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**Barbara Byrd-Bennett**  
Chief Executive Officer

DATE: March 21, 2013

Parent or Guardian of a Student at  
Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School  
3030 W. Arthington St.

Parent or Guardian of a Student at  
John Milton Gregory Elementary School  
3715 W. Polk St.

Re: **Proposed Closure of Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School**

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), I am committed to ensuring that every child in every neighborhood receives a high-quality education that prepares them to succeed in college, career, and life.

Right now, the reality is that too many of our children are not receiving the education they deserve. We have a school utilization crisis that is spreading our limited resources too thin. We are funding half-empty buildings that are costly to maintain and repair instead of using those funds to directly invest in our children's education. This crisis did not happen overnight, and we will not fix everything overnight either, but our children need and deserve for all of us to work each and every day to improve their chances to succeed.

From investments in early childhood education and a full school day to ensuring there are strong principals and teachers in our schools, we are working each and every day towards achieving that goal and doing everything we can to make sure Chicago's children will thrive and succeed.

We must make certain that every child can attend a school that has the supports and resources needed to help every student flourish. Combining schools will allow us to use more resources to ensure that every student attends a higher performing, 21st century school with updated amenities, more individual instruction, and the programs they need to compete and succeed. I have made the commitment that every student and parent will have an option to attend a higher performing school in the fall and that is a commitment you can be sure I will keep.

Make no mistake, this will be hard. As a former teacher and a principal, I've lived through school closings. They are never easy, no matter where you are. But in my 40 years as an educator, I have never felt more certain that we need to take action now. If we do not take action, our children and their futures will pay the price for our delay.

I want to assure you that I have heard your concerns and I have taken them to head and heart: I will never seek to improve education at the expense of our students' safety. As we work to improve our children's quality of education, we will also work to ensure they are supported and safe by coordinating and collaborating with city agencies such as the Chicago Police Department and the Department of Family and Support Services, as well as community and faith-based organizations.

After a thoughtful, rigorous process in which we looked at every individual school and incorporated the feedback we received from more than 20,000 of you – parents across the city and community members in every neighborhood – we are making multiple proposals today. I am making a recommendation to close Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School (Bethune). I am also recommending that John Milton Gregory Elementary School (Gregory) serve as the dedicated welcoming school for students at Bethune in the fall.

There are a series of supports that we will provide in order for your child to have a safe and seamless transition to a higher performing academic environment at their welcoming school. These include:

- Access to a dedicated, higher performing welcoming school with additional capital investments and further supported by new resources to safely and seamlessly transition students in fall 2013;
- A safety plan for all students and staff at all welcoming schools created in coordination with the Chicago Police Department and other community-based organizations;
- Social and emotional supports based on the specific needs of students;
- Supports for students with diverse learning needs;
- Supports for students in temporary living situations;
- Supports for English language learners; and
- Facility improvements will be made to enhance the overall learning environment of the new school. Improvements may include items such as upgrades to playgrounds, science and computer labs, air conditioning, and others.

Lastly, principals at all welcoming schools will also receive additional discretionary funding that they can use to support the unique needs of all students at those schools.

A detailed proposal is outlined below. Please read it and carefully consider the supports we are offering to help your child receive a higher quality education at their dedicated welcoming school. And please know that our work is still not complete and your continued input will be critical in the weeks ahead. I encourage you to participate in the two community meetings and one public hearing for your school noted in the proposal below. I thank you for your continued feedback as we work to provide your child and all CPS students with the high-quality education they deserve.

### **Our Proposal and Investments**

Our proposal is to close Bethune, located at 3030 W. Arthington St. at the end of the current school year because it is underutilized, based on CPS Space Utilization Standards and student enrollment numbers recorded on the 20<sup>th</sup> attendance day for the 2012-2013 school year. Specifically, Bethune had 377 students enrolled on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of attendance, but has the capacity to serve 780 students. Bethune students will be welcomed by Gregory, located at 3715 W. Polk St. While the closure of Bethune is not related to performance, it is important to note that Gregory is a higher performing school, according to the [Chief Executive Officer's Guidelines for School Actions](#) (Guidelines).

A draft transition plan has been sent home from school with students, which outlines investments that will support a smooth and safe transition for all students.

Furthermore, CPS is committed to providing educational opportunities that fit each student's unique learning needs and each family's priorities, and encourages families to decide if this welcoming school is the best fit for their child. To support families in this decision, information from the Office of Access & Enrollment is available in the draft transition plan.

### **Attendance Area Boundary of Bethune**

I am also proposing that the geographic boundary currently associated with Bethune will be reassigned to Gregory, located at 3715 W. Polk St., and Jensen Elementary Scholastic Academy (Jensen), located at 3030 W. Harrison St. This means that Gregory or Jensen, depending on the student's home address, will be the new neighborhood school for students living in the Bethune boundary who are not currently enrolled at Bethune.

### **Public Comment on this Proposal**

Public comment can be made during the following two community meetings and one public hearing:

#### **Community Meeting 1**

Monday, April 08, 2013  
5:00pm-7:00pm  
Manley High School  
2935 West Polk Street

#### **Community Meeting 2**

Thursday, April 11, 2013  
5:00pm-7:00pm  
Manley High School  
2935 West Polk Street

#### **Public Hearing**

Thursday, April 25, 2013  
5:30pm-7:30pm  
CPS Central Office  
125 S. Clark St.

I invite you to share your feedback on this proposal at the scheduled community meetings and public hearing. If you wish to comment at the community meetings or hearing, you must sign up to speak on the day of, at the designated location, beginning one hour before the designated start time and ending one hour after the start of the meeting or hearing. You will have two minutes to speak, unless the hearing officer or meeting organizer provides an extension. The hearing will conclude at the stated end time or following the comments of the last person who has signed up to speak, whichever occurs first.

After the community meetings and public hearing, I will review a written report from the hearing officer. At that time, I may recommend that the Board of Education of the City of Chicago consider and approve the closure of Bethune.

**Further Questions and Concerns:**

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call 311 (City Services) or visit [www.cps.edu/qualityschools](http://www.cps.edu/qualityschools).

Thank you for your consideration and patience during this time as we work to provide your children with all the resources and supports they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barbara Byrd-Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a stylized "H" at the end.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett  
CEO, Chicago Public Schools