

STUDENTS AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE?

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF RENAISSANCE 2010 SCHOOL CLOSINGS IN THE MIDSOUTH

January 2007

STUDENTS AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE?

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF RENAISSANCE 2010 SCHOOL CLOSINGS IN THE MIDSOUTH

January 2007

Pauline Lipman, Ph.D.

University of Illinois – Chicago

(Research conducted while an Associate Professor at DePaul University)

plipman@uic.edu

Alecia S. Person

**Graduate Student, Social and Cultural Foundations in Education, DePaul
University**

In collaboration with Kenwood Oakland Community Organization

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the teachers, parents, students, administrators, school staff members, and community members who agreed to be interviewed and to Kenwood Oakland Community Organization for facilitating the study and inviting us to conduct it. Thanks also to members of Teachers for Social Justice for help with transcriptions and to Heather Horsley, Gina Behrens, and Eric Gutstein for additional support. Thank you to Chicago Capacity Building Initiative for financial support for production.

This report may be freely reproduced for non-profit purposes provided that correct attribution is provided.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction.....	9
Background.....	12
Findings.....	15
Conclusion.....	43
Recommendations.....	45
Appendix A: <i>Proposed Framework for Renaissance 2010</i>.....	47
Appendix B: <i>Interview Questions</i>.....	50
Appendix C: <i>Research on Student Mobility</i>.....	52
References.....	54

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2004, Mayor Daley announced Renaissance 2010, a plan to close 60-70 schools and open 100 new schools: one-third charter schools, one-third contract schools, and one-third CPS performance schools. The first phase, termed the Midsouth Plan, called for the closure of 20 of 22 schools in the Midsouth. Faced with strong opposition from the community and supporters across the city, CPS backed away from this plan. Nevertheless, Renaissance 2010 school closings have had a substantial impact on the Midsouth. As of January 1, 2007, twelve Midsouth schools have been closed.

This report outlines findings and recommendations of an initial study of the effects of school closings in the Midsouth. Based on the assumption that people are experts on their own experience, we interviewed teachers, students, administrators, counselors, security guards, and parents in receiving schools – those not generally heard in public discussion about Renaissance 2010. This report seeks to begin to uncover the human dimensions and lived educational consequences of a plan to improve schools by displacing students, educators, and families.

This is not a comprehensive study of the effects of Renaissance 2010. It is an initial investigation of experiences in one area of the city. However, the results are indicative of a more widespread problem. They should sound a warning note about a policy to improve schools by closing them and transferring students.

In spring 2006, various community organizations, school reform groups, unions, and teacher and parent organizations called on the Chicago City Council to recommend a moratorium on further school closings until a comprehensive independent impact study could be conducted. Results of this initial study support the legitimacy and urgency of that call.

Purpose of the study

1. To learn about effects of school closings on receiving schools in the Midsouth
2. To determine if the evidence warrants a larger, more comprehensive study of Renaissance 2010 and a halt on school closings until results of that study can be discussed by the public.

Summary of Findings

- **Lack of resources in receiving schools:** People in receiving schools reported they lack necessary resources, staff, and professional support and have had inadequate preparation for an influx of new students.
- **Disruptive and demoralizing climate:** People in receiving schools reported a climate of uncertainty, demoralization, tension, and stress affecting students, teachers, and families due to school closings, threats of further closings, and student transfers.
- **Negative effect on teaching and learning:** Teachers reported an influx of new students negatively affected academic work of all students at receiving schools.
- **Problems with safety and discipline:** Transfer of students across gang lines and into unfamiliar neighborhoods, coupled with the stress experienced by transferred students, contributed to increased discipline problems, violence, and concerns about safety.
- **Schools felt they were “set up for failure”:** Teachers and administrators believe that a history of declining resources and lack of support created conditions in the Midsouth that set up schools to fail and be closed. This is exacerbated by transferring in new students without adequate resources.

- **Lack of consultation with the school community/disregard for their knowledge:** Teachers, administrators, families, students, and community organizations reported that they were not informed in advance or consulted about school closings although they have invaluable local knowledge about youth, schools, and community context.

