Data and Democracy Project: Investing in Neighborhoods

Research Paper Series, Paper #3

Examining CPS’ plan to close, turn-around, or phase out 17 schools

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A collaboration of

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Urban development policy is much more locally driven today than in the past and much more reliant on a variety of intersecting streams of public and private resources. As a result, efforts to revitalize communities are more interrelated, interdependent, and potentially conflicting in practice. In turn, the ability to evaluate the effects of policies and programs intended to improve communities requires information that is more crosscutting and interdisciplinary in nature.

The Data and Democracy Project aims to make a contribution to study of education, economic development, and housing policies in Chicago through an in-depth study of their relationship on the ground. The overarching question we aim to answer is: "How do these three policy agendas intersect when used to revitalize communities, and what kinds of benefits are produced?" Recognizing that the term "benefits" is relative and often subjective, we are producing new measures that go beyond the traditional indicators of neighborhood improvement (e.g., change in household income), educational achievement (e.g., test scores), and economic development (e.g., change in property values). Instead, we examine "benefits" from three interrelated dimensions of social justice: economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation.

While research on each area of policy exists – much of it produced by UIC researchers including those on this research team – there is a dearth of data that can be used to answer basic questions about the interrelationships between these different policy arenas. Chicago provides a fertile site to explore these intersecting policies, and to specifically look at how race and ethnicity affects and is affected by public and private interventions. This is important since an array of strategies are being employed in predominantly African American and Latino neighborhoods to improve schools, create jobs and build new housing: Renaissance 2010, which aims to “transform” 20 percent of Chicago’s public schools into new high-performing but often select or special enrollment schools; Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a public financing mechanism that is used to attract and retain new businesses and private investment through infrastructure improvement and tax incentives; and the Plan for Transformation, which is redeveloping public housing into mixed-income communities.

The Data and Democracy Project is developing a more comprehensive and in-depth framework to analyze and interpret changes in community conditions relative to policy goals and stated beneficiaries. Our intent is to make this data and analysis available to policy makers, planners, non-profit agencies, foundations, residents and community leaders, as well as other researchers, concerned with making sure the development of new schools, housing, and businesses in communities of color actually benefit – and not push out – the very families that are assumed to be the target for these improvements.

Groundwork for the Data and Democracy Project began when UIC acquired two databases from the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, a well-known fiscal watchdog organization in Chicago that closed its doors in February 2007 after 18 years of organizing and information dissemination about capital improvements and tax policy. The databases contain historical information on capital improvements for the Chicago Public Schools and property values and public investments in each of the city’s
approximately 173 TIF districts. This data has been updated and shared with university scholars and community leaders/activists to examine education and the contested nature of the city. This dialogue with people affected by and acting on housing, community economic development, and education issues on the ground helped to sharpen our research questions, which include:

• What kinds of new schools are being constructed, where are they being opened, and from which neighborhoods are students being pulled?

• What kinds of schools are being closed, where are they located, and what was the justification for their closure? Where have students that previously attended these schools been placed?

• Where are areas of new housing construction, condominium conversion activity, foreclosures, and public housing demolition relative to the placement of new schools, modernized schools, and closed schools?

• Where are areas of greatest racial and ethnic change relative to the placement of new schools, modernized schools, and closed schools?

• Where are areas of greatest property value change relative to the placement of new schools, modernized schools, and closed schools?

• Are parents and students in neighborhoods that have been the recipients of new or modernized schools more or less satisfied with these facilities? What additional public services and investments are necessary to improve the quality of the education received in these schools?

• When new schools are constructed, or created from existing schools under Renaissance 2010, what are the internal and external effects of drawing students from new and dispersed feeder neighborhoods?

• What are the educational opportunities in new schools, which students do they serve, and do these represent more equitable educational experiences for African American and Latino students?

• Which schools have received TIF funds for modernization and school construction?

• What are the advantages and disadvantages of using TIF funds to finance school improvements instead of going through the Board of Education’s normal capital budgeting procedures?

• How are community residents, students, parents, and school-, neighborhood- and city-wide-organizations shaping development policy through local organizing efforts? What voice do they have in shaping the changes occurring in schools and communities?

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“All change is not growth, as all movement is not forward.”

Ellen Glasgow
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides data that can be used to examine Chicago Public Schools plan, announced November 30, 2011, to close, phase out, turnaround, or co-locate 20 schools. The report focuses on school closings, phase outs, and turnarounds.

Neighborhood Conditions: Many of the schools to be closed or turned around are in areas with higher than average poverty rates in 2000 and in 2010 and a majority of residents African American. Some neighborhoods have seen dramatic increases in housing prices since 2000, resulting in significant demographic changes. This suggests there may be a correlation between school closings and gentrification. Others are showing signs of stress from recent extreme swings in the housing market, foreclosures, and homelessness. Rapid neighborhood change produces neighborhood instability and population mobility, and this trend is likely to get worse. School closures, consolidations, phase outs, and turnarounds are destabilizing for children and families and contribute to the instability working class communities’ face.

Disinvestment and Destabilization of Neighborhood Schools: Schools targeted for closing, phase out, and turnaround report that CPS has not invested in their schools to provide necessary material and human resources and a robust, all-rounded educational program to be successful. They also have been destabilized by a revolving door of mandated interventions, appointed area leaders, and school administrators.

Efficacy of proposed school actions: This report raises several questions about the turnaround strategy: how CPS assesses the success/failure of schools to be closed or turned around, the efficacy of the proposed alternative, what resources the school has received up to now, and effect of disruption on students and community, We find there is insufficient evidence to support the efficacy of the AUSL turnaround strategy or the school closing strategy, particularly when weighed against the destabilizing effects of replacing all familiar and trusted adults or transferring students to other schools.

Community Involvement in Local Decision-making: Another consideration is what role parents and others in the community get to play in the decision-making process prior to CPS announcing plans to close, consolidate, phase out, or turn around a school. Concern about lack of serious consultation has been raised repeatedly since Renaissance 2010 was announced in 2004, and again every year the CPS has announced school closings and turnarounds. 2012 is no exception. The lack of adequate time for participation, location of hearings outside the community and school, lack of access to information, and lack of transparency all impede community members’ participation in decisions that significantly affect them.

Promising School/community based alternatives to top-down CPS actions: Research points to the productive role of community organizing and community involvement in school improvement. Several of the school-communities affected by CPS actions have developed promising alternatives to closings, phase-outs and turnarounds.

Time Out is needed. We call for a moratorium on school closings and turn around schools – and any proposal going forward from CPS that does not seriously engage communities in the decision making process. While this is a start, CPS must do more. Invest resources to support struggling neighborhood schools. Work closely with community-driven school transformation processes and plans. Tap the wisdom and experience of Chicago families and community leaders.
FOCUS OF THIS REPORT

This report provides data that can be used to examine the Chicago Public School district’s plan announced November 30, 2011. The plan – if approved – is to be implemented following a decision made by the CPS board at its February 22nd meeting. CPS is proposing actions affecting 20 schools:

- close two schools
- close three schools in the final stages of phasing out
- phase out two schools
- co-locations at three schools.
- turnarounds in 10 schools

CPS announced that proposed school actions “focus on providing students from among the district’s lowest performing schools with access to higher quality school options and making significant investments to help boost their academic development.” CPS states the schools proposed for action meet the Board’s School Actions Guidelines. The Guidelines stipulate:

- The lowest performing schools in the district are identified using CPS’s Performance Policy which establishes the standards for placing a school on Remediation or Probation for the 2011-2012 school year based on tests administered in Spring 2011 and other performance data from prior school years. Schools rated “level 3” for two consecutive years are included in the pool.
- Schools with a pattern of underperforming other schools in their network – including low test scores and low graduation rates – remain on the list.
- Schools with low school improvement rates remain on the list.
- The school actions list takes into account other significant factors that influence school quality, including the school climate, condition of facilities, quality of leaders and community feedback.

Turn around schools
These schools will continue to serve the same students but positions of all adults in the building will be terminated and the turnaround organization will hire a new principal, teachers, and staff. There are more turnarounds proposed this year than in any previous year. Turnarounds will affect approximately 5,800 students. The Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), an external education management organization which currently runs 19 turnaround schools, would take over 6 more schools serving nearly 3,200 students. CPS Office of School Improvement would operate 4 new turnaround schools serving 2,650 students. Each turnaround school will receive $2 million to upgrade facilities and educational programs. Several schools will receive additional funding for major renovations.

AUSL Turnarounds

- Pablo Casals Elementary School, 3501 W. Potomac Avenue in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood.
- Brian Piccolo Elementary Specialty School, 1040 N Keeler Ave. in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood.
- Melville W. Fuller Elementary School, 4214 S. Saint Lawrence Avenue in the South Side Bronzeville community.
- Theodore Herzl Elementary School, 3711 W. Douglas Blvd on the West Side.
- Amos Alonzo Stagg Elementary School, 7424 S Morgan St. in the South Side Englewood community.
- Marquette Elementary School, 6550 S Richmond St. on the Southwest Side in the Chicago Lawn community.
CPS Office of School Improvement (OSI)

Turnarounds

- **Chicago Vocational Career Academy (CVCA) High School**, 2100 E 87th St. on the South Side in Avalon Park.

- **Edward Tilden Career Community Academy High School**, 4747 S. Union Ave. in the Back of the Yards neighborhood on the South Side.

- **Wendell Smith Elementary School**, 744 E 103rd St., in the Roseland neighborhood on the South Side.

- **Carter G. Woodson South Elementary School**, 4414 S Evans, in the Bronzeville community on the South Side.

Closing schools

Five schools will be closed by Fall 2012: two schools, affecting 400 students and three additional schools already in the phase-out process, affecting 127 students.

- **Simon Guggenheim Elementary School**, 7141 S. Morgan St., in Englewood on the South Side.

- **Florence B. Price**, 4351 S Drexel Blvd., in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side.

- **Julia C. Lathrop Elementary School**, 1440 S. Christiana Ave., on the West Side in North Lawndale (previous phase out).

- **Walter Reed Elementary School**, 6350 S. Stewart Ave., in the Englewood community on the South Side (previous phase out).

- **Best Practice High School**, 2040 W. Adams St., in the Near West Side community (no longer has students (previous phase out).

Phase-out Schools

The proposal will affect 2 schools and 950 students. Existing students may remain enrolled in the school, but no new students will be enrolled, and the school will decrease by one grade level per year. All students currently enrolled in these schools will be allowed to graduate. According to CPS, "incoming freshman students who live in the current boundary for either school will be reassigned to a higher performing neighboring high school."

- **Walter H. Dyett High School**, 555 E. 51st St., in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side.


Co-locations of Charter Schools

CPS proposes co-locations of charter or contract schools within three existing CPS schools that have the capacity to hold additional students. This will involve 3 schools and 1,292 students.

- **ACT (KIPP) charter school within Henry H. Nash Elementary School**, 4837 W. Erie St. on the West Side in the Austin community.

- **Chi Arts High School, a CPS contract school operated by a non-profit corporation, within James R. Doolittle Jr. Elementary School** (Doolittle East), 535 E. 35th St., in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side.

