

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Canter Middle School

April 8, 2013; 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Location: Kenwood Academy, 5015 S Blackstone Ave.

CPS Staff in Attendance

Denise Little, John Price, John Barker, Jennifer Ramirez, Margaux Mooney, Toni L. DeLuca Campbell, Ayonna Patterson, Brigitte Louis, Dave Miranda, Michael McGehee, Sharice Fulson

Brief Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Canter Elementary School. Chief of Schools, Denise Little, began the meeting by stating the purpose of the meeting, which was to accept community feedback on the proposal, and John Barker, Chief Accountability Officer, explained the proposed action. Public comment was then taken from members of the public who had registered to speak. There were approximately 150 community members present.

CPS Presentation

Denise Little, Chief of Schools, welcomed audience at 4:57. She introduced John Price, Chief of the Burnham Park Network, and John Barker, Chief Accountability Officer. After stating the proposed school action to be discussed, she stated ground rules. She said to purpose of the meeting was to listen to the public comments on behalf of CEO and to take the information back.

Ms. Little turned over to John Barker who ensured everyone had a handout, and then walked the audience through the handout.

Public Comment

Howard Fishbein, Teacher at Canter School

Mr. Fishbein has worked in education for twenty years in a variety of positions, schools, and states. Based on this experience, he believes relationships are central to education, and stated that Canter is a family. He said that like any family, the Canter Staff takes care of, supports, and challenges each other and believes people would see this if they visited the school. He thanked people for listening and asked for the school to be allowed to continue its work of providing a safe and encouraging environment.

Jane Averill, Teacher at Ray, Parent of Canter Alumni

Ms. Averill explained the history and reasoning for the founding of Canter. Before she was a teacher, Ms. Averill was a parent of a Ray student. She stated that a committee of parents and community members investigated the merits of opening a middle school, by doing research. She stated the community decided to be part of the Middle School Movement, which recognized the special needs of adolescence. She stated that her son went to Canter, and she believes it was the best experience he could have had, because of reasonable class sizes and caring teachers. She stated that the committee would never have met about creating a middle school if these needs were being met by Ray or Murray, and believes that Canter works and needs to be kept open.

N.W., 7th Grader at Canter Middle School

This student stated he is a straight A student and enjoys school. He was not excited about going to Canter until he heard it was only for 7th and 8th graders. He likes the building, lunches, and teachers, specifically math. He would like to take Algebra next year and feels prepared. He just likes the school because it is working for him and thinks it should stay open.

Deb Hass, Community Resident and CPS Parent

Ms. Hass supports keeping Canter open. She said the school action process has not valued public education or supported the schools in her community or city wide.

Chantelle Allen, Middle School Teacher, Ray Parent

Ms. Allen said that middle school students have different issues and go through things differently. She said that the cultures at the welcoming schools are set and combining the schools would be difficult. She is concerned that students have already transitioned from elementary school and now they are having that transition taken away. She asked if the CEO was told of her request for a safety plan for integrating cultures. She also desires a curriculum plan and wonders how people will ensure it will be a curriculum that works. She wants a copy of the plans. She does not believe the plans exist. She asked that the plans be sent to her.

Patrick Papezun, 1st Year Teacher at Canter

Before becoming a teacher, Mr. Papezun was an architect. He stated working at Canter was his first exposure to middle school and CPS. He is a parent of two children that will attend a CPS school in Hyde Park, so he is invested. He stated that he had choices of where to teach but came to Canter because the administration was strong and the students were great. He believes it is being shut down without anyone coming to see the good things happening in the school and disagrees with the metrics used for the decision. He believes the staff works very hard, and is insulted that someone from the network came the day of announcement to ensure there was no stealing and teaching was still occurring, but did not notice network staff coming before. He believes the proposal is unfair.

Janak Paranjape, Ray Alumni, Taught at Canter for 21 Years

Ms. Paranjape has a daughter who is going to be starting public school shortly. She lives in the Kozminski attendance boundary. She stated that what the panel was seeing and hearing is the Canter community, which will be divided if the school is closed.

