

**Community Meeting for the proposed closure of Leif Ericson Elementary Scholastic Academy**

April 6, 2013; 12:30-2:30pm

Location: Manley HS, 2935 W. Polk St

**CPS Meeting Facilitators in Attendance:** Wanda Washington, Herald Johnson, Elizabeth Mascitti-Miller, Leonard Moody

**Brief Summary:** The purpose of the community meeting was to receive public comments on the school action proposal to close Leif Ericson Elementary Scholastic Academy, in accordance with 105 ILCS 5/34-230. CPS officials stated the purpose for today's meeting, introduced the CPS staff at the meeting, and reviewed the handouts provided to the community. There were two sign language interpreters and one Spanish language translator in attendance. The speakers' comments focused on information contained in the handout and the procedural aspect of the meeting.

**CPS Presentation:**

The principal of Manley High school opened the public forum by welcoming guests to his school. Leonard Moody, Director of Internal Audit for Chicago Public Schools, introduced himself and Elizabeth Mascitti-Miller, Chief Officer of Early Childhood Education, as the facilitators of the session, and introduced Wanda Washington, Chief of Schools for the Garfield Humboldt Network. He then introduced the proposed school action and the handouts given to community members. The handouts included the summary of transition supports, a map explaining the boundary changes and frequently asked question summaries. He also let the audience know that the CPS team will be representing Barbara Byrd-Bennett, the CEO of Chicago Public Schools.

Ms. Mascitti- Miller discussed the meeting rules and procedures, and reaffirmed the purpose of the Community Action Meeting.

**Public Comment:**

**Cynthia Johnson**

Ms. Johnson stated that the school is academically doing well and stated several facts regarding the school's academic success. She claims that the enrollment has increased almost 60%. She stated that the school was unaware of utilization minimums and had they known, the school could have an opportunity to meet expectations. Ms. Johnson explained the plan of action she

supports to increase enrollment including placing banners outside the school, collaborating with the office of Academic Enhancement.

**Alderman Jason C. Ervin (Ward 28)**

The Alderman did not want to see Ericson students leave the community and does not think that students will utilize the transportation option being provided by CPS. He believes the school has been considered as a neighborhood school and that there is a small percentage of students bused into Ericson. He agreed that the school should be a STEM school and believes that only one school is not enough to service the community. He was also concerned that students will be crossing Adams to Faraday which would be a dangerous commute. He emphasized students would rather attend a school that is nearby their home/neighborhood.

**Mr. Banks, parent of two Leif Ericson students**

Mr. Banks indicated that he had two daughters that graduated from Ericson. He voiced concerns over students having to cross Pulaski traveling through high-crime areas. He does not think the police has the capacity to do everything to keep students

**Hazel Prentiss, teacher**

Ms. Prentiss was concerned about safety issues and believes they have not been addressed. She was worried about children traveling through high-crime areas. She voiced concerns over students being victimized as they travel to Sumner, which is over one mile away.

**Student of Ericson School**

This student expressed concern over his mother worrying as he travels to Sumner. He explained his emotional attachment to the school.

**Mr. Colwell, math teacher at Ericson School**

Mr. Colwell expressed concern over the school closing. After researching the decision, he concluded that Ericson is more utilized than Sumner and ranked higher in some performance categories than other schools in the Network and District. He discussed that the enrollment rate has increased more than Sumner. He also described that the test scores at the school are high and better than average.

**Ms. Rose, parent volunteer**

Ms. Rose expressed concern over the school closing. She stated that students are in school from into the late afternoon every day and have myriad of extracurricular activities and cross-cultural learning. She stated that the walk from Ericson to Sumner was not a straight shot as some people seem to think.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Student at Leif Ericson School**

She recited the creed of Leif Ericson School.

### **Student at Leif Ericson School**

Student stated that he could have gone to any other school, but chose Leif Ericson. He also pointed out that Leif Ericson has a waiting list illustrating that the school is in high demand.

### **Wendy Pearson**

Ms. Pearson asked CPS officials if they had any students on the west side or south side of the city where students are exposed to violence. She stated that this type of behavior happens around Sumner Elementary School, and Ericson students will be placed in this environment.

### **A recent graduate of Leif Ericson**

This graduate voiced objections over Leif Ericson merging with Sumner Elementary School. She told the story of her recently traveling to work in the K-Town community where Sumner is located and having to dodge bullets because community members were shooting. That same path is where Ericson students will have to walk.

### **Bonnie Thomas, a concerned parent**

Ms. Thomas is a concerned parent and voiced objections over students having to walk over a mile to Sumner Elementary School.

### **A student at Leif Ericson**

This student at Leif Ericson questioned why the school will be closing.

### **Parent of two students at Leif Ericson**

A concerned parent attributed the work of the staff has provided her daughter an opportunity to attend Whitney Young. She discussed she is a committed parent.

### **Ms. Fullilove**

Ms. Fullilove stated that both her son and daughter went to Ericson and are now both successful.

### **Student at Ericson**

This student looks at Mr. Abram, Ericson's principal, as a father figure. She indicated that he is very supportive of students at Ericson and serves as more than just an instructional leader.