Summary of Recommendations

- **A freeze on school closings pending results of a comprehensive impact study.** There should be a freeze on all school closings under Renaissance 2010 until a comprehensive, qualitative and quantitative impact study is conducted and the public can weigh the results. The study should be conducted by independent researchers with full access to CPS data.
- **School/community-centered school transformation process.** Schools showing poor academic performance should begin an immediate process of comprehensively evaluating their school's strengths and weaknesses, using qualitative and quantitative data, and develop a comprehensive plan for school transformation. Evaluation and development of the plan should involve teachers, administrators, support staff, the local school council, concerned community members and organizations, students, CPS staff, parents/guardians, school employee unions, and invited outside experts. CPS should provide adequate resources for evaluation, planning, and implementation of a plan for transformation.
- **Receiving schools should be given additional resources and support.** Schools that have received transferred students should be provided with additional material resources and professional and support staff to meet increased academic and social needs. Resources should be identified by school personnel, parents/guardians, and students (as age appropriate).

- **Schools are public community spaces. Instead of closing them they should be expanded as full-service community schools.** Rather than close public schools in low-income communities, CPS should expand services in underutilized school buildings. Schools with unused space should be made full-service community schools to house, for example, adult education classes, after school programs, youth development programs run by community organizations, computer literacy classes and public computer access, parent centers, mental health and public health centers, and community safety patrols.
- **Under-enrolled schools should be transformed into small public schools with elected local school councils.** CPS is creating “small schools” across the city. Under-enrolled schools should become small public schools with elected local school councils and small enrollments. To make this transition, these schools should engage in a school/community-centered transformation process involving the present school community.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2003, the Commercial Club of Chicago released *Left Behind*, a report which called for sweeping changes in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Contending that the Chicago Teachers Union and Local School Councils bear significant responsibility for the failure of the city's public schools, the report argued that Chicago should move to a market-driven school system based on privatization, competition, and school choice. As a starting point, *Left Behind* proposed that CPS create 100 new charter schools. In June 2004, at an event sponsored by the Commercial Club, Mayor Daley announced Renaissance 2010, a plan to close 60-70 schools and open 100 new schools: one-third charter schools, one-third contract schools (similar to charters), and one-third CPS performance schools.

The first phase of Renaissance 2010 was to be the Midsouth Plan. Under the Midsouth Plan, 20 of 22 schools in the Midsouth were to be closed. However, in the face of strong opposition from the community and supporters across the city, CPS backed away from this plan. Nevertheless, Renaissance 2010 school closings have had a substantial impact on the Midsouth area. As of January 1, 2007, twelve Midsouth schools have been closed (Einstein, Future Commons, Doolittle West, Raymond, Hartigan, Douglas, Terrell, Williams, Woodson South, Donahue, Farren and DuSable). Through its educational support and advocacy work in the Midsouth, the Board of Directors and staff of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) heard many stories from students, teachers, and families about negative consequences of school closings and student transfers due to Renaissance 2010.

In spring 2006, KOCO proposed a systematic study to investigate the experiences of those affected by school closings. At the same time, various community organizations, school reform groups, unions, and teacher and parent organizations petitioned the Chicago City Council to recommend a moratorium on further school closings until a comprehensive independent impact study could be conducted (see Appendix A). This report outlines findings from an initial qualitative study of the effects of school closings in the Midsouth.

Purpose of the Study

A guiding assumption of this study is that people are experts on their own experience

Closing a public school, transferring students to other schools, and displacing professional and non-professional staff is a drastic measure. We undertook this study, in collaboration with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, to learn about the experiences of those affected by Renaissance 2010 school closings. The study focuses on academic experiences, safety, classroom and school climate, and support for students with special needs. This is not a comprehensive study of the effects of Renaissance 2010. Rather it is an initial investigation of experiences in one area of the city, the Midsouth.

The purpose is:

1. To learn about effects of school closings on receiving schools in the Midsouth
2. To determine if there is enough evidence to warrant a larger and more comprehensive study of the effects of Renaissance 2010 in Chicago and a halt to school closings until the results of that study can be discussed by the public.

A guiding assumption of this study is that people are experts on their own experience. We wanted to hear from those experiencing the effects of school closings and student transfers due to Renaissance 2010. These are voices that generally have not been heard in the debates surrounding Renaissance 2010; thus we have devoted ample space to their words. Our data are primarily based on interviews with parents, teachers, administrators, school staff, and students. In this report we outline findings from interviews in three Midsouth schools and offer recommendations based on those findings.

