

ORIGINAL

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

For the Proposed Closure of Songhai Elementary

Learning Institute

Public Hearing

STENOGRAPHIC REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS had in the above-entitled matter held on April 23, 2013, at the Chicago Board of Education Central Office, 125 South Clark Street, Room 1550, Chicago, Illinois at 5:30 p.m., Mr. Thomas Rakowski, presiding.

CPS STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

MS. LISA HUGE, CPS Attorney

MS. KAREN SAFFOLD, Chief of Schools, Rock
Island Elementary

MS. ASHLEY RICHARDSON, Portfolio Manager

Reported by: April T. Hansen, CSR

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1 (Whereupon, proceedings
2 commenced at 5:31 p.m., as
3 follows:)

4 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Good evening, all.
5 This is a public hearing regarding the closure of
6 Songhai School and its consolidation with Curtis
7 School. So if that's what you're here for, you're
8 in the right place.

9 And my name is Thomas Rakowski,
10 R-a-k-o-w-s-k-i, I'm the Hearing Officer. I'm an
11 independent hearing officer appointed from an
12 independent hearing officer list. I don't work for
13 the School Board, I don't work for the union.
14 Unfortunately, I don't really work for anyone, I
15 work for myself. And my job today is to conduct a
16 hearing. First the School Board will -- the school
17 will make its presentation, and then we are going
18 to have public comments.

19 There usually is a time limitation, but
20 judging from the amount of people here, I don't
21 know if we really have to have a time limitation.

22 You know, I appreciate, and I'm sure the
23 school appreciates also, you coming down here on
24 not what you call a really nice day. And, you

1 know, it's people like yourselves that make this
2 whole public process work. People that care and
3 people that show up for meetings and so forth.

4 Everything regarding publication and
5 notice is in here?

6 MS. HUGE: Yes.

7 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Okay. You may
8 commence.

9 LISA HUGE

10 Thank you. Good evening, Your Honor, my
11 name is Lisa Huge, L-i-s-a, H-u-g-e. I'm an
12 attorney in the Chicago Board of Education Law
13 Department.

14 Before we begin, I'm remiss in forgetting
15 to state that we do have an interpreter here, we
16 have one who is doing -- presenting in sign. And
17 we also have a Spanish interpreter.

18 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Yes, I neglected to
19 mention that. We do have a Spanish interpreter and
20 we have a sign language interpreter.

21 Is there anybody here who requires the
22 sign language interpreter or Spanish interpreter?

23 Not at this time.

24 Okay, proceed.

1 MS. HUGE: Thank you, Your Honor.

2 As I mentioned, I'm appearing before you
3 today in connection with the proposal of the Chief
4 Executive Officer, or CEO, of the Chicago Public
5 Schools to close Songhai Elementary Learning
6 Institute and welcome returning students to George
7 W. Curtis Elementary School.

8 At this time I would like to tender to
9 you the binder that is before you, admit into the
10 record the CEO's compiled Exhibit 1, a binder of
11 documents being submitted for your consideration in
12 support of the proposal. A copy of this binder is
13 also available here on the podium to the left of me
14 for public viewing.

15 The binder consists of documentary
16 evidence and written statements demonstrating that
17 the CEO's proposal complies with the requirements
18 of the Illinois School Code and the CEO's
19 Guidelines for School Actions. Specifically, the
20 written statements and documents demonstrate the
21 following:

22 Tab A includes the notice of the
23 scheduled community meetings and hearing published
24 in the newspaper, and affidavits attesting to the

1 delivery of notice to the parents or guardians,
2 school staff, Local School Council members, and
3 elected officials.

4 Tab A also includes an affidavit
5 attesting to the proper publication of: One, the
6 list of qualified independent hearing officers, and
7 draft Guidelines for School Actions before November
8 1. Two, the finalized Guidelines for School
9 Actions, following a 21-day public comment period.
10 Three, the proposals before March 31, and at least
11 15 calendar days before the first community
12 meeting. And four, summaries from the community
13 meetings within five days after the meeting.

14 Tab B, the binder includes the Illinois
15 School Code Provisions, designating the powers of
16 the Board and outlining the process for school
17 actions. This tab also includes the Board's policy
18 on school performance, remediation, and probation
19 for the 2011-2012 school year, and the policy on
20 review and establishment of school attendance
21 boundaries.

22 Also at tab B are Chicago Public Schools
23 Spaces Utilization Standards, and the CEO's
24 Guidelines for School Actions for the 2012-2013

1 school year. Finally, tab B includes the CEO's
2 Procedures for Public Hearings on Proposed School
3 Closings.

4 At tab C, the binder includes written
5 evidence in support of the CEO's proposal.

6 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Hold on one second.
7 Tab A includes 16, or 17, I'm trying to find B. I
8 have C.

9 I have it. Thank you, go ahead.

10 MS. HUGE: Turning your attention to Tab C, the
11 binder includes written evidence in support of the
12 CEO's proposal. Tab C contains the transcript and
13 summaries from two community meetings to elicit
14 public comment held at a location convenient to
15 Songhai and Curtis School communities. Tab C also
16 includes the written statement of Ashley
17 Richardson, the accompanying presentation
18 demonstrating Songhai's under-utilization, and the
19 space available at the Curtis facility to welcome
20 students without exceeding its enrollment
21 efficiency range, and a map proposing the
22 attendance boundary change.

23 Finally, tab C includes the written
24 statement of Karen Saffold and accompanying

1 documents demonstrating Curtis as the higher
2 performing school and outlining the support that
3 will be offered at the transition.

4 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: And that tab again
5 is?

6 MS. HUGE: C, as in cat.

7 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: C, number?

8 MS. HUGE: Starting with number 17.

9 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Okay, 17 is the
10 meeting, 18 --

11 Okay, go ahead. Thank you.

12 MS. HUGE: Finally, tab C includes the written
13 statement of Karen Saffold -- I think I already
14 said this part. Sorry, Judge.

15 At this time I request the CEO's
16 compiled Exhibit 1 to be admitted into the record.

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: It shall be
18 admitted.

19 (Whereupon, document so offered
20 was received as CPS Exhibit No.
21 1.)

22 MS. HUGE: Thank you. I would now like to
23 introduce the CEO's representative Ashley
24 Richardson, who will make a statement in support of

1 the proposal. This statement is located in the
2 binder at tab 21.

3 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Ms. Richardson,
4 proceed.

5 ASHLEY RICHARDSON

6 Good evening, Your Honor. My name is
7 Ashley Richardson, and I am a portfolio planner for
8 Chicago Public Schools. I have been in this
9 position since June of 2012. As a portfolio
10 planner, I manage strategic planning to improve the
11 efficient utilization of CPS facilities. Prior to
12 joining CPS, I worked as an analyst and manager at
13 Kraft Foods before obtaining my Masters of
14 Education in Education Policy at Harvard Graduate
15 School of Education.

16 I have been asked to appear at this
17 hearing today to convey to you, the parents, and
18 the community, as well as interested members of the
19 public in attendance, information regarding the
20 space utilization of the Songhai facility with
21 respect to the proposal to close Songhai.

22 According to the Chief Executive
23 Officer's Guidelines for the 2012-2013 school year,
24 the CEO may propose to close a school if it is

1 underutilized based on CPS Space Utilization
2 standards and student enrollment numbers recorded
3 on the 20th attendance day for the 2012-2013 school
4 year. The CEO may only propose a closure if the
5 impacted students have the option to enroll in a
6 higher performing school, and the resulting space
7 utilization after the closure will not exceed the
8 facility's enrollment efficiency range as defined
9 by the CPS's Space Utilization Standards.

10 I will discuss the details regarding the
11 space utilization of this proposal, after which my
12 colleague, Karen Saffold, will discuss the
13 performance of the welcoming school and highlight
14 the supports being offered in the draft transition
15 plan.

16 Songhai is currently located at 11725
17 South Perry Avenue. Songhai is an elementary
18 school that, as of the 20th day of attendance for
19 the 2012-2013 school year, serves 317 students in
20 pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten through 8th
21 grades.

22 To understand the enrollment efficiency
23 range of a facility, Chicago Public Schools
24 utilizes its Space Utilization Standards, which are

1 located in your binder at tab 14.

2 The enrollment efficiency range is plus
3 or minus 20 percent of the facility's ideal
4 enrollment. For elementary school facilities, the
5 ideal enrollment is defined as the number of
6 homerooms, multiplied by 30. The number of
7 allotted homeroom classrooms is approximately 76 to
8 77 percent of the total classrooms available.

9 As an elementary school's enrollment
10 increases above the efficiency range, a school may
11 be considered overcrowded as programming options
12 are reduced or compromised. As an elementary
13 school's enrollment decreases below the efficiency
14 range, a school may be considered underutilized as
15 classrooms are unused or poorly programmed making
16 the use of limited resources less effective.

17 A typical elementary school facility has
18 a total of 39 classrooms. Therefore, the number of
19 allotted homerooms, approximately 76 to 77 percent
20 of 39, is 30 classrooms. Multiplying 30 classrooms
21 by 30 equals the ideal enrollment number of 900.
22 Finally, the enrollment efficiency range is plus or
23 minus 20 percent of 900, which is 720 to 1,080.

24 If a school in this typical elementary

1 school facility had an enrollment below 720, it
2 would be considered underutilized. Alternatively,
3 if the school's enrollment was above 1,080, it
4 would be overcrowded.

5 There are 32 total classrooms within the
6 Songhai facility, approximately 76 to 77 percent of
7 this number is in the number of allotted
8 homerooms. This number multiplied by 30 yields the
9 ideal enrollment of the facility, which is 720. As
10 such, the enrollment efficiency range of the
11 Songhai facility is between 576 to 864 students.

12 As stated, the enrollment of Songhai as
13 of the 20th day of attendance for the 2012-2013
14 school year, is 317. This number is below the
15 enrollment efficiency range, and thus, the school
16 is underutilized.

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Do we know what that
18 date is?

19 MS. RICHARDSON: I'm sorry?

20 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: What date the 20th
21 day of attendance for the 2012-13 school year is?

22 MS. RICHARDSON: I can supplement and get you
23 that answer, sir.

24 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Okay, proceed.

1 Thank you.

2 MS. RICHARDSON: The CEO has proposed that the
3 students from Songhai be welcomed at George W.
4 Curtis Elementary school, or Curtis. If this
5 proposal is approved by the Board of Education for
6 the City of Chicago, the resulting space
7 utilization will not exceed Curtis' enrollment
8 efficiency range as defined by the CPS Spaces
9 Utilization Standards.

10 Curtis has 40 total classrooms.
11 Approximately 76 to 77 percent of this number is
12 30, the number of the allotted homerooms. This
13 number multiplied by 30 yields the ideal enrollment
14 of the facility, which is 900. As such, the
15 enrollment efficiency range of the Curtis facility
16 is between 720 to 1,080 students. Curtis currently
17 has 474 students enrolled.

18 To fully explain the enrollment trend
19 associated with these schools, I would like to
20 direct your attention to the screen. Projected is
21 a slide that shows the enrollment trend of Songhai
22 and Curtis. Green hash lines showing the
23 enrollment efficiency range of the Curtis facility,
24 and a circle representing the combined projected

1 enrollment for 2013-2014.

2 Songhai's current enrollment of 317
3 students and Curtis's current enrollment of 474
4 students combines to a total of 791 students,
5 within the enrollment efficiency range of the
6 Curtis facility. Further, the projected enrollment
7 of Songhai for the 2013 school year is 304 and the
8 projected enrollment for Curtis is 505, for a total
9 of 809 students, which is also within the Curtis
10 enrollment efficiency range. Thus, there is enough
11 space within the Curtis facility for students from
12 Songhai and students from Curtis.

13 If Songhai is closed, the CEO is also
14 proposing that Songhai's attendance area be
15 reassigned to Curtis at 32 East 115th Street at the
16 end of the current school year. A map showing the
17 proposed boundary change is located in your binder
18 at tab 23, and copies of this map were available
19 tonight at the registration desk.

20 In proposing this boundary change,
21 several factors were considered as outlined in the
22 review and establishment of School Attendance
23 Boundaries Policy, including, but not limited to,
24 the capacity of Curtis, geographic barriers, travel

1 time, distance traveled, and program
2 considerations.

3 You will next hear from my colleague,
4 Karen Saffold, who will discuss the performance of
5 Haley and highlight the proposed transition
6 efforts.

7 Thank you, Your Honor. This concludes
8 my statement.

9 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

10 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, I would now like to
11 introduce the CEO's next representative, Karen
12 Saffold, who will make a statement in support of
13 the proposal. This statement is located in the
14 binder at tab 24.

15 KAREN SAFFOLD

16 Good evening, Your Honor. My name is
17 Karen Saffold. I'm the Chief of Schools for the
18 Rock Island Network.

19 Chicago Public Schools are divided up
20 into networks. Network offices are run by a chief
21 to provide support and oversight for the schools
22 assigned to them on behalf of the CEO.

23 George W. Curtis Elementary School is
24 within the geographical boundaries of the Rock

1 Island Network.

2 By way of background, over the past 20
3 years I have worked in a number of capacities
4 within the public education including teacher,
5 curriculum coordinator, assistant principal, and
6 principal before becoming an area instruction
7 officer in 2006. I have a doctorate in education
8 and hold degrees and certificates from Illinois
9 State, Roosevelt, NOVA Southeastern, Harvard, and
10 Northwestern Universities.

