

In Re: The Matter of the Proposal to Close)	Hon. Clifford L. Meacham (Ret.)
)	
Dumas Technology Academy)	Independent Hearing Officer
and)	
Relocation of James Wadsworth)	Thursday, April 25, 2013 at 5:30 PM
Elementary School)	
Chicago, IL)	
)	
)	

HEARING OFFICER REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

The undersigned, a retired judge and attorney licensed to practice in Illinois, was appointed to serve as an Independent Hearing Officer, pursuant to 105 ILSC 5/34-230(f) in the above matter. On April 25, 2013, at 5:30 P.M. a hearing was conducted in the Board Room of the offices of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, located at 125 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Notice of the hearing was sent to parents or guardian(s) of students, school personnel, and local School Council members on as required by Illinois law and/or the Chicago Board of Education's applicable Policies, Guidelines and Procedures. Notice of the Hearing was served via hand delivery to the schools, and by publication on the CPS website and in the Chicago Sun-Times. Finally, Notice was sent to Alderman Leslie Hairston, Alderman Willie Cochran, State Representative Christian Mitchell and State Senator Kwame Raoul on March 21, 2013. (See, CPS Compilation Exhibit, Tabs A1 – A6).

The hearing was convened pursuant to 105 ILCS/34-230 Section (f). The purpose of the hearing was to elicit public comment from concerned persons, including representatives of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Chicago Public Schools, parents of children attending the school(s), members of the local school council, principals, teachers, counselors, staff, students, representatives of the Teachers' Union, and interested members of the general public.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

The CEO has proposed that Dumas Technology Academy, located at 6650 South Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL be closed and same be relocated to James Wadsworth Elementary School located at 6420 South University Avenue, Chicago, IL. In addition, the geographical boundaries currently associated with said schools would be modified.

HEARING

Approximately 125 individuals attended the Public Hearing not including representatives of CPS. Thirty-one (31) individuals signed up to make public comments on the CEO's proposal. All who wished to make a statement were allowed to and did in fact speak. The Hearing Officer left open the Record until 5:00 p.m. on April 26, 2013 to allow for additional written comment from interested members of the public. Any additional written material received during this period is included in the Record and is summarized herein.

A certified Court Reporter, Maureen A. Woodson, transcribed the hearing, pursuant to the directives in the document entitled, "Procedures For Hearings On Proposed School Closings, Consolidations, Co-Location, Phase-Out or Reassignment Boundary Changes" (See, CPS Compilation Exhibit Tab B - 16). The relevant evidence presented at the hearings by representatives of the CEO and public as to whether the CEO's proposal should be endorsed

and that Dumas be closed in its students be reassigned to James Wadsworth Elementary School, and that the geographical boundaries of Dumas be reassigned is summarized below.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE RECEIVED AT THE PUBLIC HEARING
Chicago Public School Representatives

Joseph Gergeni, attorney for the Board of Education Law Department, offered the Exhibit Binder prepared by Board personnel in anticipation of the Hearing into Evidentiary Record. The Binder was admitted without objection.

Statement of Ashley Richardson, Portfolio Planner

Ms. Richardson provided the following statement (TAB A-22):

Good evening, Your Honor. My name is Ashley Richardson, and I am a Portfolio Planner for the Chicago Public Schools. I have been in this position since June of 2012. As a Portfolio Planner, I manage strategic planning to improve the efficient utilization of CPS facilities. Prior to joining CPS, I worked as an analyst and manager at Kraft Foods before obtaining my Masters in Education in Education Policy and Management at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

I have been asked to appear at this hearing today to convey to you, the parents and the community, as well as interested members of the public in attendance, information regarding the space utilization of the DumasTechnologyAcademy, or Dumas, facility with respect to the proposal to close Dumas.