Methodology

In collaboration with staff of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, between April and September 2006, we conducted tape-recorded, extended interviews with a total of 20 people. Because students and teachers from closed schools are dispersed, and because receiving schools have been significantly affected, we decided to interview people in receiving schools. Interviewees included teachers, students, administrators, a counselor, security guards, and parents. The teachers we interviewed were all veteran teachers at their schools. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (Appendix B) constructed around key issues which have been identified in educational research as relevant to student mobility. We transcribed taped interviews and analyzed them for main themes. One or both of us also attended 15 public hearings since summer 2004 and recorded field notes from the testimony of parents and teachers. We consulted these notes for consistency with interview data.

To protect confidentiality, the schools and individuals interviewed are not named. We have further masked identities to preserve anonymity. This is in compliance with accepted standards of research ethics. In this case, we also perceive a climate of fear in schools in the Midsouth. In a context in which schools are being closed and teachers are losing jobs, people are afraid to speak on the record about the conditions in their schools and the history of what has occurred over the past several years. This climate made securing interviews difficult even though we were working with respected members of the community. This is the principal reason we were unable to interview more people. An officially sanctioned study (conducted by independent researchers) might face fewer of these obstacles.

While this study documents experiences of a group of parents, teachers, administrators, school staff, and students in receiving schools in the Midsouth, it is hampered by the failure of CPS to make available for public scrutiny data on how transferred students have fared across the school system. These additional data would include the test scores, suspensions, course failures, and drop-out incidents of transferred students. They would also include data on violent incidents, support systems, and

resources at receiving schools.

BACKGROUND

The Renaissance 2010 Plan is sharply contested. Mayor Daley, CPS officials, and the Commercial Club assert that Renaissance 2010 will improve education. Teacher and school employee unions; community, parent, and teacher organizations; and school reform groups have voiced considerable concern about the educational and social consequences of a plan to improve schools by closing them. In September 2004 the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless filed a legal challenge against Renaissance 2010, claiming that school closings violated the rights of homeless children. Opponents of Renaissance 2010 have also voiced concern the plan creates schools run by private organizations and eliminates school employee unions and elected local school councils.

According to *The Catalyst* (Williams, 2004, June), the Chicago Public Schools estimate around 11,800 children – many of them expected to be from middle-class families – will eventually enroll in Mid-South schools by 2014, up from 8,600 enrolled in 2004. However, the fate of thousands of low-income, mostly African American CPS students currently enrolled in Mid-South schools hangs in the balance. Across the city of Chicago, 20 of the city's schools have been closed and 37 schools have opened under the Renaissance 2010 plan. As of January 1, 2007, twelve schools (five since 2004) in the Mid-South have been closed and six schools (including DuSable High School which has reopened as 3 small schools) have been reopened as Renaissance 2010 schools. Approximately one-fourth of the area's students, 2,244, were directly affected when their schools were shuttered (Illinois State Board of Education data: <http://www.isbe.state.il.us>). Ultimately, an estimated 8,600 (Williams, July 2004) Midsouth area students will be affected by school closings, ninety-seven percent of whom are low-income, African American students. Many of the low-income students displaced by these school closures have been moved two or three times.

Student mobility has been shown to negatively effect young people's achievement, emotional health, and other aspects of their well-being (Engec, 2006; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; Kerbow, 1996; Kerbow, Azcoitia & Buell, 2003; Minneapolis Family Housing Fund, 1998; Perlstein, 2001; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy, 1999; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). Many of the nation's high mobility urban schools face low test scores, negative social environments, school violence, and low teacher and administrator morale. Researchers agree that low-income and "minority" students in urban school districts are more likely to experience difficulties due to excessive classroom mobility. For these students, high mobility is yet another barrier, among others, to an adequate education; and the long-term effects of high mobility include lower achievement levels, a slower academic pace, and ultimately, the reduced likelihood of high school completion. Students, parents, and teachers alike have discussed the hardships that go hand-in-hand with mobile populations. In short, student mobility makes it difficult to resolve problems in the nation's urban schools.

The mass movement of CPS students has almost certainly affected the students, teachers, and administration of every school in the Midsouth community; and although school mobility has been shown to negatively affect students socially and academically, to date, there have been no studies of their experiences while undergoing these drastic transformations. In August 2006, after pressure from a coalition of community, teacher, and union groups, the Chicago Sun Times (Rossi & Speilman, June 28, 2006) reported that CPS agreed to track test scores, gains, and attendance of students impacted by Renaissance 2010. We have been unable to obtain this study from CPS. If it was completed it has not been released to the public, to the best of our knowledge.