11 As you have already heard, Songhai
12 Institute fits the criteria of the Chief Executive
13 Officer's Guidelines for school actions because it
14 is underutilized based on CPS Space Utilization
15 Standards, and student enrollment numbers recorded
16 on the 20th day for the 2012-2013 school year.
17 Songhai students will be welcomed by George W.
18 Curtis Elementary School, located at 32 East 115th
19 Street. The facility at 32 East 115th Street has
20 enough space to welcome the Songhai students, and
21 the resulting combined enrollment will not exceed
22 the facility's enrollment efficiency range.

23 When Songhai students are welcomed by
24 the Curtis administration, staff and students, they

1 will be attending a higher performing school based
2 on the CEO's Guidelines for School Actions.

3 One way that the CEO's Guidelines for
4 School Actions define a higher performing school is
5 if the school received a higher level on the
6 Performance Policy for the 2011-2012 school year.
7 Under the CPS Performance Policy located in your
8 binder at tab 12, each school receives an annual
9 rating based on the performance on a variety of
10 performance standards including standards used test
11 scores and school attendance. Schools at Level 1
12 are the highest, and schools designated Level 3 are
13 the lowest performing. Songhai received a Level 3
14 rating based on its 2011-2012 school year, while
15 Curtis received a level 2 rating. The performance
16 reports reflecting these levels are included in the
17 binder of documents that you received under tab 25.

18 Please note that the performance policy
19 ratings for 2011-2012 school year appear under the
20 2012-2013 header on these reports as these ratings
21 are used to determine each school's accountability
22 status for the 2012-2013 school year.

23 If this proposal is approved, students
24 will receive additional supports at Songhai during

1 the remainder of this school year and at Curtis
2 next year, and CPS will provide assistance to ease
3 the transition process as much as possible.

4 The CPS has developed a plan dedicating
5 additional resources to address any safety concerns
6 and to fulfill students' academic, social,
7 emotional, and other individuals needs. The draft
8 Transition Plan explaining these additional
9 resources was sent home to all families affected by
10 the proposals, and is located in your binder at tab
11 one.

12 If the Board approves this proposal, CPS
13 will publish final transition plans which will
14 incorporate feedback from community meetings, this
15 hearing, and additional input received.

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

24 First, OSS will review and update the

1 school safety audits, security personnel
2 allocations, and school safety technology systems
3 to makes sure arrangements are made as possible and
4 appropriate.

5 Second, OSS will be available to address
6 specific safety concerns raised by students and
7 staff.

8 Third, OSS will provide safe passage
9 supports for students and staff traveling to and
10 from the school.

11 Safe passage workers wear identifiable
12 vests and stand on designated street corners to
13 monitor students' safety during travel to and from
14 home and school. Prior to the start of the
15 2013-2014 school year, OSS will work with the
16 Curtis administration and the community to
17 designate specific intersections for safe passage
18 supports.

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

22 First, a Principal Transition
23 Coordinator, or PTC will be assigned to help the
24 principal at Songhai maintain academic rigor for

1 the remainder of the school year and assure a
2 smooth transition to Curtis. PTC is a former
3 principal or other administrator with significant
4 experience who will be a resource for the
5 administration and ensure continuity and support
6 for faculty and students.

7 Second, the Curtis administration will
8 receive comprehensive student-specific data on all
9 transitioning students to allow staff to
10 proactively identify individual students' needs and
11 to prepare to meet those needs.

12 Third, the principals will receive
13 discretionary resources to provide direct academic
14 support to students. For example, these funds may
15 be used to provide an instructional coach, teacher
16 leader, or to obtain academic tutoring programs or
17 positions for students for reading and math.

18 The principals will be supported as they
19 consider how to use these resources.

20 Students will also receive social and
21 emotional support to help them adjust to the new
22 learning environment, including the following:

23 First, CPS will help school staff
24 members facilitate intervention groups, or peace

1 circles, aimed at helping students work through
2 concerns associated with the transition.

3 Second, CPS will help staff implement
4 restorative practices such as peace circle and
5 peace juries to encourage peer to peer problem
6 solving and resolution.

7 Third, groups of students in need of more
8 individualized attention will be provided access to
9 highly structured interventions.

10 Fourth, to foster an environment that is
11 both supportive and inclusive of all students, CPS
12 will provide resources to Curtis to implement
13 culture building activities such as staff luncheons
14 and team and trust building activities. Resources
15 will also be provided to sponsor activities such as
16 school visits for families, coffee chats with their
17 principals, picnics, field trips, or parent
18 meetings to help transitioning families to get to
19 know each other better.

20 Finally, additional transition supports
21 will be provided to ensure that Songhai students
22 who have unique needs or circumstances are
23 adequately supported for this transition, including
24 students with adverse learning needs, students in

1 temporary living situations, English language
2 learners and early childhood participants. These
3 additional resources and supports are provided in
4 detail in the draft transition plan located in your
5 binder at tab 1.

6 In conclusion, Songhai is underutilized,
7 the combined enrollment of Songhai and Curtis
8 student at the 32 East 115 Street facility will not
9 exceed the facility's enrollment efficiency range,
10 and Curtis is a higher performing school. The CEO
11 believes that this proposed school closure will
12 help the District better serve all the students and
13 is prepared to assist students with additional
14 resources and supports as they transition.

15 Thank you for your time. This concludes
16 my statement.

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you,
18 Ms. Saffold.

19 MS. SAFFOLD: You're welcome.

20 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, this concludes the
21 presentation in support of the CEO's proposal. If
22 you have any additional questions, we will be
23 available to answer them. Thank you for your time
24 and your attention.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: What's the
2 difference between a closing and a consolidation,
3 pursuant to the definitions here?

4 MS. HUGE: I'm sorry, Your Honor, I'm looking
5 for the policy.

6 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: You can look at it
7 and we can address it later. It just seems that
8 this fits into both definitions, what we are doing
9 here today. It's listed as a closure, but is it a
10 closure or is it a consolidation or is it both?

11 The closure talks about closing of a
12 school and transfer of students to one or more
13 receiving schools. And a consolidation --

14 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, are you looking at tab
15 15, the definitions section?

16 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Yes.

17 MS. HUGE: Okay. Yes, at page three of tab 15,
18 that's where the definitions are laid out. The
19 closing -- or "closure" means closing a school and
20 sending all the students enrolled at that school to
21 one or more designated receiving schools. In this
22 case it would be to one school. And co-locations
23 would be two separate independent schools, and
24 that's not what we are doing here.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Correct. So this is
2 a closure and a consolidation?

3 MS. HUGE: No. This is a closure of one
4 school.

5 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Okay. Thank you.
6 Anything else?

7 MS. HUGE: Not from the CEO. This is the time
8 for the public.

9 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Ladies and
10 gentlemen, we do have quite a number of people who
11 have arrived, and I'll go through a little bit.

12 This is regarding the closure of Songhai
13 School. My name is Tom Rakowski, R-a-k-o-w-s-k-i,
14 I am the Hearing Officer. I'm an independent
15 hearing officer selected from a list of independent
16 hearing officers. And this hearing is required by
17 law wherever there is a school action, either a
18 closing or a consolidation or a phase out or so on
19 and so forth.

20 The school has made a presentation, and
21 what I would like to do now is get some community
22 input from yourselves. And once again, I
23 compliment you all in taking the time out of a busy
24 day and your busy lives to come down here and be a

1 part of this. It's your participation that makes
2 the whole public process work.

3 I'm sure there is an updated list. All
4 I have are three names up to now. Do we have
5 another list?

6 MS. HUGE: Not yet, no, Your Honor. I was told
7 that the person -- they were going to go downstairs
8 and see if there is an updated list. But so far,
9 yes, only three names.

10 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Okay. What I would
11 like to do, I'm not sure how many people are
12 talking. The school rules are two minutes per
13 person. I don't really necessarily want to hold
14 everybody to that, but at the same time I want to
15 make sure that everybody here has a chance to say
16 whatever they want to say.

17 We do have a Spanish interpreter. Does
18 anybody here need a Spanish interpreter? Okay.
19 Okay, great. And we also have a sign language
20 interpreter. Anybody here need one? And she's
21 over here.

22 Okay. The first name I have on the list
23 is Ruby Dowsey.

24 Good evening.

1 RUBY DOWSEY

2 Good evening. Do I need to spell my name?

3 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: You want to state
4 your name and spell it for the court reporter.

5 MS. DOWSEY: My name is Ruby Dowsey. R-u-b-y,
6 D-o-w-s-e-y.

7 My question that I was trying to
8 prepare, my first question of course is when did
9 Curtis become an AUSL school?

10 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Become a -- go
11 ahead.

12 MS. DOWSEY: It's an AUSL school, and I would
13 like to know when did that take place. Was that
14 before the 2011-2012 year? And if that is, why did
15 Curtis become an AUSL school? Was it because it
16 was a lower performing school at that time?

17 MS. SAFFOLD: Curtis became an AUSL school
18 last year -- two years ago. The 2010-2011 school
19 year. So 2010-2011, 2011-2012 school year.

20 MS. DOWSEY: Was that because it was an under-
21 performing school at that time?

22 MS. SAFFOLD: I cannot answer that, I'm just
23 answering the first question. I don't know the
24 answer to that.

26

1 MS. DOWSEY: Does the CPS representative have
2 an answer to that?

3 MS. SAFFOLD: We can write that down and get
4 back to you.

5 MS. DOWSEY: I think that is very important,
6 because both of these schools are in the same
7 boundary, and one was picked up in the 2010-2011
8 year, as Ms. Saffold just said. And if that one
9 was picked up because it was an under performing
10 school, and as they stated Songhai was an under
11 performing school for the past so many years, they
12 were both under performing schools at the same
13 time. So now this one has been picked up, what is
14 it the Academy of Urban School League, I believe.
15 Which as I just looked up, it means that it's a
16 program that picks up schools that are
17 under performing.

18 So Curtis was basically in the same boat
19 as Songhai. And I'm just trying to figure out who
20 decided Curtis got picked up versus Songhai, since
21 they both were under performing at the same time?
22 Who made that decision?

23 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Your question is not
24 as much directed at whether a school should close,

1 but your question is directed which school should
2 be consolidated into which school.

3 MS. DOWSEY: Well, it's both. Because I live
4 in the area. My children go to Songhai and I have
5 a child graduate from Songhai. So I'm quite
6 familiar with Curtis and Songhai. They both were
7 under performing schools, from me as a parent and
8 community member.

9 Then one school got picked up and cleaned
10 up and under Daley's administration, I believe.
11 Every day I would drive past and it would say, you
12 know, "new construction," "improvements under
13 Richard Daley." So I'm just trying to figure out
14 as a parent, a community member, who decided that
15 Curtis should be picked up and cleaned up and
16 dusted off and we are going to do away with
17 Songhai. Who made that decision?

18 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Well, certainly I
19 don't know. I'm the Hearing Officer.

20 MS. DOWSEY: I know. I wrote your name, I was
21 here.

22 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: If you can answer
23 the question.

24 MS. RICHARDSON: Yes, Your Honor. AUSL is a

1 third party provider that CPS works with, so we
2 will consult with them and supplement the record
3 with an answer to her question.

4 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

5 MS. DOWSEY: I'm done.

6 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

7 Mr. Vernon Lawson. Good evening. State
8 your name and spell it for the court reporter.

9 VERNON LAWSON

10 Good evening, Your Honor. I'm Vernon
11 Lawson, V-e-r-n-o-n, L-a-w-s-o-n, and I represent
12 the Salvation Army. I'm the music and gospel arts
13 director for the entire Chicago area. I've been
14 collaborating through the Salvation Army. For a
15 little over three years now we have been partnering
16 with over ten CPS schools around the area, for
17 about eight going on nine years.

18 And I can't really speak too much to
19 Curtis, because I'm not involved with them. We
20 attempted to collaborate with Curtis two, three
21 years ago, and it just didn't work out. But we
22 have been at Songhai, and I can tell you about the
23 learning environment and the kind of collaboration
24 and the learning community that is at Songhai.

1 And before I do that, I will tell you
2 that I was a school teacher, public school teacher,
3 high school and middle school, for a little over
4 ten years, and I've been at my current job for nine
5 years. And I have a Masters in Educational
6 Leadership, and certified, about to be a
7 principal. So I do feel that I can speak on behalf
8 of the learning community of Songhai.

9 Since we have been to Songhai I've
10 noticed a definite improvement in the learning. We
11 have the kids that are playing band, we have kids
12 that are doing vocal, and kids that are
13 percussionists. They go to our Salvation Army
14 center on 119th, which is one of the largest
15 community centers in the country. That was made
16 possible by a gift from the Foundation for
17 McDonald's.

18 The kids receive enrichment activities
19 like music, gym, they do tutoring. There is a lot
20 of opportunities available to them. And I will
21 tell you that Songhai has been working very, very
22 diligently to come alongside the community agencies
23 and organizations like the Salvation Army, and we
24 have been very effective at what we feel is

1 bridging the gap and meeting the needs of the
2 school. Giving them opportunities for sports
3 leagues, opportunities for arts enrichment
4 activities, and connecting them with a broader
5 community and allowing their students to explore
6 their potential and go beyond the walls of Songhai
7 School.

8 They have gone to camps, they have done
9 lots of very, very positive enrichment activities.

10 Thank you. I see your -- my time is up,
11 and I will conclude.

12 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

13 MR. LAWSON: So with that said, I would like to
14 say we really support Songhai and we are glad to be
15 collaborating with them, and we would like to
16 continue that as we move forward.

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you,
18 Mr. Lawson.

19 Kathleen Murray, good evening.

20 KATHLEEN MURRAY

21 Good evening, sir. I'm Kathleen Murray,
22 K-a-t-h-l-e-e-n, M-u-r-r-a-y, and I'm with the
23 Chicago Teachers Union. And I am speaking out
24 against the closing of Songhai Institute for many

1 reasons.