According to the Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for the 2012-2013 school year, the CEO may propose to close a school if it is underutilized based on CPS Space Utilization Standards and student enrollment numbers recorded on the 20th attendance day for the 2012-

2013 school year. The CEO may only propose a closure if the impacted students have the option to enroll in a higher performing school and the resulting space utilization after the closure will not exceed the facility's enrollment efficiency range as defined by the CPS Space Utilization Standards. I will discuss the details regarding the space utilization of this proposal, while my colleague John Price, will discuss the performance of the welcoming school and highlight the supports being offered in the draft transition plan.

Dumas is currently located at 6650 South Ellis Avenue. Dumas is an elementary school that, as of the 20th day of attendance for the 2012-2013 school year, serves 331 students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten through 8th grades.

To understand the enrollment efficiency range of a facility, Chicago Public Schools utilizes its Space Utilization Standards, which are located in your binder at tab 14.

The enrollment efficiency range is plus or minus 20% of the facility's ideal enrollment. For elementary school buildings, the ideal enrollment is defined as the number of allotted homerooms multiplied by 30. The number of allotted homeroom classrooms is approximately 76%-77% of the total classrooms available. As an elementary school's enrollment increases above the efficiency range, a school may be considered overcrowded as programming options are reduced or compromised. As an elementary school's enrollment decreases below the efficiency range, a school may be considered underutilized as classrooms are unused or poorly programmed, making the use of limited resources less effective.

A typical elementary school building has a total of 39 classrooms. Therefore, the number of allotted homerooms, approximately 76%-77% of 39, is 30 classrooms. Multiplying 30 classrooms by 30 equals the ideal enrollment number of 900. Finally the enrollment

efficiency range is plus or minus 20 percent of 900, which is 720 - 1080. If a school in this typical elementary school building had an enrollment below 720, it would be considered underutilized. Alternatively, if the school's enrollment was above 1080, it would be overcrowded.

There are 41 total classrooms within the Dumas facility. Approximately 76%-77% of this number is 31, the number of allotted homerooms. This number multiplied by 30 yields the ideal enrollment of the facility, which is 930. As such, the enrollment efficiency range of the Dumas facility is between 744-1116 students.

As I stated, the enrollment of Dumas, as of the 20th day of attendance for the 2012-2013 school year, is 331. This number is below the enrollment efficiency range, and thus, the school is underutilized.

The CEO has proposed that the students from Dumas be welcomed by James Wadsworth Elementary School, or Wadsworth. Wadsworth will be relocated from its present location to the current Dumas facility at 6650 South Ellis Avenue. If this proposal is approved by the Board of Education for the City of Chicago, the resulting space utilization will not exceed the 6650 South Ellis Avenue facility's enrollment efficiency range as defined by the CPS Space Utilization Standards.

To fully explain the enrollment trend associated with these schools, I would like to direct your attention to the screen. Projected is a slide that shows the enrollment trend of Dumas and Wadsworth, green hashed lines showing the enrollment efficiency range of the 6650 South Ellis Avenue facility, and a circle representing the combined projected enrollment for 2013-2014.

As I previously explained, the enrollment efficiency range of the 6650 South Ellis Avenue facility is 744-1116. Wadsworth currently has 251 students enrolled. The combined enrollment from Dumas and Wadsworth is 582 students, which is below the enrollment efficiency range of the 6650 South Ellis Avenue facility.

Further, the projected enrollment of Dumas for the 2013-2014 school year is 317 and the projected enrollment for Wadsworth for next year is 252. Even the combined projected enrollment for 2013-2014 of 569 is below the 6650 South Ellis Avenue facility's enrollment efficiency range. Thus, there is enough space within the 6650 South Ellis Avenue building for students from Dumas and students from Wadsworth.

If Dumas is closed, the CEO is also proposing that Dumas' attendance area be reassigned to James Wadsworth Elementary School at 6420 South University Avenue at the end of the current school year. Wadsworth would then be relocated to the current Dumas facility at 6650 South Ellis Avenue. A map showing the proposed boundary change is located in your binder at tab 23 and copies of this map were available tonight at the registration desk. In proposing this boundary change, several factors were considered as outlined in the Review and Establishment of School Attendance Boundaries Policy, including, but not limited to, the capacities of Dumas and Wadsworth, geographic barriers, travel time, distance traveled, and program considerations.

