

Pete Leki started the ecology program at Waters elementary and Chaired the first Local School Council there.

Much has been said lately about the determination of the CPS to close down "100 schools" because of *under-utilization*. *Under-utilization*. Another word borrowed from the business-model lexicon. It is as though local public schools were equivalent to MacDonald's or Dunkin Donuts. Business dwindling? Shut it down and move.

But schools are not businesses. Schools are the center of a community's life. It is often the one island of security in a ruined landscape. It is the place where the nurse and social worker can be found, breakfast and lunch are served, where inter-generational continuity happens. It is the place where after school programs are offered, parents network, and playgrounds are maintained and available. Threatening to shut down a school because its enrollment numbers have dipped below some arbitrary number is a business decision, not an educational one. Six years ago Waters School population dipped to 350 and our beloved school was threatened with closure, even demolition! Six years ago I was part of an afterschool arts integration program for 4th and 5th graders that explored "community". We asked our students which places in their community, in their opinion, were the most important to them. The results took our breath away. We were expecting them to select McDonalds, the movies, Welles Park, even Harvestime Foods. But 95% of the kids answered : Waters School. And second place by a huge margin was... Waters School Gardens!

A school board that threatens to close such a school is not acting in the best interest of that community. We know how things turned out at Waters. The dark cloud of condo-conversion and skyrocketing rents that drove away so many school families, also brought a wave of young professional families that recognized Waters vision and accomplishments, and helped to reverse the loss of students.

But schools in many communities aren't blessed with that happenstance. They are communities without grocery stores and L trains, without a vibrant commercial district and a regional library. To close a local school in these communities is like shutting off the water and gas, discontinuing garbage pick-up. It is to abandon neighborhoods and leave them in the hands of gangs and speculators.

In some instances the Board intends to close the local school and turn over the public property to for-profit charter schools. Here, again, the model of government as a business takes hold. Public funds are being funneled directly to private companies that are owned by people friendly with the mayor.

The Commission on School Utilization Community Meeting for the north side has been scheduled on **Friday, December 14 from 7:00pm - 9:00pm, and will take place at Horner Park, 2741 W. Montrose Avenue.**

If you are unable to attend, your comments and feedback may be submitted to the Commission on the School Utilization's [website](#), under the "Schedule" tab