2 Personally, I cut my teeth teaching at
3 Songhai back in the 1990's when it was Scanlan
4 School. Songhai Learning Institute back then was
5 rocking and rolling. We had about 60 staff members
6 and so many programs, and over the years those
7 programs have been cut and dis-invested in. We
8 lost our music teacher, Mr. DuBuois. That is why
9 the center stepped in.

10 Those children haven't had specials and
11 reading specialists and Chapter One money in
12 years. It's just fallen by the wayside. We have a
13 dedicated staff at that school, and the teacher
14 staffing can get pretty beat up, too. They're very
15 devoted people. But again, now they have worked so
16 hard, and their payback is their school is closing
17 and the children are going to have to walk a very
18 far distance to Curtis.

19 Also, in 2003 there was a fight between
20 the two schools. In fact, Songhai had to go on
21 lockdown and the students and teachers and staff
22 were held up inside that building until the early
23 evening hours. Some were brought over to Roseland
24 Hospital, and staff members stayed with the

1 children until their parents came. The two schools
2 are rival schools. We have gang lines and we also
3 have rival schools in the City of Chicago,
4 especially in areas such as Roseland.

5 Also, Curtis, to answer that person's
6 question, Curtis was turned around like Dr. Saffold
7 said maybe two school years ago. And a turnaround
8 is when the entire staff is fired all the way down
9 to the custodial staff, the engineer, they're all
10 fired. The school is cleaned up. By cleaning it
11 up, they put in entirely new staff. They pump
12 money into the school. They offer new programs.

13 And there are two types of turnaround. A
14 turnaround that's done by CPS and another
15 turnaround that is done by AUSL, the Academy of
16 Urban School Leadership. So Curtis was turned
17 around because it was considered failing. And now,
18 I'm not -- I don't have the data in front of me,
19 their scores, but in past years that has happened.
20 So they could never close Curtis because they
21 already took care of that problem. So that's what
22 seems to be happening here.

23 Thank you.

24 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you,

1 Ms. Murray.

2 Next I have Yolanda Anderson. Are you
3 going to make a comment, Ms. Anderson?

4 Marie Gayden. I'm just going through the
5 list. Are you going to speak?

6 MS. GAYDEN: No, I wasn't going to speak.

7 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you. I'm just
8 going to go through the list just to make sure I
9 have everyone here. James Hawkins. Any comments
10 Mr. Hawkins?

11 MR. HAWKINS: Yeah, I have a comment.

12 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Proceed.

13 JAMES HAWKINS

14 My name is James Hawkins, J-a-m-e-s
15 H-a-w-k-i-n-s

16 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Go ahead.

17 MR. HAWKINS: During the presentation from the
18 Board, I heard them speak about that, you know, the
19 numbers with the school being at 875. Well, about
20 a couple years ago I know the Board was going back
21 and talking about small schools. Now I want to
22 know why we are moving back to big numbers now?

23 I think kids learn in a smaller setting
24 better, you know. Because I know we had three

1 schools in one where you had schools where they had
2 500 students or less. Now we are moving elementary
3 kids up into being 800. That's a lot of kids, you
4 know, in an elementary setting. And I think data
5 has shown that kids learn better in small
6 settings,, you know.

7 So that's my comment.

8 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you,
9 Mr. Hawkins.

10 Cynthia Solomon, any comments?

11 MS. SOLOMON: Yes, one.

12 CYNTHIA SOLOMON

13 Cynthia Solomon, C-y-n-t-h-i-a
14 S-o-l-o-m-o-n. This is my first year at Songhai.
15 This year Ms. Pirtle has brought me in as the fine
16 arts person. I bring to the table several things.
17 I'm a two-time Smithsonian Grant holder. We have
18 made partnerships with certain schools in the
19 suburbs to be sister schools. We are also part of
20 the arts liaison, which the Mayor has particularly
21 been pushing this year. Unfortunately, our
22 receiving school, Curtis, has not done any of these
23 things.

24 Through our enrichment our kids have

1 grown. They have gone on from basically, you know,
2 scribbling on paper to actually thinking. They're
3 developing what art is and how it is important in
4 their daily lives.

5 My after-school program is overflowing.
6 Every day I get children coming in asking how can I
7 participate, what is it I have to do. Now at this
8 point it seems to be a waste of time to stop
9 showing this kind of learning. Our sister school
10 which we are going to merge with, Curtis, does not
11 have these kind of programs. I have spoken to
12 people at Curtis to find out exactly what they are
13 offering, and none of this is going on.

14 So to me, why stop now? With my
15 partnership with Smithsonian, we offer kids free
16 field trips to the Art Institute, to various other
17 participating programs, summer programs, which I'm
18 in the process now of writing grants for them to
19 get scholarships into the Art Institute children's
20 programs. This would be a plus. I hate to see
21 this stop at this moment.

22 Thank you.

23 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

24 T.C.

1 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, could we ensure that the
2 students' last names are not stated on the record,
3 just for confidentiality for the students. Thank
4 you.

5 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: I see. I'm sorry.

6 Student A. Good evening.

7 STUDENT A

8 Good evening. My name is T.C. When I
9 first came to Songhai, I really didn't know what
10 was going on, but I knew just then I felt safe.
11 Songhai is the best thing that ever happened to
12 me. I just want to say that Songhai is the best
13 thing that has ever happened to me.

14 We get to go to the Chicago Bulls and we
15 have all kinds of sports and different activities.
16 I just want to say keep Songhai open.

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

18 Laverne Richard.

19 LAVERNE RICHARD

20 Good evening, Your Honor. My name is
21 Laverne Richard, I'm a teacher at Songhai
22 Institute. As one of our activities at school we
23 have the Stellar Girls as a STEM program, science,
24 technology, education and mathematic. Our girls

1 have been learning a lot of different projects,
2 they have been creating new projects. Example, one
3 project they created dealing with or making Band-
4 Aids, so they created their own Band-Aid. We
5 pulled DNA from fruit.

6 So there are a lot of different
7 activities that our kids are going through through
8 the science program, and I'm going to let some of
9 them speak their experiences.

10 STUDENT 1: I think Stellar Girls taught me a
11 lot about, like, because I really didn't know how
12 to pull DNA from fruits and stuff like that.

13 STUDENT 2: I like Stellar Girls because it
14 really helped me with my math and science because I
15 went from a D in math to a B.

16 STUDENT 3: I want to say that at Stellar Girls
17 I learned a lot. I learned about how, like, bread
18 can mold and paper towels can mold. And it helped
19 me with my science.

20 STUDENT 4: I want to say that Stellar Girls
21 taught me a lot in my math, science, and them
22 helping me. When I grow up I want to become an
23 engineer and help save people's lives.

24 STUDENT 5: I like Stellar Girls because it

1 taught me a real lot and I brought my grades up a
2 lot and I like Stellar Girls.

3 STUDENT 6: I like Stellar Girls because it's
4 fun and exciting and it brings my grade up to a B.

5 MS. RICHARD: So at Songhai you're closing a
6 great program that our students have. I don't
7 believe Curtis has the STEM program.

8 Thank you.

9 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

10 Student B.

11 STUDENT B

12 I've been going to Songhai for a long
13 time. I have been to Songhai for a long time and I
14 couldn't ask for a better school. Teachers at
15 Songhai make me feel comfortable and safe, and at
16 Songhai we have sports and after-school activities
17 and games to keep kids off the street. And if we
18 are forced to go to Curtis, it won't be the same.
19 I just want to say don't close down our school.

20 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: The student C.

21 STUDENT C

22 My name is D.S. I've been at Songhai for
23 a year now, and I just want to Ms. Pirtle for
24 letting me enter her school. At Songhai make me

1 feel safe there and I'm comfortable, and when I did
2 no math Ms. Crowley came up and she helped me with
3 math. And Ms. Pirtle, if I had something wrong,
4 Ms. Pirtle will come up and she will say "stop
5 messing with him," and they will leave me alone.

6 And then for the rest of the school,
7 thank you for letting me into you all school. And
8 please don't close down Songhai School.

9 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

10 Student D.

11 STUDENT D

12 Hi, my name is T.W. You should not close
13 down Songhai Institute because it helped many
14 students including their reading, math, social
15 studies, science, and any of the activities that
16 they really need.

17 And all I want to say is will you all
18 come to our school? Our school is the best school
19 ever. If you come to our school, you can see
20 pictures of us with Wayne Robinson. We have famous
21 Bulls pictures, and we got a lot. And all I want
22 to say, welcome to our school, it's the best
23 school. And I want to say don't close down Songhai
24 Institute.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

2 Student E.

3 Deattra Woolfolk.

4 DEATTRA WOOLFOLK

5 Hello, my name is Deattra Woolfolk. I'm
6 a parent volunteer at Songhai Learning Institute.
7 I've been there four years. At Songhai Learning
8 Institute has taught me a lot of being a school
9 itself, as there were announcements around the
10 school. I have a kid at school like Songhai.

11 They help the children there and they
12 support the children and the staff there. The
13 children help the staff and principal as well.
14 It's not just the staff and the principal helping
15 students, the students there help the teachers and
16 the parents and the principal. It's like we all
17 like a big family. We all work together as one,
18 not separate individuals.

19 We don't pick and disagree with
20 everything everybody say. We all come together
21 along as one, and figure out an option how we are
22 going to work everything out. So you all better
23 not shut Songhai or you're going to be breaking up
24 the biggest family you ever did.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Going back, Yolanda
2 Anderson.

3 YOLANDA ANDERSON

4 Good evening, Judge. I'm a first-year teacher
5 at Songhai Learning Institute, and I have some data
6 I want to share.

7 Songhai is on the rise. Songhai's 2012
8 progress report, and current Dashboard data shows a
9 great trajectory of success over a short period of
10 time and should not be closed but remain open and
11 become a welcoming school. Composite ISAT meets
12 exceeds data for our school is as follows:

13 2012, ISATs composite was 60.1 percent.

14 2011, 55.3 percent. And 2010, was 49.1 percent.

15 There have been many improvements made at Songhai
16 Learning Institute in the past few years under the
17 new leadership. We should not stop this progress
18 from continuing.

19 Per CPS space utilization records, Haley
20 has 529 students with 61 percent of the building
21 utilized, West Pullman has 301 students. If Haley
22 were to receive West Pullman's 301 students, Haley
23 would then have a total of a 830, which is only 40
24 students shy of the ideal program enrollment. The

42

1 Board states that 80 percent efficiency utilization
2 is ideal. Also, per CPS space utilization records,
3 Curtis has 474 students, about 53 percent
4 utilization. If Curtis were to receive 317
5 additional students, this would bring their total
6 to a few students short of 800.

7 Songhai currently has everything that is
8 being promised to welcoming schools. For example,
9 as a welcoming school, Songhai students would not
10 have to cross the railroad tracks or gangland
11 boundaries to attend Curtis. The students who
12 currently attend West Pullman would no longer have
13 to cross two major intersections of 119th and 115th
14 to get to school.

15 Additional facility openings. New
16 science lab with smart board, new air conditioned
17 computer lab, LCD projector and cameras in
18 classrooms, library media center, two half-day head
19 start programs, portable air conditioners for
20 classrooms, iPads for students, pledges from BMO
21 and Chicago Bulls. MAC lab for students pledged
22 from BMO and the Chicago Bulls. ADA accessibility,
23 large cafeteria.

24 Gold level US health care certified

1 school, which we received a letter from First Lady
2 Michelle Obama. Indoor and outside recess area,
3 gymnasium, swimming pool, large stage and
4 auditorium with ADA accessibility.

5 You get the picture. Please leave us
6 open. Thank you.

7 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Student G.

8 STUDENT G

9 Good afternoon. I think Songhai should
10 stay open because I have been there for half my
11 whole life. My teacher taught me a lot. She doing
12 a lot for our school such as let the staff make
13 their own program such as the STEM program, Study
14 Island, after school Boys to Men, and the most
15 important, Girl Power.

16 I attended sports. Most schools don't
17 have sports. Songhai has a basketball team for
18 girls and boys. Most schools don't have that.
19 They have track for boys and girls.

20 You shouldn't close Songhai. Songhai is
21 our family. If you all move us to Curtis, it
22 wouldn't be a family no more. This is my last year
23 and all my years I felt safe. So I want everyone
24 else to feel safe.

1 So I'm begging you not to close
2 Songhai. To me ain't no better elementary school
3 than Songhai. Some kids had crazy moments and wild
4 moments, but every teacher told them something that
5 they students -- to a successful year at Songhai.

6 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

7 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, I was just tendered a
8 document from someone in the audience, Yolanda
9 Anderson, that I would like to tender to you. This
10 is just for your review.

11 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you. And that
12 is entitled Songhai Child's Passport to a Bright
13 Future, and it will be made part of the record.

14 (Whereupon, document so offered
15 was received as Public Exhibit
16 No. 3.)

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Student F.

18 STUDENT F

19 My name is N.C. First I want to start
20 out by saying when I first came to Songhai I was
21 heartbroken and my heart was full of pain because
22 in 2010 I lost the most important person in my
23 life, my mother. It was something I have never
24 seen in my life and it changed me in many ways.

1 But Ms. Solomon, Ms. Walten, and
2 Mrs. Rodriguez helped me through so many things.
3 They taught me how to move on with life because
4 life still goes on. No matter how hard it gets,
5 never to give up. They show me that I wasn't
6 alone, and I will want to thank each and every one
7 of them for opening up their hearts for me and
8 showing me that I really wasn't alone and that they
9 really love me no matter what I did.