- **Talent Development charter school within Richard T. Crane Technical Preparatory High School**, 2245 W. Jackson Blvd. in the Near West Side community.
FIGURE 1. SCHOOL CLOSURES, PHASE OUTS, TURNAROUNDS (2012)

#### Legend
- School Actions 2012
- Receiving Schools
- Chicago Community Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>School Address</th>
<th>Receiving School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guggenheim</td>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>7141 S. Morgan St.</td>
<td>A: Bond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>4351 S. Drexel Blvd.</td>
<td>B: NTA; C: Fuller; D: Woodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lathrop</td>
<td>Closing existing phase-out</td>
<td>1440 S. Christiana Ave.</td>
<td>E: Johnson; F: Lawndale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reed</td>
<td>Closing existing phase-out</td>
<td>6350 S. Stewart Ave.</td>
<td>G: Nicholson; H: Banneker; I: Parker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dyett HS</td>
<td>Phase-out</td>
<td>555 E. 51st St.</td>
<td>J: Phillips HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Crane HS</td>
<td>Phase-out &amp; Co-Location</td>
<td>2245 W. Jackson Blvd.</td>
<td>K: Wells HS; L: Manley HS; M: Marshall HS; N: Farragut HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nash</td>
<td>Co-Location</td>
<td>4837 W. Erie St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Doolittle</td>
<td>Co-Location</td>
<td>535 E. 35th St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Casals</td>
<td>AUSL Turnaround</td>
<td>3501 W. Potomac Ave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fuller</td>
<td>AUSL Turnaround</td>
<td>4214 S. St. Lawrence Ave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Herzl</td>
<td>AUSL Turnaround</td>
<td>3711 W. Douglas Blvd.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Marquette</td>
<td>AUSL Turnaround</td>
<td>6550 S. Richmond St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Piccolo</td>
<td>AUSL Turnaround</td>
<td>1040 N. Keeler Ave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Stagg</td>
<td>AUSL Turnaround</td>
<td>7424 S. Morgan St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>CVS</td>
<td>OSI Turnaround</td>
<td>2100 E. 87th St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>OSI Turnaround</td>
<td>744 E. 103rd St.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Tilden HS</td>
<td>OSI Turnaround</td>
<td>4747 S. Union Ave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Woodson South</td>
<td>OSI Turnaround</td>
<td>4414 S. Evans Ave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Does not include Best Practice High School, which no longer has students.
PUTTING THE CPS PLAN IN CONTEXT

A lot has changed in Chicago in the last 25 years. Neighborhoods that were once home to working class families have been up scaled while many middle class enclaves around the city are now struggling with foreclosure and declining property values. Gentrification pressure in communities along the lake – north and south – pushed many families with children out, resulting in a loss of over 15,000 school age young people between 1990 and 2000. This was further exacerbated with the transformation of public housing beginning in the late 1990s, which has moved thousands of families around the city and is still not completed. And while the central area of the city grew 66 percent this past decade and is now home to nearly 185,000 people, mostly higher income Whites, the City’s south and west sides lost nearly 180,000 middle and lower income African Americans between 2000 and 2010.

Our schools have also changed. We now have a market of schools to shop from: alternative, selective enrollment, performance contract, military, and charter, turn around, as well as traditional neighborhood elementary and high schools. Many of the new schools are operated by non-profit private organizations, such as the Academy of Urban School Leadership (AUSL), a private organization, currently operates 19 schools and has aspirations to operate at least 6 more, with some reports of a total of 35 schools in the near future. These privately run schools operate under a contract with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and some contract out management to for-profit corporations. All rely on investors including the CPS and other public agencies but also foundations and corporate philanthropy to operate.

In this new education market, many neighborhood schools are competing with schools with open attendance boundaries that recruit children from all over the city. Others restrict access. Magnet and selective schools only enroll students that fit their criteria.

Figure 2. Types of schools in CPS system, 2011-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Chicago &quot;Public&quot; Schools</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative High Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement academies</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract schools</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnaround elem &amp; HS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance schools</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter schools</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

2 Affordable Housing Conditions and Outlook in Chicago, UIC Voorhees Center, 2006 http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/Publications/nc_woodsrspt_0706.pdf
The language of choice suggests that parents now have better school options to choose from. This assumes being able to meet the criteria, which relatively speaking very few students in CPS schools can when it comes to the select enrollment schools. It also assumes that parents will have the know-how and time to be savvy consumers. More importantly, the new types of schools are presented as better alternatives to public neighborhood elementary and high schools. In reality, this is not the case. Currently, 24 charter schools are listed as either being on Academic Watch Status or Academic Early Warning Status.  

While new schools were being added, the CPS has been closing, turning around and phasing out neighborhood schools, pushing thousands of students out of their neighborhood. In three years – 2008-2010 –CPS closed, phased out, consolidated or designated as “turn around” 53 schools. An estimated 15,000 youth were directly impacted. This does not include the youth at nearly 100 schools receiving displaced students. The justification that students would get into better schools did not hold based on research in 2009, which found that only about six percent of recent displaced students had moved to the top schools in Chicago and gained academically. The same concerns are being raised now as CPS announced that 10 schools would be closed or turned around in 2012.  

State legislation introduced in 2009 created the Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force, which is charged with ensuring that “school facility related decisions,” such as the ones being made now, are educationally sound and fiscally responsible, and made with community input. When CPS announced its proposal, the reaction from a large number of residents and public school supporters was that these decisions were neither grounded nor necessary. The Task Force agreed and in January 2012 called for a moratorium on closings and turnarounds. The reasoning: “CPS’s historic and continuing lack of transparency and evidence-based criteria for decisions resulted in the pervasive climate of public suspicion about what drives CPS to take

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4 Data from the Illinois Interactive Report Card, retrieved February 12, 2012 from http://iirc.niu.edu/Default.aspx. AEWS means Academic Early Warning Status. These schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years and are eligible for state sanctions. AWS means Academic Watch Status. These schools failed to make AYP for two additional years after being placed on Academic Early Warning (or four annual calculations of missing AYP) and are eligible for additional state sanctions.  
school actions and allocate resources, often in ways perceived to be highly inequitable.\textsuperscript{6} Further, as the Task Force chair state Rep. Cynthia Soto, D-Chicago noted: "This is a new (CPS) administration. They really have to get to know these communities before they start to take school actions. Some of the schools they've proposed are performing and should not be targeted."\textsuperscript{7}

**How did we get here?**

Clearly, the current state of instability at CPS and in our neighborhood schools is not a recent phenomenon. We can trace back the 25 years when school reform in Chicago began as an earnest, democratically based effort. Back then, Chicago was hailed as a pioneer for putting local school decision making into the hands of elected local school councils. Progress was made in some communities, however, it was short-lived. By 1995 a new agenda started with the introduction of high stakes accountability under Paul Vallas – the first Chief Executive Officer of CPS. The shift toward a business management approach to schools set the stage for today’s education market in Chicago.\textsuperscript{8} However, it was the arrival of Arne Duncan in 2001 that really laid the groundwork for what is happening today. CEO Duncan’s tenure is often referred to as the “diversification” period of CPS because he featured so many different approaches to educational reform. Duncan favored an education market and expanded the number and types of schools in the system. Under the Renaissance 2010 plan, CPS opened 155 new schools and closed 82 schools in just eight years (2001-2009). While graduation rates increased during this time, so did the percentage of students leaving the system and racial gaps increased, especially between African American and white students.\textsuperscript{9}

During this period, a lot of resources were put into magnets, turnarounds and charters – buildings, equipment and classroom materials. While selective enrollment and magnet schools have state of the art school facilities and resources, many neighborhood schools in African American and Latino working class communities have no library, science or computer lab, are lacking up-to-date books or even enough texts for children to take home. While CPS has put millions of dollars into upgrading buildings and providing additional resources for turnaround schools, other schools in close proximity have overcrowded classrooms and lack basic resources. As a result, Chicago has produced a two-tier school system with most of its neighborhood schools on the bottom.

Framed as creating choice, these efforts have instead created turmoil and stress for many families whose children are traveling all over the city in search of better educational opportunities. Many parents either spend time driving their children around or worrying about them taking public transportation, or they spend their money on private transportation. For families sending children to their local underperforming neighborhood school, many worry about the quality of their child’s education but also that their school will be closed or somehow changed, which may or may not benefit their child. Still, others have decided to take matters into their own hands, developing their own

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strategies to improve school conditions and outcomes for their children. Parents, teachers and principals, with what little resources they have are trying to “turn around” their school without emptying it out or bringing in all new staff.

CPS needs a time out!

What this data suggests is that with all the dramatic changes to Chicago Public Schools in the past decade, we have seen relatively little progress in academic achievement. Instead, we have closed neighborhood school doors on thousands of students, mostly Latino and African American – who make up the majority of public school students. At the same time that dropout rates have gone down for all students, the number of homeless students has increased. As of December 2011, 13,888 students were homeless – while only 3.4 percent of the CPS enrollment, that number is up by nearly 3,000 children since the start of the 2011-12 school year count! And the problem is wide spread with nearly 80 percent of the schools reporting at least one homeless student.10

All this is occurring in a context of increased neighborhood instability and stress in communities experiencing rising levels of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, foreclosures, and public housing demolition. School closings and transferring students to schools out of their neighborhoods has not only contributed churning in our communities, it has increased school violence.

This report reviews the current CPS plans through a lens of “sound” community driven practices to illustrate why these strategies are problematic and how they are likely to contribute to neighborhood destabilization. Also included are case studies that illustrate how currently struggling schools have been disinvested and set up for failure. Some of these cases also demonstrate community driven “promising” efforts that present an alternative to the CPS plan.

Despite the efforts of legislators, CPS continues to plan closures and restructuring schools with seemingly no consistent evidence-based justification. As with the Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force, we call for a moratorium on more school closings and turn around schools – and any proposal going forward from CPS that does not seriously engage communities in the decision making process. While this is a start, CPS must do more. This includes investing resources to support struggling neighborhood schools and working closely with community-driven school transformation processes and plans, tapping the wisdom and experience of Chicago families and community leaders.

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10 CPS data on homeless youth in CPS schools as of December 30, 2011 provided to Laurene Heybach, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.
NEIGHBORHOOD DESTABILIZATION

Overwhelmingly, the students affected by school closings in the past five years are African American or Latino. As Figure 3 shows the schools to be closed or turned around in 2012 are in areas that have a majority of African American residents. These are the same communities that lost thousands of residents between 2000 and 2010 according to the US Census. Some of this can be explained by the Chicago Housing Authority’s Plan for Transformation, which relocated several thousand families out of public housing on the south side. In addition, we suspect that some families may have had to move due to foreclosure while others were displaced by gentrification pressures and speculation (see Figure 4).

Adding to the volatility of these communities is the effects of the housing market, which shot prices way up in the last decade only to bring them way down when the bubble burst in 2008. As Figure 5 illustrates, the change in housing values (based on actual home sale prices) varies greatly around the city. While some neighborhoods have seen increases in housing prices since 2009, they were by no means seeing signs of what might be considered the classic form of gentrification. Instead, these communities along with many others are showing signs of stress from recent extreme swings in the housing market.

Housing boom. The last two decades in the US and particularly in Chicago has been a phenomenal testimony to the power of investment over our communities. Whether attributed to speculation, gentrification, or simply higher demand for certain neighborhoods, the changes in the housing prices in many Chicago communities are striking. This includes several communities with schools now slated to close which began seeing housing sales prices increase rapidly beginning in the early 2000s with several in double-digit figures through 2006. This includes East Garfield Park, Fuller Park, Greater Grand Crossing, Roseland, and South Chicago – and even in North Lawndale and Englewood which had fast increases in sales prices 2004-06. While the housing market has slowed way down, it has not reversed the impact of the boom, and in many cases, the bubble bursting has left these communities worse off with even lower housing values and more vacant properties than before the boom.

