

## **Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close Graeme Stewart Elementary**

April 11, 2013; 5:00-7:00pm

Location: Amundsen High School, 5100 N Damen Avenue

### **CPS Facilitators:**

Tim Cawley, Chief Administrative Officer

Sebastian De Longeaux, Chief Procurement Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Craig Benes, Chief of Elementary Schools, Ravenswood Ridge Network

Phil Salemi, Deputy Chief of Elementary Schools, Ravenswood Ridge Network

Luis Garcia-Juarez, School Council Relations

### **Brief Summary**

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Stewart Elementary School in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials reviewed the proposed action and there were about 10 community members in attendance and 4 speakers. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics including: CPS budget deficit, detailed supports for students, and concern around planning.

### **CPS Welcome**

Tim Cawley, Chief Administrative Officer, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting. He introduced the sign language interpreters and Spanish translators. He asked if anyone required Spanish translation. No one raised their hands. Cawley then presented an overview of the proposal and reviewed the materials available to meeting attendees. Sebastian De Longeaux, Chief Procurement Officer then explained the meeting rules and procedures. The meeting was opened for public comment at about 5:13pm.

### **Public Comment**

#### **Martin Ritter**

Mr. Ritter is a CTU organizer; prior to that he said taught for 8 years and is affiliated with 675 units, including 18 UNO schools he said he is organizing. Martin asked if he was the only speaker and if he could take two hours to filibuster. He said he believes that he read that CPS issued \$329M bond issue and asked if it was wise to take a district father into debt when there is a \$1B deficit. He said he took basic finance in college and learned that if you are a billion dollars in the hole, it is not sound financial practice to go into the hole another \$329M. He said that the PR spin would be to use the money for iPads, AC and plenty of other things. He then said that he hears the CEO and Mayor say that closing schools are tough decisions. He said he thinks the tough decisions are to ask “friends at the merc and the board of trade” to pay their fair share. He said he thinks a tough decision is to close the LaSalle TIF and provide more revenue. He said those are tough decisions.

**Jonathan Knowles**

Mr. Knowles is a student at Northwestern University. He said that he had questions based on the information presented. He asked how does CPS plan on handling additional students in the classroom and maintaining class sizes that teachers can manage? He said that he sees noted there is \$1.7M invested in the building, but asked if there are larger class sizes how would it be handled? He then asked how Stewart students would be brought up to standard in their new classrooms at Brennemann. He said that Brennemann has accolades and asked how new students will be held to standards and how CPS plans on helping them transition. He asked how would CPS make sure the transition would go smoothly.

**Martin Ritter**

Mr. Ritter said that he would continue with his comments. He asked how many people who work for CPS have teaching and learning experience in classrooms, he said he knows that Mr. Benes does. He said that people without teaching experience, these are the people who make disastrous decisions regarding public school students. He said that those who taught have organized new opposition in the union to fight back against corporate reform. He said that the decisions are being done on a spreadsheet without actual direct contact with teachers and support staff who are dedicated to putting children first. He said that children deserve smaller class sizes, and to be provided with art, music, a librarian, world language, and computer technology. He said instead they will get iPads which will be obsolete in 2 years. He said that best practices are not part of the budget and that if you really wanted to make a difference CPS would listen to educators- someone with a bachelors and masters in teaching. He said educators know what works, not Bill Gates, Eli Broad and the Walton family, who do not have any experience in this but they do have experience in destroying classrooms, closing schools and privatizing public education and reversing what educators like John Dewey put together years ago.

**Martin Ritter**

Mr. Ritter asked if there are any Board of Education members present. He said Mr. Cawley is high ranking and said he “gives him credit”. He then said that people making decisions are not here to listen. He said that there is a court reporter and note taker. He said the CEO made a comment about the winter hearings that people understood about closings. He said he was at 15 hearings and he said no one at those hearings go it that CPS had to close schools. He said he does not accept the CEO’s comments. He said he does not think CPS wants to do this; he thinks the Mayor has an agenda for charters and to privatize. He said that Bishop Desmond Tutu said you either fight for justice or you stand with the oppressors. He said this is the time to fight right now. He said CPS PR uses phrases like “holding children hostage” in failing schools. He said when did teachers become terrorists? He said teachers are teaching reading, math and social studies. He then said that is the type of relationship CPS has with 27,000 workers in the system. He said the last two years deficits turned to surpluses. He said the deficit is because Arnie Duncan decided to put pensions on a credit card before he went to DC. He then said that an unelected, unaccountable school Board is making the decisions. He said there is an appointed

educator on the Board. He said in two years he hopes there is a new Mayor and CEO who do the right thing.

### **Reggie Spears**

Mr. Spears said that it came to his attention at an LSC meeting that there are not plans for anything yet because we are only two weeks into the notice of proposed school closing. He said his comment is that if CPS is going forward with plans and school closings that plans should be in place already. He said all plans should be in place and he and other teachers, parents and students want details. He said if there are not plans the decisions are narrow sighted. He said safety plans should be detailed because CPS knew a long time ago what schools were slated to be closed. He asked why plans are not in place. He asked why students, parents, and he do not have details and said “the devil is in the details”. He said it does not seem like the Board of Education has student interests in mind.

### **Jonathan Knowles**

Mr. Knowles said he had follow up questions. He said the print materials mention academic intervention and asked what activities there are to bring together parents, staff, and students? He then said it mentions academic intervention. He asked how detailed is the plan? He said it seems like rhetoric and is vague. He said to provide details about what the plan encompasses and how CPS will intervene. He said that switching schools won’t change performance and asked how CPS will make sure the change is not just a change in environment. He then said that sometimes teachers are held 100% accountable for things out of their control like student home life. He said if home life is crazy a student may not do homework and a teacher can’t be held accountable. He said to make sure teachers and parents are accountable.

### **Jerry Rose**

Mr. Rose said that Stewart and Trumbull are both in the architectural survey, a landmark survey and that they are both orange rated, which is the highest quality of architectural landmark in the survey. He said they are both just short of being a landmark. He said he intends to follow the citizen procedures to recommend them. He said that the tribune says the Landmark Commission is political and a waste and that they vandalize the city. He said they’ve vandalized Michael Reece, he said they’ve torn down Prentice, and now they don’t care that we have a city that destroys schools. He said the schools are significant priority architecture. He said to look up Dwight Perkins. He said they are significant prairie architecture; during the time he was an architect for the board of Education he built significant buildings. He said for the city to close and turn Trumbull into a fast food place or into another building would be “cultural vandalism.”

### **Jonathan Knowles**

MR. Knowles said he is from Florida and that after coming tonight he is disappointed to see what looks like a PR move from local government. He said there are teachers here to fight for their jobs and they cannot get answers to their questions. He said teachers are not being disrespectful but want to find out what is best for students, kids and families. He said he thinks it is sad. He

said it is a difficult decision but for CPS to realize the weight of the decision and when CPS decides to close or keep open schools to take it to heart and not pound a gavel. He said to think about kids, communities, homes and children who may have to go further and be put in danger.

Tim Cawley reiterated the process of gathering public comment and input and the purpose for the meeting.

There was no public comment from about 5:59-7:00pm.