

Community Meeting for the proposal to Close Henson Elementary School

April 8, 2013

7:30p.m.-9:30p.m.

Location: Manley High School, 2935 W. Polk Street

**CPS Facilitators:**

Tracey Martin-Thompson, Chief Officer of Strategic School Support Services

Stephanie Donovan, Chief of Staff, Office of Strategic School Support Services

**Also in attendance:**

Chandra James, Chief of Elementary Schools, Austin North-Lawndale Network

Carolyn Chatman-Walls, Austin North-Lawndale Transformation Instructional Support Lead

Warren Morgan, Principal of Manley High School

Alderman Chandler, 24<sup>th</sup> Ward

**Brief Summary**

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposal to close Henson Elementary School in accordance with Public Act 097-0474. CPS officials reviewed this proposed action. There were about 134 community members in attendance and 31 speakers. The speaker comments focused on a variety of topics including: Support for struggling schools, reading and math data (ISAT), NWEA data, criminal activity in the Hughes community, testimonials about Henson's principal's effectiveness during her tenure, testimonials about Henson's school culture and tradition, questions about the validity of the Henson's utilization report.

**CPS Welcome**

At 7:31p.m. Warren Morgan, Principal of Manley High School, welcomed those in attendance and introduced the meeting.

7:34p.m.

Tracey Martin-Thompson, Chief Officer of Strategic School Supports introduced the CPS facilitators and other CPS officials. Ms. Martin-Thompson introduced the purpose of the meeting and introduced the court reporter, interpreter, signer, and note-taker. Ms. Martin-Thomas over viewed the school action and noted the next community and hearing date. Ms. Martin-Thomas reviewed the contents of the packet of information that described the proposed school action. Ms. Martin-Thomas shared the CPS Quality Schools website to review summaries from prior meetings and shared information about how to obtain further information by dialing 311 (City Services) or visiting the CPS Quality Schools website.

**Public Comment**

Stephanie Donovan, Chief of Staff, Office of Strategic School Support Services reiterated the purpose of holding the meeting. Ms. Donovan reviewed the process for sharing thoughts, comments and concerns for the meeting. Ms. Donovan shared that any documentation that the public would like to provide to CPS can be given to the court reporter, will enter them into the public record. The time for this meeting, and future meetings was shared with the audience. Ms. Donovan, reminded the audience that this is the first of three meetings, and shared the dates and locations of future meetings. .

**Alderman Chandler**

Alderman Chandler reiterated that he is continuing his fight to ensure that all schools in the 24<sup>th</sup> Ward remain open. Alderman Chandler told the meeting that much of the information in the CPS handouts is inaccurate and requested that a CPS official visit the schools before disseminating inaccurate information. The Alderman stated that there are more effective ways for CPS to balance its budget, including moving out of the 125 S. Clark building. Alderman Chandler stated that the schools on the West Side deserve the same resources as schools in other communities and that he believes that the best way for CPS to balance its budget is to cut central office staff, not close schools on the West Side. He reiterated his opposition to closing any schools.

**Joshua Hallerberg**

Mr. Hallerberg is a technology teacher at Henson. He stated that the enrollment figures that CPS presented are incorrect because they do not take into account that Frazier school closed and reopened. He stated that the school's NWEA scores are stronger than the norm in multiple categories.

**Amanda Cleaves**

Ms. Cleaves stated that she is the counselor and case manager at Henson. She talked about how the CPS materials inaccurately described that she school does not have a computer lab, when the school has two computer labs. She then described the staff and community's efforts to paint the building last summer when CPS denied their request to paint the school. She talked about how important the Erie Clinic's services are to the school, and expressed concerns about the adverse impact on Henson's students if they did not have access to the Erie Clinic. Ms. Cleaves then discussed Henson's partnerships with community and parent groups, and the wide variety of programming that these partnership provide the students of Henson. She stated that these are unique resources that the students would not be able to have access to at other schools.