Economic bust. The late 1990s marked some of the lowest unemployment rates and the fastest growing housing prices in decades. Yet while property values increased 63 percent between 2000 and 2005 (the market began slowing in 2006), annual median family income actually went down by about $4,000 in that same time period (both values adjusted for inflation). Even now as housing values have dropped, unemployment and stagnant wages have not made housing that much more affordable for many lower-income families.

Foreclosure effects. A broader concern now is that with the recent and sharp downturn in the economy we are likely to see many more communities losing families because of foreclosure. For the most part, this includes families living in single family homes that for whatever reason fell behind in paying their monthly mortgage. Looking at Figures 3 and 4 together, we see that most of the recent foreclosures in Chicago were in non-white communities where housing sales prices in the previous few years had been climbing. A lesser known but important statistic nested in these maps is the number rental units impacted by foreclosure. In 2010, nearly 6,000 apartment buildings went into foreclosure – an average of 123 buildings a week.

These buildings contained over 17,000 units. The estimated 37,700 rental units foreclosed on between 2009-2010 is greater than the number of owner-occupied units in the same period,

**Mobility continues, especially for renters.** Last decade a lot of families moved. About half of all households in Chicago had moved once between 2000 and 2005, which was about 10 percent higher than the US. This is likely due to the loss of affordable housing due to demolition and condominium conversions in the private market, the demolition of public housing and the loss of thousands of subsidized housing units. At that same time, many higher-income families were also moving into new homes. The most recent data from the US Census provides a startling statistic: 52 percent of renters in Chicago moved into their unit between the beginning of 2008 and spring of 2010. At the same time, less than 10 percent of owners moved during that 2.5 year period. While the housing crisis may have slowed down the movement of owners, it has clearly accelerated the mobility of renters.

**Homelessness continues rising.** When a rental building is foreclosed, tenants are evicted. For some families, this means moving to another apartment with little notice or time to search. For some, decisions are made to keep children in the same school, which may mean families separating when they are forced to move outside an attendance boundary. For others, eviction can mean becoming homeless if you have limited resources and cannot afford the necessary deposit and first month’s rent. According to the latest data from CPS, there are 13,888 homeless students in the system as of December 2011. In the fall, this number was 10,535 -- a 31% increase in four months – which was higher than that past few years.

In sum, a variety of factors in the housing market have contributed to rapid neighborhood change affecting neighborhood demographics and school enrollments. These factors also produce neighborhood instability and population mobility, and this trend is likely to get worse. In this context, it is important to ensure that education policies do not exacerbate student mobility and further destabilize communities. Schools may be one of the few anchors in communities in flux and under stress. Policies that destabilize schools and displace children or their teachers en mass undermine this important role for schools in a time when many of Chicago’s mostly low-income students of color and their families face destabilizing conditions.

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13 For more detail read Affordable Housing Conditions and Outlook: And Early Warning for Intervention. 2006. Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, University of Illinois at Chicago. At [http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/](http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/).

14 CPS data on homeless youth in CPS schools for September and December 2011 provided to Laurene Heybach, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

15 See “Number of Homeless Students Increases.” December 2008. Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.
Figure 3 Percent African American (2010) by planned school actions (2012)
Figure 4: Planned school actions (2012) with foreclosures and public housing.

Legend:
- Potential School Actions, 2012
- Closed Schools, 2001-2011
- Current & Former CHA Public Housing
- Foreclosure Associated Vacant Property by Chicago Community Area*
  
  - 0 - 69
  - 70 - 160
  - 161 - 284
  - 285 - 591
  - 592 - 693

* Source: Woodstock Institute, 2011
Figure 5 Percent change in median home sales price, 2009-2012 with potential school actions (2012), existing turnaround schools and schools closed in last decade.

The average change in home values throughout Chicago was -23%.

- Turnaround Schools
- Potential School Actions, 2012
- Closed Schools, 2001-2011

% Change in median home sale price 2009 - 2012 by Chicago community area:
- -100% - -35.7%
- -35.6% - -28.9%
- -28.8% - -22.4%
- -22.3% - 0%
- 0.1% - 118.3%

Data Source: Chicago Tribune
DISINVESTMENT AND DESTABILIZATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

For schools to succeed and to provide students a robust, all-rounded education, they must have the necessary material and human resources. In examining why schools are struggling, a basic question is: Has CPS invested in the schools? Do they have the basic resources to be successful?

Schools also need the stability of sustained, high quality programs, curriculum, and leadership chosen and implemented through a school-based, collaborative process. Thus, in examining why schools are struggling, a second important question is: Has the school had sustained, research-based interventions and leadership stability? Was the school-community part of the process?

Disinvestment in neighborhood schools facing closing, turnarounds, phase out. The quality of a school’s physical plant is a fundamental factor in its success. Up to date science labs, libraries, physical education facilities, and technology as well as a well-functioning and maintained building provide a productive learning environment and send a message to students and teachers that CPS cares about them and supports learning. Investing in struggling neighborhood schools is an important indicator that CPS wants them to succeed. Yet many neighborhood schools in Chicago are in disrepair. Yet Tim Cawley, Chief Operating Officer of CPS, seemed to indicate that CPS policy is actually to disinvest in these schools. In December, 2011 he told the Chicago Tribune, "If we think there’s a chance that a building is going to be closed in the next five to 10 years, if we think it's unlikely it's going to continue to be a school, we’re not going to invest in that building." Overall, CPS has not prioritized essential components of a quality education and social support for all students. CPS has not allocated funding for every school to have at least one full time art and music teacher, comprehensive physical education, enough school nurses and counselors, support for emergent bilingual learners, and smaller class sizes.

Schools that are named as failures and proposed to be closed, phased out, or turned over lack necessary resources, adequate teaching and support staff, arts and music, libraries, science labs, and textbooks. Many of the schools also have large class sizes even though education research has established that students who learn in smaller classes, especially in the crucial early grades, have higher academic achievement and on-time graduation rates, lower drop out rates, and greater academic engagement than peers in larger classes. Reducing class size is most beneficial for low-income students and students of color.

Parents, teachers, and students testifying at hearings on school actions cited a history of CPS failing to invest in their schools (see below). They cited large class sizes and lack of funding for necessary staff, libraries and art and music classes. These are basic building blocks of quality education.

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Class size:

- Woodson, a proposed turnaround school, has over 30 students in its 1st grade class. The other 1st and 2nd grade class is a split-level class with a total of 29 students.

- Casals’ early grades also have overcrowded classes with nearly 30 students per classroom from kindergarten through 2nd grades.

- At Guggenheim, proposed to close, last year’s 3rd grade class had 32 students, greater than 91% of all CPS schools. Its kindergarten had 28, greater than 70% of all CPS schools. The situation has not improved this year with both split-level classes and overcrowded classrooms – 35 3rd & 4th graders, 26 5th & 6th graders and 29 7th & 8th graders are taught in split-level classes. Class sizes are not any better for classes that are not split-grades. There are now 32 students in the 2nd grade class and 29 in 1st grade.

- At Lathrop, instead of providing the school with the necessary funds for staff to teach each grade separately with reduced class sizes, the 4th and 5th grades, and the 6th and 7th grades are combined in split-levels classes.

Art and Music:

- Only 25% of CPS elementary schools are provided funding for both arts and music. Most schools are forced to choose between the two.

- Out of the 12 elementary schools proposed for closure/turnaround, only one has both art and music positions funded.

- Price, Lathrop, Guggenheim and Reed have neither.

- Herzl, Smith and Fuller and Stagg are only allotted a part-time teacher for one of the subjects.

Libraries:

- Across CPS, 1 in 4 elementary schools do not have school libraries.

- Out of the 12 elementary schools proposed for closing/turnaround, neither Lathrop, Piccolo, Fuller, nor Smith have a designated librarian staffed at their schools.

Inequitable investment in turnaround and charter schools. On the other hand, turnaround schools receive significant additional funding, more instructional staff, resources, and improvements to the school facility. The proposed 2012 turnaround schools are slated to receive at least $20 million, and this does not include millions more in capital spending on building renovations. In addition, AUSL schools have additional adults in the classrooms. Chief Operating Officer, Crawley, said that buildings housing turnarounds are more likely get interior renovations, bathroom facilities or an addition. "We believe that we get more bang for our capital investment buck when we couple it with a program change in the building," Crawley said. "When we turn a school around, when we add a new gifted program or a language program … we believe there’s a synergy that communicates to students and families that it’s a new day, that there’s new things happening at the school."20

While CPS plans to cut back investment in struggling neighborhood schools, which are in low-income African American and Latino communities, CPS also plans significant additional funding for turnaround schools and charter schools in the next school year. This continues a record of prioritizing Renaissance 2010 schools, including charters, for capital

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improvements. The CPS capital budget plan announced at the December 14, 2011 Board of Education meeting shows capital improvements disproportionately in schools serving a higher proportion of white and affluent students than the district average. And almost one-fifth of the $660 million will go to schools proposed to be closed down, turnarounds, or required to share space with charter schools.

Charter schools are also slated to receive a bigger chunk of district funding and support from CPS. A new “District-Charter Compact” will give charter schools in Chicago easier access to school facilities and an increase in per-pupil public funding. The Compact is part of a Gates Foundation initiative called “District-Charter Collaboration Compacts.” Gates will provide CPS with $20 million to help charters find and buy facilities. Mayor Rahm Emanuel said “he hopes high-performing charter operators from around the country will ‘look at this as an opportunity to set up shop.’”

Destabilization. Schools slated for school actions have experienced a revolving door of top-down imposed interventions and programs, principals, and area leadership. This churning has been destabilizing. Perhaps this is why a theme running through community hearings was that teachers and parents felt they had been “set up for failure”.

As Table 1 below shows, many schools faced with closing, phase out, or turnaround have experienced a significant turnover of school administration and area leadership. On average, over six years (2005-2011), they have had a new principal every two years. Reed has had five principals and Price four during this period, and many of the schools have had three principals. During this period, each area officer lasted approximately 2.4 years. The Area Officer is CPS’s chief executive officer of the area. A new Area Officer means new CPS leadership and often new instructional programs, new mandates, and new kinds of professional development. The merry-go-round of initiatives driven by a revolving door of leadership is highly destabilizing.

In addition, the schools slated for CPS actions have experienced multiple school openings and closings in their area. School closings involve transfer of students, often to schools now slated for closing or turnaround. These are also areas with large numbers of charter schools opening and competing with neighborhood schools for students. The destabilizing effects of all these school openings and closings are documented in the Bronzeville case studies. This is in a context of neighborhood instability due to volatile housing markets, gentrification, and high mobility. The instability of housing and population are undoubtedly contributing factors to the huge drop in student enrollment and high mobility rates in schools facing actions as compared with the city average (see Table 1). Charter school openings are likely also a contributing factor. In sum, through school closings, turnarounds, and opening charter schools that compete for students with neighborhood schools, CPS is contributing to the churning of the low-income African American and Latino neighborhoods where the proposed school actions are located.

