

Community Meeting for the Proposal to Close John Calhoun North Elementary School

April 13, 2013; 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Location: Al Raby High School, 3545 W. Fulton Boulevard

CPS Facilitators:

Adam Anderson, Officer, Portfolio Planning and Strategy

Todd Babbitz, Chief Transformation Officer

Also in Attendance:

Wanda Washington, Chief, Garfield-Humboldt Network

Lionel Harris, Manager, Family and Community Engagement

CPS Presentation

Mr. Anderson summarized the overall process of the meeting and stated that this was the second meeting regarding the proposal to close Calhoun. He mentioned that summaries of the meetings and responses to questions would be posted on the CPS website. He indicated special attention is being paid to the planning and implementation of safety issues that threaten the safe arrival and departure of students at the welcoming school, Cather. He stated that CPS is partnering with the community, Streets and Sanitation, and the police department to ensure that students will have safe passage to and from the school. He provided an overview of the handout distributed to the audience. He then transitioned to Mr. Babbitz.

Mr. Babbitz provided an overview of the meeting logistics including the agenda and the two minute speaking limit. He then began the public comment portion of the agenda.

Brief Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close John Calhoun North Elementary School and welcome students at Willa Cather Elementary School, in accordance with 105 ILCS 5/34-230. The speakers were parents, staff, students and community members. The most repeated concerns/issues raised were regarding safety, the relative performance of the closing and welcoming schools, and the concern about the use of the building post closure. Many people are under the impression that the building will be given to a charter school. The speakers comments are summarized below:

- One speaker described the caliber of the special ed program at Calhoun and said it was being used as a model statewide.
- One speaker mentioned that the school is a showcase for educational programs and mentioned “great scores and good data.”
- Multiple speakers raised concerns about gang territories and children’s safety.

- The principal commented that students, staff, and parents do not understand the guidelines the Board used to propose the closure of Calhoun. She cited Calhoun's track record of academic success and being a "showcase" for programs in the past.
- The principal also questioned the cost of the required maintenance and upgrade numbers. She cited Calhoun's dedicated gym and auditorium and her thoughts that Cather did not have the same quality facility.
- A speaker compared Calhoun and Cather's test scores and enrollment information and conclude that Calhoun was the better school.
- Multiple speakers commented that the improvement Cather will receive already exist at Calhoun.
- One speaker expressed concern about finding a replacement teaching position with other teachers also looking for work.
- One speaker raised concern about Calhoun students not having representation on the Cather LSC until the next LSC election.
- Cather's "Academic Watch" status was brought up by multiple speakers as well as the issue of the transfer student that caused Calhoun to be Level 2.
- One speaker commented that people's focus should be on educating students and not school closings.
- One speaker mentioned the nearby Level 3 charter school.
- One speaker inquired about the class size at Cather after Calhoun's closure.
- One speaker raised concern about Calhoun's academic progress being stopped by the closure.
- One speaker inquired about the status of the Calhoun building after closure.
- One speaker called on the audience to contact their elected officials and express disapproval of their "balancing budgets on the backs of children."
- One speaker inquired about the discrepancy between the state's Academic Watch rating and Cather's Level 1 performance.
- One speaker raised concerns about housing development plans in the area.
- One speaker praised the Head Start program at Calhoun.
- Multiple speakers commented that they thought the Calhoun building would be used to house a charter school.