

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Bethune Elementary School

April 8, 2013 5:00pm-7:00pm

Location: Manley High School 2935 W. Polk

CPS Staff in Attendance

Tracey Martin-Thompson - Chief of Strategic School Supports, Stephanie Donovan, Chief of Staff for Office of Strategic School Supports, Warren Morgan, Principal of Manley High School

Brief Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Bethune in accordance with 105 ILCS 5/34-230. CPS officials made a presentation regarding this proposal. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics including: the safety of the students traveling to Gregory, gang violence around Gregory, concern that children and families may not feel welcomed at Gregory, the support and sense of family at Bethune, and teacher accessibility before, during and after school. The meeting started at 5:02pm and concluded at 6:54pm.

CPS Presentation

Ms. Martin-Thompson opens the community meeting by welcoming everyone who is in attendance. She then explained that tonight's meeting was the first of three meetings, and gave the date, time and location of all future meetings. Lastly, she referenced the documents provided to each person in attendance and gave a brief explanation of the contents of each page in the packet.

Public Comment

Latasha Petty, AUSL representative

Ms. Petty stated that 97% of students remain in CPS, and within two years they got to 60% of students meeting/exceeding state standards. She said in 2013, 50% of students met their goals. She said that they have incorporated many after-school programs to support increasing student achievement.

ZT, student

She said that the school has helped her emotionally and socially. She stated that Bethune is a place where students can go to get computer access and where they feel comfortable enough referring to their teachers as "mothers and fathers". She stated that Bethune teaches students more than just academics, they teach life lessons.

Ernest Williams, Principal since July 2012

Mr. Williams described all of the school's efforts to improve culture and academic outcomes. Mr. Williams stated that he came from a Level 1 school, and that Bethune's culture and climate

is comparable to other high achieving schools. Mr. Williams talked about how students come to the school with significant academic deficiencies, but that the staff works to provide intervention and challenges students to achieve. Mr. Williams stated that the school offers social-emotional support and if Bethune closes, the students who depend on these supports will suffer. He is concerned about his students' well-being if they leave Bethune.

Terence Knight, Disciplinarian

Mr. Knight said he's seen a lot of growth in the students' achievement. He said they have begun to reason and make more positive decisions. He believes Gregory will do a wonderful job with their students, but the concern is the territory that the students have to cross. He stated that his biggest concern is the students being misunderstood, misled and a lack of support for their needs. He asked what will happen to the building.

Deanna Johnson, Parent of a Special Education student

Ms. Johnson asked what will happen for special education students if they go to Gregory. She questioned whether the school will be overcrowded or whether students will continue to receive the needed supports for their education. She stated her concern for special needs students.

Enix Daniels, Father and uncle of nine students

Mr. Daniels stated that he has been supportive of Bethune since the transition in 2009 to AUSL. He stated that CPS asked that the parents trust the transition process during this time of change, and they did. He said he doesn't understand why they are proposed for closure. He said Bethune has a science lab, like at a college and the school offers students a variety of activities. Mr. Daniels asked that the principal be allowed to continue to make strides toward improving student learning.

Felicia Hilson, Alum

Ms. Hilson said she was a student at Bethune, and many changes have occurred since the change to AUSL. She said Bethune has a lot of love, and the people are family. She believes the parents are supportive of students before and after school.

Alderman Jason Ervin

The Alderman stated that he traveled the path between the two schools and saw criminal activity including evidence of drug use and gang activity. The Alderman also stated that students would have to pass through gang territory and abandoned buildings. Alderman Ervin said Bethune has already had a turnaround action in 2009, and that he believes it is unfair for students to have to endure a closing just a few years later. The Alderman is concerned that students will not be safe traveling from East Garfield to West Garfield. He stated that there are other viable options for students at Gregory and Bethune, specifically Kellman Elementary. Alderman Ervin also stated his objection of closing a school that is named in honor of an African-American civil rights activist. The Alderman restated parent and student concerns of safety and the desire to continue to attend a community school.