**Joy Harrison**

Ms. Harrison is a parent of a student in the Henson Head Start program. She is concerned about the distance that the students will have to walk to Hughes because of the danger in the community. She talked about the after-school programming and external partnerships, and how beneficial these partnerships are to the community. She talked about how the new principal has not had enough time to turn around the school.

**Kelvin Cochral**

Mr. Cochral is the lead security officer at Henson. He talked about being involved with Henson for the past 43 years in multiple roles. He described Henson as a place where the community comes together through sporting activities. He is concerned about how challenging it will be for Hughes to welcome the students, based on his experience with Frazier closing.

**Shamata Mortigan:**

Ms. Mortigan is a parent at Henson. She says her daughter is already terrified of the neighborhood, and is concerned about any increased distance. She said that the entire staff and administrators creating a welcoming and supportive environment. She concluded by stating that CPS should provide transportation if they close Henson.

**Valerie Lenard**

Ms. Lenard is with the Lawndale Alliance and is working with the Committee to Save North Lawndale Schools. She believes that Henson is a model of what schools should be. She talked about how the school never appears to be closed because there are always adults working with the students. She talked about how the school has secured resources for its children. Ms. Lennard said that her organization has proposed an alternative plan to CPS and has not received a response.

**Julia Hatchet**

Ms. Hatchet is a volunteer parent at Henson. Ms. Hatchet described the instability that is associated with school closings. She described her various efforts to support students at Henson. She believes that Henson is making great growth and that the students are already suffering consequences over the anxiety associated with Henson's closing.

**Tina Smith**

Ms. Smith is the Vice Chairperson of the Henson LSC and has been involved with Henson since 1989. She stated that many of the parents at Henson are single parents, and are unable to send their students to Henson. Ms. Smith referenced the external partnerships, after-school activities, and staff as critical to her son's development. She stated that the entire community needs Henson to remain open.

**Janette Darrell**

Ms. Darrell is a consultant for CPS and chairs the Education Committee for the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District for Rep. Davis. She advocated for Henson to receive additional resources, such as Dell computers, and described how important the Erie health center is to the community. She invited the community to participate in a rally on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in support of Henson.

**Antoinette Bailey**

Ms. Bailey is a parent of six students at Henson. She says that the staff is kind and her students access the clinic and the food market at Henson. She believes it is a mistake to close Henson

**SR**

SR is a former student from Henson and is a current student at Westinghouse. She described her academic progress at Henson and says that her current academic success is because of her experiences at Henson. She thinks it would devastate for Henson to close.

**Isaac Lewis**

Mr. Lewis publishes a local newspaper. Mr. Lewis described Hughes as a “good school” but is concerned about CPS’s reasons for closing Henson. Mr. Lewis has stated that because CPS erroneously stated that Henson doesn’t have a computer lab, that the community should be skeptical of the rest of the data that CPS has distributed.

**Isaac Lewis (second turn addressing the meeting)**

Mr. Lewis questioned why isn’t choosing the closest schools as the welcoming schools. He stated that this is occurring in several CPS proposals, referencing the closing of Bethune. He also questioned whether CPS has studied the psychological effects of school closings on children.

**Jannette Darrell (second turn addressing the meeting)**

Ms. Darrell stated that Henson has the community’s best security system and they can see the entire perimeter of the school. She also questioned why CPS is not giving the new leadership an opportunity to improve the school, stating that he has only been in charge for a short period of time. She also talked about how her own children are successful because of the education they received at Henson.

**Julia Hatchet (second turn addressing the meeting)**

Ms. Hatchet talked about the “parent patrol” in the community who is familiar with the students in the community. She said that the parent patrol with Henson is a strong part of the communities. She stated that the administration is familiar with the students and are working hard to form connections and that they have plenty of resources. She asked that CPS keep Henson open so the children can continue to grow.