10 Songhai has many new things that's going
11 on. We have a lot of programs. We got the Chicago
12 Bulls. We have been to the Bulls and BMO Harris
13 Bank, and the Chicago Bulls came to our school. We
14 got the opportunity to get something that many
15 other schools didn't. So why try to send us
16 somewhere we don't want to be? In my eyes they
17 aren't doing no better than we are.

18 I ask you please keep my school/other
19 home open. Don't send me and my little sister to
20 Curtis. Keep my school open.

21 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Steven Mosley.

22 STEVEN MOSLEY

23 Good evening. My name is Steven Mosley,
24 spelled S-t-e-v-e-n, M-o-s-l-e-y. I'm a single

1 parent as well as an advocate against gun violence,
2 as well as LSC, Local School Council member, civic
3 engagement, you name it, et cetera. Business, own
4 a film production company. The list goes on.

5 But I'm here not to give a speech, not
6 to try to entreat anyone. I'm here because we
7 don't need to turn our schools or communities into
8 a marketplace. We don't need to continue to find
9 our young children in rivers dead. We need to wake
10 up and get out of ourselves and stop thinking about
11 ourselves. Because it's not about us, it's about
12 our children.

13 What about the statement, "What about the
14 children," the slogan, "What about the children"?
15 And this to me, you know, is very devastating.

16 And you heard all the comments, I heard
17 all the comments from stakeholders or whomever from
18 CPS. And it's not about utilization of space in a
19 school, it's about our children. And like I said,
20 me, myself, I'm a community activist fighting hard
21 constantly every day, being practically homeless.
22 This is very serious to me.

23 And it's very dear, because the school is
24 a safe haven protecting our children from these out

1 of this dangerous world. It's trouble on every
2 side. So let's get it together, because trouble is
3 coming our way, believe it or not.

4 You're saying to yourself, "Well, I don't
5 have to deal with it, I can go home to my house."
6 You never know what might be waiting for you. So
7 let's just be very careful about how we go about
8 handling our children. Suffer the children, the
9 child will lead the way, okay?

10 So what I want to say is that also,
11 everybody mentioned all the wonderful programs.
12 I'm into production. Not to mention, it's alumni,
13 student that graduated from Songhai, 1946, that has
14 a historical hit stadium production play entitled
15 "Skipper" that will soon be getting into the
16 school. I'm a part of the college that's named
17 after him, okay. I'm a part of that production.
18 This is very serious.

19 I realize the time is up. But, hey, like
20 I said, I'm not going to sit here and tell you to
21 keep our school open, because at the end of the day
22 I know it's you all's decision. But please take
23 into consideration that trouble is on every side.
24 Have a blessed day.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you,
2 Mr. Mosley.

3 Telisa Dantzler.

4 TELISA DANTZLER

5 Good afternoon. My name is T-e-l-i-s-a,
6 D-a-n-t-z-l-e-r, I'm a teacher's assistant. I have
7 been working for Songhai for 22 years. I have seen
8 my -- excuse me, I'm nervous. My brothers and
9 sisters went there, my children went there, and I
10 also want my grandson to go there.

11 We have done so many wonderful things at
12 this school, you would not believe it. You would
13 have to come there and see it for yourself. We
14 have also another additional offering that provides
15 for the students. We have a Century 21 community
16 school, five year grant. We're an adopted school
17 year by the Harris Bank and Chicago Bulls. We also
18 have STEM, bio education programs, Stellar Girls.
19 We also have Ray and Jones, the Crock Center -- and
20 excuse me, I'm so nervous -- the Salvation Army
21 band.

22 Reading is fundamental, Carl Budding and
23 Company, All Stars after-school program, the art
24 program. We also have a culinary club, we have

1 Girl Scouts, girls and boys basketball, volleyball,
2 track, double dutch and cheerleading. Harvard
3 street Dance Community Grant recipients. We are
4 also first school of American Foundation for Chess,
5 school course and an auditorium theater grant
6 recipients.

7 I have been at this school for a long,
8 long time, and I also wanted my grandson to come to
9 this school, too. But I only have one question
10 that I would like to ask, and that is, why? Why
11 should our kids have to fight for an education?

12 That's it.

13 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

14 Student H.

15 STUDENT H

16 I want to say that you should keep
17 Songhai open because we have a lot of activity.
18 I've been at Songhai since kindergarten and I want
19 it to stay open because it helped me with grades
20 and I improve all my grades. And I just want to
21 say just keep Songhai open.

22 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Student I.

23 STUDENT I

24 Good evening, Your Honor. I want to say

1 I've been in this school for four years. My mama
2 went to this school, my uncle, all my aunties, my
3 grandma and all of them. This school been open for
4 a real long time, and I want it to stay open.

5 Thank you.

6 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

7 Student J.

8 STUDENT J

9 I think Songhai shouldn't close down
10 because I have been a part of the Songhai family
11 since I was in first grade. I am really close to a
12 lot of teachers and staff members in this school.

13 Songhai has improved over the last three
14 years. I have a -- we have great after-school
15 programs. Songhai has taught me a lot and they
16 even provide us uniforms. Please keep Songhai
17 open.

18 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

19 Student K.

20 STUDENT K

21 My name is R.A. I want to know why would
22 you close my school? And I don't want to cross the
23 railroad tracks because I live all the way on
24 (redacted). And my mom and sisters graduated from

1 this school, and I want to graduate from the same
2 school. All I want to say is just keep my school
3 open.

4 Thank you.

5 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

6 Student L.

7 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, just for the record, for
8 confidentiality we probably don't want the young
9 lady's address on the transcript. So I would ask
10 you to instruct the court reporter to please strike
11 that.

12 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Okay.

13 MS. HUGE: But the point being that she lives
14 far away, across the train tracks. Just don't want
15 the specific address. Thank you.

16 UNKNOWN STUDENT

17 Hi. I don't think Songhai should close
18 because I've been going to this school for four
19 years, head start to second grade, and I don't
20 think they should close because we just got a lot
21 of things coming to us by funds. Stellar Girls,
22 Harris Bank, and the Bulls come to our school.

23 And I don't think that should close down
24 because our school been up for the longest. Our

1 school been up for the longest, it been up since --
2 because our school used to be a white people
3 school. That's how long our school been up.

4 And there's a prayer we say every day,
5 and this how it go.

6 I promise to do my best today, to
7 respect myself, my teachers, and my classmates. To
8 learn as much as I possibly can and to bring honor
9 to the name Songhai Elementary School.

10 Thank you and have a great day.

11 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

12 Student M, as in Mary.

13 Oh, Student L.

14 STUDENT L

15 Hello, my name is D.L. I would just like to
16 say my mother went to the school -- my mother went
17 to the school, my aunties went to this school, my
18 big brothers went to this school, I'm going to this
19 school, my little brother is going to this school.
20 I'm third generation of this family school, and
21 I've prepared a speech.

22 My name is D.L., and I go to Songhai
23 Learning Institute. I'm 12 years old, in the
24 seventh grade, and I'm in room 104. So I am going

1 to tell you about why you should not close down our
2 school.

3 First, I want to introduce myself. I
4 was born in Chicago, Jackson Park Hospital, but I
5 grew up in Riverdale. So when I was 11 years old,
6 about to turn 12, we moved to Roseland Community in
7 Chicago. So when it was time to go to back to
8 school my mother enrolled me in Songhai Institute.

9 Since I was enrolled in this school, it's
10 been an experience that I would not take back for
11 nothing. So there are so many programs in this
12 school, over 12 of them. I'm in band, I play
13 trombone. I'm in the art program, I make stuffed
14 animals, and I also run track.

15 At my old school, we had nothing like
16 this, we just had basketball. We weren't even an
17 official team, we just played students versus
18 students.

19 So I ask you why? Why this school? Why
20 not Curtis Elementary school? I hear they came up
21 to this school and beat students down, attending
22 down to the ground. I was not there, but I heard
23 terrible things. Like, if a student from Songhai
24 comes up to this school, there will be nothing but

1 fights every day. And I'm a sensitive kid. When I
2 get picked on I lash out sometimes, but sometimes I
3 have to keep it in when I try my best.

4 My mother says if Songhai closes, I
5 would have no choice but to go to Curtis. So I nod
6 my head and say okay. But I don't want to go to
7 Curtis. I want to stay right where I am at Songhai
8 Learning Institute.

9 So please don't close our school,
10 please. I would understand if you will have to
11 still do it, but I beg of you not to. Please think
12 about it. Please, just please don't close our
13 school. Please.

14 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

15 Student M.

16 STUDENT M

17 Excuse me. My name is K.H., I've been going to
18 this school for like six years now and my father
19 went to this school and I hope my little sister
20 will go to this school.

21 So I'm really thinking about why close
22 down our school? What did we do for you to close
23 down ours and not Curtis? All I want to say is
24 please don't close down our school.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

2 Student N.

3 STUDENT N

4 My name is D.D.. Songhai is not just a
5 school, it's a home. So if you close Songhai down,
6 it's like you're taking 321-plus kids from our
7 home. Songhai is not just any school, it's a place
8 that nurtures you and be there for you when you
9 need something. Also, the teachers I think
10 probably do things that probably no other school
11 wouldn't.

12 Songhai has been open since 1897, and the
13 year is 2013. Now it's on the closing list. Think
14 about it from your perspective as if your child's
15 school was closing down. I have been attending
16 Songhai for half a decade, and Songhai has been
17 through a lot but nothing severe like this.

18 Songhai has many activities going on,
19 such as getting adopted by Harris Bank and Chicago
20 Bulls. Also, we have amazing sports, et cetera.

21 We should not have to walk extra blocks.
22 The majority of us live by Songhai. It's not fair
23 to us, the parents, anyone, because every weekday
24 the parents have to worry about their child getting

1 snatched or beaten up. There is at least two girls
2 that went on the news saying they were sexually
3 assaulted or boys getting brutally beaten by gang
4 bangers.

5 Not everyone parents has a car to drive
6 their child off -- drop their child off at school.
7 It's not fair to the students or to the teachers
8 having children in one classroom, 35, 45 children.
9 What kind of education are we getting?

10 Everyone deserves a second chance to fix
11 their mistakes, so please give Songhai a second
12 chance and don't close it down.

13 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

14 UNKNOWN STUDENT

15 Well, first I would like to say I'm in
16 eighth grade, and I'm going to graduate this year.
17 But I would not want my little brothers and sisters
18 walking home, I mean, walking to Curtis because I
19 feel like it's a long way and it's too risky. I
20 live down the street from Songhai and I just don't
21 feel safe with them walking to Curtis.

22 And also, I would like to come back up to
23 Songhai when I'm in college and say hi to my
24 teachers and tell them that I made it.

1 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

2 Student O.

3 STUDENT O

4 Hello, my name is R., and I would just like to
5 say that Songhai is not just a school, it's the
6 biggest family I've ever seen. And if you close
7 Songhai down, you're breaking up a family. And
8 some of us live right around the corner to Songhai
9 and we would not like to walk extra blocks and pass
10 railroads just to go to Curtis.

11 And just don't close Songhai down.

12 That's all I have to say.

13 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

14 Student P.

15 STUDENT P

16 I think you should not close Songhai down
17 because it's close transportation for me and my
18 little brother. Because since my mother work, we
19 don't got nobody to take us to school. Since I'm
20 the older brother and I'm graduating this year, and
21 I need my brother to go to Songhai because it's a
22 close transportation because he lives right up the
23 street. So I need him to be safe because he's my
24 only brother and I love him and I want him to be

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1 taken care of.

2 And I think Songhai is a great family.

3 We always have and we do a lot of classwork, and we
4 just love each other.

5 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

6 Student Q.

7 MS. HUGE: Your Honor, I think we missed number
8 45, Lynette Johnson-Watts. But it's up to Your
9 Honor.

10 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Lynette Johnson-
11 Watts.

12 LYNETTE JOHNSON-WATTS

13 Good evening, Your Honor. I'm Lynette
14 Johnson-Watts. I just wanted to mention a couple
15 of things this evening.

16 One, I see that you're not very aware,
17 well, too much aware of AUSL, and I want to mention
18 that once upon a time I was at a school the Boone
19 Elementary school that is now a turnaround school.
20 And it was -- it is now an AUSL school. But at the
21 time, now that particular school is on the list
22 also to be closed. So that makes me wonder is this
23 AUSL program really as effective as CPS tried to
24 promote it to be.

1 Also, the very next year that that
2 particular school was made an AUSL school, there
3 was a student that was in one of my colleague's
4 rooms that brought a gun to school, and we talked
5 about that extensively. And she was telling me
6 about this particular student, and how he was in
7 her room when she had him. And I'm just wondering
8 when you take students and separate them from an
9 environment that they're used to and teachers that
10 are used to certain children, would she have not
11 possibly saw that ahead of time? Or been there for
12 that child, to talk to that child so that could
13 have been alleviated ahead of time? But now that
14 particular school that's an AUSL school is on the
15 closing list as of this date.

16 Also, I just wanted to mention as far as
17 Ms. Pirtle and the administration bringing in the
18 STEM program, to really promote the science
19 technology engineering and mathematics in our
20 school. Well, one other step that she did was she
21 allowed my daughter, who is a college freshmen,
22 that is a STEM Scholar at Central State University,
23 to come in and talk to her Stellar Girls. To show
24 them that someone real, and that this is what you

1 can aspire to.

2 So it's not all about oh, we just want to
3 stay there or we just want certain things. They
4 are, we are, making changes. And we are promoting
5 a healthy environment and a positive education for
6 these students.

