

**BEFORE THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO**

In the matter of:)	
The Hearing to take Public Comment)	Philip L. Bronstein
On the Proposed Closing of:)	Hearing Officer
William Rainey Harper High School)	2018
John Hope College Preparatory High School)	
Paul Robeson High School)	
TEAM Englewood Community Academy High School)	

**Hearing Officer's Report and Recommendation
To the Chief Executive Officer
Regarding the Proposal to Close
William Rainey Harper High School
6520 South Wood Street
John Hope College Preparatory High School
5515 South Lowe Avenue
Paul Robeson High School
6835 South Normal Boulevard
TEAM Englewood Community Academy High School
6201 South Stewart Avenue**

INTRODUCTION

On January 30, 2018 at 5:30 p.m., the undersigned, an attorney licensed to practice law in Illinois, convened, as Independent Hearing Officer, a public hearing at 42 West Madison Street, Chicago, Illinois, to receive comment from interested persons regarding the proposed closure of William Rainey Harper High School (Harper), John Hope College Preparatory High School (Hope) Paul Robeson High School (Robeson) and TEAM Englewood Community Academy High School (TEAM). Closure would take effect at the end of the 2017-18 school year. Should the Board approve the closures:

1. Taking into account the geographic boundary currently assigned to Harper, those students north of 67th Street will be assigned to Gage Park High School and those south of 67th will be assigned to Bogan High School for the 2018-2019 school year, unless another option is selected.

2. Taking into account the geographic boundary currently assigned to Hope, for the 2018-2019 school year, unless another option is selected, those students west of Racine Avenue will be assigned to Gage Park High School. Those students east of Racine will be assigned to Phillips High School.
3. Taking into account the geographic boundary currently assigned to Robeson, for the 2018-2019 school year, unless another option is selected, those students west of Racine Avenue and north of 67th Street will be assigned to Gage Park High School and those east of Racine and north of 67th will be assigned to Chicago Vocational High School. Those students west of Halsted and south of 67th will be assigned to Bogan High School.
4. TEAM does not have an attendance boundary. Current students at TEAM, for the 2018-2019 school year, will be provided options to enroll in higher performing schools, as defined by the Guidelines. CPS will work with TEAM, students and their families to develop individualized transition plans that determine the schools that will best meet the academic and social-emotional needs of each student.

The CEO presented statistics that in the past 10 years, enrollment at the 4 high schools at issue had declined 70-85%. Furthermore, of those eligible to enroll in the 4 high schools, 92% chose to travel outside of Englewood for their high school option. Should the Board approve the proposal, the CEO commits to opening a new high school in Englewood (currently planned for the Robeson campus site), with a projected opening in fall 2019. The new high school would open with a freshman class only. It would be an open enrollment neighborhood high school. Accordingly, none of the students currently enrolled at Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM would attend the new high school.

A certified shorthand reporter transcribed the Hearing. Spanish language and sign interpreters were present. Notice of this Hearing was sent to the principal, staff, local school council, parents or guardians as well as the state senator, state representative and alderman for the schools that are subject to the proposed actions. A summary of the proposed school actions was published in the Chicago Sun-Times on December 27, 2017.

Preceding the present Hearing, the CEO of Chicago Public Schools conducted, through her representatives, two Community Meetings, one on January 10, 2018, and the second on January 17, 2018. The first meeting was held at Kennedy King College, 740 West 63rd Street in Chicago. The second meeting was held at Hamilton Park Fieldhouse, 513 West 72nd Street in Chicago. The Hearing Officer has received verbatim transcripts of these meetings.

The Public Hearing was conducted pursuant to 105 ILCS 5/ 34-230, and CEO Procedures for Public Hearings on Proposed School Closure, Consolidation, Co-Location, Phase-Out, or Reassignment Boundary Change and Guidelines for School Actions 2017-2018 School Year.

Relevant Statutes

- 105 ILCS 5/ 34-18 (Powers of the Board)
- 105 ILCS 5/ 34-200 (Definitions)
- 105 ILCS 5/ 34-225 (School Transition Plans)
- 105 ILCS 5/ 34-230 (School Action Public Meetings and Hearings)

Pertinent Chicago Public Schools Policies and Procedures

- Final Guidelines for School Actions, 2017-2018 School Year (Published November 22, 2017)
- Chief Executive Officer's Procedures for Public Hearings on Proposed School Closure, Consolidation, Phase-Out, or Reassignment Boundary Change
- Chicago Public Schools Space Utilization Standards and Methodology (Issued January 19, 2018)
- Chicago Board of Education Policy on Review and Establishment of School Attendance Boundaries (Policy Manual Section 703.2, Board Report 05-0622-P01)
- Chicago Board of Education School Quality Rating Policy (Begins with the 2014-2015 School Year) (Policy Manual Section 302.6, Board Report 14-1119-P01)

Exhibits

Ms. Hasti Anderson, Assistant General Counsel-Board of Education of the City of Chicago, tendered, and the Hearing Officer received into the record, the CEO's compiled Exhibit 1, a binder of documents in support of the proposed school actions.