Joy Clendeming , CPS Parent

Ms. Clendeming said she has been to many CPS meetings. She went last week to a meeting with the Alderman. She said the community engagement process should be a dialogue and conversation, but this was not. She said she was there to stand with these people in support of Canter and of all schools, that Canter should be kept open, and that she believes Canter is a school that works.

Stacza Lapinski, Community Member

Mr. Lapinski is a concerned community member and a parent of a soon-to-be CPS student. He supports keeping schools open. He spoke of the lack of transparency and a lack of trust with parents, students and teachers in CPS.

David Adams, Ray Parent

Mr. Adams is in support of Canter Middle School. He thinks it is a school that works. Hyde Park parents want a neighborhood middle school that is not overcrowded. He has met Canter teachers and has been inspired by their passion.

Tsitsopilos Bessie, Social Worker at Canter

Ms. Bessie has worked at Canter for 3 years. She has also worked at many other schools. She is very concerned about the emotional trauma that school closings are causing the children. She believes that schools are about relationships and learning, and that school closings are taking away the relationships that keep children safe and allowing them to learn.

Malinda Hall, Hyde Park Resident and Ray Parent

Ms. Hall thinks closing Canter is a mistake and will lead to the overcrowding of schools. She believes her son's teacher is a great teacher, but can't teach effectively with over 20 to 25 students. She is insulted as a parent, tax payer, and a productive citizen, and believes this is creating an underclass and future prisoners.

Emon Powell, Parent of Canter Grad

Ms. Powell said it should say a lot that she came with no child in CPS, and she appreciates all of the Canter teachers. She is very supportive of the principal, and appreciates the help Canter provided her son who was dealing with an illness when he was there. He is currently getting ready to graduate high school and will attend Morehouse College. She still feels she is a part of the Canter community.

Monique Williams, Ray Parent

Ms. Williams is concerned about the impact this action will have on class size at Ray. She wants her child to go to Canter. She has spoken to parents at Canter who say nothing but positive things, which reassures her as a parent. She stated that the number of students in a classroom does matter, and believes there are no empty classrooms at Ray.

Walter Winsor, Math Teacher at Canter

Mr. Winsor stated that he has been at Canter for eight years and believes the staff is the strongest it has ever been. He stated that he is an expert in math and believes he should not be put into a position where he needs to teach language arts as well because that is not his expertise and students deserve better than that. He is concerned that the ability to have expert teachers in every class may be impacted by the proposed action.

Gordon Mayo, Ray Parent, Ray LSC Chair

He stated that the meeting was about Canter and said he was sorry it is closing. He asked what was going to

be done with the information heard today?

Summary of response from Ms. Little: We are going to report the information back to the CEO of CPS.

He then asked if there was a possibility she would change her mind?

Summary of response from Ms. Little: – No proposal is final until the board will vote expected 5/22.

Mr. Mayo said that he hoped she would change her recommendation, but if Canter could not stay open, he believes the board should go with the previous proposal by a state representative that it happens more gradually, which involves a phase out of Canter and phase in at Harte. He believes that plan would not cost more. He also stated that Ray is having an exciting year.

Beth Herring, Harte Parent

Ms. Herring said she came as an angry and frustrated parent. She was not frustrated with the facilitators but with the mayor, who did not attend these meetings. She stated that closing Canter Middle School would have serious repercussions. The lack of continuity would impact the mental and emotional well-being of the students and students at receiving schools will also suffer. She was concerned that Harte is already deemed efficiently utilized by the CPS formula but would receive more students. She does not support the closing of Canter and demands a moratorium on all school closings. She said that she believes these meetings were not designed to find creative ways to save schools. She believes this was dehumanizing for the many people involved and was not an example of community engagement.

Parent of Canter Alumni

This parent's son had a fantastic experience at Canter and had many of the teachers in attendance at the meeting. The parent believes the administration at Canter is excellent. She said it is not underutilized, and if the board thinks it is underutilized or not an excellent school, she believes they are misinformed. She suggested the possibility of moving the sixth graders at Shoemith to Canter to allow the programs at Ray and Harte to stay the same. She asked if there was any reason this could not be done.

Summary of response from Ms. Little – Ms. Little suggested the parent set up a meeting to discuss with John Price, and stated she did write it down to discuss with the CEO.