**Ms. Rhonda Bonner, LSC chairperson and concerned parent**

Ms. Bonner stated that students feel good about coming to school, and the school community has successfully cleared crime from the school's corner.

**LSC Secretary**

He stated that they will continue to support Leif Ericson and the community.

**Jamaria Williams**

Ms. Williams stated that Sumner is dangerous and due to a high number of registered offenders, it is unsafe for females to travel in that area.

**Ms. Griffins**

Ms. Griffins works by Sumner and voiced concerns over students having to travel through a high-crime area.

**Student at Leif Ericson**

This student questioned why schools are not closing in Caucasian neighborhoods and only in African-American neighborhoods.

**Student at Leif Ericson**

This student stated that the teachers are like family, Ericson has helped her achieve her goals and she has now been accepted into Lane Tech. She wants other students in the community to be able to have that same opportunity.

**Student at Leif Ericson**

Student stated that Ericson is like "a home away from home", and does not want to see the school close.

**Student at Leif Ericson**

Mr. Thomas questioned why CPS officials are closing schools on the South and West side, but opening them on the North side. He believes that Ericson deserves to remain open.

**Hasan Prentiss**

Mr. Prentiss is the vice president of the student council. He spoke about the commendable strides that the school has made as a whole and do not want to see the school close.

**Laquita Grissit**

Ms. Grissit wants to see her student graduate from kindergarden and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Believes that CPS is an obstacle in the student's lives.

### **Parent of Lief Ericson school**

Concerned parent expressed that out of all of the schools that her daughter got accepted to, she chose Leif Ericson because they considered it the best school. She pointed out that to have iPads at home would not be conducive to learning. They still will need WiFi or else it will just be an iPad with a lot of free apps.

### **Parent of Lief Ericson**

Parent stated that Mr. Abram has entirely turned the school around. He expressed doubts in the decisions made or if genuine long term thought have gone into the process. He stated that students are now going to be in the middle of danger and violence.

### **Mr. Trotter**

He stated that his involvement with the school has been successful as a supplemental program in helping the students in becoming successful. He does not want to see Ericson close.

### **Student at Leif Ericson**

Leif Ericson has exposed them to colleges, trips, and cultivating activities. He has family that goes to Ericson and want them to have the same opportunities that he had.

### **Student at Leif Ericson**

Student stated that she is planning on going to Lane Tech and Leif Ericson helped make that possible.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student at Leif Ericson**

She stated that because of Leif Ericson she is now inspired to be an actress. She then went on to say that other schools such as Gregory should be closed. Ericson school is full of doctors, scholars, and teachers.

### **Student at Leif Ericson**

3<sup>rd</sup> grade student at Leif Ericson expressed gratitude for Mr. Abram and Mrs. Luster.

### **JD, Student at Leif Ericson**

He expressed concerns over the City of Chicago closing schools. Schools are more important. He loves Leif Ericson and does not want to see the school close.

### **TK, 5<sup>th</sup> grade student at Leif Ericson**

Student does not understand why the school is being closed given there are drug dealers, prostitutes, and killers in their neighborhood.

**Ms. Dixon, parent of Leif Ericson student**

Ms. Dixon asked if any CPS officials have ever been in their neighborhood and walked through their streets. Their children fear the thought of having to walk to school. They fear having to worry if they will make it to school and make it home to see their mother.

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student at Leif Ericson**

Student stated that Leif Ericson is a family and a good building which has prepared her to go on and do bigger and better things.

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student at Leif Ericson**

Student stated that she is a better person today because of Leif Ericson.

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student**

He stated that both the Chief and Deputy Chief of Schools have been to Ericson and know how well they are doing. He wants a chance to play basketball and make it to the NBA. He stated that he wants to graduate and by keeping Ericson open, that will be more possible.

**Vicki True**

Ms. True stated that instead of closing schools, money should be funneled to better schools and /or social community centers. They can be multipurpose centers and serve as safe places for community gatherings.

**Two students from Leif Ericson School**

Two students from Leif Ericson got up and co-spoke about their disdain for seeing the school close.

**Two students from Leif Ericson School**

Two students from Leif Ericson got up and co-spoke about the family environment of their school. They felt as if this decision will take them from their homes.

**Crystal L., a parent volunteer at Leif Ericson**

Ms. L. stated that seeing kids cry over education should evoke some type of emotions out of CPS officials. Students should not have to cry over the fate their education. CPS also needs to keep their promise on their contract with Mr. Abrams.

**8<sup>th</sup> grade student at Leif Ericson**

Student expressed hurt over the idea of their school closing and the inability of young students having the continued opportunity go to school alongside with their peers.

**KJ, student at Leif Ericson**

Student said that she has best friends and the best teachers in the world at Ericson and that it would be horrible if that was all taken away from her.

**Mr. Abrams, Principal of Leif Ericson School**

Mr. Abrams urged Leif Ericson citizens not to speak in a derogatory manner against any other schools, or CPS officials. He encouraged students to do well in the classroom. He expressed love for the students and the school. If given an opportunity to stay open, he believes that they will succeed. He expressed concern for a willingness to do better and to push within the classroom and in life. He wants students and community members to keep the faith and that they will succeed.