A. NOTICES OF HEARING (TAB A)

1. Notice Letters and Draft Transition Plans sent to the parents or guardians of students at Harper, Hope, Robeson, and TEAM,

- Bogan, CVCA, Gage Park, and Phillips, for the proposed closure of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, dated December 1, 2017.
2. Notice Letters and Draft Transition Plans sent to the administrators, staff, and Local School Council Members at Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, Bogan, CVCA, Gage Park and Phillips, dated December 1, 2017 for the proposed closure of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM
 3. Affidavit of Cheryl Nevins, Regional Portfolio Planner for the Chicago Public Schools, regarding: (a) publication of Draft Guidelines for School Actions on October 1, 2017, (b) publication of the List of Independent Hearing Officers for hearings on October 31, 2017, (c) publication of Final Guidelines for School Actions on November 22, 2017, (d) publication of Proposed School Actions on December 1, 2017, (e) delivery of Notice Letters and Draft Transition Plan to parents and guardians, school personnel, and Local School Council Members of Harper, Hope, Robeson, TEAM, Bogan, CVCA, Gage Park and Phillips, on December 1, 2017, and (f) publication of summaries from community meetings on or before January 14, 2018 and January 21, 2018
 4. Affidavit of Francis Bilecki, Chief Policy Officer for the Office of Intergovernmental Relations of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, regarding delivery of notice letters and Draft Transition Plans to elected officials on December 1, 2017
 5. Public Notice of Hearing and Community Meetings by newspaper publication in the Chicago Sun-Times on December 27, 2017

B. RELEVANT LEGAL AND PROCEDURAL DOCUMENTS (TABS 6-14)

C. DOCUMENTS AND WRITTEN EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSAL

15. Transcript of the January 10, 2018 Community Meeting regarding The Proposed Closure of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, dated January 13, 2018
16. Summary of the January 10, 2018 Community Meeting regarding The Proposed Closure of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, dated January 10, 2018
17. Transcript of the January 17, 2018 Community Meeting regarding The Proposed Closure of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, dated January 17, 2018
18. Summary of the January 17, 2018 Community Meeting regarding the Proposed Closure of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, dated January 17, 2018
19. Written Statement of Megan Hougard, Chief of Schools for Network 11 of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, dated January 30, 2018

20. Written Statement of James Dispensa, Director of Demographics and Planning of the Department of Planning and Management for the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, dated January 30, 2018
21. Englewood Community Leadership Steering Committee, Data Review Analysis PowerPoint, Enrollment Trends at Englewood High Schools
22. Englewood Community Action Council letter, dated January 12, 2017
23. Englewood Community Leadership Steering Committee, Meeting 3 Notes, dated November 2, 2017
24. Englewood Community Leadership Steering Committee, Data Review Analysis PowerPoint, Enrollment Trends of Englewood High School Students Attending Non-Englewood Neighborhood Schools
25. Map of proposed Englewood High School Attendance Boundaries
26. Chicago Public Schools' Report on the Impact on the Racial Composition and Stability Resulting from the Closing of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM High Schools, dated January 30, 2018

BOARD PRESENTERS MEGAN HOUGARD

Megan Hougard is Network 11 Chief of Schools, responsible for the support and oversight of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM, and a 12-year veteran teacher and administrator. Ms. Hougard noted that over the past 10 years, the four schools have each experienced a 70 to 90% decline in enrollment, with current enrollment between 90 and 135 students in grades 9-12. More than 90% of students who live in Englewood choose to attend high schools outside of Englewood. "As a result of the under-enrollment, the schools are facing both funding and programming concerns," she said.

Ms. Hougard said "CPS needed to address this extreme under-enrollment, and engaged community stakeholders to promulgate a plan." CPS formed the Englewood Community Action Council (CAC), comprised of 43 parents, community representatives, and local school council members across the community. CAC independently recommended that CPS create a state-of-the-art neighborhood high school in Englewood and consolidate the existing schools to provide students with a high quality neighborhood school option. CAC's request ultimately culminated in CPS's June 2017 decision to invest in a new, state-of-the-art neighborhood high school in Englewood, currently valued at \$85-million.

In addition, CPS formed A Community Leadership Steering Committee, facilitated by Ms. Hougard, comprised of community leaders, educators, parents and members of CACs, Local School Councils (LSC) and Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) in Englewood and West Englewood. On November 2, 2017, the Steering Committee met and voted. The majority voted to close the 4 high schools with 6 voting to close at the end of the 2017-18 school year, and 2 voting to close at the end of the 2018-19 school year.

The Steering Committee also requested that CPA provide comprehensive, individualized support to transition students, Ms. Hougard said. In response, CPS developed a draft transition plan to ensure the Steering Committee's recommendations would be implemented.

According to Ms. Hougard, the CEO's recommendation "aligns with the Steering Committee's desire to provide the highest quality education opportunities for students at Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM. "We firmly believe the recommendation made today, while difficult...is in the best interests of students and their families," she said, adding that she and her staff will continue to work with families to ensure that each student transitions successfully to a school of their choice, and will be able to transfer to higher performing schools rather than being automatically assigned to a new school. To ensure student success, CPS has set aside \$8.3 million over the next 3.5 years to support this transition. Funds will be provided to receiving schools starting in fall of 2018 through the 2021 school year.

Ms. Hougard said, "This proposal meets the Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for School Actions because the request for closure was made by community members via the process outlined within the Guidelines." She noted that beginning in summer 2017, the Network worked with community, schools, staff, parents and students to formulate a plan in the event the four schools close. Two community events were held during summer 2017. Student panels were conducted at all four schools. Teachers and staff participated in numerous meetings and five dedicated parent meetings were held in December 2017 through January 2018. The CPS Office of Safety and Security and Office of Social and Emotional Learning will work closely with School-Based Transition Coordinators, the Student Outreach and Re-Engagement (SOAR) Team, and families to ensure individualized plans to get to and from school safely.