Camille Hamilton- Doyle

She supports Canter school for many reasons. She believes the administration has done a wonderful job, teachers teach a particular subject, and students try to be the best they can with the administration's support. She said a few years ago, the community was asked to change and create a needed middle school. Now that the community supports it, CPS is coming again to change it back to the way it was.

Tom McDoyal, Community Member

He has had the opportunity to meet and talk with the math teachers at Canter who impressed him as a professional group. He thinks it would be a loss to break them up. He likes the idea of removing sixth graders

from Shoemith to reduce the number of students there.

Gerry O., unidentified affiliation

He stated he believes Canter is a wonderful school and it is important to not change Harte and Ray. He said the suggestion related to building up Canter instead of tearing it down was a good one. He has been an active member of the Hyde Park community and supports the community. He said people need options and Canter is an important option for the parents of middle school-aged children. He stated that the community does not want empty buildings. He said to look at the effects this would have on the kids in the neighborhood and to please pass along the Hyde Park community’s disagreement with the proposal.

Lara Shaeffer, Ray Parent

Ms. Shaeffer is in support of keeping Canter open. She was confused about the idea to use the building as a parent university. She thinks there could be other ways to use the building in addition to a middle school, and noted the example of community centers. She suggested people think creatively about how to use schools instead of closing them down.

Carol Gittler

Ms. Gittler is not questioning the closing of Canter, but she is questioning sending kids back to Ray and Harte with no programming. She noted an example of another middle school which has a gardening curriculum. The school has a green house and partnerships with city organizations like the Chicago Botanical Gardens. She suggested coming up with a new program for an environmental school. She said that both Canter has an existing curriculum and a faculty that know how to support adolescents. She thinks the Board should be looking to do something new and different.

R.P., Canter Student

This student said Canter turned his education around. His teachers believed in him, and he started to do his homework and go to class. He said if Canter is closed, there may be other students that will not be able to get the same help.

Isabelle B, Carter Parent

Her daughter was in the previous speaker’s class and had the same experience. She believes it is a better option for students because it is a small school, and the teachers and administrators care. She said it should be added to and not taken away. She stated that her daughter had an experience at a much larger school and fell through the cracks, but that changed when she came to Canter. She stated that we are talking about human beings and not just numbers. She believes Canter is aiming to make every child a masterpiece, and they are succeeding. She said her daughter was an example of that.

Cole Dillon, Graduate of a CPS School, Chicago Homeowner

Mr. Dillon stated he represented the point of view of a homeowner with no children in the public schools. He expects school closings will have a big impact on the price of his home and impact on his community. He chose to move to Chicago to put his tax dollars to support the children of Chicago. While doing his own research, he

learned the CEO may have a contract with the Broad Foundation. He said that if this was the case, she should recuse herself of this process. He does not believe that she lives in the city or pays taxes, as he does. He believes this is a philosophy that has been previously tried and has repeatedly failed in a variety of school systems and does not want this to be the future of Chicago. As a taxpayer who is invested in the city's schools, he wants CPS to make them great and stop playing with theories. He said go back to what works and he believes that is neighborhood schools.

Pamela Williams, Harte and Canter Parent

Ms. Williams' children volunteer regularly in this community. She believes if the community dynamic changes, it makes it more difficult for them to be active citizens of Hyde Park and Chicago as a whole. Every year they play an active role in different festivals and free family programs. She believes these schools are teaching these children to be citizens of Chicago, like her children. She said that she does not think this could be said about all schools in Chicago.

Kristy Papczun, Wife of a Canter Teacher, Ray Parent

Ms. Papczun did her graduate research on middle school philosophy. She believes middle school works. Middle school teachers have a special endorsement. She stated that the transition from a middle school into a high school is much less stressful than the transition from a K-8 school into a high school. She said Canter is doing great things and should not close. Closing Canter would be doing direct harm to its students.

Mikki Kendall, Canter and Ray Parent and CPS Alumnus

Ms. Kendall said CPS cannot fix what is not broken. Students will not be served well by larger class sizes and fewer teachers. She was at Kozminski and believes in this neighborhood and community. She wants to see children succeed and believes this disruption will hinder that. She believes the proposal is about money but will harm her younger son.