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# TABLE 1: DESTABILIZATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Network Area</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Former Instructional Area</th>
<th># Area Officers, 2005 - 2011</th>
<th># Principals 2005 - 2011</th>
<th># AP's</th>
<th># of Nearby Schools Closed</th>
<th># of Nearby Charters Opened</th>
<th>% Change in Enrollment 2005-2012</th>
<th>2011 Mobilization Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin-North Lawndale Elementary</td>
<td>Herzl</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-31.7%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lathrop</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-78.9%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nash</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-53.9%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnham Park Elementary</td>
<td>Fuller</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-42.7%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doolittle</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-58.6%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-78.5%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woodson South</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-33.7%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Englewood-Gresham Elementary</td>
<td>Guggenheim</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-29.9%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-90.4%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stagg</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-18.4%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garfield-Humboldt Park Elementary</td>
<td>Casals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-25.1%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Piccolo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-43.9%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Calumet Elementary</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-44.0%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midway Elementary</td>
<td>Marquette</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-0.02%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Side High School</td>
<td>CVS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-64.6%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dyett</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-45.8%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Side HS</td>
<td>Tilden</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-65.9%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Side HS</td>
<td>Crane</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-50.3%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.6%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposed School Actions Have Potentially Serious Consequences

If schools are consistently failing to educate children and support their development, serious action is warranted. However, phasing out, closing, and turning around schools are drastic steps that can destabilize schools and displace students, parents, teachers, and communities. The Board of Education should consider the effects of proposed school actions on:

- **Student safety.** Since 2004, closing schools and transferring students to schools outside their immediate neighborhood has resulted in spikes in violence in elementary and high schools. In addition, parents are concerned about the safety of young children bused to schools far from home or forced to cross dangerous streets on their way to school. In 2009, a student at Fenger High School was killed in a student fight. When Carver High School was turned into a selective enrollment school beginning in 2000, students were transferred to Fenger (5 miles away), despite a history of conflict between students from the Carver and Fenger neighborhoods. In 2009, CPS made Fenger a turnaround school. Most adults in the school were fired. As a result, when student conflicts erupted in Fall 2009. There were few trusted adults who knew the students and could defuse the situation. Parents directly attributed the student death to the destabilization of both Carver and Fenger.

- **Disruption of relationships with trusted adults.** Research demonstrates that authentic caring is a key ingredient of school success for low-income/working-class students of color. In contexts where students experience destabilized housing and economic conditions and disinvestment in their neighborhoods, long-term relationships with trusted adults in their schools can be an important stabilizing factor, giving them support for learning and development.

- **Mobility.** Student mobility is harmful to academic progress. Most school districts develop policies to limit the harmful effects of mobility, e.g., providing transportation for homeless students to remain in a “home” school. In addition to mobility caused by closing schools, turnarounds that remove all familiar adults from a school building and bring in a new set of unfamiliar teachers, administrators, and staff with whom neither trust nor personal connections exist is a form of mobility that is destabilizing to students and families.

- **Loss of committed educators and school staff.** Terminating the contracts of educators and staff, some of whom have given years of committed service to schools and communities, represents a loss of important resources and is devastating to the teachers and staff concerned. Many support and service staff in neighborhood schools live in the communities where they work. Their termination breaks connections between the school and its community.

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Demoralization of phase-out schools. A phase-out is a death sentence for a school. No additional students are admitted but existing students are allowed to graduate. For these remaining children, the school withers in front of them as teachers are let go, programs are cut, space is co-opted by a new school that moves in, and resources dry up. The decline accelerates flight from the school, hastening its demise. This runs counter to CPS’s stated goal of providing “access to higher quality school options” and “making significant investments to help boost [students’] academic development”.

As a whole, the negative effects of school actions are of particular concern in communities that already face instability, violence, and stress due to poverty, racism, unemployment, housing instability, and disinvestment.

Thus, we propose several points to consider in assessing if the proposed CPS actions are appropriate and necessary and if better alternatives exist. The following combination of factors should be taken into account in taking action to close or phase out schools and terminate school staff.

1. How are academic achievement and progress measured? This should be multisided. Test scores are just one measure of academic achievement, and a narrow measure of what students know and can do. They are insufficient to assess student learning or the quality of a school’s educational program overall. Other forms of assessment are necessary to holistically assess student learning and progress, for example, evaluation of student work over time, projects such as research papers or science projects, and assessments of students’ ability to synthesize and apply knowledge to solve problems, including real world problems.

There are other aspects of a good or improving school, including the level of student support and safety, teachers’ commitment to students and community, ways in which the school contributes to building community stability, strong expectations for students’ academic success, quality of curriculum and instruction, professional growth of the staff, and programs that support children’s all-round development.

2. Has a school been given the resources to succeed? Support includes strong and stable leadership; high quality educational programs sustained over time with adequate professional development and support; current and sufficient high quality educational materials, facilities, and technology; necessary school staff for a well-rounded educational experience: appropriate student support staff and services.

3. Has the proposed school action demonstrated its efficacy? Is there substantial independent research supporting closings, turnarounds, and phase outs? Is the efficacy of these actions sufficient to warrant serious disruption to students and the school community?

4. Is there a viable alternative? Does the school-community have a promising plan for school transformation? Are there promising developments in school leadership, curriculum, teaching staff, and school culture that suggest the school can lead its own transformation? Would the school community plan and promising steps underway benefit from additional CPS resources targeted for schools facing actions?

27 See for example the School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement (SIPAAA) for Reed Elementary which has been phasing out for two years: http://schoolreports.cps.edu/SIPAAA/SIPAAA_REED_610264.pdf
EFFECTIVENESS OF PROPOSED ACTIONS?

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires corrective action for schools persistently failing to make "Adequate Yearly Progress." Options to restructure failing schools through comprehensive changes in leadership, staffing, and governance include: reconstitution/turnaround (replacing administrators and teachers), conversion to charter schools, closing schools and sending students to a better school in the district, take-over by education management organization. Since 1997, CPS has employed five restructuring strategies: Reconstitution, School Closure and Restart, School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP), Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) turnarounds, and CPS Office of School Improvement (OSI) turnarounds.28

National research indicates that although these actions may work in some situations, they have not worked across the board. The research concludes that, in general, turn-around strategies are either unproven, ineffective, or harmful.29 An authoritative review of the research found that NCLB's top-down model of accountability and coercive action, such as school closures and turnarounds, is ineffective, creates turbulence, and violates professional norms of educators and leads to demoralization.30

Effectiveness of school closures in Chicago

Chicago’s policy of closing schools and transferring students to other schools (Renaissance 2010) has not improved learning for displaced students. Research shows school closings did not generally improve elementary students’ educational opportunities as most displaced students were transferred from one low-performing school to another with virtually no effect on academic achievement.31 Moreover, new schools did not necessarily benefit these students. Schools that were reopened as charter schools or under new management showed substantial changes in the composition of the student body. The reopened schools served students who were more affluent and had higher prior achievement and fewer special education students. The schools also served fewer students from the neighborhood around the school.32

Effectiveness of Turnarounds in Chicago

In February 2012, the Consortium on Chicago School Research released a summary report on top-down restructuring models in Chicago. This is the first substantial study of turnarounds and other restructuring models in Chicago. The findings are inconclusive. The report shows small gains in achievement in mathematics and reading, while high schools that underwent interventions showed no differences from similar schools in rates of student absence or students on track to graduate. Positive effects are also confounded by the huge infusion of resources in turnaround schools and by the fact that some neighborhood schools were "turned around" by replacing them with schools that selected students by lottery, i.e., charter schools. As the Catalyst Chicago review of the study notes, "In fact, the study draws no conclusion about whether turnarounds are the best strategy to improve the lowest-achieving schools, or whether the Academy for Urban School Leadership is the best organization to carry it out."34

Several national researchers have also raised questions about the study's methodology and the significance of the reported gains. "There are many limitations to this study and if one were to take a true, critical eye at these results, they do not conclusively show these reforms caused these schools to turn around in the way described in the report," said Geoffrey Borman, professor of education and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dan McCaffrey, a statistician at the Rand Corporation, criticized the study's inclusion of schools that experienced drastically different interventions. Schools that were closed and re-opened as charters and magnets had new higher performing students than the students previously enrolled in the school. "Shifting students and changing labels is not a legitimate way to improve a school," said McCaffrey. The U.S. Department of Education refused to endorse the study because of methodological questions.

Data provided by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) also dispute the report's conclusion that turnaround schools did not systematically push out students. (The report shows that reenrollment rates in the first year of intervention were similar to the rates before intervention, with the exception of schools that were closed and restarted.) CTU data show a pattern of loss of large percentage of students in turn around schools compared with neighborhood schools in the same area. The CTU

35 Prof. Borman noted it is difficult to control for the huge influx of resources and the fact that some schools replacing neighborhood schools picked students by lottery.
36 www.ctunet.com/for-members/text/SchoolClosingResearchBulletPoints_3-2.pdf Fenger High School went from an enrollment of 1200 in 2009, its first year of turnaround, to fewer than 700 students in 2011, a loss of 42%. Neighboring Julian lost 200 students over that time period, a loss of 14%. Harper High
data continue to raise questions about whether students at turnaround schools are being pushed out or choosing not to attend.

**School actions at what cost?**

School closings and turnarounds are drastic actions under any circumstances, but they can have particularly serious consequences in communities that are already destabilized by disinvestment in jobs and community institutions, poverty, high unemployment, high rates of incarceration, and housing instability due to closing of public housing, gentrification, and home foreclosures. Schools are anchors in these communities. A school closing can be the “last straw” pushing low-income residents out of a gentrifying neighborhood, facilitating the process of turning it over to middleclass residents. A school closing or turnaround results in loss of community programs and trusted educators, lack of safety, and may increase student mobility. It means disruption of established parent-school connections.  

The February 2012 Consortium study raises concerns about the loss of experienced teachers and teachers of color. The study found that less than 10 percent of teachers in schools that were closed and reopened as new schools or turnarounds were rehired. This represents a rupture of established ties between educators and the students and families in those schools. The new teaching staffs were whiter, younger, less experienced, and more likely to have provisional certification than the teachers who were at the schools before the intervention.  

Of particular concern is the loss of African American teachers. Over the past 10 years, CPS has experienced a disproportionate loss of African American teachers. From 2000 to 2010, the African American teaching force declined by 11% (from 40.6% to 29.6% of all teachers) while the percentage of white teachers increased by 5.2%. ISBE state report cards show that the district lost 2,759 African American teachers. Because most schools closed or turned around in Chicago were in African American communities with the heaviest concentrations of African American educators, African American teachers have been particularly affected, especially since replacement schools are hiring more white teachers. The loss of 11% of African American teachers in a district whose student population is nearly 50% African American has serious implications for equity and for students’ educational experiences. There is a large body of research demonstrating that successful teachers of African American, Latino, and other students of color understand and relate to their

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http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=163

39 http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source=About_Educators&source2=Teacher_Characteristics&districtID=15016299025&o3f3o=D

http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx
students’ communities, backgrounds, and cultures, and these teachers are more likely to be teachers of color. CPS officials should consider the psychosocial cost of proposed actions for students of color.

Third, there are concerns about the destabilizing effects on homeless students. Almost 10% of the students enrolled in the schools facing school actions are homeless as compared with an average of 2.6% of students in the district. At Dyett High School, proposed to be phased out, 30% of students are homeless. Homeless students already face high mobility, so school actions will have a disproportionate impact on one of the district’s most vulnerable student populations.