"In conclusion, Ms. Hougard said, "The CEO's proposal meets the Guidelines for School Actions. My network, staff and I will work diligently with each individual student to present them with high performing options to better prepare them for future success."

James Dispensa

James Dispensa, Director of School Demographics and Planning for the Chicago Public Schools, spoke at the request of the CEO. Mr. Dispensa has been responsible for demographic studies, enrollment projections and monitoring space utilization for CPS since October 2004.

Mr. Dispensa asserted that "Pursuant to the CEO's Guidelines for School Actions (Guidelines), the CEO may propose a closure if the action is requested by the school(s) principal, parents, or community members, and the resulting space utilization will not exceed the facility's enrollment efficiency range as defined by the CPS' Space Utilization Standards." Mr. Dispensa said this proposal is consistent with

the CEO's Guidelines as "resulting space utilization after consolidation will not exceed the enrollment efficiency range as defined by CPS' Space Utilization Standards."

Enrollment in grades 9-12 at Harper, Hope, TEAM and Robeson is 134, 95, 92 and 128, he said. If the Board approves the closure of the four schools, the District will provide individualized school transfer request and assignment. Each student may meet with a transition team to discuss needs and school options. Each student may choose from approximately 20 high schools closest to their homes, and the district will attempt to give students their highest choice consistent with available capacity.

Mr. Dispensa said that in addition to this individualized support, all returning high school students from Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM will be geographically assigned to either Gage Park High School (Gage Park), Wendell Phillips Academy High School (Phillips), Chicago Vocational Career Academy High School (CVCA) or William J. Bogan High School (Bogan).

Gage Park has 46 classrooms, ideal capacity of 1,104 and an efficiency range of 773-1,214. With enrollment of 328, there is sufficient capacity for 450 to 850 additional students, he said. Phillips has 82.5 classrooms, ideal capacity of 1,980, and an efficiency range of 1,386-2,178. With enrollment of 634, there is sufficient capacity for an additional 750-1,500 students. CVCA has 111.5 classrooms, ideal capacity of 2,676 and an efficiency range of 1,873-2,943. With enrollment of 880, there is sufficient capacity for an additional 1,000-2,000 students. Bogan has 61.5 classrooms, ideal capacity of 1,476 and an efficiency range of 1,033-1,623. Enrollment is 781, leaving sufficient capacity for 250-800 additional students, he said.

"The proposed closings will have no significant impact on the racial composition and stability of these schools," Mr. Dispensa said. "In terms of racial composition and stability, the option of maintaining the status quo offers neither an advantage nor disadvantage over the option of closing these schools," he said. "While other alternatives were examined, no alternative affected the resulting racial ethnic distribution of students."

PUBIC COMMENT AT THE PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF HARPER, HOPE, ROBESON AND TEAM

Darlene O'Banner

Steering Committee and LSC Member and PAC chairperson at Earl Elementary

Ms. O'Banner, a 48-year resident of Englewood and alumni of Luke O'Toole Elementary and Gage Park High School, spoke in support of the CPS proposal to close Harper, Hope, Robeson and Team. Ms. O'Banner said she understands the utilization of closing the schools, as she was involved in closing schools in 2012.

Renee Howell-Collins

Ms. Howell-Collins spoke against the plan, calling closing all 4 high schools "unprecedented" and "equivalent to killing the heart, soul, mind and body of 40% of the teenagers in Englewood." She said the Steering Committee was not representative of the Englewood Community and should be dissolved immediately. She suggested that instead of closing Harper, it should be expanded to a college bound school offering unconventional learning. Hope should merge with ACE Technical Charter School or Gage Park. None of the effected schools should have an incoming freshman class for 2018-2019. This would leave only the class of 2020 to be transferred to another school. 75% of the incoming freshman class at the new high school should be Englewood children.

Patricia Elliott

Parent

Ms. Elliott, whose son will graduate in June from TEAM, spoke against the closure plan, noting she was worried about the children's safety. "If you all transfer these kids to another high school, how will you all feel if the gangs... mess with these kids trying to get to a new location?" she asked. Ms. Elliott also said she felt plans for future students were inadequate.

Elward Ford

Community Member

Mr. Ford was born and raised in Englewood and attended 8 different community schools. His family members attended Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM. While Mr. Ford said he was "very much outraged" that CPS would close 4 schools at once, he said he believed the new "state-of-the-art" school would improve educational opportunity and help alleviate gang activity as well as its "stigma."

Dori Collins
Parent/CAC Member

Dori Collins, parent of a 2012 graduate, former educator, speech pathologist, former Local School Council Member and Parent Advisory Council Member, spoke in support of the plan. She is a current member of the Englewood Community Action Council, which wrote the initial proposal for the new state-of-the-art high school and recommended closing the 4 existing high schools. She also served on the Steering Council, examining data and educating parents. Ms. Collins said the Community Action Council did “robust marketing” with parents and reached out to community members. “Students are very resilient about their future and plans, and they’re looking forward to being motivated to move on and have the opportunity to have a magnificent educational experience with the new high school.”

M.E., Student
Senior at TEAM

A senior at TEAM spoke strongly against the closure plan. “We feel like we are family at these schools,” he said. He said students would be scattered and some left behind at other community schools. “The kids feel like I want to go to my neighborhood school,” he said.