This report and all data that CPS has access to related to Chicago Public Schools, and Renaissance 2010 specifically, should be made publicly available. These are data about the education of children in publicly funded schools and concern all members of the public. CPS officials are public servants and there is no reason why the data they have should not be made available for public scrutiny and analysis.

Students displaced by the Renaissance 2010 Plan have to cross gang lines, adapt to changing schools and curricula, and endure violence in and around their schools in order to receive an education. We found that students already attending receiving schools have faced similar challenges. In fact, the entire community suffers when a school is closed. Closing a school also disrupts families and displaces teachers, administrators, and school staff, some of whom have committed years of service to educating children in their schools. In short, closing a public school is a drastic measure. Test scores alone are inadequate to assess the effects. As a parent we interviewed said, people are not “things on paper.” This report seeks to begin to uncover the human dimensions and lived educational consequences of a plan to improve schools by displacing students, educators, and families.

FINDINGS

As we analyzed the interviews and notes from public testimony, we found remarkable similarities in the issues and concerns voiced by those we interviewed in receiving schools. We identified six main themes which are the principal findings of the study:

- **Lack of resources in receiving schools:** People in receiving schools reported they lack necessary resources, staff, and professional support and have had inadequate preparation for an influx of new students.
- **Disruptive and demoralizing climate:** People in receiving schools reported a school climate of uncertainty, demoralization, tension, and stress affecting students, teachers, and families as a result of school closings, threats of school closings, and transfer of students under Renaissance 2010.
- **Negative effect on teaching and learning:** Teachers reported an influx of new students negatively affected academic work at receiving schools.
- **Problems with safety and discipline:** Transfer of students across gang lines and into unfamiliar neighborhoods, coupled with the stress experienced by transferred students, contributed to increased discipline problems and concerns about school safety.
- **Schools felt they were “set up for failure”:** Teachers and administrators reported that a history of declining resources and lack of support created conditions in the Midsouth that set up schools to fail and be closed. This is exacerbated by transferring in new students without adequate resources.
- **Lack of consultation with the school community/disregard for their knowledge:** Teachers, administrators, families, youth, and community organizations reported that they were not informed in advance or consulted about school closings although they have invaluable local knowledge about youth, schools, and community context.

- **LACK OF RESOURCES IN RECEIVING SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT TRANSFER STUDENTS**

“...because of the school closings you would think that we would have more resources and more funds, but actually, it’s just the opposite. WE have LESS resources and LESS funds. We have MORE students; we have LESS personnel. We’re shorthanded.”

Transferring large numbers of students from one school to another school outside their immediate community, particularly under conditions of stress and anxiety, requires additional professional and non-professional staff and additional material resources in receiving schools. CPS central administrators planning the transition should provide additional support to receiving schools. They should be well aware of potential problems and ensure that receiving schools have the resources to address them. The likelihood that there will be conflicts between new students and students enrolled in the school calls for more security staff. Increase in enrollment requires more teachers and more support staff. The latter are especially important because uprooted students can be expected to be anxious and fearful. Potential discontinuities between academic programs at sending and receiving schools and the extra time needed to assess what children know and know how to do may require a lower teacher-student ratio and additional professional development. An influx of students with special needs requires additional staff.

Teachers and staff who we interviewed in receiving schools told us they have not received the resources they need to effectively respond to the academic and emotional needs of transferred students. Nor is there additional support for school security. Despite some promises by CPS central administrators that the receiving schools would receive additional help, they reported receiving little support from the CPS central office. The gaps are being filled in through the hard work and volunteerism of local school staff.

In particular, the school staff reported they cannot adequately meet the needs of additional special education students, ensure school safety, or provide adequate counseling.

For example School A's enrollment doubled due to transfers of students from closed schools. It now has nearly 800 students and just one counselor. The need for more counselors is critical because transferred students have faced the trauma of being dislodged from their school community. There has also been an increase in discipline and safety issues but interviewees reported the receiving schools have not been given enough additional security personnel. In one school this was a critical need because of the tensions caused by transferring in a large number of students from a school that was an arch rival of the receiving school.

Teacher School B: "...because of the school closings you would think that we would have more resources and more funds, but actually, it's just the opposite. WE have LESS resources and LESS funds. We have MORE students; we have LESS personnel. We're shorthanded."

Professional staff member School B: "I know for a fact that my principal wrote and typed her finger off asking for help at the beginning, for extra resources, extra help. And instead of them giving us the resources they are cutting them....They are down to the bare bone. And I just don't know how there is space for the students to achieve or even for the teachers to survive, because it causes early burn out, because you are just overworked."