Questions to consider

- If there is not conclusive evidence that turnarounds are the best strategy to improve the lowest-achieving schools or that the Academy for Urban School Leadership is effective, why is the district expanding this strategy?
- Are the huge investment and the turmoil and harmful side effects caused by turnarounds worth it?
- In a number of schools slated for school actions, school data and evidence presented at school hearings indicate that the schools have begun a promising school-based improvement (see Piccolo case study) or that the schools and communities have developed a viable plan for school transformation (see Bronzeville and Crane case studies). Why not invest the resources and support earmarked for turnarounds and charter schools in existing schools and their promising school-community plans and initiatives?

Building the AUSL district?

In 2008, AUSL Executive Director, Donald Feinstein, stated that by 2012, AUSL planned to operate 25 schools, including 20 schools serving grades K-8 and 5 high schools. Feinstein also commented in an interview with the U.S. Dept. of Education that AUSL did not expect to return the schools to the district, as with some other turnaround models, but planned to operate them long term as a district within CPS. AUSL now operates 19 schools. If the Board approves proposed 2012 school actions, in fall 2012 AUSL will operate 25 schools -- 20 k-8 schools, 5 high schools. The location of proposed turnarounds and school closings indicates that many would directly feed into AUSL’s networks (see Figure 6).

A question to consider

Are the highly contested and disruptive proposed school actions warranted or are they part of an agreement between CPS and AUSL to develop an AUSL district within CPS?

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43 http://www.ed.gov/oese-news/ausl-chicago
FIGURE 6. AUSL NETWORKS AND FEEDERS FROM 2012 ACTIONS

Note: Howe & Morton first became AUSL turnarounds in 2008 and then became AUSL teacher training sites in 2011.
PARENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Participation in decisions about school actions
An important consideration is what role parents and others in the community play in the decision-making process prior to CPS announcing plans to close, phase out, co-locate, or turn around schools and what role they play in transforming their schools.

The 1988 Chicago School Reform law established elected Local School Councils, making Chicago a national model for democratic parent and community participation in school decision-making. The law established that parents and community members are legitimate and necessary decision-makers in what happens in their children’s schools.

However, since the Renaissance 2010 plan was announced in 2004, parents, community members, students, teachers, staff, administrators, and LSC members have consistently maintained they have not been consulted and their perspectives have not been taken into account when CPS has decided on actions affecting their schools. They have argued that the process is not transparent, and they have been shut out of decisions. These concerns have been raised repeatedly at community meetings and during public comment sessions of meetings of the Chicago Board of Education.44 Concern about

exclusion of community participation and lack of a transparency was so widespread that in 2009 the Illinois State Legislature established the Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force (HB630) to oversee the process by which CPS makes facilities decisions and ensure that school facility decisions are transparent, made with the input of the community, and reflect educationally sound and fiscally responsible criteria.

Despite mandated legislative oversight, the CPS process continues to raise doubt about its commitment to genuine community participation and its respect for the views of those affected. Public meetings on school turnarounds and closings for 2012 were held at CPS headquarters, making it difficult for many parents to attend. Some meetings were scheduled until 10:00 PM, adding another obstacle for working parents. Meetings that were held in the community were not at the affected schools. The hearing structure does not allow for dialogue. At the final set of hearings, CPS power point presentations supporting proposed school actions took up as much as half of the allotted two hours. Parents, teachers, principals, students, and community members were allowed just two minutes each, and there was no

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opportunity for the school community to present its case in a unified presentation or to systematically present their own plans for school transformation. Few Board of Education members attended these meetings, and there was no opportunity for parents, students, teachers, or community members to question CPS officials.

This is particularly troubling because while CPS presents quantitative data supporting closing or turning around schools, the community has little opportunity to challenge or question these data. Even some school principals, who should have the best overview of their school, were allotted only two minutes to speak. The qualitative data presented by teachers and parents—their observations on improvements in school leadership, school climate, academics and importance of the school to the community are not given equal weight with CPS data. Yet, established educational research and school evaluation use a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative data.

As a result, on January 12, 2012, the Facilities Task Force approved a resolution stating that CPS was out of compliance with House Bill 630. They accused CPS leaders of being disingenuous in engaging parents and community members.

**Parent-community role in school transformation**

Research on school improvement supports the collaboration of educators, students, communities, and parents in transforming schools.

Researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research identified what are now known as the *Five Essential Supports* for effective and sustainable school improvement:

1. Strong school leadership as the driver for change
2. Strong links to parents and the community
3. Development of teachers’ professional capacity
4. Safe and stimulating, student-centered learning climate
5. Instructional guidance and materials

The researchers contend that all five supports are *integral* to transforming schools. Because schools are complex organizations, the researchers concluded that all five supports are *interdependent*—they function as part of a unified whole. The overall success of school transformation depends on all five supports working together. As the authors state, “…we ultimately came to view the five supports as an organized system of elements in dynamic interaction with each other….” (p. 66). Using an analogy of baking a cake, they argue that the absence of one of the supports does not just mean that the “cake” tastes bad—it means, “…if one of the ingredients is absent, it is just not a cake” (p. 66). Strong links to parents and the community is one of the five supports.

A Designs for Change study of 144 Chicago K-8 Schools with 15 Years of sustained achievement gains also identified *Family and Community Partnerships* as one of five essential supports for student learning. Thus, there must be strong ties between a

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school and parents and community for a successful process of school transformation and on-going improvement.

Top-down actions by CPS officials run counter to the essential supports for school improvement identified in the research. Failure to work with, consult, and develop relationships with parents and communities in a process of school change demonstrates lack of respect for the members of the school community, lack of democracy in decision making, and failure to tap community wisdom.

**Promising School-community alternatives to top-down CPS actions**

Over the last decade, researchers have begun to document the role of community and parent organizing in democratizing education policy making and promoting sustainable and equitable school reform. This research analyzes how parents and school communities across the U.S. have collaborated with teachers and principals to create more equitable school cultures, foster culturally relevant teaching, and create more powerful learning communities.

In 2010, a coalition of 35 local, state and national parent, student and community organizing groups petitioned the U.S. Dept. of Education to adopt a Sustainable Success Model for “dramatic and sustainable” school

change that would require school districts to: 1) undertake a comprehensive needs assessment—done in partnership with parents, educators, students and community members—so that local solutions are tailored to local problems, 2) implement research-based instructional and educational reforms, 3) address essential social, emotional and physical needs of students, and 4) recognize parent, student, and community leadership as key to sustainable student success. This proposal is based on the premise that parents, community members, and students have knowledge valuable to a school vision and they should play an integral role in transforming their schools. The coalition’s report emphasized a combination of community wisdom and research-based strategies:

These are our communities. We know the strengths and the challenges in our schools. Responsible school change is a process of collaboration between students, parents, communities and educators. Successful school change must employ research-based strategies that have the greatest likelihood of actually improving conditions for learning. Dramatic action is not enough; we need to get it right.  

Several of the school-communities affected by CPS actions have developed promising alternatives to closings, phase-outs and turnarounds. The proposal for a Global Achievers’ Village would create a network of Bronzeville schools including, Dyett, Price, and Fuller (see Bronzeville case

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study below). Crane High School parents and teachers have proposed a plan to improve their school. Other schools facing CPS actions have already begun promising new practices initiated by new leadership (see Piccolo case study) while other schools have strong existing programs that could be built on to develop their schools. 

A question to consider: Rather than forge ahead with drastic actions that do not have the support of the school community, why not work with teachers, principals, parents, and community members to transform their schools by building on existing strengths, promising developments, and school-community plans to transform their schools?
Bronzeville has been ground zero for school actions since 2001. Since that time, CPS has closed and turned around 15 schools and proposes to close/turn around 4 more in 2012 (see Figure 7 below). These school actions have exacerbated conditions for a stressed and polarized community—one in which the destruction of public housing and the shuttering of healthcare and childcare facilities, along with massive displacement and home foreclosures exist side by side with upscale housing development and gentrification (partially tempered by the 2008-09 economic crisis) and new schools (charters and turnarounds). The Bronzeville community has been hard hit by destabilization and disinvestment by the city of Chicago as a whole. This year, CPS proposes to close, phase out, or turnaround four Bronzeville schools: Dyett High School (phase-out), Price Middle School (close), Fuller Elementary School (AUSL turnaround), and Woodson Elementary School (CPS turnaround). The case studies of Dyett and Price examine and illustrate CPS’ disinvestment and destabilization of Bronzeville schools and its disregard for meaningful community input.

Neighborhood Destabilization
The map below shows school actions in the greater Bronzeville community over the past ten years (Figure 7). This year’s proposed CPS actions are marked in yellow, including Dyett and Price. According to a report issued by WBEZ and the Catalyst:

Very few of the schools shut down have remained vacant. Many house charter schools, magnets or selective enrollment schools. Almost all of the schools that closed were neighborhood schools with attendance boundaries. More than half of the replacement schools admit students by lottery or test scores.

These closings and openings have created substantial dislocation of students, as some students have attended as many as four schools in their elementary school careers.

Figure 7: Completed (Red) and Proposed (Yellow) School Actions, Mid-South Area, 2001-Present.

Small circles are turnarounds, teardrops are closings/phase-outs.

50 http://www.wbez.org/no-sidebar/Chicago-school-closings
53 Source: http://www.wbez.org/no-sidebar/Chicago-school-closings

Three of the four Bronzeville schools that CPS is proposing to close (Woodson is not included) are part of the Bronzeville Global Achievers Village (BGAV). This plan is facilitated by the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), an established organization started in the 1960s. The BGAV plan also includes Reavis Elementary, Robinson Primary (K-3), and Mollison Elementary. The thrust of the plan is to have a “village” of six schools, five of which feed into Dyett High School (although Robinson feeds into Price, which feeds into Dyett). The six schools will be connected through a shared vision of education based on the community and its culture, strong LSC and family involvement, wrap-around supports for students’ emotional and social needs, and a globally oriented and rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum.

The BGAV plan has been developed over the past 18 months with much community participation. KOCO staff have held numerous planning sessions with parents, teachers, administrators, community residents, students, and outside partners to develop coherent and cohesive curricular frameworks, shared values and mission for the village, and a workable strategy. The plan is also well supported by numerous external professional partners, including the Strategic Learning Initiative, an organization with a documented track record of successfully working with school communities to transform teaching and learning. CPS is well aware of the network, and KOCO and school staff have repeatedly reached out to CPS administration for partnership and support.

However, the plan to close, phase out, and turnaround half of the schools in the BGAV makes clear that CPS intends to ignore the proposals. This is the case, even though the plan comes directly from the community—that is, it is home grown in Bronzeville. The CPS proposal to close or turnaround half of the schools in the Village is seen by many community members as a summary rejection of the plan, despite months of patient, painstaking work. Many Bronzeville residents interpret this as a slap in the face to the community, students, parents, teachers, and administrators, and cite it as a prime example of the disrespect CPS pays to community wisdom and democratic inclusion.

Florence B. Price Middle School Case Study

Price Middle School Gardens
Shania [Interviewer from the Philadelphia Student Union]: Your middle school, Price Elementary School in Chicago, was part of the Renaissance 2010 plan. Can you talk about what it was like?