Ra Joy
Candidate for Lieutenant Governor

Mr. Joy spoke strongly against the closure plan. “My question for the CPS Board and for Mayor Emanuel is, are you really listening?” He called the plan a “false choice,” in which they (students) move forward in the near term without a public high school option. “Why is it always the black and brown families who are asked to sacrifice? Why is it always the black and brown communities that are asked to do more with less?” Mr. Joy asked. The parents, teachers, principals, community leaders and students “are the ones who have the real solutions to these real challenges.” He asked that the CPS and the Mayor “listen harder,” collaborate to “stop the destabilization of our neighborhoods, and keep the doors of opportunity open for all Chicago students.

Pastor Jonathan Brooks
Parent

Jonathan Brooks, Pastor of the Canaan Community Church, former teacher and parent, spoke strongly against the proposed closure. He asked for transparency, and wondered how parents can be assured that the \$8.3 million investment will be used in ways that support their displaced students. He said enrollment numbers indicate “a lack of investment in all neighborhood schools in Chicago. We’re looking for redirection of resources” to educational programs, “not just new buildings,” he said. Pastor Brooks spoke to the importance of preserving the history of the closed schools and opening a museum to do so. He labeled “destruction all of the neighborhood high schools in Englewood unacceptable,” and he called for continued conversation throughout the community “to decide which of the schools should be saved as well as a robust plan of investment in the remaining school or schools.”

Lawrence Wagner
Law Project for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

Mr. Wagner said the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless vehemently opposed the plan, saying it would particularly harm neighborhood homeless students. Across CPS, 4.7% of students experience homelessness. Across the 4 closing Englewood high schools, 19% experience homelessness, he said. These students face greater enrollment, attendance, success and mobility challenges, he said. Mobility causes academic delays, disruption of peer and teacher relationships and missed school days. “CPS’ proposed school closures will particularly add to the instability that homeless students face,” Mr. Wagner said. He said these students would likely end up at a neighborhood school based on redrawn boundaries, rather than at a higher performing school. This flies in the face of 2015 Chicago Consortium of School Research, which determined that only students who attend substantially higher performing schools have better academic outcomes. Mr. Wagner called CPS’ allotment of time and resources to the transition insufficient. If CPS moves ahead with the closures, Mr. Wagner requested revised transition plans with more support, staff and time to help all students--homeless students in particular—as well as designated slots at higher performing schools.

Arell Miller
Robeson Alumni

Ms. Miller spoke against the closure plan, saying, “My issue is, why don’t they build an annex?” Ms. Miller said, there is ample land and space for the additional students to attend Robeson. She said the neighborhood does not need a \$78-million state-of-

the-art school. Rather, she said community concerns focused on safety and keeping students in the same neighborhood.

Erica Clark
Parents for Teachers

Ms. Clark, speaking on behalf of Parents for Teachers, rejected “the plan to close every single high school in Englewood.” She said that the community is roughly the size of Niles or Arlington Heights, and that the closure plan violates state law and CPS’ School Action Guidelines. She labeled CPS’ presentation “very amusing,” adding that CPS asked for community generated proposals but that the Englewood plan does not exist on the CPS website. “It was not generated by the community, and the community, as you will hear tonight, does not support it,” she said. Ms. Clark also noted that the receiving schools, except for TEAM, are not higher performing. In addition, she said the plan violates school code as it provides only “empty promises” and no specific details for a transition plan. “They simply copied and pasted one document into four, changed a few dates, addresses and times, and passed this off as something that is a value to families. It’s not.” Ms. Clark said. She charged that “the real problem” is that “the plan doesn’t address the individual and unique needs of each school...because CPS doesn’t see these children who are mostly low income and black as unique individuals to be valued and cherished and supported. Please, please value and protect these students by rejecting this unlawful and unjust plan.”

Patricia Devine Reed
Community Member

Ms. Reed, an educator, administrator, artist, resident and Canann Community Church member, spoke against the plan. She favored a state-of-the-art school, but said that was possible in one of the existing schools, which she called “relatively new” and “beautiful.” She also spoke against the closure of the 4 schools, labeling the situation “the result of 50 years of racism toward the community. The investment has not been in our youth,” Ms. Reed said. “We have to think first, always first of our students,” she said, calling it “immoral” to fail to have a community high school for a year or longer.

Larry Dean
Organizer, Black Youth Project 100

Mr. Dean spoke vehemently against the plan. “I just want you guys to know and Mayor Rahm Emanuel to know we are not going to go down without a fight,” he said. “We believe in keeping these schools open and keeping these schools prosperous for black students.” Mr. Dean referenced the 50 school closings recently, which he called “black and brown schools,” adding that Mayor Emanuel promised not to close more schools. And, yet again, he said, “the schools being closed today are black and brown schools. We are going to fight to prove that there are people that love and care about

these black youth.” Mr. Dean said. He noted that the City is currently building a police academy for \$95-million. “It’s ridiculous...when we’re closing 4 schools,” he said. He said students should be worrying about getting into college and things high

school kids worry about, not about being arrested, being in gang warfare or about how to get a basic education, all concerns which will be amplified by the planned closings. He said the Black Youth Project 100 will make sure the world finds out that Mayor Emanuel is “taking schools out of our communities. I need people to understand it is important to provide support for these students, because the fight will not end today.”

Drew Heiserman
Teacher

Mr. Heiserman, who has taught in Englewood for 8 years, called the proposed closure plan “blatantly racist... a farce...and the destruction of a neighborhood. The Mayor has a black people problem,” he said. “He is not going to get elected again doing this nonsense. It’s got to stop,” he said, noting that at a community meeting of more than 200, only 2 people spoke in support of the measure.