You will next hear from my colleague, John Price, who will discuss the performance of Wadsworth and highlight the proposed transition efforts.

Thank you, Your Honor. This concludes my statement.

Statement of John Price, Chief of Schools for the Burnham Park Elementary Network

Mr. Price provided the following statement (TAB A-25):

Good evening Your Honor. My name is John Price. I am the Chief of Schools for the Chicago Public Schools, Burnham Park Elementary Network. Chicago Public Schools are divided up into Networks. Network offices are run by a Chief and provide support and oversight for the schools assigned to them on behalf of the CEO. Dumas and Wadsworth are within the Burnham Park Elementary Network and I am responsible for the support and oversight of Dumas and Wadsworth on behalf of the CEO. I have been the Chief of Dumas and Wadsworth since February of 2012.

By way of background, I have been an educator for approximately 18 years. I began working as a teacher in 1995. I have taught at the elementary, middle school and college levels. I have also worked as an Assistant Principal and Principal where I led efforts to significantly close the achievement gap for students. Currently, I serve as the Chief of Elementary Schools for the Burnham Park Network, managing 35 schools with approximately 13,000 students. I hold a bachelor degree from Stanford University and a Masters of Administration and Leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

As you have already heard, Dumas fits the criteria of the Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for School Actions because it is underutilized based on CPS Space Utilization Standards and student enrollment numbers recorded on the 20th attendance day for the 2012-2013 school year. If this proposal is approved, Dumas students will be welcomed by Wadsworth and Wadsworth will relocate to the current Dumas facility, located at 6650 South

Ellis Avenue. The facility at 6650 South Ellis Avenue has enough space for Dumas and Wadsworth students and the resulting combined enrollment will not exceed the facility's enrollment efficiency range.

When Dumas students are welcomed by the Wadsworth administration, staff, and students, they will be attending a higher performing school based on the CEO's Guidelines for School Actions. The CEO's Guidelines for School Actions define a higher performing elementary school to be a school receiving a higher level on the Performance Policy for the 2011-2012 school year. The CEO's Guidelines also define a higher performing elementary school, if the Performance Policy level is equal, to be a school performing higher on the majority of four performance metrics for the 2011-2012 school year. Both Dumas and Wadsworth received a Level 3 rating in 2011-2012. Thus, the higher performing school under the Guidelines is the one that performed higher on the majority of four performance metrics.

The four performance metrics analyzed are the percentage of points the school received on the Performance Policy, the ISAT composite meets or exceeds score, the Value-Added score in reading, and the Value-Added score in math. I will explain each of these metrics below and explain Wadsworth and Dumas' performance in 2011-2012.

The first metric to compare is the schools' percentage of points received on the Performance Policy. The Performance Policy bases its rating on a point system. Points are received for the school's current level of performance and improvement over time on standardized tests and attendance, as well as the growth of individual students from year-to-year on the state test. For 2011-2012, Wadsworth received 45.2% of available points and

Dumas received 26.2% of available points. Thus, Wadsworth received a higher percentage of points on the Performance Policy.

The second metric is the ISAT Meets or Exceeds Composite score, which is the combined result of the ISAT reading, mathematics, and science assessments. Wadsworth's ISAT Meets or Exceeds Composite score was 59.9%, while Dumas' Meets or Exceeds Composite score was 56.0%.

The third and fourth metrics are the schools' Value-Added score in reading and math. Value-Added is a component of the Performance Policy that compares student academic growth on the ISAT at a school with the growth of similar students across the District. This is done through a regression methodology that controls for nine student-level factors, including grade level, prior performance on the ISAT, free or reduced lunch eligibility, race or ethnicity, mobility, participation in the Students in Temporary Living Situations program, Individualized Education Program (or IEP) status, English Language Learner status, and gender. Controlling for these factors allows us to see how much impact the school had on its average student over the past year. Because we control for prior performance, this metric allows us to identify schools with low test scores where growth is rapid, and schools with high test scores where growth is slow.