Osha [Chicago HS student, former Price student]: Well before it was turned into a middle school [2006-7], violence wasn’t really an issue. Then they started to close all these schools around our community and started sending students our way. The violence did increase because the new students didn’t get along with each other. So it was like a whole shake up.

Shania: Could you think a little bit more about why the violence was happening between students?

Osha: Closing schools in our community—well, not in our community, but schools that were nearby—brought students into our schools who had conflicts. They [CPS] kicked those students out and when they got into our school, [students] fought each other, because of basketball rivalries or because of where we live, you know? One person was with this group and another person was with that group and then someone says “that’s the guy who tried to jump me” or something like that...then they just start fighting and stuff. The violence just started increasing. [Spring 2011]

The above dialogue captures one aspect of the destabilization—spiked violence in communities saturated with school actions and student transfers—that Price Elementary (now Middle) School has experienced over the past 10 years. Price has also faced insufficient investment and lack of inclusion in the decisions CPS has made for the school. Destabilization, disinvestment, and lack of democratic inclusion at Price, taken together, have severely hampered the education of Price students over the past decade.

CPS Proposal to Close Price
Price is located at 44th Street and Drexel Boulevard in Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood on the Southside. Its student body is 99.3% African American, 96.6% low-income, and 16.4% of students are classified as special education. CPS officials argue that Price should be closed because, “...year after year, Price has failed to give its students access to the quality education they need to grow academically. Price’s chronically low performance is hurting its students and their futures. We must provide students with access to a better education now.” The CPS rationale for closing Price, presented at its January 6 hearing, revolves around three claims:
1. Price has been on probation for four consecutive years.
2. Almost one out of two Price students are not meeting IL state standards.
3. Price is in the bottom 8% of schools in the District.

Understanding Price’s Performance in its Larger Context
Price’s academic performance has to be seen not only in light of the destabilization, disinvestment, and lack of democracy perpetrated by CPS in the school community, but also through understanding the larger neighborhood effects of poverty, massive displacement, and gentrification in the

54 http://phillyeducationjustice.org/"we-had-fight-lessons-chicago-communities'-struggle-against-school-closings
55 http://lirc.niu.edu/
Mid-South area. Furthermore, one cannot examine Price’s performance without also considering how CPS, as a whole, has succeeded—or failed—in supporting schools across the city in low-income communities of color. For example, while it is true that Price has been on probation for four straight years, so have hundreds of other CPS schools. A cursory examination of the 250+ schools listed on the FY12 Probation List shows that almost 200 of them have been on probation for four (or more) consecutive years, or about 80% of the schools on probation. Price is not exceptional. A pertinent question is: Since the number of schools on probation in CPS has almost tripled since the beginning of Renaissance 2010 (CPS’ signature effort at improving underperforming schools by closing them, transferring students, and supporting turnarounds and charter schools), in what ways can one frame Renaissance 2010 as a successful school improvement project? And why is CPS continuing the same policies this year?

CPS also states that “almost one out of two Price students” does not meet state standards. Conversely, this means that more than one out of two is meeting state standards. This was not the case in 2001, when less than one out of four (22.9%) Price students met state standards. Since that time, there has been a steady, gradual, but definitely uphill trend. That is, Price has been an improving school over the past decade, according to CPS’ own data, as shown in Figure 8 below.

These two points—Price is similar to hundreds of other schools on probation, and it has steadily if slowly improved—call into question CPS’ argument that Price should be closed. And, it does not address an important question: How does the history of disinvestment and destabilization impacting Price affect its academic performance as measured by CPS metrics?

Figure 8: Price Elementary School, Composite ISAT Over Time—Percent Meeting/Exceeding

57 http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/allschools.html
History of Destabilization and Disinvestment

No analysis of Price’s academic performance can be complete without taking into account the churning of schools in Bronzeville or the turnover of leadership at Price – both have destabilized the school.

At the end of the 2003-4 school year, CPS closed two elementary schools in Bronzeville, Raymond and Douglas. Students from Raymond were supposedly to attend a Perspectives Charter School, but that school has a lottery and neighborhood students have no guarantee of being accepted. Similarly, students from Douglas were to attend Pershing West Middle School, but that school became Pershing West Magnet School in 2007, again, with no guaranteed acceptance of neighborhood students. Thus, some students came to Price from Raymond and Douglas, with no extra support or resources. Each of those schools is about 2 miles from Price. Given turf and gang lines in Chicago, this had a major destabilizing impact on Price.

In 2006-7, CPS combined Price and Robinson elementary schools, both of which were K-8 schools, but from different geographic areas that had different gangs. CPS turned Robinson into Robinson Primary School (grades K-3) and Price into Price Middle School (grades 4-8), with no extra resources to either school to handle the complexities of merging students from different neighborhoods. Robinson was to be a feeder to Price. According to a Price LSC member and to youth who were students at Robinson and Price at the time, the merger caused students from both geographic areas to form “crews” for their own protection, increasing tension in the school. These actions contributed to the spiked violence that former Price student, Osha, spoke about in the quote at the start of the case study. This was a major destabilization of Price school.

After Price and Robinson’s attendance boundaries were combined, near-by academically higher-scoring schools (e.g., Ariel Community Academy and Pershing West Magnet School) and new, well-financed charter schools (e.g., Perspectives Charter at IIT Campus) siphoned off some higher-achieving students. Price, a neighborhood school mandated to take all students, admitted students with lower test scores. Once Robinson became a K-3 feeder to Price, the Robinson principal, according to a Price LSC member, recommended that higher-achieving students avoid Price and instead go to Ariel and Perspectives Charter. Furthermore, after Robinson became a feeder to Price, Price’s percentage of special needs students spiked, from an average of a little over 12% the preceding three years, to an average of about 17% over the next five.58 Both the loss of academically more prepared students and the disproportionate numbers of academically less prepared students and special needs students further contributed to the destabilization of Price.

At the end of 2004, Price’s principal of 14 years, Dr. Carl Lawson, retired. Since he left, there have been six principals in eight school years (one of whom was an interim principal). Strong school leadership is key to improving schools. From this standpoint, the extreme turnover in leadership at Price is very disturbing and certainly destabilizing.

http://acct.multi1.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/allschools.html
CPS Plans for Price Students

If Price closes, the designated receiving school will be National Teachers Academy (NTA), run by the Academy of Urban School Leadership (AUSL). Students will be bused to the school, which is four miles away. Price’s current attendance area would disappear and be spread between two nearby schools, Woodson and Fuller59 (both of which CPS proposed for turnaround this year due to their probation and performance status—that is, they are “no better” than Price). Those students who chose not to attend NTA would go to their new “neighborhood” schools, Woodson or Fuller. All three possibilities are in different gang territories than Price, furthering the possibility of violence. Other students may be spread far and wide. According to a recent CCSR study, “Of the displaced students who reenrolled in CPS elementary schools...less than half attended one of the designated receiving schools.”60 Thus, two salient issues are that the majority of displaced Price students could attend schools no better than Price, and all the students are potentially in harm’s way if Price closes.

Community Response to CPS Plan

In response to CPS’ proposal, community members raised a number of issues at CPS hearings and in public meetings: the safety of the children and destabilization from school closings, the need to develop and strengthen neighborhood schools, the disinvestment in Price especially compared to turnaround schools’ resources, and the disregard for community input.

Safety and Destabilization: NTA is four miles away from Price. Given CPS' track record of protecting students from closed schools who transfer to schools in new neighborhoods,61 parents are fearful for their children’s safety. They have consistently brought up this concern at CPS community hearings on proposed Price school actions (January 6 and January 20, 2012).62 For example, a parent asked, “How will CPS stop fights in the classrooms at National Teachers Academy (NTA) [if Price students are relocated there]” and expressed “concern over fighting between students from different schools.” Another community resident said he “does not see how CPS can take an action like this [closing Price] and view it as doing anything but disrupting a culture of calm.”

Strengthening, supporting, and investing in existing neighborhood schools: Parents throughout Chicago have consistently advocated for quality schools, with appropriate resources, in

61 For example, closing Austin High School, with the resulting spiked violence at Wells and Clemente High Schools; closing Englewood High School, causing spiked violence at Hyde Park, Dyett, Hirsch, and Robeson High Schools; making Carver Area High School selective enrollment and the spiked violence at Fenger High School.
their own communities. The Price LSC chair said, at the January 20 hearing, “The LSC is committed to children receiving a world-class education in their own neighborhood.” Another community resident commented, at the January 6 hearing, that she was “concerned about children being taken from a school where they have been since kindergarten and that students and teachers have relationships with parents….students’ grades will drop if they are taken out of their school.” She also worried about “the relationships that have been developed over the years.”

Price LSC member and president of the PAC said, “If the proposed action is about the children, why move them from the building they are already in? Why move students around when they have a school in their own community?” A January 29, 2012 Chicago Tribune article reported that CEO Brizard himself concurred with the importance of neighborhood schools. Brizard: emphasize[d] that the best school options come from improving neighborhood [emphasis added] campuses rather than from increasing the number that have selective enrollment…..”What we have to do, folks, is create great schools for kids, no matter where they are,” Brizard said.63

A main theme at the hearings was CPS’ inequitable investment in schools and the historic lack of CPS support for Price. One teacher said that, “the support that CPS is offering [at NTA], such as a full-time social worker, should be offered here in the community.” A parent LSC member at Price said, Put the proper resources into the school. If CPS can do it at NTA, CPS can do it at Price. Price doesn’t have music or art. There are so many disparities in CPS. The disparities across the city are unfair and unconstitutional.

Another community member said, “If CPS does what it does in schools on the north side, and gives the same amount of resources, they [Price] will get the same results. It is unfair to expect the same result when different resources are being provided.” And a parent said, “You cannot hold schools accountable if they don’t have the proper resources. Don’t transport these students out of their community – they need to know that they have been invested in and not spread out across the community.”

Disregard for community input: There has been a consistent disregard for the perspective of the school community and a violation of the process the Board is mandated to follow. On November 30, 2011, CEO Brizard wrote a letter to Price parents proposing to close Price. The letter stated, in part, “…we are proposing today, after a very lengthy and thoughtful process, to close Price…”64 This was the first letter informing Price parents that CPS intended to close their school. This suggests that the “very lengthy and thoughtful process” never involved Price administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, students, LSC members, or other members of the school community. A price LSC member, at the January 20 hearing, said that: Her son asked her why CPS wants to close his school—he loves Price and doesn’t want to go to another


64 http://cps.edu/About_CPS/Policies_and_guidelines/documents/TransitionPlan/Price_Parent.pdf.)
school. He asked her, "Why do they feel they need to make a decision about my life and I have no say so about it?" Little people are human beings—they have feelings—they feel that they are under attack, as if they are not worthy to come in to their own school.

The Price LSC Chair presented a letter to the CPS hearing officer at the January 20 hearing explaining its opposition to the proposed closing. She said, “CPS wants to close the schools and shuffle around the children like cattle. You [CPS officials and hearing officer] would not accept this for your children.”

**Conclusion**

Price Elementary School has consistently improved its ISAT scores over the past 10 years. This is so despite the destabilization resulting from being a receiving school when Price and Robinson Elementary schools were combined and reconfigured, the general churning of Bronzeville schools, and other aspects of disinvestment and destabilization. In sum, it seems that CPS has failed to adequately support Price.