Stephanie Burton-Taylor, Hyde Park Resident, CPS Alumnus, CPS School Teacher

She said her son is struggling in his education. He is now a 7th grader at Canter, and the staff at Canter is working with him. Adults need to think about what they are teaching students. Adults talk about respect but are now disrespecting these kids by not talking to the students and asking them why they want their school to stay open.

Angela Paranjape

Ms. Paranjape argued that the plan is incomplete. She said Ray and Harte will be K-8 and Shoemith is staying a K-6. She wanted to know where Shoemith's 7th and 8th graders would go. She also wanted to know how many teaching positions would be open and if Algebra will be offered. She wanted to make the point that Hyde Park is home to Lab School, a top notch school where the Mayor's children go. She disagrees that this is the best plan for students and is not convinced that CPS administration has the best interest of children in mind.

Vicky Long, Community Member

She argued that this process has been flawed. She said that there has been no dialogue or interaction. She does not believe schools should be closed. She does not believe the community has a voice in the decision.

Greta Holmes, Senior Activist

Ms. Holmes does not have children in public schools. She asked if closing Canter was inevitable and if so, what the purpose of the meeting was. She does not believe the school should be closed. She has been active in seeking social justice and believes meetings like this are sometimes useless. She asked that the facilitators do what they could to ensure the community at the meeting is heard.

Charlie Mabry, Parent of former Canter Students

Mr. Mabry has had four students come through Canter. He has two who are now on the honor roll in college at Alabama A&M and two on the honor roll at Kenwood. He stated that the Canter staff has helped him become a better parent, and the school is like a family.

Donna Hart, Canter Parent

Ms. Hart moved her family from Minnesota two years ago. She wanted a middle school in the Hyde Park area, so Canter was the perfect choice. She stated that if Canter closes, she will have no other choice but to move back to Minnesota.

Patrick Brutus, Ray Parent

He is in favor of keeping Canter open and maintaining the academic integrity of the Hyde Park community. He stated that CPS should be talking about increasing educational options for our children because the community is better when there is more to offer.

J. H., Canter Graduate

She said that coming to speak was a hard decision, because adults told her she did not understand. She said what she understands is that CPS wants to shut down the school that made her successful. She said she is currently at Kenwood. She believes that both children and adults will be affected by this action.

T.A., Canter Student

When he was in 6th grade, he said he was thought of as a ‘lost cause’. He said Canter gave him what he needed, including staying after school and retaking failed tests. He said he had a chance at Canter.

Alderman Hairston, 5th Ward

The Alderman explained that she was never consulted when the decision was made to close Canter and send children into her ward. She was never informed at a meeting with Mr. Price that the principal and assistant principal of Ray Elementary School was going to be escorted out of the building. She was also not informed of the parent meeting that was conducted earlier that day at Ray School. She stated that she was elected to represent the people of the 5th ward and that she matters, her people matter, and her students matter. She will not allow anyone to disrespect them. She stated that they will not be a community where only the rich and politically connected get a say. They have always been a politically active community and will continue to speak with voices and votes.

D., Canter Student

He thinks Canter is a very good school. The last school he was at had a lot of violence. He thinks he finally found a good school. He is inspired by his teachers and says they believe in him and thinks closing Canter is a mistake. He can walk to the school.

S. B., Canter Student

This student does not think closing Canter is a good idea. She said her teachers have faith in her.

Leslie Travis, Teacher in Hyde Park

The Canter building is a stabilizing influence in the community. The staff is tireless at policing the community and patrolling the area. As a community member, she is worried about the impact of an empty building next to a high school and an active library branch. She thinks Canter is doing a great job keeping the community vibrant. She stated that it speaks a lot about the community that children stay and raise their children here. Buildings need to stay filled and occupied.

S.S., Canter Student

This student believes this school should not shut down because it is very successful. She says the teachers help students with their problems. They take personal time to stay after school and make sure students understand and pass their classes. She thinks shutting down the school is a mistake.

D.R., Canter Student

This student stated that when he first came to Canter, it was like a home away from home. His teachers pushed him to do better, and said Canter is like a family. He said students come to Canter and feel loved and safe even if they do not feeling that way at home. He asked to please keep it open.