The Value-Added metric is a standardized measure with a mean of zero. Standardization means that the score is reported in standard deviation units, which is a measure of how far away the school's score is from the District average. A positive number means that students at the school are growing at a faster pace than similar students in the District. For example, a positive 1 indicates that the school is one standard deviation above the

mean, meaning that the school's students are growing at a faster pace than approximately 84% of schools in the District. A score near zero means that students at the school are growing at about the same pace as similar students in the District. And a negative score means that students at the school are growing at a slower pace than similar students in the District.

As you can see, Wadsworth's reading Value-Added score was -0.5 in 2012 and Dumas' reading Value-Added score was -0.1. This means that, on average, students at Dumas grew at a faster pace in reading when compared to students at Wadsworth in this area. Wadsworth's mathematics Value-Added score was -0.4 in 2012 and Dumas' Value-Added score was -0.9. This means that, on average, students at Wadsworth grew at a faster pace in mathematics when compared to students at Dumas in this area.

To summarize, Wadsworth performed higher than Dumas in 2011-2012 on three of the metrics identified, and thus, is a higher performing school based on the CEO's Guidelines for School Actions.

If this proposal is approved, students will receive additional supports at Dumas during the remainder of this school year and at Wadsworth next year, and the Network will provide assistance to ease the transition process as much as possible. CPS has developed a plan dedicating additional resources to address any safety concerns and to fulfill students' academic, social and emotional, and other individual needs. The draft transition plan, explaining these additional resources, was sent home to all families affected by this proposal and is located in your binder at tabs 1 and 2. CPS will publish final transition plans, if the Board approves this proposal, which will incorporate feedback from community meetings, this hearing, and additional input received.

The CPS Office of Safety and Security, or OSS, has worked with the Chicago Police Department, Department of Family and Support Services, local community groups and faith partners, elected officials, and other sister agencies to develop a plan for the safe transition of students. If this proposal is approved, OSS will take the following steps:

- First, OSS will review and update school safety audits, security personnel allocations, and school safety technology systems to make enhancements as appropriate,
- Second, OSS will be available to address specific safety concerns raised by students and staff.
- Third, OSS will provide Safe Passage supports for students and staff traveling to and from school. Safe Passage workers wear identifiable vests and stand on designated street corners to monitor students' safety during their travel to school in the morning and home in the afternoon. Prior to the start of the 2013-2014 school year, OSS will work with the Wadsworth administration and the community to designate specific intersections for safe passage supports.

Additionally, students will receive academic supports as they transition, including the following:

- First, a Principal Transition Coordinator, or PTC, will be assigned to help the principal Dumas maintain academic rigor for the remainder of the school year and ensure a smooth transition to Wadsworth. PTCs are former principals, or other administrators with significant experience, who will be a resource for the administration and ensure continuity of support for faculty and students.

- Second, the Wadsworth administration will receive comprehensive, student-specific data on all transitioning students to allow staff to proactively identify individual student needs and prepare to meet those needs.
- Third, I will set aside dedicated time to hold “office hours” and will welcome families and students affected by this action to discuss concerns and educational options. My office hours are Tuesdays 9-10am and Friday afternoons 4-6pm.
- Fourth, principals will receive discretionary resources to provide direct academic support to students. For example, these funds may be used to provide an instructional coach, teacher leader, or to obtain an academic tutoring position or program for students in reading and math. I will support principals as they consider how to use these resources and approve their selections once decisions are made.
- Fifth, beginning this fall, CPS will offer students attending Wadsworth with an opportunity to participate in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, or STEM, program. The STEM program aims to build engaging learning environments and trains students to become problem solvers and critical thinkers on a global level, capable of developing and designing multiple solutions for complex real-world situations and grounding their decisions in evidence-based reasoning.

Students will also receive social and emotional supports to help them adjust to a new school environment, including the following:

- First, CPS will help school staff members facilitate intervention groups or peace circles aimed at helping students work through concerns associated with the transition.