Joy Clendenning
Parent/Managing Director of Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education

Ms. Clendenning, Managing Director of Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education, a parent group that advocates for equal education for all children, spoke strongly against the plan. Over 8 years, the group has worked with parents, teachers and students and has analyzed facilities, she said. She concluded that “without a robust authentic community engagement process that creates a real comprehensive citywide facilities plan, CPS should put a hold on closing and opening schools.” CPS should instead use the resources dedicated for displacement and invest them in existing schools, she said.

W.F., Student
Freshman at Harper

The student spoke strongly against the plan and spoke of his fear of increased gang violence. When you close Harper, you are doing nothing but creating another gang, he said. “As a young black male who would be a new face in that community, they will be watching us. Some of our brothers and sisters can’t go there because they already saw some of our faces in the other community.” Y’all say we have low enrollment, but it is because you don’t want to fund our school.” The student said. “What are y’all going to do after three years and the enrollment starts to drop? Y’all going to build a new school again?” he asked. The student said it is “unreal” that 4 high schools are closing in the Englewood neighborhood, and makes him feel

“targeted.” He said Harper has had several Gates scholars, professionals and people who have made a difference in the community.

D.B., Student

The student spoke strongly about racism in Chicago and his opposition to the plan. “People from black communities are harshly treated and are assumed to be dumb, but that’s not true,” he said. “Instead of closing our school, it is not hard to invest in a school,” he said. “But you don’t care, so you will keep on tearing down schools, smallest to largest.”

T.O., Student
Harper

The student spoke against the plan, which he called “disrespectful.” “It is not right to close down every neighborhood school in the Englewood community and leave us only with the option of going outside of our neighborhood or attending a charter school,” he said. The student said the solution was to consolidate the schools. Harper has teachers that care, a great building with a culinary arts kitchen and adequate space to bring back attractive vocational programs. Harper has had Gates Scholars, monologue competitions and, “we could do so much more,” he said. “How can you keep taking our funding away from us because we have low enrollment?” he asked. “You cannot starve us and then blame us for being hungry.”

T.B., Student
Harper

The student said she felt ignored by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and unprotected by the plan to close Harper. “The safety plan will not work...they (students) will probably get bullied or mistreated because of the color of their skin,” she said. The student noted that she learned a new word in civics class: autocratic - a leader who does not consult the people before making a decision. “This decision was made without consulting with any of the people,” she said.

Bobbie Brown
LSC Chair

Ms. Brown strongly opposed the proposed plan. She said Network 11 had a transition meeting at Harper, indicating they had 1200 community surveys and had conferred with the LSC Chair. But, Ms. Brown, who lives in the community, said she never received any survey and that, as LSC Chair, herself, she does not recall talking to Network 11. She said the proposed action has unified students in opposition to

the plan at all four schools. Children who would not speak up before are becoming leaders. "These are our babies, and we are going to fight for our babies," she said. "We might have a president in our midst...and we will get the victory out of all of this."

Michael Buino
Teacher

Mr. Buino spoke vehemently against the proposed plan. He has been a theater teacher at Harper for 4.5 years, and in that time has built one of the city's most competitive high school theater programs. Harper is the only CPS neighborhood high school to place finalists in the citywide August Wilson Monologues Competition for the last 4 years. Harper has had several medalists in the Chicago NAACP ACT-SO competition for theater and spoken word poetry, and one student competed in the national NAACP competition. Mr. Buino's students have performed at the Hyde Park High School Theater Festival. The class brings seniors to Midwest college auditions and those students have received over \$300,000 in scholarship offers. Mr. Buino has two students studying at Eastern Illinois University, another 2 at Northeastern Illinois University and several at City Colleges of Chicago. In addition, the program has garnered \$150,000 in free programming to bring professional artists into the classroom. Harper students see more theater production in the school year than any other students in the city, he said. "Before you kill this program...come to my classroom," Mr. Buino said. "See for yourselves the thriving community of theater artists my students have created and then tell me Harper is not worth saving."

Rebecca Martinez
Chicago Teachers Union

Ms. Martinez spoke strongly against the proposed action. She said that prior to the 50 schools closing in 2013, there were multiple earlier school actions that affected several of the proposed closure schools. Harper turned. Team used to be Englewood High School before it was closed. And Hope has a co-location with the charter school. These schools already have experienced "CPS' failed policies," she said. Ms. Martinez said instead of changing course, CPS and the Mayor "are doubling down" on failed policies that disproportionately affect black and low-income students -- "the very students that CPS and the City should be prioritizing," she said. "When is the mayor going to propose a plan that lifts up black and Latino students instead of bringing them down...?" she asked. Ms. Martinez criticized what she termed "a failed policy" of student based budgeting and inadequate funding. Instead of closing the schools, she suggested a plan for sustainable, well-funded, student-centered community schools with relevant and engaging curriculum and support for every child.

Bob Israel
Save Our Community Coalition

Mr. Israel, a Robeson graduate, believed that proceedings on Englewood school closures were a farce and closure was a “done deal.” He said that CPS would never close all of the schools in Lincoln Park, Beverly or Bridgeport. He agreed with another speaker, who accused Mayor Emanuel of strategic gentrification.

Erica Nanton
Co-chair of the Illinois New Poor People’s Campaign

Ms. Nanton stated that she, as well as over 20 organizations within the city, supported the students at Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM. They demand that these schools are invested in as sustainable community schools. Cincinnati, New York and Tulsa have embraced sustainable community improvement models that have drastically improved education. She believed that money was available to do this as the City spent \$95-million to build a new police academy and CPS had set aside \$8.3-million for transition costs. Ms. Nanton said that a survey of 8th grade students showed that there were 426 students in Englewood and 253 in West Englewood. Accordingly, she believed that there was a sufficient student population to invest fully in community schools.