Irami Osei-Frimpong, Parent

He asked who would be the winners and losers. He said if Canter stayed open, winners would be students who get to take 8th grade Algebra. He asked if the receiving schools offer algebra.

Summary of response from Ms. Little - Yes. Any program at Canter will be transferred to the welcoming school.

He asked if this was not the case, who can he hold accountable.

Summary of response from Ms. Little - Ms. Little stated he can call David Vitale, who is the chair of the Chicago Board of Education. If the motion is passed, all programming must be transferred to the welcoming school.

He stated the community is trusting Ms. Little when she says these programs will transfer, and again asked who can be held accountable.

Summary of response from Ms. Little – Ms. Little noted that this request and guarantee is being recorded.

S., Canter Alumnus

She said Canter changed the person she is today. She felt prepared when she got to high school at Kenwood. The teachers cared and told her what she had to do to pass. She asked about what would happen to these caring teachers. She said she wanted her family members to go to Canter.

S., Canter Alumnus

She believes she is a successful sophomore at Kenwood because she went to Canter. She was in 8th grade algebra with Mr. Winter and now she is taking advanced algebra trigonometry. Next year she will take statistics.

D., Canter Alumnus

He discussed how Canter got him ready for high school. He feels like they are closing because CPS wants more money. He said teachers work hard and should be paid.

Lina Fritz, Community Member

Ms. Fritz has been a Hyde Park resident for 10 years and does not have a child in CPS yet. The community is working hard to lift up the schools. She joined the LSC at Shoemith and thinks the community is the ideal academic canvas. She wants to be able to walk her children to school and is committed to CPS. She is insulted that community input is parceled into 2 minute fragments without any exchange or dialogue. She is not sure anything is going to be considered. She claimed Mr. Price said Hyde Park schools would not be affected in this closing, so she asked how people are supposed to trust that CPS means what it says. The community is supposed to own the schools their taxes pay for, and CPS should work for them. Now decisions are made about the schools for which community taxpayers are paying. She said CPS should be defending the proposal to taxpayers, not the other way around.

Hannah Hayes, Hyde Park Resident

Ms. Hayes' son went to Ray from K-6. She said they heard there about the importance of middle school and how students need certain things they cannot get in K-8. She does not know why she should believe CPS. She said that CPS has heard from the community that Canter is clearly a school that works. She said that she did not know who said underutilized. She urged the panel to listen to the students and everyone else that had spoken.

Mr. Winters, Canter Math (including Algebra) Teacher

He explained how the number of students who passed out of freshman algebra and geometry has increased over the years. He explained that Canter was now able to offer algebra to 32 out of 110 students. He wondered how this amount of success would be possible with much larger numbers at Ray and Harte.

Casandra Dunlap, Canter Parent

She said the people who have the power to make a difference are not here. She stated that she had never seen as dynamic of a duo as the current Canter administration. She said that this has to be reconsidered and that she wants her current 6th grader to go to Canter. She believes this is all politics and not about kids.

Student from a CPS Military Academy

This student said he did not graduate from Canter Middle School. He went to summer school and was not

focused. He felt as a young black male, gangs want him more than the college system and the CPS system does. He questioned how people who did not go to CPS schools can make decisions about them. He wants his family to be able to go to Canter because he trusts the teachers there. He does not believe the people leading CPS are doing a good job.

Canter Student

This student said the staff at Canter are the people that are making a difference and making sure students are getting the attention they need. The student questioned where the students from Shoemith would go.

N.W., Canter Student

This student said there are great teachers at Canter. When he came here, he did not understand equations, but his teacher taught him. He said the school he came before had drug and gang problems. When he came to Canter, he said people were nice and accepted him. He asked to keep Canter open.

T.M., Canter Student

This student said that when he was in elementary school, he heard good things about Canter and always thought it was because there were no uniforms. When he got there, he said it was different. There was no gang violence or influence. There is a library, a McDonalds, and an art center down the street.

JOHN BARKER

Mr. Barker stated that the next meeting would be Friday at 5pm, and thanked the community members for attending..