- Second, CPS will help staff members implement restorative practices, such as peer circles and peer juries, to encourage peer-to-peer problem solving and resolution.
- Third, groups of students in need of more individualized attention will be provided with access to highly structured interventions.
- Fourth, to foster an environment that is both supportive and inclusive for all students, CPS will provide resources to the Wadsworth leadership to implement culture-building activities, such as staff luncheons and team- and trust-building activities. Resources will also be provided to sponsor activities such as school visits for families, coffee chats with the principal, picnics, field trips, or parent meetings to help transitioning families get to know their new school.

Finally, additional transition supports will be provided to ensure that Dumas students who have unique needs or circumstances are adequately supported in this transition, including students with diverse learning needs, students in temporary living situations, English language learners, and early childhood participants. These additional supports are described in more detail in the draft transition plan, located in your binder at tabs 1 and 2.

In conclusion, Dumas is underutilized, the combined enrollment of Dumas and Wadsworth students at the 6650 South Ellis Avenue facility will not exceed the facility's enrollment efficiency range, and Wadsworth is a higher performing school based on the guidelines set forth in the CEO's Guidelines for School Actions. The CEO believes that this proposed school closure will help the District better serve all students and is prepared to assist students with additional supports as they transition.

Thank you for your time and attention. This concludes my statement.

Comments from the Public

Carolyn Pruitt – Retired and Substitute Teacher, Dumas

Ms. Pruitt opined that the stability of both institutions would be impacted. Removing the Dumas staff from the students is problematic, as all at the school work extremely hard to make every child an academic learner. Ms. Pruitt also suggested that the ISOT be given later in the school year.

Nadya Engler – DePaul University

Ms. Engler commented that DePaul is a partner with Dumas as part of the voluntary school choice program which ends this year. During the program's five years, numerous partnerships and alliances were formed. Project Sincere, now in over 20 schools and a nationally recognized program, was incubated at Dumas.

Keith Lewis - DePaul University

Mr. Lewis stated he worked with a group of parents and parent volunteers on issues including space utilization, community partners, student support, and activities for parents and community. He asked that these factors be given consideration.

Holly Daly, Parent

Ms. Daly opined that this plan puts the students, staff, and parents at a disadvantage, and suggested the rationale for the move was to permit the University of Chicago charter school currently in the Dumas building to take over the school. Ms. Daly submitted a Petition signed by parents and teachers.

Thewartha McDonald - Teacher

Ms. McDonald, a teacher at Wadsworth for 20 years, stated that Wadsworth is a “welcome school,” but expressed the view that moving Wadsworth to Dumas is a mistake, considering that the University of Chicago was going to share both schools, when, in fact, grades six through eight were taken over.

Student A

Student A did not want to leave Wadsworth, “the best school ever.”

Willter Johnson – Parent

Ms. Johnson is a parent with a student at Wadsworth who opined that she did not think it was wise to break up Wadsworth.

Lamona Caldwell – Parent

Ms. Caldwell is a parent of three students at Wadsworth. She opined that Wadsworth is more “kid friendly” and expressed safety concerns regarding street crossings and frustration at not having e-mails and petitions responded to.

Curtis Burrell – Teacher

Mr. Burrell, a teacher for 25 years, wondered if children are really placed first given movement across gang territories, and the fact that this appeared to break up two “happy homes.”

Jenelle Harper – Teacher

Ms. Harper, a teacher at Wadsworth for 20 years, believes that the anger over the anticipated changes is misplaced inasmuch as both schools want to stay in their own buildings, and the charter school will take over the entire Wadsworth facility.

Student B

Student B is a fourth grade student at Dumas who received support from Ms. King, the principal of Dumas, after he was shot. Ms. King and the staff donated money for food and other expenses. A second example of the staff assisting when the student’s sister was burned and in intensive care for six weeks was recited.

Student C

Student C wants to stay at her school and expressed thanks to Principal King.