In response, the Price school community participated in developing its own plan, one that goes beyond raising test scores. The goal of the Bronzeville Global Achievers Village plan is world-class schools with a rich curriculum, excellent academics, holistic supportive student development, and education for global citizenship. Given the possibilities and promise of the plan, Price’s similarity to hundreds of other overwhelmingly Black and Latino/a schools serving low-income Chicago children, and the district’s historic inability to “fix” these schools “from above,” it seems reasonable that, rather than close Price, CPS administration should commit to work with the school, and its community partners, to develop the Bronzeville Global Achievers plan.
Dyett High School Case Study

It was January 6th, 2012, the night of the first community meeting for the proposed phase-out of Walter H. Dyett High School. Rows of people held signs “Business As Usual Is Not An Option,” and “I Choose Children, Not Adults,” as teachers, parents, and community members used their designated two minutes to speak in support of saving Dyett. Who were these people? Later, it was uncovered that many of them were paid protesters who did not even have a relationship with the community of Dyett High School. But throughout the evening, actual members of the Dyett school community approached the microphone and exposed a history of disinvestment in Dyett over the last few years: loss of teachers, classes online, cuts in counselors and this year no Assistant Principal. A retired CPS teacher and Reading Coach of 28 years articulately stated the core issue with phasing out Dyett. He said, “The solution here is for every school, for every neighborhood school, to be made into a good school…I think things should change—that’s not the issue. How should they change? And I just don’t think that closing down a school like Dyett is the solution. The solution is to invest more in Dyett.” His passion moved the crowd as people burst into applause. The paid protestors holding those signs could do little to combat the heartfelt words.

Dyett School Background

Walter H. Dyett High School is located at 51st Street and St. Lawrence Avenue at the northern-most tip of Washington Park, a leafy, historic Chicago park bordering the Hyde Park community and the University of Chicago on its eastern flank. CPS proposes to phase-out Dyett High School based on chronic low academic performance and the need to provide “higher quality education options” for high school students on the Southside. Dyett High School is a neighborhood public school whose 2011 enrollment was 492. Dyett students are 90.7% low-income and 97.8% African American, and 25.6% of the students are classified as special education. The school received a Level 3 performance ranking for 2011, and only 6.0% of its students met Illinois state standards, although this was more than twice its percentage from the previous school year.

Dyett students protesting at CPS

The decision to phase out Dyett not only puzzles but also angers many parents, students, and Bronzeville community members. In an area beset by school closings and turnarounds over the last 13 years, Bronzeville certainly needs a neighborhood high school. But if CPS phases out Dyett, its attendance boundaries will be reassigned to Wendell Phillips Academy High School at the end of the 2011-2012 school year. Phillips is approximately two miles north of Dyett High School, and is also a Level

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66 http://iirc.niu.edu/Default.aspx
3 school with very similar metrics as Dyett. Because of this, many parents wonder why CPS would use the argument of "chronic academic underachievement" and cite a Level 3 performance rating as reason to phase-out Dyett—and then propose that Dyett students be sent to Phillips. This contradicts the CPS principle of providing a "higher quality education" and mirrors research on previous CPS school closings which found that almost half of students from underperforming schools end up attending schools with equal performance—while only 6% end up at high-performing schools. In fact, Dyett’s performance is comparable to nearby high schools. With the exceptions of King High School (selective enrollment) and Kenwood Academy, all area high schools received Level 3 Performance Ratings, the same as Dyett. More to the point, Dyett and Phillips have almost the exact same demographics and average ACT scores, and the school are not far apart on PSAE scores. Thus parents question: Why send Dyett students to a school that has the same academic and economic challenges?

Dyett High School Farm

Community Investment in Dyett

The greater Chicago community has invested thousands of dollars into Dyett over the past few years. In 2009, the Chicago Botanical Gardens and the Chicago Park District created the Dyett-Washington Park Green Youth Farm, adjacent to the school. The farm has provided employment for 17-21 students each summer since 2009, after-school programs, and community growing space for residents. The ESPN series, Rise Up, partnered with the Chicago Bulls’ community outreach program to renovate Dyett’s gymnasium. This four-week renovation included a new gymnasium floor, basketball hoops, signs and a paint job, uniforms for Dyett’s teams, and sports equipment for the physical education department. The Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) has invested time and resources into developing the youth of Dyett to be informed and organized community members who are able to advocate for their rights and needs.

CPS Disinvestment in Dyett

Despite investment from community members, there is significant evidence that CPS has disinvested in Dyett since 1999, when CPS turned Dyett—historically a middle school—into a high school.

- At community meetings and public hearings, teachers cited the loss of staff as contributing to school destabilization.
- Dyett’s LSC proposed that CPS fund the Read 180 program, a highly researched and effective reading program, desperately needed for the school’s underdeveloped readers. As one teacher testified at a CPS hearing, many of Dyett’s students come to the school reading years below


68 http://www.chicagobotanic.org/greenyouthfarm/
grade level. However, CPS denied the LSC proposal.

- Another LSC member and parent volunteer in the Bronzeville area noted *The Knock at Midnight* Program, a truancy prevention program, also did not receive any funding.

- CPS mandates an art credit to graduate high school, but Dyett lost its art teacher this year due to funding cuts. The result is that in order to graduate, Dyett seniors must still take an art class, but their only current option is to take it online.

- When Dyett became a high school in 1999, there were only seven books in its library according to a long-time Dyett LSC member—and no honors or AP classes.

- In 2011, Dyett’s athletic director wrote an impassioned, and successful, plea to the ESPN media network for extra resources for their athletics programs. At the time, Dyett’s principal commented on the school’s poor physical condition: “The school has probably not been freshly painted in probably 20 or even 30 years.”

**Destabilization**

Since 1999, students living in Chicago’s south side have experienced a large degree of dislocation as dozens of schools have been closed, created, and turned around. As we point out, in the immediate Bronzeville area, CPS closed or turned around 15 schools, not including this year’s proposals. This has had a profoundly destabilizing effect on the community. In particular, with respect to high schools, there have been five key high school actions in Bronzeville since 1999. Some of these have had documented impacts on Dyett.

- In 1999, CPS turned Dyett into a high school. This coincided with CPS turning King High School into a selective enrollment school. Area students not meeting King’s selective enrollment criteria went to other schools. While King accepted higher-achieving students, many lower-achieving students had to go to other schools. And while King got $24 million to renovate, Dyett got nothing for its transition to a high school.

- When CPS phased out Englewood at the end of 2005, Englewood students were reassigned to four Southside schools, including Dyett. Dyett received no extra resources to handle the influx of students, and there was a major spike in violence. In 2006, a former Dyett student, not affiliated with any gang, was murdered around the corner from the school while waiting for a bus in a case said to stem from the closing of Englewood and the mixing of students from rival gang territories. At the time, “Lisa Scruggs, senior policy advisor to CPS chief Arne Duncan, conceded that some of the receiving schools [from Englewood] need more money for security than CPS has provided to date.”

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70 http://espn.go.com/blog/chicago/high-school/post/_/id/1293/dyett-picked-for-athletic-facility-makeover


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72 http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-12-04/news/0212040273_1_martin-luther-king-iii-first-class-smaller-class-sizes

73 http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/The_Board_of_Education/Documents/BoardActions/2005_02/05-0223-EX15.pdf

• DuSable High School closed at the end of 2005-6 and reopened as three new schools, two of which were selective enrollment schools. Students were pushed out and had to attend other high schools.

• CPS turned around Harper High School in 2008, and the school’s enrollment dropped dramatically—Harper’s attendance went from 1258 in 2008 to 770 in 2011, a drop of 39%.  

• When CPS turned around Phillips High School and turned it over to AUSL in 2010, its enrollment was 857. However, AUSL’s website now lists Phillips’ enrollment at 593, a drop of 31%.

No school plan attempting to improve Dyett would be complete without a thorough investigation of who went there over these years, from what schools, under what circumstances, what were the impacts, with what additional resources—or not—and how did this contribute to destabilizing Dyett and its academic performance.

Reactions to Proposed Phase-out

Parents and community members are concerned about students’ safety and security because Dyett’s reassigned attendance boundaries cross different gang territories. The designated receiving school for Dyett students is Phillips Academy. According to an analysis by Chicago Magazine, students traveling by public transportation (since the district will not bus students) must pass through conflicted areas to get from Dyett to Phillips. This has raised concerns among community residents and parents of Dyett students. According to one area grandmo ther, “There are gangs at Phillips High School. I don’t want my daughter caught up over there. If Chicago wants a bloodbath, that’s what they’re asking for. You put these children in other schools, you will have a bloodbath.” A student concurred: “People come from different schools and going to another school, they probably have a rival gang there, and so that’s kind of bad.”

A former Englewood teacher and CTU Representative noted at the January 6 hearing, “Saying we are going to take extra precautions is like saying we are going start a fire, and then we will call the fire department...does this make sense? Is this good for children?” He reminded community members of the transfer of Austin High School students to Roberto Clemente High School, and the spike in violence that ensued as children made the trek to school.

Parents and students fear a repeat of the tragic events that occurred near Fenger High School in September 2009. When CPS made Carver Area High School a selective enrollment military academy beginning in 2000, they made it off limits to the vast majority of students in the massive, adjacent Altgeld Gardens CHA development. Students from the Gardens were reassigned to Fenger High School in Roseland, their new “neighborhood” school—five miles and two bus rides away. CPS then turned around Fenger in summer 2009, eliminated the vast majority of experienced Black teachers from Fenger who had known students, their families, and community for years. In the first three weeks of school in

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75 http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getSearchCriteria.aspx
77 http://www.ausl-chicago.org/schools.html
2009, fights between Gardens and Roseland students were rampant, setting the stage for the tragic death of a student in late September. These events linger powerfully in the memories of Chicago parents and students.

**Student Voices**
It is important to consider student perspectives in any school action. At the final Public Hearing for the proposed phase-out of Dyett (January 27, 2012), about 20 Dyett students spoke against closing their school. Their testimony spoke to disinvestment in the school and fears about safety. This is a sampling of student voices. A Dyett student:

As proof of the continued disinvestment, it is now 2012, and now we only have one honors class...they put us on probation, the took away five teachers, and the worst part is now we are on the phase-out list...CPS always says it is in the interest of the children, but in reality, it is not.

Another Dyett student:

Instead of helping us, they set us up for failure. Our LSC requested the Read 180 Program to help students when they are behind, but CPS said no. Instead of sending future students to Phillips, why don’t you put the money back into Dyett?

A third student cited research: “We still deserve a quality education...The University of Chicago did a study that shows that closing schools does not improve student achievement.” Another said, “CPS is showing students that giving up is ok,” and, another: “We don’t want another Fenger!”

**Special education disparity**
Dyett has one of the highest percentages of special needs students in the city: 25.6% for 2012. This figure is roughly twice the average of CPS schools as a whole (13.1%) and is also twice the average of the area high schools (13.2% -- this percentage, includes Dyett itself). A Dyett teacher commented that if CPS is comparing Dyett’s performance to the rest of the district, “you’re comparing apples to oranges.”

**Conclusion**
Dyett’s academic performance cannot be disentangled from the legacy of lack of support, stability, and investment in the school and the destabilization and disinvestment in the larger Bronzeville and Southside Chicago community. The school needs a massive infusion of extra support, especially when over a quarter of its enrollment is special education students.