7 Thank you.

8 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

9 Myra Gregory.

10 MYRA GREGORY

11 Myra Gregory. M-y-r-a, G-r-e-g-o-r-y. I
12 would like to say this is my children's first
13 year. They are transferred because we just moved
14 into the neighborhood. I have four children that's
15 in the third grade, kindergarten, and PreK, the
16 twins.

17 I would like to speak about my eight year
18 old. Mr. Ross is his teacher. That is the best
19 teacher that my son has had. There is not a day
20 Mr. Ross do not help him with his math. And if he
21 can't help, he called me so we can work together.
22 My son had an issue not paying attention, but
23 Mr. Ross work with that. Last Friday, Mr. Ross
24 called me up, showed me a paper that my son got the

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1 highest score in his reading, 95 percent.

2 My son, he's in kindergarten. The other
3 school he transferred, he didn't have them when he
4 was there. My son coming home with 100 percent
5 every day, every Friday on his spelling test. My
6 twins in PreK, they're learning how to spell their
7 name, their colors, and everything.

8 And I just feel welcomed in that school.
9 It was our first year there, it wasn't a full year
10 there because we came in December, and if you close
11 that, you're closing these children's future. And
12 it's just not right.

13 Plus, I'm a full time -- I work, their
14 father work, and their grandfather walk them to
15 school. Their grandfather should not have to walk
16 them all the way to 115th. Passing the railroads,
17 that's not safe. And also, with this school, they
18 have blocks where people block it off with the cars
19 where the kids aren't going to get hit by a car.
20 They go on 115th, you can't block off that main
21 street. You can't block that off. And I know my
22 future is my kids, and my future speaks.

23 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

24 Student R.

1 MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC: She wanted to say she
2 love her school.

3 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

4 Student S.

5 STUDENT S

6 I want to say that please do not close
7 down Songhai, because I have a great teacher named
8 Mr. Ross. He help me with my math that I don't
9 know. He helps me with everything that I do. And
10 all I want to say is please do not close down
11 Songhai.

12 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

13 Student T.

14 MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC: They might be in the
15 restroom.

16 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Student U.

17 V.

18 STUDENT V

19 I want to say don't close down our school
20 because it can be very dangerous to the younger
21 children crossing the tracks going to Curtis. Did
22 you know there was a younger kid hit by a train
23 crossing those tracks? And you wouldn't want to
24 put our students' safety in danger. Please don't

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1 close our school.

2 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

3 W.

4 STUDENT W

5 I just wanted to say that I've been at
6 Songhai for two years now, and they walk with me.
7 It's like it's not like a school, it's like a home,
8 family. Like the relationship you have with your
9 mother is like what you got with one of these
10 teachers.

11 Like, when I first came to Songhai I was
12 kind of nervous, but then I got used to it because
13 they like family to me. And Curtis, you going to
14 put all these kids into Curtis? Like, Curtis isn't
15 that big. And I just want to say don't close it
16 down.

17 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

18 Student X.

19 Gerald Ross.

20 GERALD ROSS

21 Good evening. My name is Gerald Ross,
22 G-e-r-a-l-d, R-o-s-s. I'm currently a third grade
23 teacher at Songhai Learning Elementary School.
24 I've been there for 15 years. Over the course of

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1 those 15 years I've seen the good, the bad, the
2 ugly, and pretty much everywhere in-between.

3 One thing I have not seen is a great
4 school, except for the last three years. Songhai
5 has turned into a great school for these students.
6 I'm not going to talk at length about the after-
7 school programs or those before-school programs,
8 even in-school programs like chess, where all the
9 primary students are learning how to play chess. I
10 want to speak about the quality of instruction that
11 occurs in-between all of these activities.

12 Our students have worked hard. The data
13 proves that these students' test scores have risen
14 over the last three years by more than the District
15 average.

16 The one other point I want to make is you
17 can hear how dedicated these students are. I'm not
18 sure where these dedicated students are headed.
19 Our school, it's a health certified school. We
20 have data to prove that we have a wonderful climate
21 and culture at Songhai.

22 If you look at the data for Curtis, there
23 is no data. In my world no data is bad data.
24 Where are these children going? If there is no

1 data for the Curtis Schools on what culture, what
2 climate, where are these students going? These
3 kids love their programs, they love staying
4 involved at their programs. They love their
5 teachers.

6 Once again, I'm asking you to please keep
7 Songhai Elementary School open because it is a
8 great school for these students.

9 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Ross.

10 Gregory Garmon.

11 GREGORY GARMON

12 Good evening, Your Honor. Gregory
13 Garmon. G-r-e-g-o-r-y G-a-r-m-o-n. I'm
14 representing Center for Community Academics for
15 Success Partners. 21st Century, that's me.

16 We serve as an academic partner for
17 Songhai for the last two years as the leading agent
18 in the grant team for 21st Century, the funding by
19 the Illinois Board of Education. Now, the programs
20 that we bring to the school building social,
21 emotional, educational, and recreational supports,
22 serve as agents. We offer these opportunities
23 before, during and after school and even on
24 weekends, okay.

1 Songhai students and their families are
2 contracted through the year, and I repeat, through
3 the year FY '17. Okay, this is -- that's four
4 years. If you take that away from them, where is
5 this money going to go to?

6 During this Community school Initiative
7 Partnership there has been an increase in student's
8 participation in and out of school time activities
9 that student surveys indicate they want to remain
10 in school due to the increase in crime that occurs
11 in their neighborhood. Students have expressed
12 their fears of going to Curtis due to the fact that
13 they are clearly aware of the bullying and violent
14 acts that occur between the two schools in this
15 Roseland area.

16 A merger of these two schools will
17 disrupt the educational environment within the
18 school building. Parents have expressed their
19 concern losing this true community school, and have
20 expressed apprehension of sending their child to a
21 contract school, a school that has a different
22 philosophy in education.

23 Finally, Songhai community School is
24 heading in the right direction. A new principal

1 increased school times programming and a host of
2 community partners, as you have heard, have often
3 brought these parents back to school and developed
4 a renewed interested in their child's educational
5 success.

6 We hope the City of Chicago, CPS Board of
7 Education, provides Songhai an opportunity to
8 continue the success of these past two years and
9 allow the community partners to utilize school
10 space for expanding community programming.

11 And this is stated sincerely, Dr. Tony
12 Bell, Executive Director of Centers for Community
13 and Academic Success Partners, Century 21.

14 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

15 Number 74, Tashiee Johnson.

16 TASHIEE JOHNSON

17 Hi. My name is Tashiee, T-a-s-h-i-e-e,
18 Johnson, J-o-h-n-s-o-n. I'm a single mother of
19 six. In 2003, it was Easter Sunday, April 20,
20 2003. It was a bunch of murders on Easter Sunday.
21 That day my children's father was murdered.

22 We moved from 67th to out there to the
23 hundreds, 119th. When we moved to 119th, I thought
24 it was going to be hard. When I say hard, I

1 thought it was going to be hard and I needed to
2 adapt.

3 When they arrived at Songhai Elementary
4 School, they opened up their doors. They have not
5 once closed their doors. My son had an attitude
6 problem out of this world. They hugged him, they
7 told him everything was going to be okay. Not only
8 did they hug him, they hugged me, they told me it
9 was going to be okay.

10 If you close Songhai, we have nowhere
11 else to go. Nowhere. You can't tell us we can go
12 to Curtis and Curtis is going to hug us like
13 Songhai hugged us. They are not going to do it.

14 I've got four other kids up in Songhai.
15 I want to see them move forward. I want to see
16 this school stay there. I want to see everything
17 that Songhai said they were going to give these
18 children, I want to see it happening. If you close
19 Songhai, it not going happen. These kids not going
20 to have that opportunity.

21 It's a lot of kids out there without
22 fathers. They brought boys to be Men. My son
23 learned how to tie a tie. They didn't know how to
24 tie a tie. They say "yes, ma'am," "no, ma'am,"

1 "yes, sir," "no, sir." Because of what this school
2 did for my kids, you can't close Songhai. You got
3 to give them the opportunity to do what they
4 promised they was going to do for these kids. And
5 if you close it, they can't do it. Where is the
6 opportunity going to go?

7 This is the only school that I have went
8 to that said all of the parents come, grab your
9 kids, we are going to get a school bus, we're going
10 to do this. They brought photographers to the
11 school. They did family day. Songhai is a
12 family. Everybody that came here and expressed it,
13 if you take this family away, it's going to be
14 chaos. Please don't close Songhai.

15 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

16 That concludes the list that I have
17 regarding Songhai School.

18 Are there others? And if so step up, one
19 at a time.

20 EBONIE KENDRICKS

21 Hello. My name is Ebonie Kendricks, and
22 I'm a special education classroom assistant at
23 Songhai Learning Institute, and behind me I have my
24 Girl Power room. These are girls I have mentored,

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1 I have cried with, I have laughed with, I have been
2 a mother to, I have been a counselor to, and I
3 still am. So they wanted to be behind me today,
4 like I've been behind them since I have been at
5 Songhai Learning Institute.

6 But tonight I am representing
7 Mr. Richard Flesher, who is one of our partnerships
8 who supplies free school supplies for our school.

9 Mr. Flesher states, given the fact that
10 the Songhai ISAT scores have gone up so drastically
11 in the past three years, it is indeed a very sad
12 day to learn that Songhai is to be closed. In
13 2010, 49.1 percent of Songhai students met or
14 exceeded state standards. By 2012, the same
15 measurement found that 60.1 percent of the children
16 met or exceeded that benchmark. That is an
17 increase of 22.4 percent, far more than the average
18 for the entire CPS system.

19 This is indeed a remarkable achievement,
20 given the abnormal amount of CPS-approved
21 administrative turnover at Songhai. As the founder
22 and president of Schools Camp Corp, a federal
23 charity that provides free student supplies to
24 nearly 40 CPS schools, I can attest to the strong

1 commitment of Mrs. Pirtle and her staff to the
2 students of Songhai and the community.

3 Those of you at CPS should be made aware
4 of the fact that the achievement I alluded to
5 earlier is the direct result of the staff making
6 significant improvements in the curriculum
7 delivery, and their emphasis on helping students
8 work to the best of their abilities.

9 Without the steadfast work of Songhai
10 staff, you would have more empty desks and far less
11 ISAT score achievements than you do now. What is
12 all the more remarkable about the Songhai success
13 story is that it has been obtained in spite of the
14 very real plight which exists in the neighborhood.
15 I can assure you that closing Songhai will not only
16 further exacerbate the plight, but you are bound to
17 see ISAT scores plummet as students are crowded
18 into other schools.

19 This school isn't under utilized. It is
20 utilized widely by the current staff, given the
21 dearth of resources. Closing schools just adds to
22 the very real trend of something being taken away
23 from the residents. They have lost enough stores,
24 factories, jobs, and securities over the years.

1 Closing the schools is another instance of the
2 citizens losing something or having something taken
3 away, and it is outside of their control.

4 I urge you to keep hope alive. Give the
5 children and community what they deserve, keep
6 Songhai open. Sincerely, Richard Flesher.

7 Thank you.

8 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

9 (Whereupon, document so offered
10 was received as Public Exhibit
11 No. 4.)

12 JAMES PETERSON

13 Good evening. My name is James Peterson.
14 J-a-m-e-s P-e-t-e-r-s-o-n. Sir, I would just like
15 to say during my time at Songhai, I came in as a
16 food service manager, and it has really been so
17 awesome to work with such fine people and
18 students. Not only am I a lunchroom manager, I'm
19 also clergy, musician, a lot of other things I do.
20 And I'm trying my best to even talk to the students
21 even as they come through the line.

22 Sometimes it has been difficult, but, you
23 know what? That's what it's all about, getting
24 them to understand what respect is. And I can say

1 that these students have really learned a lot of
2 respect since I've been there.

3 I have a great rapport with the
4 principal, the assistant principal, and the staff
5 that I work with. We received a letter from
6 Michelle Obama from the White House, I would like
7 to read it. It's dated October 9, 2012.

8 To the Songhai Learning Institute,
9 located at 11725 South Perry Avenue, Chicago,
10 Illinois 60628. And it states, "Dear friends: I
11 am so pleased to congratulate Songhai Learning
12 Institute on achieving the gold award in the
13 Healthier US School challenge. This challenge is a
14 cornerstone of the Let's Move Initiative, an
15 ambitious initiative to solve the childhood obesity
16 epidemic with the generation.

17 Our schools are on the front lines in
18 this effort, and your participation in the
19 Healthier US School Challenge is fundamental to
20 helping solve the problem of childhood obesity.

21 As a winner of the gold award, Songhai
22 Learning Institute is among the very best of the
23 best, going above and beyond the minimum
24 requirements to help ensure your students live full

1 and active lives. The environment you and your
2 team have created through education, nutritious
3 food, and opportunities for physical activity will
4 help your students learn how to make healthy
5 choices now and for years to come.

6 This is an extraordinary accomplishment
7 and you should all be proud of what you've
8 achieved. As leaders in this effort, I hope you
9 will reach out to other schools and offer your
10 expertise and advice to help them reach for the
11 goal as well. Our strength as a nation and our
12 ability to responsibly shape our future depends on
13 tackling childhood obesity, and I'm inspired by the
14 work you are all doing to help realize the promise
15 of a brighter, healthier tomorrow for our children.

16 Sincerely, Michelle Obama.

17 I would like to add that years ago, I
18 won't say how many, but years ago, I was a single
19 parent and my daughters graduated from Songhai. It
20 was Scanlan then. And also, I have siblings that
21 also attended that same school. As a matter of
22 fact, Terry Cummings came out of that school as a
23 basketball star. And I would like to say we've
24 heard so many good things about this school, and

1 what I truly believe, don't close it. You need to
2 strengthen it and add to it.