Special Education Resources

Despite additional students with special needs in receiving schools, teachers and administrators report that their staffing is inadequate. The need for additional staffing in receiving schools is exacerbated by cuts in funding for special education services. In June 2006, CPS cut \$26 million in funding for special education staff – 200 teachers and 750 special education aides (Karp, 2006; New Coalition for Economic and Social Change, Oct. 2006). This is in addition to reductions in special education positions over the last several years.

Teacher School A: *“If you’re telling me you’re going to have 17 special ed children [with different diagnoses] all in one room, you’re asking for it....There’s no way you will ever be telling me you want Ms. _____ to handle 17 children with all these different [special education] labels. ...You’re not trying to teach those children. You’re trying to fail them.”*

Staff School A: *“We’re not getting the support from, you know, the upper level, the people who are supposed to come out [from the district office], the specialists they call themselves. We’re not getting the support for those [additional] special needs children.”*

Administrator: *“That is so unfair to all the different categories [of children with special needs] in there. You know they need that second hand to help them out in the classrooms... No extra support staff next year for the special needs.”*

Class size

Despite transfer students needing more attention, class sizes have increased. Displaced from their former school community, marked as students from a “failed” school, entering schools without adequate resources to address their academic and emotional needs, students are fearful they will fail again. Teachers who are under the pressures of the extra demands produced by transferring in students expressed frustration at their inability to adequately respond to the needs of these students. In one school teachers and administrators said they had 34 students in the seventh grade and several other grades with 29 or 30 students.

Teacher School B: *“They need help with dealing with social issues. They deal with a lot, and I am not sure how to...one person in the classroom is just not enough. [We need] reduced class size so you can give the kids the attention that they need.”*

Teacher School B: "I'm up to 34 [students] with inclusion [of students with special needs]. So the kids are pushed like sardines in a classroom, and they get intimidated by their space."

Support staff

There is also a need for more educational support staff and security in the schools. Despite this need, the people we interviewed said over the past few years these positions have been drastically cut. For example, in the past one school had staff (School Community Representatives) to make home visits and check on truant students. Now these visits are conducted by the Assistant Principal and one of the school's two security guards.

Administrator: "[we need] more funding...more personnel. Not just teachers, but security, ESP [educational support personnel], especially ESP assistance... You know if each teacher, even if you may have one assistant for each, maybe three rooms, let's say, it would probably be doable...so they could pull out those two or three students who need extra attention and work with them on a consistent basis. But here, we don't have enough personnel to go around...When I first came here the Follow Through Program tracked students from Head Start all the way to third grade...and because of that we got extra funding, so we had somewhere between seven and nine ESP, and I mean that made a WORLD of difference...and we had truant officers. Now we don't have any School Community Representatives and we are actually down to two ESPs."

These cuts have also affected parent participation. At one school, the parent liaison had been the key organizer of a network of parents. As a result, the school had developed a range of programs for parents including adult education classes, parent patrols, and computer literacy classes. That position was cut.

Teacher School B: *“...at one time we had a fairly large network of parents who could actually go out and contact other parents and bring them in, but now it’s kind of dwindled down to next to nothing....We had a lot of parental programs....We actually had a Parent Liaison...and she would head different parent things and that was her main focus....But now we don’t have the personnel to do that, so when I get a chance...in fact I’m trying to call parents now so that we can have...something for the parents, where they can come out and do something.”*

Preparation and support

People we interviewed in receiving schools said that they had little support from CPS central office to prepare for the influx of new students. One school more than doubled its enrollment. A school that had been a middle school was turned into a k-8 school and received a large influx of k-5 students. This new group of students required new knowledge and instructional approaches but the staff received no additional support.

Teacher School A: *“I have been here at this school for 32 years so I know what I’m talking about. There was a whole change for the whole staff. We weren’t used to dealing with the smaller kids, but of course we had to learn how to adjust. But they didn’t put any thought into that. You know, they just put the kids here, no resources coming with them to help us.”*

Teacher School A: *“Even with the records it was last minute. The teachers had to volunteer to go back and pack the records [of students to be transferred] and send them downtown. And they weren’t even paid for it.”*

Staff School A: *“...the transition that took place, we incorporated not just middle school...we went to all-inclusive Pre-K through 8th grade. And there were some struggles that I don’t think many people know that we had to endure. There were no funds you know. There were no books. Categorical money follows kids, and we knew that was*

coming and we went up substantially, we more than doubled [that] which was great, but there were some other things that were not dealt with. Whenever you more than double a population, security should come with.”