Shannon Bonner
Teacher at TEAM

Ms. Bonner stated that although enrollment at TEAM was low, they were a family and learning was happening. She said that students at TEAM deserve to complete their high school in Englewood. She explained that TEAM does have outside partners that help students have a well-rounded experience. She stated further that current conditions pose challenges to students and teachers as “we try to find a way to make a dollar out of 15 cents.” To compensate for a lack of funds, teachers and students spend extra hours at school. Ms. Bonner bought track uniforms for the students out of her own pocket. She stated that students are nervous about their futures, scared for their safety, and worried about leaving their neighborhood. Ms. Bonner closes by reminding CPS that their decision effects students and not just school facilities.

LaShonda Sherman
Educator

Ms. Sherman, a current resident of Englewood, stated that she went out of her neighborhood to attend high school. The high school she attended, Whitney Young, was high performing. She knows that receiving schools envisioned by the plan are not high performing. Lindblom High School, a higher performing school, is not included in the plan. These children need to be placed in more rigorous schools. She said that CPS must do a better job with metrics and measurements. Otherwise, even a state-of-the-art school will fail.

Kevin Andre Brooks

Mr. Brooks, a Pastor, noted that he had served local churches in Englewood and had spent time at each high school slated for closure. He was Co-chair of the Englewood CAC. He complained that the process was not democratic, and that is why so many members of the Steering Committee are not vested in the plan. He believed that the promise of a new school was a political ploy. He argued for an elected school board.

Willie Preston

Mr. Preston stated that the Board and CPS are positioned to do what the Mayor wants them to do. This will stop, he said, "and we will be confrontational." He said the community would defend Robeson and that "if our house gets closed, your house gets closed."

Jaymal Greer

Mr. Greer believed that decision makers with respect to school closures were puppets of the Mayor. He said the school board should be elected. He stated that these children are our future and we need to invest in them. He urged investment in books, new technology and after school programs. He derided the expenditure of \$95-million to build a new police academy. He questioned how decision makers could live with themselves after making such poor decisions.

Email Statements and Documents

After adjournment of the January 30, 2018 Hearing, the Hearing Officer received in the record 149 emails, 3 statements and a report titled, "Racial Justice And Englewood High Schools." Two written submissions supported the proposed school action. The rest were opposed.

The writers self-identified as parents of children attending Harper, Hope, Robeson or TEAM. A number were parents of school-aged children attending CPS schools in the City of Chicago but outside of Englewood. Many were alumni of CPS schools. Some writers were members of civic groups. A few of the writers also gave oral statements at Hearing.

Recurring remarks of those opposed to school closures labeled both process and result as appalling, immoral, inhumane, unconscionable, or shameful. The following is a representative sample of comments:

1. Englewood residents deserve public schooling that is safe and convenient.
2. It is wrong to compel students to leave their community to attend school.
3. Recent proposed school actions inequitably favor economically advantaged areas. This constitutes social injustice.
4. Education displacement will have long-term health consequences.
5. At least keep one school open or postpone closures until the new school is built.
6. Children's safety will be at risk because of gang activity in unfamiliar areas.
7. The City of Chicago throws people of color under the bus.
8. Economic challenged areas deserve greater resources.
9. Black communities are viewed disrespectfully and inhumanely.
10. What is happening in Englewood with proposed closures should not happen anywhere in the city.
11. It is unbelievable that CPS would close 4 high schools before building a new one.
12. Closures will devastate children, their families and their community.
13. Put the money currently dedicated to capital projects into existing schools.
14. A University of Chicago study of 2013 CPS closings concluded that most displaced students end up enrolling in lower performing schools due to safety concerns.
15. Reboot the public engagement process and come up with a creative solution like Jenner-Ogden.
16. Invest in neighborhood schools.
17. Stop privatization and focus on providing full resources to neighborhood schools.
18. There was no authentic community involvement in the closure process.
19. Work with the community for a more appropriate plan.
20. Let Englewood high schools students complete their schooling in Englewood.
21. Phillips, deemed not good enough for South Loop children, apparently is good enough for displaced Englewood children.
22. Students bussed across the city into new communities will face an unnecessary interruption in their emotional and social lives.

23. The plan is another example of the neglect that CPS shows to lower income neighborhoods.
24. Students at the 4 schools are doing amazing things, especially in light of how little they are given.
25. The \$8.3 million allocated for transition must be accounted for.
26. There is no reason to think that a state of the art school is going to be a golden ticket for resolving complex issues
27. In many instances, receiving schools have greater performance issues than the schools being closed.
28. The time allotted for choosing a receiving school is too compressed.
29. Thought should be given to leaving 2 schools open, so children have a neighborhood option.
30. Removing community anchors like schools will worsen pervasive violence.
31. The plan to close Englewood schools violates state law and the CPS's own Guidelines.
32. Distrust in CPS is warranted and well deserved.

One statement supporting the schools action was from an LSC and Steering Committee Member. The other referenced the fiscal unsoundness of keeping schools open with such low enrollment.