Felicia Thompson – Parent

Ms. Thompson complained about a disrespectful security guard at Wadsworth. She has children at Dumas, which has a wheelchair accessible playground. She also expressed thanks to Principal King after being attacked going to get a report card, and emphasized the concern over safe passage.

Lakeesha Rucker – Parent

Ms. Rucker has three children at Dumas. She believes that she, rather than the Board, knows what is best for her family. Her son, a victim of gun violence, was sent to a different school but Principal King got him back to Dumas. Dumas has been upgraded with an elevator, ramps, double door exits, automatic doors, and handicapped restrooms on all floors. The staff at Dumas has supported her and her family “like a family.”

Yolanda Harris – Parent

Ms. Harris has four students at Dumas Academy. Her children have received support and are learning at Dumas. She believes that removing teachers and staff will “disrupt, set back, and discourage” her children. She also expressed concern that the proposed changes are divisive.

Student E

Student E stated that students and teachers at Dumas have a personal relationship, and that the teachers encourage them to be their “very best.” She invited those with orange shirts to stand up, and the Hearing Officer noted for the record “60 to 70 orange shirts.”

Student F

Student F equated losing staff to losing education. She also has a younger brother in Dumas preschool who has learned much. She expressed thanks to the entire Dumas Academy staff, especially Ms. King.

Student G

Student G loves her teachers and her principal.

Beverly Stephens – Parent

Ms. Stephens expressed the thought that Dumas teachers are mothers and fathers, and they are needed.

Reverend Tolbert – Clergy, Christian Methodist Community Partners

Reverend Tolbert expressed the thought that it is morally wrong to take public money and fund a private school. His opinion was that Wadsworth does not have under-enrollment, and to move Wadsworth students to the Dumas building to allow expansion of the University of Chicago charter school will cause further under-enrollment.

Sharon Butler – Grandparent

Ms. Butler expressed concerns that direct questions and concerns have not been addressed by CPS. Ms. Butler also stated that CPS did not adequately visit and assess each school. She felt that Wadsworth, teaching K through 5, was unfairly compared with schools instructing K through 8. She indicated that CPA lacks credibility.

Student H

Student H is a middle schooler at Dumas. He recited his personal test scores and percentile rankings as proof that Dumas teaches its students.

Student I

Student I has worked hard at Dumas, which has supported him, his little brother who has a disease, and his family.

Student J

Student J recited his test scores, and credits Dumas and its teachers for inspiring him to achieve success at a magnet school.

Stacie Beach

Ms. Beach provided an information packet and poster that were received in evidence. Ms. Beach also took issue with the calculation underlying the argument that there is underutilization that justifies the proposed action.

Rhonda Atkins – Preschool Teacher: Dumas

Ms. Atkins recited that the three full day preschool teachers at Dumas have over 42 years' experience, and that the three teacher assistants have over 42 years' experience. She recited her classroom activities, and analogized the proposed change as akin to tearing apart a family and home.

Student K

Student K, a former Dumas student and valedictorian, indicated that not only did her classes generate knowledge, creativity, determination and self-confidence, but that she was with two DCFS children who have made great progress.

Charles Payne

Mr. Payne, while recognizing that there can be a necessity to close schools, expressed concern with the process. He believes that CPS has undermined what is going on at Wadsworth, and that as matters currently stand the strong school is Dumas. Mr. Payne urged consideration of the consortiums data:

- Dumas is at the 53rd percentile, Wadsworth at 9th
- Teacher/Principal trust & Dumas, 53rd percent, Wadsworth 10 percent
- Collaborative teachers; Dumas 11 percent, Wadsworth 43 percent
- Quality and pay development: Dumas 63 percent, Wadsworth 8 percent
- NWEA – Reading: Dumas is positive .69, Wadsworth negative 2.3

- NWEA – Math: Dumas is positive .96, Wadsworth negative .6

Mr. Payne concluded by emphasizing the importance of duplicating and extending positive cultures for children.