Staff School A: *“We came in a week early the year they closed the school to try and get ourselves together so that we can know how to deal with all these children that were going to be coming to us in September. So we worked at trying to work on organizing the classes and everything....So Arne Duncan came to the school and walked the halls. He said, ‘Anything you need just let us know. This is my assistant; let us know what you need. We’ll give you whatever support that you need....’ So we followed him up on his word and told them what we needed. Till this day we haven’t gotten it.”*

Basic resources

Former students at school C (a high school) narrated a history of lack of basic resources to fulfill the most rudimentary high school functions. This included lack of chairs, books, science labs, security personnel and qualified teachers. Moreover the school had a leaky roof that CPS had not fixed. It required student and community organizing to get CPS to fix it. According to the 2005 Illinois School Report Card, 57.1% of the classes were taught by “non-highly qualified” teachers as compared with 1.8% for the state and 11.2% for the district. The students’ account of inadequate resources and lack of preparation to make [school C] a functioning, let alone successful, high school in the Midsouth is very disturbing. It calls for a more thorough investigation in its own right. However, these conditions are additionally problematic because [school C] was also a receiving school for students from schools closed under Renaissance 2010. If schools are closed on the grounds that they are failing to educate students, then why are these students being transferred to schools with profoundly inadequate resources? The following portion of an interview illustrates some of the problems.

Student 1: *“They didn’t have adequate funding, adequate resources. They didn’t have the things they needed to do a high school, period.”*

Interviewer: Can you give an example?

Student 1: *“How about chairs...This was a couple of days before the first day of school so, you know they had no chairs.”*

Student 2: *“[school C] is a struggle school. Struggled for chairs, struggled for books, struggled for the right utensils just so kids who didn't have them could have them, teachers rolling in and out, it was crazy.”*

Interviewer: For example, did you have science labs?

Student 2: *“Yeah, yeah they weren't too much equipped but we had goggles.”*

Student 1: *“We didn't even dissect a frog. We didn't even do the regular things that regular high school children get to do, right.”*

Student 3: *“A limited supply, we did worksheets. There were certain experiments we could do with H₂O and food coloring, that's as far as we would go. We had the goggles but no aprons.”*

Student 1: *“I mean we had a library with no books, no books at all...There is a library teacher in there but maybe five or six books up in there and that's not even a joke. It wasn't even funny. Some take their education for a joke but you have the certain few who actually come there to get the knowledge and social skills that they need to develop and to make it in the real world. Having no books in your library will not get you there.”*

Student 2: *“We had a Spanish teacher that did not speak a lick of Spanish, no Spanish at all. He went straight out of the book and didn't even know which chapter he was on. How could you supply us with these type of teachers?”*

- **DISRUPTIVE AND DEMORALIZING CLIMATE**

“...We can kind of see the light going out, especially with some of the... what I think are some of the best teachers here...that we have here. It’s hard...”

Interviews revealed that many teachers, staff, and community members felt the influx of students from closing schools and the possibility that their school may close next has produced a climate of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and demoralization in the receiving schools. The challenge of meeting the educational and emotional needs of students without sufficient resources is demoralizing for teachers and school support staff. The possibility that receiving schools may also be closed has created a climate of uncertainty that contributes to the stress created by the transfer of additional students. For all concerned there is a feeling of loss of school community as schools are closed and students are transferred. This climate affects student learning and teacher effectiveness.

A veteran teacher spoke about the effects on students of labeling schools “failing” and closing them.

Teacher: *“They [students] kind of think that _____ might be closing....So that does play into their attitude of how much they want to try if they think the school is already going to fail anyway. So, if a couple kids were saying it, I'm assuming that a lot of them are thinking that this school is probably eventually going to be slated to close, and you know, why try anyway.”*

During the interviews teachers and staff expressed feelings of anxiousness, fearing the day their school, too, will close. Teachers realized and acknowledged that their “nervousness” and anxious feelings have detrimental effects on the children in their classrooms.

Teacher School B: *“I mean, no one knows the future, but then once you hear your school*

is closing, or hear there's a possibility of your school closing, then that really has a, uh, uh, bad effect on people. And, you can kind of see it, and it is kind of a domino effect... When a teacher comes in and he or she is nervous and kind of antsy, the students see this, or they feel this, and the same thing happens to them [the nervousness and anxiousness]."