3 Thank you.

4 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

5 STUDENT

6 Hello, my name is T.C. I am a former student
7 of Songhai Elementary School. I left in 2011.

8 I would like to read, March 20, 2013.

9 BMO Harris Bank announced today with the Chicago
10 Bulls that Songhai Elementary School Institute has
11 been selected as their 2012-2013 school partner to
12 benefit from the education program. Donations of
13 material and guest speakers throughout the school
14 year, BMO Harris Bank also announced they will
15 donate \$1 for every point the Bulls score during
16 the 2013 playoffs to Songhai Elementary for
17 supporting their Songhai initiative.

18 in a continued effort to support
19 education, each year BMO Harris Bank and the
20 Chicago Bulls choose a new Chicago public school to
21 adopt. The program encourages CPS students to
22 demonstrate a commitment to their education by
23 excelling in their school work and maintaining
24 greater attendance records.

1 During the pep rally we had at the school
2 today, Bulls player Nate Robinson, along with many
3 of the Bulls, visited the students celebrating the
4 school's achievement by becoming 2012-2013
5 adopt-a-school partner.

6 In addition, BMO Harris Bank and the
7 Bulls revealed they will donate funds and add PC
8 and MAC stations to the school's college and career
9 room, as well as two mounted air conditioners in
10 their existing computer lab. Songhai Elementary
11 will also receive tours of the United Center.

12 In partnership with the Bulls, we
13 congratulate the great students of Songhai
14 elementary for their achievements in their
15 classrooms in the community. Said Justin SBT,
16 grant advertising and the sponsorship BMO Harris
17 Bank.

18 We hope to see a long Bulls playoff,
19 which no doubt will lead to a lot of point scores
20 making for a significant donation to the school.

21 Well, I would like to say that you
22 shouldn't close Songhai school because my sister
23 graduated from there, I graduated from there, and I
24 would like to see my little cousin graduate from

1 Songhai Elementary School. I mean, even though I
2 go to another school, I still come up to help with,
3 like, with students and help them out. So, yeah,
4 don't close Songhai.

5 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

6 RUSSELL KIDD

7 Hi, how are you doing? My name is
8 Russell Kidd. First of all, I would like to say
9 bless God for all the people that's coming out
10 here. At Songhai, it's like a church. Every kid
11 come there and they go to talk to somebody, they
12 need somebody to hold, they need somebody to love,
13 and especially to learn something.

14 Why close the school down and move the
15 kids farther away? Go across the tracks, a train
16 might come, hit them. You know what I'm saying? A
17 car come down the street, Songhai got their streets
18 blocked off. Can't no cars get to it until the
19 school is closed.

20 All I got to say is don't close the
21 school. That's a family, that's a house of love.
22 God bless, and thank you.

23 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

24 We are going to have to start winding it

1 up here. Go ahead.

2 STUDENT

3 I've been attending Songhai for many
4 years, and I have learned many a different thing.
5 I don't think it would be safe for my or anyone's
6 younger siblings to go to another school. When the
7 Bulls came to our school, they gave us a jersey
8 with "Songhai Number 1." We are number one, we
9 will be number one.

10 We have talent shows, Christmas and
11 Halloween parties. Most school don't have that.
12 See it from our point, place your feet in our
13 shoes. Save our school.

14 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: Thank you.

15 That concludes our public hearing with
16 respect to Songhai School.

17 This record will remain open until
18 tomorrow afternoon at 5:00 o'clock, if there is
19 anyone that wants to add anything to this record by
20 way of statements or documents.

21 Do we have e-mail numbers and fax
22 numbers and an address if anybody wishes? I know
23 it's in my file here someplace.

24 MS. HUGE: The e-mail address is

1 qualityschools@cps.edu, or documents can be dropped
2 off on the seventh floor here at 125 South Clark in
3 the law department.

4 HEARING OFFICER RAKOWSKI: That's quality with
5 a capital Q, I believe.

6 Okay. I thank you all very much.

7 (Which were all the proceedings
8 heard or offered at the hearing
9 of said cause, ending at
10 7:35 p.m.)

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1 STATE OF ILLINOIS)

2) SS:

3 COUNTY OF C O O K)

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5 April T. Hansen, being first duly sworn
6 on oath, says that she is a court reporter doing
7 business in the City of Chicago, and that she
8 reported in shorthand the proceedings of said
9 hearing, and that the foregoing is a true and
10 correct transcript of her shorthand notes so taken
11 as aforesaid, and contains the excerpts of
12 proceedings given at said hearing.

13



14

April T. Hansen

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Certified Shorthand Reporter

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A					
abilities	20:5,7 28:10	ambitious	assistant	14:24	6:17
72:8	60:17	74:15	16:5 49:6	based	boat
ability	administrative	American	70:22 74:4	10:1 16:14	27:18
75:12	71:21	50:4	associated	17:1,9,14	Boone
abnormal	administrator	amount	13:19 21:2	basically	59:18
71:20	20:3	3:20 71:20	assure	27:18 36:1	born
above-entitled	admit	analyst	20:1 72:15	basketball	54:4
1:7	5:9	Anderson	attempted	44:17 50:1	bound
academic	admitted	2:8 34:2,3	29:20	54:16 75:23	72:16
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48:11 49:11	64:6,24 65:1	119th	24	2:11,12	875
65:20	65:4,14	30:14 43:13	15:14	52	34:19
wondering	66:17 67:4	68:23,23	25	2:12	
60:7	68:8 71:11	12	17:17		
Woolfolk	72:24 75:5	17:8 53:23	26		
41:3,4,5					

9					
9					
74:7					
900					
11:21, 23 13:14					
95					
62:1					

ORIGINAL

**HEARINGS-SCHOOL ACTIONS
2013-CHICAGO BOARD OF
EDUCATION**

DATE: APRIL 23RD, 2013

REPORTER: APRIL HANSEN

**SONGHAI ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL**

*******EXHIBITS ONLY*******

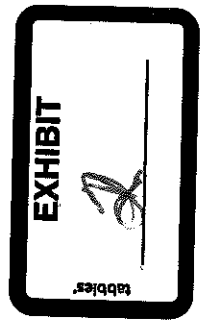
Final Print-out

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Public Hearing to Consider
Proposed Closure of Songhai Elementary Learning Institute

Tuesday, April 23, 2013
5:00pm-7:30pm
Room
1E50

Attorney Lisa Huges
Hearing Officer Thomas Rakowski

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE	EMAIL	RELATIONSHIP	YES	NO
1. Ruby Dowsey				LSC Chairperson	Yes	
2. Vernon Lawson				KROC - Salvation Army	Yes	
3. Kathleen Murray				Union Rep	Yes	
4. Yolanda Anderson				Teacher	Yes	
5. Marie Gayden				Teacher	No	
6. James Hawkins				Security	No	
7. Cynthia Solomon				Teacher	No	
8. Tara Cole				Student A	Yes	
9. Lonell Wilkins				Student	No	
10. Linda Wilkins				Parent	No	
11. Cynthia Solomon				Student	No	
12. Betty Person-Boredeaux				Parent	No	
13. Laverne Richard				Teacher	Yes	
14. Robert Higginbotham				Student	Yes	
15. Malik Walker				Student	No	
16. Davius Fairley				Student C	Yes	
17. Trevon Walker				Student D	Yes	
18. Cathene Bradfield				Parent	No	
19. Sharon Green				Student	No	
20. Tashiee Johnson				Parent	Yes	
21. Deatra Woolfolk				Parent	Yes	
22. Sierra McCoo				Student	No	
23. Dierra McCoo				Student	No	



CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
 Public Hearing to Consider
 Proposed Closure of Songhai Elementary Learning Institute

Tuesday, April 23, 2013
 5:30pm-7:30pm
 Room
 1550

Attorney Lisa Huges
 Hearing Officer Thomas Rakowski

24	Tyrwathia McCoo		Student	No
25	Chantell McCoo	Student G	Student	Yes
26	Sherry Pirtle		Principal	No
27	Donisha Johnson		student	No
28	Davona Fairley		student	No
29	George Walker		Student	No
30	Tonia Hughes		Parent	No
31	Nia Cole	Student F	Student	Yes
32	Steven Mosley		Parent/LSC	Yes
33	Evonia Mosley		Student	No
34	Angela Sykes		Parent	No
35	Cortez Grant		Student	No
36	Mariah McKinney		student	No
37	Terry Watson		Parent	No
38	Tatiana parker		Student	No
39	Russell Kidd		Guardian	No
40	Arnita Torrey		Parent	No
41	Teresa Castillo		parent	No
42	Alandra Moreno		Student	No
43	Dominique Gaines		Parent	No
44	Coty Ronald		Granddad	No
45	Lynette Johnson-Watts	came down to change	Teacher	Yes
46	Telisa Dantzler		teacher Assistant	Yes
47	Yasmine Warren	Student H	Student	Yes
48	Monay McCullen	Student I	student	Yes
49	Navarie Moore		student	No
50	Anaya Moore		student	No
51	Mckara Dowey		student	No
52	Sharnise White		student	No
53	Mosiah Dowsey		student	No
54	Domnique Pugh		student	No
55	Armai Johnson		student	No

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
 Public Hearing to Consider
 Proposed Closure of Songhai Elementary Learning Institute

Tuesday, April 23, 2013
 5:00pm-7:30pm
 Room
 1550

Attorney Lisa Hudge
 Hearing Officer Thomas Rakowski

56	Syriah Daniel	Student J	Student	Yes
57	Ananda McCoy		Student	No
58	Zeidre Foster		CTU	No
59	Robin Anderson	Student K	Student	Yes
60	Antoinette Christian		Parent	No
61	Demetrious Lyons	Student L	Student	Yes
62	Kavon Hawkins	Student M	Student	Yes
63	Asia Green		Student	No
64	Marshall France		Student	No
65	Debra Hester		SECA	No
66	Kaela McDougall		Salvation Army Partner	No
67	Dynasty Durrah	Student N	Student	Yes
68	Diesha McGuire		Student	No
69	Rodrigo Gamboa	Student O	student	Yes
70	Jordan Everetts	Student P	Student	Yes
71	Kemante Hicks	Student Q	Student	Yes
72	Demetrious Claire		Student	No
73	Deidra McCree		parent	No
74	Kewana Potts	Student Y came down @630 to sign up to speak		Yes
75	Wanda Lugo		teacher Assistant	No
76	Ebonie Kendrickicks		SECA	Yes

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Public Hearing to Consider
Proposed Closure of Songhai Elementary Learning Institute

Tuesday, April 23, 2013
5:30pm-7:30pm
Room
1850

Attorney Lisa Hüge
Hearing Officer Thomas Rakowski

Case No.	Case Name	Relationship	Response
77	Harold Thompson	Grandfather/guardian	No
78	Myra Gregory	Parent	Yes
79	Christopher Jackson	student	Yes
80	Romya Coty	Student	Yes
81	Roshann Coty	student	Yes
82	Ronald Coty	student	No
83	Leilani McCoy	Student	Yes
84	Demesha Crosby	student	Yes
85	Casara Woods	student	Yes
86	Kadija Smith	student	Yes
87	Kimberly Washington	Community Member	No
88	Amie Ross	Community Member	No
89	Gerald Ross	Teacher	Yes
90	Gregory Garmon	24th century coordinator	Yes
91	Willona Abner-Adkins	Assistant Principal	No

SONGHAI.... A CHILD'S PASSPORT TO A BRIGHT FUTURE!

Songhai Is on the Rise.

Songhai's 2012 Progress Report and Current Dashboard Data shows a great trajectory of success over a short period of time and should not be close but remain open and become a "Welcoming School!"

Note: Composite ISAT meets/exceed data for our school is as follows for the last three years:

2012 ISAT Composite 60.1%

2011 ISAT Composite 55.3%

2010 ISAT Composite 49.1%

There have been many improvements made at Songhai in the past few years under the new leadership. We should not stop this progress from continuing.

Songhai currently has everything that is being promised to welcoming schools!

For example, as a welcoming school Songhai students will not have to cross the railroad tracks or gangland boundaries to attend Curtis. The students that currently attend West Pullman would no longer have to cross 2 major intersections of 119th & 115th to get to school.

SONGHAI LEARNING INSTITUTE

Our Proposal.....Songhai Remains Opened & Become the Welcoming School to West Pullman Elementary

Based on the 20th day data:

Per CPS Space Utilization records Haley has 529 students with 61% of the building utilized. West Pullman has 301 students.

If Haley were to receive West Pullman's 301 students, Haley would then have a total of 830 which is only 40 students shy of the ideal program enrollment. The board states that 80% efficiency utilization is ideal.

Also per CPS Space Utilization records Curtis has 474 students with 53% utilization. If Curtis were to receive 317 additional students, this would bring their total to a few students short of 800.

We propose that Songhai becomes the Welcoming School to West Pullman!

With Songhai welcoming West Pullman, this will bring Songhai's enrollment to a total of 618 and bring us to an 80% efficiency rate.

