wants to know what the budget plans are and stated that Belmont-Cragin has great teachers and a great Principal. She also asked if answers will be provided at the next meeting.

*Summary of Response from Peter Rogers: Mr. Rogers stated that the next meeting will be held on Thursday. He also stated that he knows the importance of getting answers to the parents and community.*

Ms. Deuringues spoke a fourth time asking what CPS would like her to tell the other parents during the next PAC meeting. She is not happy and she understands that this is the process. She also stated that if at least part of a plan is not released at the next meeting, the crowd will not be as quiet as it has been.

*Summary of Response from Grace Rappe: A two page flyer was passed out regarding preliminary considerations for the co-locations. The purpose of this meeting is to listen to your comments and bring them back.*

#### **Suzana Obera, Parent of a student who attends Belmont-Cragin School**

Ms. Obera feels that the neighborhood where Northwest Middle School is located is unsafe and wants CPS to guarantee the safety of the children at the school.

#### **Walter Erickson, retired teacher**

Mr. Ericson cited the flyer that states that CPS will make the necessary capital investments for the transition. He asked where and when the transition plan will be released to the community.

#### **Cynthia Wolski, teacher at Belmont-Cragin School**

Ms. Wolski cited her teaching experience and expressed the safety concern of the parents. She wants to know what CPS will do to make sure that the children are safe on a daily basis when they move to another part of the city, facing new challenges with a new community.

She later spoke again and stated that teachers and parents from Belmont-Cragin are willing to work to come together as a community with Northwest Middle School.

#### **Roxana Torres, mother of student who attends Belmont-Cragin School**

Ms. Torres has a concern regarding the safety of students. She is also concerned about the safety of students outside at recess as well as outside of the school in general. She would like to know the hours of the school as well as how the school is planning the transition, given that there will now be younger students attending the school.

**Terrence Kilbasa, community member**

Mr. Kielbasa agrees that the schools that are on the list to be closed should be closed. Further, students who drop out in the middle of the year should be responsible for paying tuition for that year.

**Soraya Ramos, teacher at Belmont-Cragin School**

Ms. Ramos voiced a concern regarding the need for transportation for the students to their new location. She also wants to know the concrete steps that will be taken to ensure that the transition goes well.

Ms. Ramos also spoke later to suggest that what attributes to Belmont-Cragin's continuous improvement is that fact that it is a small school and close-knit community.

**Frank Braun, parent of a student at Belmont-Cragin; product of CPS**

Mr. Braun wants to know what the future is of Belmont-Cragin. He has never heard of two schools being located in the same building. He wants to know if Northwest Middle School will eventually become Belmont-Cragin or if Belmont-Cragin will eventually become Northwest Middle School.

Mr. Braun spoke again and asked about the longevity of the school. He asked for a timeline. He drives his student to and from the school every day because he does not live in Belmont-Cragin's neighborhood. He said that if he lives in a neighborhood, he should have every right to enroll his student into the schools in his neighborhood. Unfortunately, the schools in his neighborhood are not accepting new applicants.

Mr. Braun spoke a third time and referenced a rumor that there are two years left on the lease of the Belmont-Cragin building. He requested for Mr. Rogers to look into that rumor and see if there is any truth to the rumor. He also stated that he understands that the school "is falling apart." He asked that if parents were willing to come in on weekend and volunteer their time to update the school, would it be a possibility for the school to remain open? He would like for that to be addressed at the next meeting.

**Alejandra Morales, a parent of a student at Belmont-Cragin**

Ms. Morales stated that CPS is communicating what CPS wants to communicate and that the interests of parents are not being conveyed. At the next meeting, she wants answers to the questions raised. She has to get up at 6:00am to make adjustments for her child and would like to know what adjustments CPS will be making as well.

**Analleli Munoz, Lead Teacher at Belmont-Cragin**

Ms. Munoz cited the flyer that states that CPS will make necessary capital investments. She wants to know whether the current dual-language program at the school will be compromised by the co-location.

**Stacey Stewart, Principal of Belmont-Cragin Elementary School**

Ms. Stewart thanked CPS for not closing Belmont-Cragin school. She thanked the Network, the community, the parents, the teachers, and the external partners. She stated that the school is a great community that involves not only staff and students but also families. She explained that they have external partners that provide extra after-school support to students as well as dedicated teachers and staff that work together as a Professional Learning Community. She stated that it is her responsibility to ensure that this works and that she looks forward to working together to ensure that the work that is going on at Belmont-Cragin continues in the new transition.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Rogers thanked everyone for their comments. He informed the parents that their questions are being recorded and he will bring the questions and concerns to CPS. He assured the parents that the inability to respond does not reflect disrespect, but that CPS wants to hear what the parents want and then CPS wants to be able to provide the information properly. He stated that there will be another meeting on Thursday, April 11, 2013 at 7:00pm. Public comment concluded at 12:00pm.