Loss of community

Teachers and staff also felt that there is no longer a strong sense of connection within their school community. They point out that incoming students from closing schools are not from the immediate school community and have no real connection to the school. This negatively affects students and creates tension and conflict within the school. These interviews corroborate a central theme we heard repeatedly in community hearings in other parts of the city – that the school is a center of stability in the community and to close it destabilizes the community (e.g., in relation to the closing of Grant, Howland, Bunche, Englewood High School, Collins High School).

Teacher School B: *"One of the changes you feel the most I think the greatest impact is that there's no longer this sense of community atmosphere. You know, you've got students that are from all over the place. So you no longer have a sense of community. You know when _____ was a COMMUNITY school, the parents knew the other parents. You began to meet the parents because you have the siblings, cousins, or what have you. You know, it becomes uh, uh... almost like a family-orientated learning environment. And so there's a greater connection to the child, I think, than when you.. with these isolated incidents of students coming in and uh, and sometimes you don't even see the parents, when these students transfer in. So, it makes it difficult for you to be really even effective, and then, too, because in previous years of the community and family atmosphere, I think there was less, uh, conflict among students."*

Teacher School B: *“It’s a whole different climate, you know...whereas if they just walked across the street to school, or just came a couple of blocks away to school. They knew everybody as they were coming to school...Now [they] are coming from a little ways away.”*

Low teacher/staff morale

Staff, teachers and professional personnel also spoke of the low morale among school staff, and of a loss of a certain closeness, or “family bond,” that tied them to one another, and gave them a purpose, a sense of “working as one for the students.”

Teacher School B: *“I think the morale is very low. You know, when I look back at _____, we used to relish the time we would go off on a retreat and we would have half the staff. It was an enjoyable experience, camaraderie, cooperation, but now you have the retreats – you come for the meetings, but you don’t stay for the overnight socialization. People go their separate ways, and we just don’t have it like it used to be. I mean, we just don’t have that closeness; that family bond like we used to have. [Our school] used to be...One teacher mentioned that she wanted to come to [school] because she’d heard about the staff, how they would have social gatherings, and would do things after, away from the school, build morale, support each other, teachers wanted to come here. But I don’t think they’d tell you that now. I think they’d say this [teaching at this school] is a mistake.”*

Teacher School B: *“I think from a lot of the teachers it’s getting harder and more stressful. We can kind of see the light going out, especially with some of the... what I think are some of the best teachers here...that we have here. It’s hard. It’s a lot. It’s taxing to come and deal with some of things that you have to deal with on a daily basis... It’s just these kids go through a lot, and they bring it to class, and you have to deal with these things every single day, almost. So it’s just...it, it does play on your spirit. It brings your spirits down at times. I mean, say if a school did close, and you are going to get this influx of kids. You know that they probably are not going to have the best attitude.*

Nobody wants to leave their school. You can remember when you were in school...that's where you want to be. ... It's a challenge, and I know I can speak for myself, over the years, I feel myself turning into not the person I used to be."

- **NEGATIVE IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

"You have your demoted students and then you have another set of demoted students coming in [from closing schools], it's not right. You got to help move these people on instead of moving them down from one school to another."

Using CPS data, the *Chicago Catalyst* reports that closing schools and transferring students has not produced significant academic benefits for students: "Since school closings began in 2002, more than 8,000 students have been displaced from 23 neighborhood schools, and despite signs of academic progress, most are enrolled in schools that are not much better than the ones they left....Only 10 percent of displaced elementary school students are now attending schools where at least half of children enrolled pass a standardized reading exam. Only 1 percent, or 47 children, are going to schools in what the district considers to be its top echelon—schools where pass rates are 70 percent or higher" (Duffrin, 2006).

Our interviews suggest that school closings may be having detrimental academic consequences for all students in receiving schools. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students at receiving schools expressed concerns about the negative impact school closings are having on teaching and learning and the academic achievement of both incoming and current students. As indicated in the introduction to this report, mobility has been shown to have a negative impact on academic achievement, emotional well-being, and high school completion. Our findings consistently indicate that teachers and administrators

perceive a negative effect on all of the aforementioned categories.

Effect on the School's academic achievement

Teachers and school personnel we interviewed reported that student mobility negatively impacted test scores at receiving schools. In some cases, they noted that their schools were on the rise academically before the CHA Plan for Transformation. Closing public housing projects and destabilizing the school's enrollment, followed by changing the school's attendance boundaries, produced the first round of challenges. This was followed by CPS designating their schools as receiving school under Renaissance 2010, adding further enrollment instability.

