

Name: Erisa Apantaku

Title of meeting: CPS Community Meeting for Closing of Englewood Schools

Agency/Organization hosting the event: Chicago Public Schools

Start Time: shortly after 6p

Number of people at meeting: 175

The scene

The second community meeting held by CPS to get feedback on [the proposal to close 4 neighborhood high schools in Englewood](#)—Robeson, Hope, Harper, and TEAM Englewood—was held at the Hamilton Park Fieldhouse on January 17th, 2018. A full transcript of the event can be found [here](#). The room was set up such that three groups of chairs were facing the east wall, which had a white screen on which CPS officials projected a power point presentation. The fieldhouse had photographs from TRACE (Teens Reimaging Art, Community, and Environment) beside the walls.

CPS states goals and addresses concerns

The meeting began on time with Harold “Chip” Johnson—Chief Officer of CPS’s Family and Community Engagement in Education—stating the goals of the meeting, which were to address some of the concerns raised by community members at the last meeting, solicit public comment on the proposal, and put parents/guardians in touch with certain services for one-on-one chats, such as the Office of Diverse Learners and the Student Outreach and Re-engagement Centers. Johnson also referenced behaviors exhibited during [the first meeting held on January 10th, 2018](#). He said he lives in Bronzeville stating and “I don’t want to [turn on the TV](#) and see my people in disarray and have people laughing at their TV sets.”

Before the meeting began it’s public comment section, there were presentations from four CPS officials. [Megan Hougard](#), Chief of [Network 11 \(Harper, Hope, TEAM Englewood, Robeson, Lindblom\)](#) and former assistant principal of Harper, and Dr. [Julious Lawson](#), Network Chief and Deputy Chief, gave an overview of the plan like they did at the first meeting. [Liz Kirby](#), previous Chief of Network 11 and Chief of School Strategy and Planning gave a presentation addressing concerns from the first meeting about the \$85 million. Why spend that much money on a new school when you could just invest it in the current schools? Kirby explains that the schools did get investments over the years and those investments didn’t work: “if we look at capital investments, just in the '06-'07 school year, we have \$29 million in capital investments. So this is not a situation where no money has been given to these schools.” The money invested then did not reverse the declining enrollment, and declining enrollment makes it hard for the school to provide the classes they would need to meet education requirements.

[Jadine Chou](#), Chief Safety and Security Officer for CPS, also spoke. A large concern from parents and community members during the first meeting was fear that students having to leave the neighborhood could be targets of violence. Chou brought up that already, 92% of students

living within Englewood already leave Englewood to attend school. Chou mentioned that every child will get an “individualized safety plan.” She also mentioned parents have suggested CPS get buses to pick kids up from school but that students respond to that plan with “I’m too cool to ride a yellow bus.” Chou ended by saying that these meetings are just the beginning, “we are here to make sure that these children are safe.” Public comment began shortly after that.

The West Englewood Coalition

At around 6:25pm, members of the West Englewood Coalition began to file into the fieldhouse black beanies and t-shirts with white lettering. They did the same thing as at the last meeting—walking in late, silently, all as in one group. They were accused of being paid protesters at the last meeting and members of the coalition were part of shouting matches at the previous meeting. The way this meeting was set up, the first grouping of chairs (i.e., the chairs closest to the fieldhouse entrance) was practically full when they walked in, filled with students, teachers, parents, and concerned community members. Many of the speakers who went up to oppose the CPS closure plan were seated in this section. The second grouping of chairs was also almost full. The last grouping of chairs were not almost full and this is where many West Englewood Coalition members chose to sit. Many also stood in back with press people. I do not recall any West Englewood Coalition members going to the mic to speak, unlike during the first meeting when several did.

Public comment almost exclusively in opposition to the current plan as it is

Several individuals who spoke in opposition of the plan during the first meeting also spoke at the second meeting. Erica Brown, a parent who was a part of the shouting match in the first meeting, again spoke against the plan. Ashley Rodriguez, a student at Harper High School, said: “Y’all taking our classes away. Y’all taking money out of us. Y’all taking money away from us, from our schools that we need. Y’all talking about how much education is so much important but y’all taking it away from us.” This is probably one of the biggest concerns I heard repeated in the first meeting and the second meeting: the current students at the four high schools will be left behind. In the [draft of the transition plan](#), CPS stated that they will set aside \$8.3 million for supporting these students over the next 3.5 years, but that doesn’t assuage the fears of students, teachers, and parents that these kids will slip through the cracks.

[Keith Harris, president of the Englewood Political Task Force, who resigned during the first meeting](#), said: “I got a question. How many of y’all will let me come in your house and move your furniture around without your permission? Okay. So why are we letting the mayor and CPS come in our community and do what they want to do? We can stop that. It ain’t a done deal. Ain’t nothing done unless we say it’s done.” Darryl Smith, spokesperson for the [Englewood Political Task Force](#) and candidate for Cook County Board of Commissioner of the 2nd district, also spoke in opposition of the plan. Members of the Englewood Political Task wore white beanies. There were also members of the group [CeaseFire](#) present. They wore orange beanies. There were also members of Pilsen Alliance at the meeting.

While public comment was mostly in opposition to the plan as it is currently laid out, one speaker in support of the plan did make a moving statement. "I'm a resident of Englewood for 40 years," Theodria Constanopolis began. She received the guardianship of 5 grandchildren in 2011 and has been concerned about where these kids would go. Several years ago other grandchildren she had went to Robeson and Harper, but she wished she had had options for them to go somewhere else. "I'm in favor of the new high school. Before this, I was looking at high schools outside of Englewood. I am now considering the new high school." She ended her comment by saying: "Change hurts."

But support for the plan within the public comment section of the meeting was few and far between. Asiaha Butler, president of [R.A.G.E.](#) and a member of the [Englewood Steering Committee](#), was joined on the mic by two other members of the [Englewood Steering Committee](#) (Eddie Johnson and Gloria Williams). Through Butler, they said they would, "resign effective immediately if the Steering Committee is not restructured that would include parents who have young people who will be going to the new school that would not include additional residents, as well as other educators who are not in a position to have secret agendas on the Steering Committee."

The end of the meeting

The public comment section of the meeting ended before 8pm, at which point Chip Johnson said if anyone else wanted to speak, they could, but they'd have to sign up first. A few more speakers did, but by this point many members of the audience were talking amongst themselves and beginning to file out of the fieldhouse. The meeting ended when a woman who did not sign up to speak somehow got the mic and began speaking. The mic was cut off, Chip Johnson explained why the mic was shut off (because she didn't register to speak), and then adjourned the meeting.

The next meeting will be a public hearing at CPS Central Office, 42 West Madison St, at 5:30pm on January 30th, 2018.