EXHIBIT

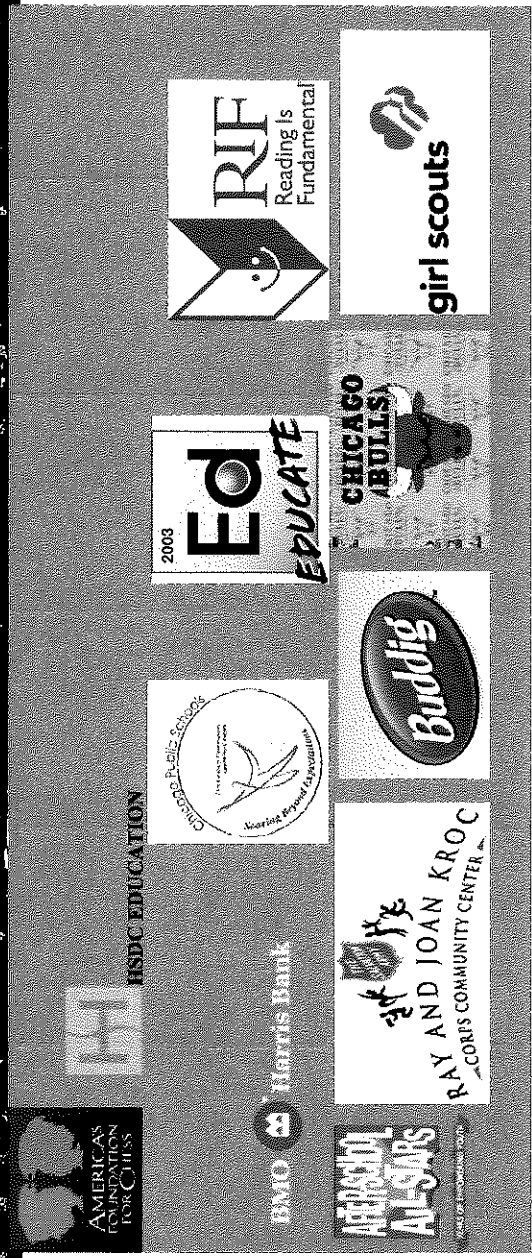
3

A Child's Passport to a Bright Future!



Additional Facility Offerings

- New Science Lab with SMART Board
- New Air Conditioned Computer Lab
- LCD Projector & Doc. Cameras in Classrooms
- Library Media Center
- Two 1/2 Day Head Start Programs
- Portable Air Conditioners for Classrooms
- iPads for Students (Pledge from BMO/Bulls)
- Mac Lab for Students (Pledge from BMO/Bulls)
- Lift for ADA Accessibility
- Laye Cafeteria
- Gold Level - US Healthier Certified School
- Indoor & Outside Recess Area
- Gymnasium
- Swimming Pool
- Large Stage & Auditorium with ADA Accessibility seats over 800
- Cell Tower Revenue
- Several Murals That Depict Pride and Success



Additional Offerings that Provides Enrichment for Students

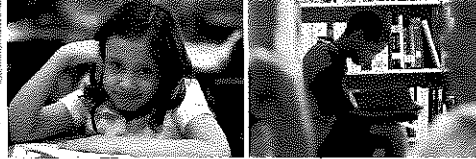
- 21st Century Community School 5 year grant
- Adopted School of the Year 2012-2013, BMO Harris Bank/ Chicago Bulls
- STEM/ iBio Educate Program - Stellar Girls 3 year grant
- Ray & Joan Kroc Center & The Salvation Army - Band & Chorus
- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF)
- Carl Buddig & Company
- After School All Stars
- 3D Art Club
- Culinary Arts Club
- Girl Scouts
- Boys & Girls Basketball, Volley Ball, Track, Double-dutch, and Cheerleading
- Hubbard Street Dance Company Grant Recipient
- First Move, America's Foundation for Chess
- Schools Count Corp., NSP
- Auditorium Theatre Grant Recipient

SONGHAI LEARNING INSTITUTE



11725 S. Perry Ave.
 Chicago, Illinois 60628
 ph 773.535.5547
 fx 773.535.5519
www.songhailearninginstitute.org
 Like us on Facebook

Building Quality in Afterschool



Center for Community Academic Success Partnerships
10824 S. Halsted*Suite 100*Chicago Illinois 60628
(312) 316-1170* Fax (866) 941-8558
A Chicago Area Project Affiliate

April 22, 2013

Board of Education
Chicago Public Schools
125 S. Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois

The Center for Community Academic Success Partnerships (CCASP) has served as the Academic Enrichment partner to the Songhai Institute School community for the past 2 years as lead agency Grantee for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Out of School time program funded by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

The program brings to the school building a wealth of social, emotional, educational, recreational support services and agencies who offer these opportunities before, during, after school and on weekends to the Songhai students and their families and is contracted with ISBE through FY17.

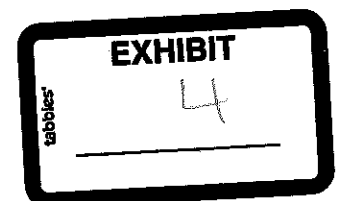
During this Community School Initiative partnership there has been an increase in student participation in out of school time activities as student surveys indicate they want to remain at school due to the increased crime that is occurring in their neighborhood. Students have expressed to us their fear of going to Curtis Elem due to the fact they are clearly aware of the bullying and violent acts that occur now between the two schools in this Roseland community. A merger of the two schools will disrupt the educational environment within the school building.

Parents have expressed to us their concern of losing a true community school and express apprehension of sending their child to a contract school and a school who has a different philosophy of educating a child than their existing school that provides multiple strategies to address the needs of students.

The Songhai School community is headed in the right direction, a new Principal, increased Out of school time programming and involving a host of community partners that have also brought more parents back to the school who have developed a renewed interest in their child's educational success. We hope that the City of Chicago and the CPS Board of Education provides Songhai the opportunity to continue the Success these past two years and allow the community partners to utilize the school space for expanding community programs in support of academic success.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tony Bell
Executive Director
CCASP



2012 School Progress Report

Pg. 2

Curtis

▲ Indicates areas where Curtis has a lower percentage compared to Songhai.



What are the Climate and Culture measures and why do they matter?

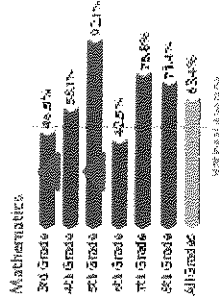
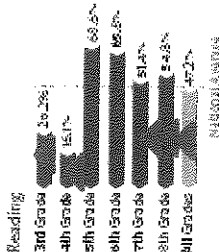
"A great school is more than just a school that does well on tests. Great schools provide a safe, respectful, and academically rich environment. CPS uses surveys, discipline data, attendance rates, and more to measure these things." Excerpt taken from 2012 School Progress Report (Frequently Asked Questions) Section, pg.4.

- Curtis should have to meet the **Great School** criteria before proposing Songhai students attend there.
- Missing School Culture & Climate data is a Red Flag.
- We don't know how safe, respectful or academically rich that environment is.

Academic Performance Details

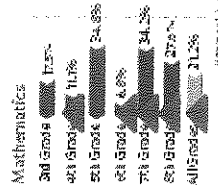
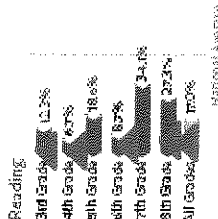
Student Growth: **NOT ENOUGH DATA**

These charts show the percentage of students who made expected gains on the NWEA MAP test last year. This is based on student growth between the fall and the spring test last year. The national average is 53%.



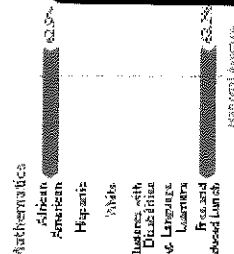
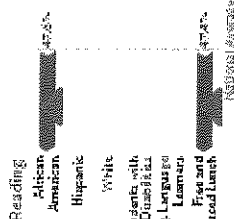
Student Performance: **NOT ENOUGH DATA**

These charts show the percentage of students who were performing at or above the national average on the NWEA MAP test last year. This is based on test taken in the spring last year. The national average is 53%.



Subgroup Growth

These charts show the percentage of students in each subgroup who made expected gains on the NWEA MAP test. This is based on student growth between the fall and spring test last year. The national average is 53%.



*Teacher for subgroups with fewer than 20 students are not displayed.

Culture and Climate

School Culture and Climate: **NOT ENOUGH DATA**

Essential: This is based on the My Voice, My School Essentials survey of teachers and eligible grade students. To see the complete report for your school, visit <http://schools.cps.edu>.

Questions from the My Voice, My School Survey	This School's Score
Involved Families: Does the school partner with families and communities?	NOT ENOUGH DATA
Supportive Environment: Is the school safe and supportive with high expectations?	NOT ENOUGH DATA
Ambitious Instruction: Is instruction focused, challenging and engaging?	NOT ENOUGH DATA
Effective Leaders: Does leadership focus on results and school improvement?	NOT ENOUGH DATA
Collaborative Teachers: Do teachers work well together and strive for excellence?	NOT ENOUGH DATA

Safety: Student views of safety

Questions from the My Voice, My School Survey

Questions from the My Voice, My School Survey	This School's Score
Safety: Do students feel safe and does the school support positive behavior?	NOT ENOUGH DATA

Where is the Culture & Climate Data for this School?

Behavior and Discipline: How the school addresses student discipline

Metric	2011	2012	District Average
Percent of misconducts resulting in suspension	62.3%	65.0%	57.7%
Average length of suspension	4.5 days	3.8 days	3.4 days

Other: Student and teacher attendance

Metric	2011	2012	District Average
Student attendance	93.8%	92.8%	94.3%
Teacher attendance	95.7%	97.7%	96.7%

EXHIBIT

5

tables

A Closer Look at

Curtis's

Key Probes

6 years On Probation - 2013 marks the 3rd year of Turnaround

Based on NWEA MAP Data

Curtis's National Average of Performance:

21.2.0% Math & 17.0% Reading which is less than Songhai's

Response Rate was 0.7% students & 10.3% teachers
Has Not Determined if Curtis is organized for improvement

Did Not Meet USDA's Healthier School Criteria

- Curtis was Turned Around in 2010.
- Curtis had Capital Improvements made to the facility during the Turnaround Process.
- Curtis received additional resources.
- There is Not Enough Data to determine if the school is organized for improvement.
- Curtis is not Healthy Schools Certified.
- Curtis is 2 Points away from being a Level 3 school.

2012 School Progress Report

George W Curtis Elementary School

221 North St Chicago, IL 60648
 (773) 545-4101
 All 31 Schools

Overall Rating:



Overall Rating

How does CPS rate this school? Is the school on probation? This school received a score of making which is a middle rating at CPS. This rating is based on the school's scores on the Performance Policy. This school is on probation and must meet a Level 1 or Level 2 score for two years in a row to be removed from probation. For more information, visit <http://cps.edu/parent>.



Student Growth:



How did we do at this school making significant or substantial progress with school year? Yes, student growth at this school is above average compared to similar schools nationally. Student growth on state tests is much clearer than in past years and is a very important measure of the school's quality. See www.cps.edu/parent for details on this school.

Student Performance:



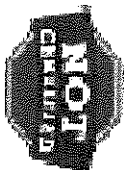
Are students at this school meeting grade level standards? No, student performance at this school is far below what we would expect. Student learning is an important focus of this school. We need to understand better why our students are performing below grade level for this school.

School Culture and Climate:



Is the school organized for improvement? The school does not have enough data to evaluate. Results from the observations in the July 2012, July School of Strategy of student and teacher, which will be shared in a separate report, and other data for this school.

Healthy Schools Certification:



The school is not yet a Healthy Schools Certified School. See www.cps.edu/parent for more information on the USDA's Healthier School Challenge, a key part of the Healthy Schools Initiative. For more information, visit www.healthy-schools.org.

Other School Priority



2012 School Progress Report Pg. 2

Songhai

★ Indicates areas where Songhai has a greater percentage % compared to Curtis.

Songhai Yielded Greater Expected Gains In Reading Overall Compared to Curtis

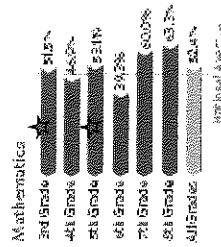
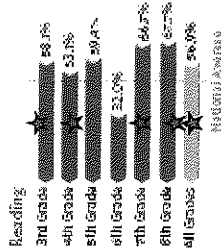
A Greater # of Songhai Students are performing at or above the National Average Compared to Curtis

Songhai is Closing the Achievement Gap in Reading at a Grater Rate compared to Curtis

Academic Performance Details

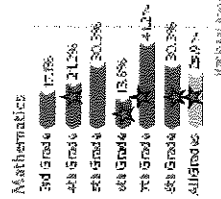
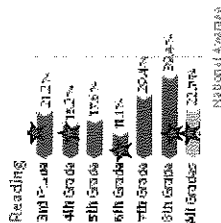
Student Growth:

These charts show the percentage of students who made expected gains in the consistent test last year. This is based on student growth between the fall test and the spring test last year. The national average is 52%.



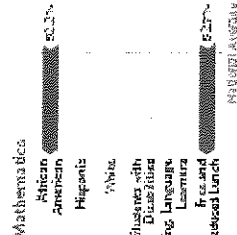
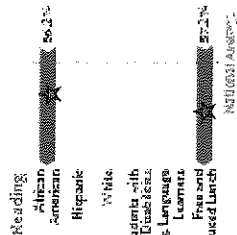
Student Performance:

These charts show the percentage of students who were performing at or above the national average on the 3rd grade test last year. This is based on tests taken in the spring last year. The national average is 52%.



Subgroup Growth

These charts show the percentage of students in each subgroup who made expected gains on the 3rd grade test. This is based on student growth between the fall test and spring test last year. The national average is 52%.