JS, Student

JS said Bethune should not close down because it is JS's "dream school." JS stated that the teachers work together to make different aspects of the school work, and to work on behalf of the students.

Parent

The parent said that her only whole family went to that school, and that her children are at this school and that she attended this school. The parent questioned how CPS can be sure that students will feel welcomed at Gregory. She also questioned how CPS planned on transporting students to Gregory.

Ms. Daniels, Parent

Ms. Daniels stated that Bethune is the only schools that students know. In her opinion, sending students to Gregory is exposing students to gang violence. The parent stated that she has been working as a para-professional in special education for students and that she is concerned about special education students.

Ms. Peterson, Tutor

Ms. Peterson questioned what the message CPS was sending to students. She is concerned that the message students will receive is that they are not worth CPS's investment. She acknowledges that there are empty classrooms, but in her opinion, it doesn't seem to be half empty. She noted that there are computer labs, gym, and a lot of resources in the school. Ms. Peterson is concerned that the students feel like they're being given up on, after a recent turnaround action.

Student

The student came stated that she came as a 4th grader and is currently in 8th grade. She would like to be able to return to Bethune in future years.

Student

The student is shocked that Bethune is closing because she believes that they have made outstanding academic progress. The student pleaded to keep the school open.

Student

The student stated that Bethune deserves a second chance to succeed. The student stated that he is graduating this year, but wants other children to enjoy the experiences that Bethune has to offer. D says that if Bethune closes and the students have to travel one mile to Gregory, they will be crossing gang territory. D stated that Bethune took their air conditioners out for energy conservation. He asked that visitors from other schools come to see the excellence that is happening at Bethune.

Student

S stated that since she has been at Bethune her test scores have improved and that she is learning more. The students compared student achievement data of Bethune's to Gregory's and do not see a significant difference.

Student

The student stated that her whole family attended Bethune. She said that she came from Jensen to Bethune specifically because of Bethune's reputation as being a good school. She believes that the school should not close because it is a welcoming atmosphere.

Rachel Shine, Teacher

Ms. Shine is impressed by the culture of the school at Bethune. She stated that the school is "a school of learners." She stated that she learned from the students how to be forgiving, and how to trust others. She also has learned from her peers, especially instructional techniques such as scaffolding and differentiating.

Student

The student stated that Bethune has given her more than any school could give a student. She stated that Bethune has built her resume so she can get into college. With the academic help she is receiving at Bethune, that she is finally succeeding. The student stated that students are able to come before and after school for support. She stated that it the school culture is not judgmental and that students feel free to work together without judgment.

Special Education Teacher

She states that they have RTI in place and other educators are coming to see what they are doing with special education. She shared that they have many programs for students to participate in before and after school. She says the students are not just improving themselves academically, but also socially. Will the students get the same or better social emotional growth support at Gregory School?

Student

She has dreams of graduating from Bethune and returning to visit. She says that the teachers at Bethune care for the students.

Student

The student stated that there has been much turnover of staff in the past decade, and that when there are multiple principals and administrations, that the school is unable to make meaningful academic progress. She asked that Bethune be given a chance to succeed.

Student

The student shared that some students will stop coming to school because parents without cars are unable to provide transportation. The student said that every student is doing their best and Bethune needs to stay open.

Ms. Johnson, Alum

Ms. Johnson spoke about how much progress the school has made since its turnaround. She questioned why CPS would want to turn around a school that is in the middle of a turnaround. She asked that CPS reconsider this proposal.

Student

The student says that Bethune feels like a family. He questioned why CPS would try to break apart a family. He stated that all students that come to Bethune are made to feel welcomed and part of the Bethune family.

Devon Towns, Parent

Mr. Towns is a community member and a parent of a nine year old at Bethune. Mr. Towns is thankful for CPD's work on the west side. Mr. Towns expressed his willingness to complete art projects for Bethune if it were to stay open.

Deanna Johnson, Parent

Ms. Johnson inquired about the transportation that will be offered to students, but also wanted to know how the parents are expected to get to Gregory.