The following are individuals who submitted emails and statements: D. Parker, Dr. Elizabeth Van Opstal, Anthony Pulford, Joanna Brown, Peter McMahan, Haley Gorman, Maggie Campbell, Tony Ginocchio, Gaerin Warman-Szvoboda, Ryan Howell, Vernocia Hannsberry, Colleen Duffy, Shani Blackwell, Elizabeth Fahey Rodriguez, Victoria Long, Sarah Ma, Tiffany Skemp, Emily Panci, Meg Harkins, Claire Rychlewski, Joe Alter, Melanie Wagner, Tarnynon Onumonu, Erica Zazo, Elizabeth Skinner, Kristen Reynolds, Roxana Espoz, Celeste O'Connor, Heather Owen, Kelly Vaughan, Courtney Everette, Brenda Delgado, Andrea Van Ouzor, Elisabeth McCann, PhD, Stephen Smith, Val Smith Susan Dobinsky, Jacquelyn Pope, Kathleen Dragan, Elizabeth Janeczko, Jillian Lych, Tiffany Lyles, Rachel Williams, Alli Rooney, Rachel Azzy, Marpessa Habeshaani, Kimberly Egonwan, jeff Jenkins, Lisa Clark, Kristna Wolter, Allegra Cira Fischer, Judy Edstrom, Michelle Shaw, Andrea Terry, Beatriz Frausto-Sandoval, Amanda Goldblatt, Wendy Miller, Teddy Huff, Tracy Barrett-Franken, Valerie Levan, Dzidzonu Djugba, Becca Blue, Annie Rebekah Gardner, Chandra Channy, Niketa Brar, Amy Pena, Helen Presley, Brian White, Aiko Kojima, Amisha Patel, Kirsten Schnoor, Marie Pickens, Mary Livoni, Lauren Bell, Lisa May Simpson, Erin Haddad-Null, Erin Weinstein, Katie Gruber, Terri Smith, Angela Hubbard, Katheen Boyle, Xochitl Bada, Jenn Kautz, Claire Parker, Jennifer Jones, Alexandra Ritson, Tim Lacy, PhD, Carmen Rodriguez, Jason McInnes, Kattie Madden, Liz Brown, Lisa Weisenberger, Megan Cusick, Cory MacDowell Gilroy, Patrick Brosnan, Sarah Brush, Mary Hughes, Lisa White, Adam Sondag, Julia Carusillo, Shalina Hampton, Harry Bryant, Sarah-Ji, Annie Swingen, Heather Lindahl, Cheryl Widman, Deb Hass, Mark Buban, Clare Fauke, Abbey Hambright, Sandra Stone, Andrea Mitchell, Rachel Collins Dixon, Jennifer Soble, Catherine Francis, Bettina Johnson, Brittany Sowacke, Rosanne Wygodny, Kristin Hamley, Sabrina Craig, Coleen O'Leary, Jennifer Boye, Kate O'Rourke, Diana Pineda, Melissa Sterne, Craig

Althedge, Tara Lockwood, Keith Helt, Autumn Laidler, Catherine King, Nora Gallagher, Jennifer Gierat, Catherine Mach, Jia Carmody, Molly Flaherty, Rick Cardis, Hallie Pallidino, Malissa Fisher, Erin Keiper, Rev. Kristian Johnson, Courtney Langston-Daniels, Nadia Mohajir

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Independent hearing Officer makes the following findings concerning the CEO's proposal to close Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM.

- The CEO has satisfied notice requirements set forth in 105 ILCS 5/34-230, 105ILCS 5/34-232, and Guidelines for School Actions 2017-2018 School Year (Guidelines)

According to Guidelines (Tab A 13):

Criteria for Consolidation or Closure

The CEO may propose a consolidation or closure only if the students impacted by a consolidation or closure will be provided the option to enroll in a higher performing school, whether designated as a welcoming school or otherwise. In addition, one of the following criteria must be met:

1. For a consolidation or closure, the school(s) principal, parents or community members have requested that a consolidation or closure proposal be considered via the process to request proposals outlined in the definitions section and the resulting space utilization after the consolidation will not exceed the facility's enrollment efficiency range as defined by CPS' Space Utilization Standards...;
- Under CPS Space Utilization Standards and Methodology (January 19, 2018) (Tab B 13), Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM are underutilized:

Harper has an enrollment of approximately 134 students in grades 9-12. Hope has an enrollment of approximately 95 students in grades 9-12. Robeson has an enrollment of approximately 128 students in grades 9-12. TEAM has an enrollment of approximately 92 students in grades 9-12.

- The resulting space utilization after closure is within the enrollment efficiency range of Gage Park, Phillips, Bogan and CVCA.

Gage Park, a proposed receiving school to Harper (students north of 67th Street), Hope (students west of Racine), Robeson (students west of Racine and north of 67th Street), has an ideal capacity of 1,104 students, and an enrollment efficiency range of 773-1,214. Current enrollment at Gage Park is 328, which means it has sufficient capacity to accommodate 450-850 additional students.

Phillips, a proposed receiving school to Hope (students east of Racine), has an ideal capacity of 1,980 students and an enrollment efficiency range of 1,873-2,943. The current enrollment at Phillips is 634, which means it has sufficient capacity to accommodate 750-1,500 additional students.

Bogan, a proposed receiving school to Harper (students north of 67th Street), and Robeson, (students west of Halsted and south of 67th Street), has an ideal capacity of 1,476 students and an enrollment efficiency range of 1,033-1,623. The current enrollment of Bogan is 781, which means that it has sufficient capacity to accommodate 250-800 additional students.

CVCA, a proposed receiving school to Robeson (students east of Racine and north of 67th Street), has an ideal capacity of 2,676 students and an enrollment efficiency range of 1,873-2,943. The current enrollment of CVCA is 880, which means that it has sufficient capacity to accommodate 1,000-2,000 additional students.