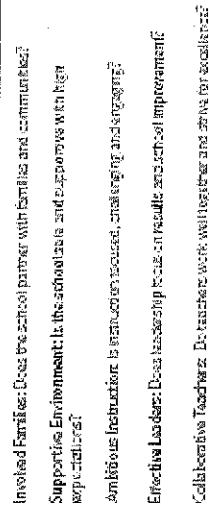


Culture and Climate

School Culture and Climate:

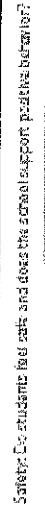
This is based on the My Voice, My School Essentials survey of teachers and 6th-12th grade students. To see the complete report for your school, visit: <http://schools.sos.wa.gov>

Questions from the My Voice, My School Survey



Safety: Student Views of Safety

Questions from the My Voice, My School Survey



The way Songhai addresses Behavior & Discipline is improving at a greater rate

Behavior and Discipline: How the school addresses student discipline



Other: Student and Teacher Attendance



Legend for Achievement Gap:

- ★ FAR ABOVE AVERAGE
- ▲ ABOVE AVERAGE
- AVERAGE
- MODERATELY ORGANIZED
- BELOW AVERAGE
- FAR BELOW AVERAGE
- VERY WEAK
- WEAK
- NEUTRAL
- STRONG
- VERY STRONG
- WELL ORGANIZED
- ORGANIZED
- MODERATELY ORGANIZED
- PARTIALLY ORGANIZED
- NOT YET ORGANIZED

A Closer Look at Songhai's Key Probes

5 years on probation - 1st year of new Admin

Based on Scantron Test

Songhai's National Average of Performance: Is Greater than Curtis's & Trending Upward

Response Rate - 91.1% students & 83.3% teachers, Songhai Is Trending Upward from previous years

Songhai Is A Gold Healthy Certified School & Recognized by First Lady Michelle Obama

- New Administration Team since 2012
- No Capital Improvements made to the facility since 1996
- Adopted by BMO Harris/Bulls 2013: A commitment to help improve the facility
- Over 10 New Partnerships; STEM, Band/Salvation Army, ASAS, Art, Cooking
- 21st Century Community School
- New Science Lab & New Computer Lab
- LCD Projector & Doc Cameras in Classrooms
- Two ½ Day Head Start Programs
- Lift to provide for SWD/Partially ADA Assessable

Songhai Elementary Learning Institute

1122 S. Perry Ave. Chicago, IL 60608
 (773) 525-5177 • <http://www.stanfordschools.org>
 Lake Calumet Elementary Network

Overall Rating: **LEVEL 1**

On Probation (3 years)

How does CPS rate this school? Is this school on probation? This school is rated a Level 3 rating, which is the lowest rating of CPS. This rating is based on the school's performance on the Performance Policy. Due to this rating, this school is on probation. In turn, we will improve our overall performance.



SCHOOL RY

Student Growth: **LEVEL 1**

As a student at this school, are you able to see academic progress each school year? Yes, student growth at this school is shown average compared to similar schools nationally. Student growth measures how much students learn in a year, or the average annual increase in the school's quality. See the details on growth by grade level at this school.

Student Performance: **LEVEL 1**

As a student at this school, would you be able to do a 4th grade math problem? Yes, student performance measures how well students score on standardized tests compared to national average for students. See details for details on performance by grade level at this school.

School Culture and Climate: **LEVEL 1**

Is this school organized for improvement? This school is "Partially Organized for Improvement" which means it is a school that is not fully organized for improvement. This means that the school will not be able to see a significant increase in student and teacher response to the survey. See details for more information on these surveys.

Healthy Schools Certification:



This school is Healthy Schools Certified. Schools must meet the criteria set by ASD for the national US School of Excellence, which is a national award. For more information on student and teacher response to the survey, see details for more information on these surveys.

SCHOOL RY



Given the fact that Songhai's ISAT scores have gone up so drastically in the past three years, it is indeed a very sad day to learn that Songhai is to be closed. In 2010 49.1% of Songhai's students met or exceeded state standards. By 2012 that same measurement found that 60.1% of the children met or exceeded that benchmark. That is an increase of 22.4%, far more than the average for the entire CPS system. This is indeed a remarkable achievement given the abnormal amount of CPS approved administrative turnover at Songhai.

As the Founder and President of Schools Count Corp, a federal charity that provides free student supplies to nearly 40 CPS schools, I can attest to the strong commitment of Ms. Pirtle, and her staff, to the students of Songhai and the community. Those of you at CPS should be made aware of the fact that the achievement I alluded to earlier is the direct result of the staff making significant improvements in curriculum delivery and their emphasis on helping students work to the best of their ability. Without the steadfast work of the Songhai staff you would have more empty desks and far less ISAT score achievement than you do now.

What is all the more remarkable about the Songhai success story is that it has been obtained in spite of the very real blight which exists in the neighborhood. I can assure you that closing Songhai will not only further exacerbate that blight but you are bound to see ISAT scores plummet as students are crowded into other schools. This school isn't underutilized, it is utilized wisely by the current staff given the dearth of resources.

Closing schools just adds to the very real trend of something being taken away from the residents. They have lost enough stores, factories, jobs and security over the years. Closing the schools is but another instance of the citizens 'losing' something or having something taken away and it is outside of their control. I urge you to keep hope alive, give the children and community what they deserve. Keep Songhai open. Sincerely, Richard Flesher



THE WHITE HOUSE

October 9, 2012

Songhai Learning Institute
11725 South Perry Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60628

Dear Friends:

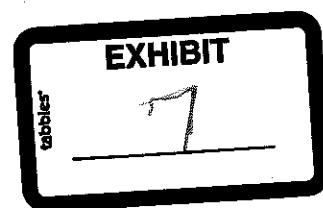
I am so pleased to congratulate Songhai Learning Institute on achieving the Gold Award in the HealthierUS School Challenge. This Challenge is a cornerstone of the *Let's Move!* initiative, an ambitious initiative to solve the childhood obesity epidemic within a generation. Our schools are on the frontlines in this effort, and your participation in the HealthierUS School Challenge is fundamental to helping solve the problem of childhood obesity.

As a winner of the Gold Award, Songhai Learning Institute is among the very best of the best - going above and beyond the minimum requirements to help ensure your students live full and active lives. The environment you and your team have created through education, nutritious food and beverage choices, and opportunities for physical activity will help your students learn how to make healthy choices now and for years to come. This is an extraordinary accomplishment, and you should all be incredibly proud of what you have achieved. As leaders in this effort, I hope you will reach out to other schools and offer your expertise and advice to help them reach for the gold as well.

Our strength as a Nation and our ability to responsibly shape our future depends on tackling childhood obesity, and I am inspired by the work you are all doing to help realize the promise of a brighter, healthier tomorrow for our children.

Sincerely,

Michelle Obama





Contact: Anna Seifert
(312) 461-6199

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Songhai Elementary Scores Big as BMO Harris Bank and Chicago Bulls' 2012-2013 "Adopt-A-School" Partner

CHICAGO, March 20, 2013 - BMO Harris Bank announced today with the Chicago Bulls that Songhai Elementary Learning Institute has been selected as their 2012-2013 Adopt-A-School partner to benefit from diverse educational programs, donations of materials and guest speakers throughout the school year. BMO Harris Bank also announced they will donate \$1 for every point the Bulls score during the 2013 playoffs to Songhai Elementary through their "Scoring for Songhai" initiative.

In a continuing effort to support excellence in education, each year BMO Harris and the Chicago Bulls choose a new Chicago Public School to be adopted. The program encourages CPS students to demonstrate a commitment to their education by excelling in their school work, and maintaining superior attendance records.

During the pep rally held at the school today, Bulls player Nate Robinson along with Benny the Bull visited the students, celebrating the school's achievement of becoming the 2012-2013 Adopt-A-School partner. In addition, BMO Harris Bank and the Bulls revealed they will donate funds to add PC and Mac stations to the school's college and career room, as well as two mounted air conditioners in their existing computer lab. Songhai Elementary will also receive special benefits such as tickets to Bulls games, appearances by Bulls personalities and tours of the United Center.

"In partnership with the Bulls, we congratulate the great students of Songhai Elementary for their achievements in the classroom and the community," said Justine Fedak, SVP, Brand, Advertising and Sponsorships at BMO Harris Bank. "We hope to see a long Bulls playoff run, which no doubt will lead to a lot of points scored, making for a very significant donation to the school!"

Before the pep rally, a BMO Harris financial expert led Songhai's sixth grade students in a lesson where they learned spending, saving and budgeting tips based on the bank's various free, online financial education programs.

Adopt-A-School recipients are selected based off their application explaining: why they think their school should be the next "adopted school," what type of contributions it offers to help improve its surrounding communities, what the school hopes to accomplish in the community moving forward, and examples of ways the school can and will use the benefits if chosen.

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About BMO Harris Bank



BMO Harris Bank provides a broad range of personal banking products and solutions through over 600 branches and approximately 1,300 ATMs in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, Nevada, Arizona and Florida. BMO Harris Bank's commercial banking team provides a combination of sector expertise, local knowledge and mid-market focus throughout the U.S. For more information about BMO Harris Bank, go to the [company fact sheet](#). Deposit and loan products and services provided by BMO Harris Bank N.A. Member FDIC. BMO Harris BankSM is a trade name used by BMO Harris Bank N.A. BMO Harris Bank is part of BMO Financial Group, a North American financial organization with approximately 1,600 branches, and approximately \$525 billion in assets (as of Oct. 31, 2012).

Dynasty Durrah

Songhai is not just a school. it's a home. So

If you close Songhai down ~~down~~ it's like

you are evicting 321+ students from their home.

Songhai is not just any school. it's

A place that nurtures you and be their ~~their~~ for

you when you need something. Also they teach you

things that you probably ~~can~~ wouldn't even learn at any other school.

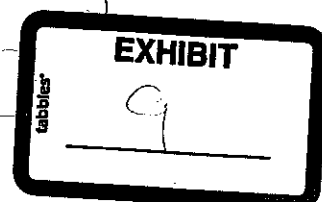
Songhai has been open since 1897 and here it is 2013 now it's on the closing list. Think about

it from your perspective as if your child's school

was closing down I

have been attending Songhai for a half of a decade.

And Songhai has been



through a lot but nothing
surver. Like this Songhai
has many activities going
on such as getting adopted
by Bmo Harris Bank, Also
we have amazing sports
and excetera we should
not have to walk extra
blocks. The majority of
us live by Songhai. Its
not fair to us the
parents anyon!! Because
Every weekday the ~~the~~
parents have to worry
about their child getting
snatched or beat up.
their at least 2 girls
amonth on the new
saying they got Sexually
assulted or Boys getting
Brutaly Beaten by gang
bangers

Hey my name is Tara Cole
When I first came to
Sorghum I was and 5th grade
I really didn't know what to
do so I just know I was
safe. Sorghum is the
best school. I just want to say
Sorghum have been adopted by
The 1st grade bulls. We get
to go to most of the home
rooms. At Sorghum we have
All kinds of sports and I
know if we go to Curtis
It will be different it won't
be the same. I just want
Sorghum to stay open.

Save
the
Sorghum
School

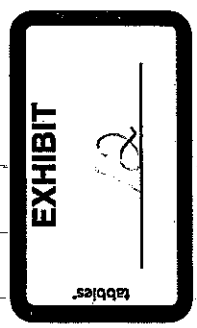


Domisha
Crosby

I want to say dont
close down our school
because it can be very
dangerous to the
younger childrens crossing
the tracks going to
Curtis, did you know
there was a young girl
killed by a train crossing
those tracks & you
wouldnt want to put
our students safety haggard
in danger please dont
close our school.



Charrell M'Co



I think Songhai should stay open because I been at Songhai for my whole life. My teacher taught me a lot. I never had a principle like ms. Pirtle. She treat every body the same, she's doing alot for our school such as let the staffs make their own program such as stella girls A&A the stem program, Judy Island, After school, boys

to men & the most
important girl power
I attended sport. most
school dont have sports.
Sanghai have basket ball
for girl & boys. we have
track for boys & girls.
you shouldnt close
Sanghai. Sanghai is a
family. If you move
us to Curtis it wouldnt
be a family anymore. this
my last year here. I
all my years I felt safe
so I want everybody to

feel safe! So I
BEGAN YOU NOT TO
CLOSE SONGHEI TO
ME ~~AND~~ NO BETTER -
Elementary school to
me. Some kids had
crazy moods or wild
moods but every teacher
told them something
in that lead those students
to success and years
to be at Songhe.

not everyone's parents has
cars to drop their child
off at school. It's not
fair to the students
or the teachers having
children clustered in
one class room 35-45
children what kinda
education ~~are we~~
~~getting~~
~~are we~~

every one deserves
a second chance
to fix the mistakes
so please give Sangra
a second chance,

First I want to start off by saying is when I first came to Songhai I was heartbroken , my heart was full with pain .because in 2010 I lost the most important person in my life my mother . it was something I never imagined to see in my life in it changed me in so many ways ! But ms pirtal ,ms soloman, ms adkins, ms kendricks , ms, hester , ms , Rodriguez ,ms lugo , ms , danzler & ms, crosby. Help me through so many things they tough me how to move on with life because life still go on no matter how hard it gets never give up . They showed me that I wasn't alone . in I want to THANK each in every one of them for opening up there hearts for me in showing me that I really wasn't alone in that they all really loved me no matter what I did ..SONGHAI has so many new things that's going on we have a lot of programs we, got adopted by BMO Harris bank & the Chicago bulls. We been to bulls games BMO harris bank AN the The bulls Came to our school we got the opportunity to get something some many other schools didn't . So Why try to send us somewhere we don't want to be ??? Why send us somewhere else if we can stay in our school ??? They aren't doing no better then we are .

**I ASK YOU PLEASE KEEP MY SCHOOL/ OTHER HOME OPEND
DON'T SEND ME ,& MY LITTLE SISTER TO CURTIS !!!!!!!**

KEEP MY SCHOOL OPEN ..!!!!!!!!!!!!

