FINDINGS: CPS’ Current Proposed School Closures and Other School Actions

- A decade of school closures and other Actions has not produced any documented or sustained academic benefit for children. CPS has never fully analyzed or tracked student-level impacts of past School Actions.
- CPS lacks the time, resources, staff, and protocol to carry out school closures. Last year, when CPS Actions impacted far fewer students (@ 9,500 across 23 schools), over 430 left CPS, dropped out or didn’t arrive for the 1st day of school this year. Re-assigning 30,000+ elementary students in such a short time will cause educational setbacks, undue hardships on families, increased safety risks for students, and will likely increase truancy problems.
- CPS’ School Utilization Formula does not follow the statutory guidelines. CPS does not account for space needs of varying ages/grade ranges of students in schools; “efficient use” of a school building is not based on “educational program design” spatial needs. Additionally CPS’ Utilization Formula ignores legal class size limits for Special Education students.
- CPS claims that school closures and consolidations will save money are unfounded. To date, CPS has not disclosed its methodology or indicated how these closures will result in cost savings, asset liquidation or other financial gains. Furthermore CPS’ steps to fast track closures (the hiring of logistics companies, transition coordinators, and safe passage providers) demonstrate that school actions will result in greater, unplanned expenses.
- The majority of schools being closed are in better condition than the Receiving Schools. CPS is rushing to spend $155 million to “fast track” building upgrades in “Welcoming Schools” to compensate and taking on more debt to finance them.
- CPS’ rationale that it’s urgent to close schools now so that children are “not trapped in failing schools” does not have merit: In 48% of the cases, students will not be re-assigned to a higher-performing school. Given the late announcement of proposed School Actions, parents’ options for their students to attend higher performing schools were reduced. Moreover CPS’ academic performance measures do not accurately reflect student growth.
- CPS’ Draft Transition Plans are deficient: CPS failed to provide details for addressing support of special needs students and the continuation of wrap around services, or detailed security and safety plans based on the “unique circumstances of the proposed school action” (as per the CPS CEO School Action Guidelines).
- Chicago’s most vulnerable students are at greatest risk. More than 1,500 SPED students and more than 2,800 homeless students will be affected (closings and receiving schools). The vast majority of impacted students will also face transportation challenges and unsafe routes due to local gang activity and other physical hazards.

FINDINGS: CPS’ DRAFT TEN YEAR EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES MASTER PLAN (“EFMP”)

- The Draft EFMP did not have adequate input from sister agencies, elected officials and stakeholders. The CEFTF’s requests to meet with these agencies were consistently denied, while our recommendations for public input and discussions with these groups were ignored.
- The Draft does not include a new Space Utilization formula. CPS acknowledges the District will have to allocate space differently to deliver the Common Core curriculum and specialized education programs like STEM and International Baccalaureate programming. Without a new educationally appropriate Utilization formula, the District does not have a sound basis for projecting future capacity need.
- CPS ignored the CEFTF’s research on best practices and “lessons learned” from other school districts for developing a sound and effective master planning process.
• **CPS’ draft plan doesn’t look at future trends for Chicago.** Instead it relies almost exclusively on limited CHA data and does not analyze planned or projected new housing production by the private sector, underestimating Chicago’s growth. It focuses on the recent past’s housing and historic economic downturn—not on future redevelopment.

• **Enrollment projections are suspect** since there is no explanation of CPS’ methodology. Longer-range population/enrollment estimates are missing: the Draft projects enrollment for 2011-2016, not 2013–2023. It does not include migration, outmigration, and fertility rates, thus ignoring new families moving into the City and anticipated births within the next 10 years—methodologies other major districts use. The Draft focuses on past population decline, while ignoring CMAP (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning) population growth projections.

• **CPS makes questionable use of newly invented “Community” definitions/boundaries** to aggregate neighborhood-level data, and ignores longstanding standard community definitions (Chicago’s 77 Community Areas) by which data are reported.

**PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the deficits in the data CPS used to recommend School Actions and the deficits in the Draft EFMP, the CEFTF does not support any School Actions at this time. Instead the Task Force recommends that:

• **CPS must complete comprehensive planning for the 10-Year EFMP** before approving any School Actions.

• **CPS must utilize “best practices”** to develop the 10-Year Master Plan, including broad public input, input from elected officials, and coordination with other local governments.

• **CPS must update facilities needs assessments** prior to the deadline for the 10-Year EFMP. To date, only 6 of the 53 schools proposed for Actions have updated assessments; only 31% of the schools district-wide have updated condition assessments.

• **CPS must revisit its methodology for projecting population and enrollment trends** based on best practices.

• **CPS must complete a full Community Analysis** including a comprehensive study of future community redevelopment plans and forecasts for annual housing unit production by the private sector as well as by government programs (such as CHA).

• **CPS must follow State Law and develop a new, educationally appropriate Utilization formula.**

• **CPS must provide a full cost/benefit analysis of proposed School Actions** projected operating, capital and ancillary costs and savings, as well as the methodology for its calculations.

• **CPS should undergo a complete audit of assets, spending and available funds.**

• **CPS must conduct and publish an Annual detailed student-level impact analysis** to determine how students adjust and what their academic progress is (for both students re-assigned and students in Welcoming Schools).

If/When CPS does take School Actions, the District must . . .

• **Provide transportation** to students having to travel more than 1 mile from their home to a new school.

• **Re-evaluate utilization of schools with a higher concentration of SPED students than the district-wide average,** give considerable weight to the impacts on SPED students, and abide by SPED class size limits.

• **Disclose the details of funding that will support “the academic, social and emotional needs of students; supports for students with disabilities, homeless students, and English Language Learners”** as per the CPS CEO’s own School Actions Guidelines and Criteria.

• **Develop detailed, individualized safety and student support plans for each school proposed for a School Action and for each Welcoming School.**

• **Develop detailed policies and procedures for maintenance and disposition of vacant school buildings,** in keeping with models of best practices used in other school districts (public input, planning, defined constraints on re-purposing, etc.).