Under Statute and Guidelines, the CEO may propose a closure only if impacted students will be provided an option to enroll in a higher performing school. Guidelines provide:

“Higher performing school” means:

- (1) receiving a higher level on SQRP for the 2016-2017 school year, or**
- (2) if the 2016-2017 school year level on the SQRP is equal, higher performing means performing higher on the majority of the following metrics:**
 - b. for high schools – for the 2016-2017 school year, Freshman On-Track rate, ACT composite average, 5-year cohort high school graduation rate, college enrollment rate and college persistence rate**

The performance rating metrics utilized by the CEO for each school proposed to be closed is nowhere in the Record. Instead, the CEO proffers (Tab C 24) a chart detailing higher performing options that would be available to sending school parents and students. Only a chart references the tie-breaker provision, and, by way of color coding, indicates that taking into account tie-breaker factors and performance metrics (referenced above), CVCA, Phillips and Bogan are higher performing than sending schools. Nowhere in the chart do statistics demonstrate that these schools – with the same numerical value as the sending schools -- are higher performing. While nothing compelled the CEO to show facts supporting this

conclusion that the receiving schools are higher performing, where school rating is an integral consideration in determining whether Guidelines were met, the omission of these facts is significant and surprising. Too, the omission of school ratings for Harper, Hope and Robeson is equally disturbing. This information was gleaned from the CPS website. TEAM, a Level 3 school, would likely (but not definitely) have higher performing options, as would those Harper, Hope and Robeson students, who would reside within the proposed redrawn boundaries for Gage Park.

Many speakers at community meetings and this Hearing expressed outrage that students in the effected schools would have their education interrupted, and they likely would attend schools just as challenged as their own, both in terms of academics and underutilization. Moreover, parents and students feared for student safety due to gang activity in areas with which they had no familiarity. They also voiced concern that their neighborhood would be destabilized by the school closures. One of the most often mentioned criticisms of the plan was that 4 neighborhood high schools should not be closed at one time, a situation students, parents, and community members believed would not happen in any other area of the city.

The CEO has prepared Draft Transition Plans for each effected high school. Each Transition Plan is largely the same. The Transition Plans for each school describe security, safety, social, academic and other supports. A CEO representative explained that with these transition supports and \$8.3-million in funding to implement them, the CPS goal was that students would select higher performing schools. In support of the plan, CPS relates that 90% of students within the boundaries of the effected schools already have elected to attend non-neighborhood public and charter schools. Apparently, the CEO's hope is that, with the addition of supports outlined in the Transition Plans and the funding to implement them, current Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM students, numbering approximately 450, would follow the same path to higher performing non-neighborhood high schools. Is this realistic?

With a high rate of homelessness acknowledged across the student population of the 4 high schools, and an undisclosed number of diverse learners and English learners, it is impossible to conclude that the CEO's expectation will actually happen. Draft Transition Plans offer a potentially rich menu of supports and funding. However, it is impossible to gauge from the plans whether students will be able to overcome the challenges they must to actually exercise an option to attend a higher performing school. All we know is a simple fact: that options will be presented.

Other than enrollment figures and facility capacity, little is discussed in the plan concerning the unique characteristics of Harper, Hope, Robeson and TEAM. What little is known came from concerned persons, who spoke at community meetings and Hearing. Educators, especially at Harper, discussed award winning enrichment programs already in place. Many lamented that the rich heritage of these schools would be lost.

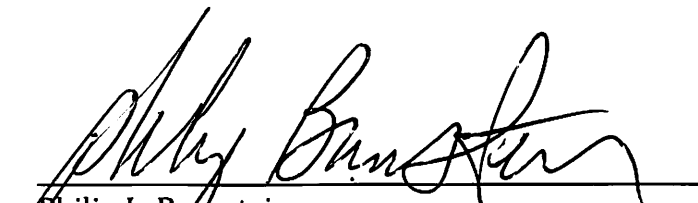
In determining whether to propose a reassignment boundary change, the CEO may consider things, such as school culture and climate, leadership, quality of facilities, and the “feasibility of impacted students to access options that are higher performing, including the likelihood of admittance and distance of travel required.” Other than free CTA passes and the staging of buses at school, the plan provides little detail regarding a safe and successful transition. Perhaps the CEO did consider the elements referenced above. However, there is no indication that these factors were considered. Maybe, with community input, the Draft Transition Plans can be improved when a final transition plan is presented.

Not surprisingly, public speakers had little objection to the building of a new state-of-the-art high school. However, many felt that resources would be better spent on improving the existing school facilities and enriching the curriculum. Speakers discussed the feasibility of maintaining one or more of the schools until the new high school was on line. In this regard, the Hearing Officer observes that the Steering Committee vote was 6 in favor of closing the 4 schools in June 2018, 2 in favor of closing them in June 2019 and 5 abstaining or voting for other options. Which other options were considered is undisclosed. It is noteworthy that, at Hearing or community meetings, 3 Steering Committee Members spoke in favor of the plan, while 5 spoke in opposition.

FINDING:

While the Independent Hearing Officer finds that the plan minimally meets Guidelines, the question ought be asked: Does minimal adherence to Guidelines, while allowing the plan to move forward, constitute success or adequate attention to the goals of the plan? Process is important. So, too, is substance. If the Board approves the CEO’s proposal as written, it is assumed that transition plans will be refined, as the Guidelines provide, to take into account concerns expressed by public speakers.

February 7, 2018



Philip L. Bronstein
Independent Hearing Officer