The author of an examination of CPS policies in relation to Dyett commented that Dyett could be seen as an exemplar of “one public school’s death by a thousand cuts.” There is little historic record to suggest that phasing out Dyett and sending its students to an equally poor performing school (Phillips) will change students’ lives. Rather, the substantial resources and support given to Phillips AUSL turnaround could be given to the Dyett school community and CPS should support the Bronzeville Global Achievers Village plan, as a viable, community-driven alternative.

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Crane High School Case Study

At the first community hearing that CPS organized to hear comments on its proposal to phase-out Crane HS, the auditorium at Malcolm X College was packed – many supporters but also quite a few “rent-a-protestors.” Crane’s supporters lined up to share one heartfelt story about their school after another. An historic turnout of politicians gave impassioned speeches.

The Crane Coalition presented an impressive slideshow of their academic gains and uncovered how CPS’ numbers are misleading and taken out of context.

“…The school creates a shelter for children…Crane is a home to its students because of the love, honesty, and wisdom of the faculty that never gives up on students.”

“Crane is the hand that puts the kids over the broken bridge.”

“Crane has opened up many doors and created opportunities…people at Crane are like a family…the school is an historical asset for students and the community.”

“…the Crane teachers are ‘there for you’ and do more than just teach in the classroom.”

“If Crane has been on probation for ten years, then an academic advisor should have been implemented to support the school,” Constance Ramsey, Crane HS Clerk.

“What is the [CPS] CEO trying to accomplish by moving students out of Crane?” Dr. Grady Jordan, retired principal and superintendent.

“Are the Crane students not good enough for the new building?” Sherrea Washington, parent.

Background

CPS is proposing to phase out Crane High School starting with the incoming freshman in September 2012. Students will be sent to Wells, Marshall, Manley and Farragut high schools, and a charter school, Talent Development, will move into Crane as a “co-location.” Talent Development currently has 200 students but plans on expanding to 600 next year, its enrollment maximum. CPS proposes to close Crane “based on the school’s chronic academic failure.” The argument is that the school has been on probation for a number of years, has a low graduation rate, and there are “better options” for the students at neighboring high schools.

Demographics

Crane students are 98.8% Black and 0.6% Latino. Eighty seven percent of the students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch and 25.8% are classified as special education, almost twice the district average of 12.2%. Crane also has a homeless student population of 7.7%, more than triple the district average of 2.2%. Given the extensive research base supporting the fact that poverty, disability, and lack of housing stability strongly impact students’ academic performance, it is clear that Crane students need extra support to succeed in school.

Community Area/Neighborhood Conditions

Crane is a neighborhood high school on Chicago’s near West side, close to the United Center, expressway, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Illinois Medical District, and downtown.

http://iirc.niu.edu/
LISC Chicago’s New Community Program spearheaded a new neighborhood within the community, and in 2007, Bloomberg News listed the area as one of the nation’s “most up and coming”\textsuperscript{83}. Many large warehouse and office buildings have been redeveloped into condos, making the community an extension of the West Loop. Nearby is the Tri-Taylor area, home to many doctors and medical students.

For about fifty years, two CHA complexes fed into the school: Henry Horner Homes and Rockwell Gardens. Henry Horner Homes was the setting for Alex Kotlowitz’s book about urban problems caused by municipal disinvestment, neglect, racism, and disenfranchisement\textsuperscript{84}. These factors contribute to violence in the community. A recent Chicago Reporter article on youth homicide in Chicago reports:

Studies strongly suggest that when young people live in neighborhoods plagued by violence, even when they don’t directly suffer violence, they are considerably more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety, and are more prone to behavioral problems and academic underachievement.\textsuperscript{85}

Destabilization—School and Community
Both Crane High School itself and its neighborhood have suffered from marked destabilization. Gentrification, school closings and openings, and the destruction of public housing combine to create much mobility and dislocation in the near West side. From 2005 until the present:

- CPS phased out three nearby high schools: Westinghouse in 2006, Collins in 2007, and Best Practice in 2009. Enrollment numbers suggest that some of these students transferred to Crane because there was a spike in enrollment at Crane between 2006 and 2007.
- Crane’s enrollment has varied substantially since 2005. From then until 2007, enrollment increased by 13% then steadily and precipitously dropped until the present, by 48%. This is due partly to gentrification and partly to new schools in the area.\textsuperscript{86}
- Family mobility in the area as a whole is high due to the destruction of CHA buildings and the influx of new, upscale housing (somewhat abated due to the current economy). Total attendance of area high schools in 2005 was just under 4,000. It dropped to about 2,700 by 2008 but is now over 5,000.
- The influx of well-resourced schools with no commitment to take all neighborhood students—an AUSL turnaround, three selective enrollment schools (two military), and several charter schools—have drawn higher-performing students but all have significantly lower percentages of special needs students than Crane.\textsuperscript{87}
- There has been a revolving door of “area instructional officers” and “network chiefs”—five in the past five years.

Disinvestment
Crane has lost a number of important programs and staff over the last few years, and CPS has not adequately maintained the facility nor provided sufficient resources. According to a Crane administrator who spoke at the

\textsuperscript{83} http://images.businessweek.com/ss/07/03/0307_nabes/index_01.htm Retrieved on December 30, 2011.
\textsuperscript{84} http://alexkotlowitz.com/02_03.html
\textsuperscript{85} http://www.chicagoreporter.com/news/2012/01/more-young-people-are-killed-chicago-any-other-american-city?tr=y&auid=10187882
\textsuperscript{86} http://iirc.niu.edu/
\textsuperscript{87} http://iirc.niu.edu/
January 6, 2012 public hearing on the CPS proposal, CPS has cut Crane funding, staffing, and programs. Other members of the Crane school community also spoke about the lack of investment in Crane. Several who testified asked why had CPS not provided sufficient support to Crane since it has been on probation for so many years and asked CPS representatives to tell the community specifically what the district has done to help the school get off probation.

Although Westside High School Network Chief, Theresa Plasencia, testified at the January 6 hearing that Crane received $7.5 million over the past five years to improve school performance.88 Crane teachers documented a lack of resources since 2007. For example,

- In 2007, CPS cut the Metro program, which allowed students to take classes at locations around the city.
- In 2009, CPS reduced the Small Learning Community (SLC) funding for Crane.
- In Spring 2011, CPS cut SLC funding to Crane entirely.
- Several classrooms had ceiling leaks, moldy walls, and cracked tiles with asbestos, but major repairs did not take place until summer 2011, a few months prior to the proposed phase out.
- There are not enough computers in the computer lab for a full class.

Community Response and Support for the Crane Coalition
Crane has an important place in the history of Chicago’s Westside community. Many individuals have stepped forward in various ways to support the school and to plead with CPS to maintain it as a neighborhood school. Alumni, community members, students, teachers, and parents came to the community hearings to protest Crane’s closing or spoke out in other forums (e.g., through the media89). Three city council members, State Representative Annazette Collins, and Congressman Danny Davis spoke in favor of keeping Crane open and providing it with the resources and support given to turnarounds and charter schools. Students argued against closing the school, citing their strong relationships with their teachers. Many said that Crane is a “home away from home” and they strongly believe that the faculty does an excellent job of supporting them academically and emotionally. Several alumni who have been successful in college gave heartfelt testimony at the community hearings and commented how they keep in touch long after they graduate.

The January 6, 2012 hearing on the proposed phase-out of Crane HS.

Problem w/ CPS Rationale
As the CCSR study on school closings documents, close to half the students who transfer due to closures attend schools with no better performance, and

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89 http://www.chicagojournal.com/news/02-01-2012/Chicago_Bears_owners:_keep_Crane_High_School_open
only 6% go to high-performing schools. This is relevant in Crane’s case. While Crane is a performance level 3 school, as are Manley and Marshall, both Wells and Farragut are at performance level 2. However, all four designated receiving schools have been on probation since probation started in 1996-7, for 16 consecutive years—outstripping Crane. To quote the hearing officer who presided over the two community hearings on CPS’ proposal to phase out Crane,

The truth of the matter is that while the receiving schools have better metrics than Crane, most of them are only marginally better and two are in Level 3. That fact begs the question as to whether, in light of the disruption that phase-out will cause, it makes sense to at least explore the feasibility of the proposed [by the community] turnaround plan.

Furthermore, the issue of former Crane-area students crossing gang lines to attend the other schools looms large as well. It is particularly ironic that Wells is one of the designated receiving schools because when Austin High School was closed and students were sent to Wells, Wells experienced a spike in violence. CPS has a history of sending students from closed schools across gang and neighborhood lines to other schools resulting in spiked violence. At the community hearings, people have warned about repeating this mistake if Crane students are sent to the designated receiving schools.

**The Crane School Community Plan**

Responding to the threat of closure, teachers, parents, and community members quickly created the Crane Coalition. Working with the LSC and community partners such as the Near West Side Community Development Coalition, the Crane Coalition developed a comprehensive academic and programmatic plan to improve student learning. The plan, summarized below, is the working product of the coalition and has been submitted to CPS and the hearing officer. The plan proposes, among several other components:

- New high-level programs (e.g., an International Baccalaureate program) and career and technical programs such as cosmetology, video game programming, culinary arts and trade programs;
- more supports such as mentoring and tutoring, social services that promote social and emotional development, and increased services for Crane’s disproportionately high population of special-needs students;
- support services and educational programs for parents—workshops and training, a parent resource room, night school, and an adult GED program;
- partnership with the Strategic Learning Initiative, a non-profit organization with a proven track record of working with whole school communities on comprehensive school transformation plans;
- academic and athletic summer programs and a transition-to-high-school program for area eighth graders entering Crane;
- soliciting student input and participation in a flexible disciplinary

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92 Schmidt, G. N. (December 2006). Bloody days increase in Chicago’s general high schools. *Substance* XXXII(4), 1, 5-7.

model and implementing Restorative Justice.

The Crane Coalition also proposes partnerships and vertical curriculum alignment with the feeder elementary schools because the academic underpreparation of incoming students concerns Crane teachers. Crane teachers and other members of the Crane Coalition believe that adding these components will improve Crane’s enrollment, attendance and dropout rates.

The CPS hearing officer, who, although acknowledging Crane’s “long time….evidence of poor performance,” recommended that CPS seriously consider the Crane Coalition plans:  

Against this evidence of poor performance is a great deal of local support (and opposition to phase-out), motivated by a strong belief that Crane continues to serve the community despite many obstacles beyond its control [emphasis added]….the Crane community has put together a well thought-out plan that has the support of many members of the community, local political leaders and the teachers and staff at Crane. This plan was put together with the assistance of credible experts in school turnaround with a track record of success.

He concluded his report: “I would respectfully recommend that the Board order an analysis of the Crane Coalition Improvement Plan before acting on the CEO’s proposals [to phase-out Crane and co-locate Talent Charter].”

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Conclusion

In the spirit of the many testimonies of parents, teachers, and students who recognized Crane’s weaknesses but expressed commitment to work together for its improvement, we agree with the hearing officer’s conclusion. Instead of phasing-out Crane and potentially endangering students by sending them to other low-performing schools that are out of their community, CPS should sit down with the Crane staff, teachers, students, parents, alumni, community members, and the Strategic Learning Initiative and collaborate on the Crane Coalition Improvement Plan. CPS should work with them to identify the resources—material and human—that will support all of the components and move toward improving Crane High School in a way that builds on the school’s existing strengths and history.