**Khendia Longmire**

Ms. Longmire is the lead K-2 teacher at Henson. She talked about the school's mid-year NWEA data, and that their outcomes are improving. She described the school leadership team's efforts to use the "Burst" program in order to enhance student growth. She described the dedication of their ILT team and described the school's efforts to analyze student data. She stated that the school needs more time to continue its work. She says that the school is providing rigorous academic instruction, and that closing Henson would be stunt the students' recent growth.

**Marian Burr**

Ms. Burr is a parent of current and former Henson students. She stated that she is willing to do anything to help Henson succeed. She questioned why CPS would want to close the school when it has so many resources already. She talked about how Henson is like a family environment.

**Isaac Lewis (third turn addressing the meeting)**

Mr. Lewis issued a plea to the community meeting to demonstrate their commitment to the school by speaking at the meeting. He implored the community to take action to prevent the school closing.

**T**

T is a student at Henson. He stated that he loves his school and his teacher.

**IB**

IB is a student at Henson. She said to please not close her school. She knows how to write her name and perform activities "the right way."

**LJ**

LJ is a student at Henson. He stated he wants his school to remain open.

**DH**

DH is a student at Henson. He asked the CPS presenters to keep his school open.

**Vivian Hudson**

Ms. Hudson is a community member. She described opening the school in the 1960s. She stated that the city is putting students in harm's way by closing the school. She says the school has adequate resources.

**Valerie Lenard (second turn addressing the meeting)**

Ms. Lenard asked CPS to reconsider the proposal to close Henson. She said that the community already has too many abandoned buildings – and that because the building was built generations ago, schools are utilized differently. She questioned why utilization has to revolve around the number of students in a school and not how the space is being used.

**Five Henson Students:**

Addressed the meeting by reciting the Henson student pledge.

**Tina Smith (second time addressing the meeting)**

Ms. Smith questioned why the city is spending tax dollars on a river walk instead of keeping schools open. Ms. Smith also informed the meeting that children, and guardians will be unwilling to make the walk to Hughes.

**Shamata Mortigan (second time addressing the meeting)**

Ms. Mortigan described the academic progress that her student has recently made academic progress and that the entire staff has contributed. She asked CPS officials to reflect about the decision to close schools.

**SR (second turn addressing the meeting)**

SR described the importance of after-school programs at Henson. She talked about how important it was in her development. She explained that the school is a very positive environment for students and that it should remain open.

**Isaac Lewis (fourth turn addressing the meeting)**

Mr. Lewis reminded the meeting that there are a number of parents who are working and wonders why the meetings are not being held at the schools. Mr. Lewis talked about the significant distance that students will have to walk. Mr. Lewis said that the Board should consider this in its proposal. He also questioned why Henson was opened in the first place.

**Antoinette Bailey (second turn addressing the meeting)**

Ms. Bailey described how the resources the school provides positively impacts the community and how the school specifically designated attention to her child who had special needs, and that her child is better off for those efforts.

**Ronnie Porter**

Mr. Porter is a science teacher at Henson. He described how devoted the staff and faculty is at Henson. He said that one cannot put a price tag on the relationships with a student. He described Henson as a family, and described how the teachers will do whatever it takes to take care of their students. He talked about the qualifications of the teachers at Henson and said that they are very qualified to teach students. Mr. Porter talked about how important it is for the Henson community to keep pushing their students so they will be successful in high school, college and beyond.

**Unidentified Speaker**

Described how important the garden is to the Henson community. Talked about how it would be wasteful if this garden was not utilized.

**Isaac Lewis (fifth turn addressing the meeting)**

Described the school's partnerships with neighborhood groups and corporate sponsorships that are supporting efforts at the school

**Kelvin Cochral (second time addressing the meeting)**

Mr. Cochral the meeting that the principal and the administration is new and has not been given an opportunity to turn around the school.

Tracey Martin-Thompson concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their attendance and reminded them of dates and times for the next meetings.