Alderman Hairston

The Alderman observed that no one from the Board had contacted her. She noted the friction that has been generated, and believes that Dumas will be overcrowded. She stated that the hearing process is a “sham” and asked the Hearing Officer to find that Dumas should remain open.

Pamela Jernigan – LSC chairperson, Wadsworth

Ms. Jernigan wishes to ensure that the children of both schools have access to a quality curriculum and staff with necessary resources and green space. She indicated the necessity of a well-constructed and safe passage plan.

Student L

Student L was concerned about the disruption of the Dumas “family.”

Summary of Documents Received

Seven exhibits were received:

1. CPS Binder
2. Petition of parents, guardians and staff members of Wadsworth (4 pages)
3. Student Statement (2 pages)
4. Photographs of poster boards

5. PowerPoint slides
6. Student Statement
7. Parent Statement

Documents submitted at the Hearing by CPS

CPS Binder and PowerPoint presentation.

Additional Written Testimony Submitted Post-Hearing

None.

HEARING OFFICER'S FINDINGS

There is little question that the technical requirements underlying a school closing have been met. At the same time, the greater issue here in the mind of the Hearing Officer is whether the process, as practiced, meets the underlying public concerns attending this proposed school closure. It is appropriate that the Board provide a complete and thoughtful foundation justifying every school closing. That information package should ideally be presented in a thoughtful and complete manner, and should embrace all aspects of why such an action is warranted. Any failure to generate and present all necessary information causes uncertainty and friction which is corrosive not only to the proposed move, but also impacts those closest to the consequence of the action-teachers, staff, parents, and, most importantly, children. Any perceived omission or error undercuts the legitimacy of the process as a whole, and makes any change that does not meet the reasonable expectation of those having an interest will be viewed as flawed.

Providing sufficient, well grounded, and accurate information in a cognizable way is the base component of any school closing proposal. The closing of an educational facility is an extraordinary thing. That there is an identification of a particular school with a community is a given; the greater the role of teachers and staff, the extent of parental participation, the success or failure of the learning environment, education achievement, safety, programs for those with special needs, physical plant facilities and capacity, successful or failing programs and a myriad of other factors are all components of what is a painful process.

To the extent the CPS is deficient in meeting the legitimate expectations of those impacted, school closings are likely to generate anger, distrust, and lack of confidence in the process. Those emotions were on display at the Dumas hearing. In addition, the statements, exhibits and depth of commitment and interest shown was compelling.

Of particular concern is safety. One important aspect of the transition plan is safety. To wait until after the plan is approved to address and disseminate a safety plan which meets the legitimate concerns of those impacted is unacceptable.

In addition, Mr. Payne's thoughtful comments and analysis warrant due consideration.

CONCLUSION

From a procedural perspective the CEO has properly performed all that was required of her in order to bring the proposed school action before the Board. There is no issue the law allows discretion in both the CEO and Board to determine what, if any, action should be taken even where guidelines for school closings are met.

It is not the province of a hearing officer to substitute his or her judgment on matters of discretion. It is the Hearing Officer's responsibility to "determine whether the chief executive officer complied with the requirements of this Section (5/34-230) and the guidelines" prior to applying her professional judgment in making the decision to promulgate the proposed school action.

It is the determination of the Hearing Officer that the Chief Executive Officer, Barbara Byrd Bennett, has with the exception of safety planning, fully complied with those legal requirements which must be met prior to the submission of the proposal to close Dumas and the transfer of its students to Wadsworth, and the reassignment of Dumas' attendance boundaries to Wadsworth, and the relocation of Wadsworth to the Board for its consideration.

The legal criteria is met. The discussion, however should continue. The issues raised and the depth of the concerns articulated by an engaged public, warrant consideration of the Board that this proposed action is truly in the best interest of those impacted by this determination.

Enter: May 6, 2013

s/ Clifford L. Meacham

Clifford L. Meacham, Hearing Officer

FURTHER THE HEARING OFFICER SAYETH NOT

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clifford L. Meacham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon. Clifford L. Meacham (Ret.)
Hearing Officer