Administrator: "In '99 when _____ closed, they were on academic probation as were we, but we were about 14.5% at that time. And they were probably about 5%.... In 2003, _____ closed. Again, it was in the single digits. By that time we had grown academically from probably 14.5% to about 30%. That was 2003. So we had taken what we had and we had started to move with it. ...And so what you're doing to us academically each time a school closes and they are below us, it's just bringing us down."

Administrator: "...we were just like on a steady incline until, maybe, a couple of years ago, and we started receiving students, and then it kind of started to go downhill because of this new influx of students...and because of this new influx of students the main focus wasn't as much on academia as on different discipline matters, like telling teachers how to take [care of these types of things]... and that changes the whole culture of the school, unfortunately..."

Teacher school B: "And it's greatly affecting student achievement, I think, because our scores have dropped..."

Teacher school B: *“I see a difference – more fights, lower achievement, and in my classroom, I can even say that the tardiness is greater.”*

Disruptive effect of large numbers of transferred students on curriculum and instruction

A great concern to teachers interviewed at receiving schools was the impact that transferring students from closed schools has on their classroom curriculum. Many teachers we spoke with expressed concern and frustration because they had to “backtrack” and repeat or teach lessons to incoming students in order to “catch them up” to the level of their new classroom. This, in turn, caused teachers and current students to fall behind in curriculum and classroom work.

Teacher school B: *“And it is a distraction in the room, you know, and you got different kids coming from different levels. And that, and one thing I found which just slowed me down in the classroom is that a lot of skills that kids did not bring with and at 7th grade I have to stop to build certain skills so we can get into that level.... Certain concepts I had to go back and repeat in math that hadn’t been taught at other schools. So I had to slow that down and then try and keep our [students] going that I knew, so that kind of put us in a back track.”*

Teacher school A: *“And it’s a different structure so when they come into this school, it just is a different structure from the school they came from. The classrooms are different...concentration is different, you know, the interest of what the school is teaching, the curriculum is different....”*

Academic consequences for transferred students

Across the board, teachers, staff, parents, and students expressed the concern that numerous schools closures in the Midsouth have detrimental academic consequences for transferred students, many of whom have been transferred not once, but two or three times. (CPS closed Einstein in 2000 and sent its students to Donahue; CPS closed Donahue in 2003 and sent students to Doolittle East and West; Doolittle West was closed in June 2005; its children were sent to Fuller or Doolittle East.)

Counselor: "Therefore those kids come to our building underachieving... children from [lists several schools]. All those kids somehow or another have now merged into this building. Okay, so now we're brought on probation prior to that....What's that going to do for the child?"

Many in the school community felt that school closings created an uncomfortable climate in receiving schools, which made it very difficult to concentrate and focus on academics. In addressing this issue, teachers interviewed noted that students from closing schools are insecure and are having difficulty fitting into their new school and class environments. This was a persistent theme in teacher interviews.

Teacher School B: "I think it has [affected students academically]...because you've lost that community feeling, and so, you know, you're working to try to re-establish that climate, that culture of the school. You're working to re-establish that. Kids are more disruptive. They're not comfortable, so therefore, they're not applying as much...not internalizing as much...as if they would come in, relaxed, comfortable... you know...so that's what I'm thinking...that may be a factor as far as achievement levels."

Teacher School B: *“And then another factor which is a factor in education is most students are comfortable when they leave one grade to go to another grade and they know you...Versus transferring to... and this has been happening with transfer students...versus going into a school and you don't even know the teachers, you don't know anybody...so, you've got to make all these new adjustments... whereas, when a student has been at _____since Kindergarten, it's like going home. It's like taking a vacation over the summer and coming back home. Going to the next classroom...oh, we're going to Ms._____room.”*

Teacher School A: *“A lot of the children can't even explain themselves, you can see the nervousness in them. You see them walking, you know. A lot of these new children, who were stuffed in here, like the first grade, you know, were expecting to go over to the little school. Because they are in first grade, you know, now they have to walk these big/ this hall and to them it's like one great big you know, it's like a Taj Mahal to them. ... They're still walking around, and they still don't know the building yet either. Part of it [is] they get so nervous...it bothers me, because they shouldn't have been thrown into it like that, you know.”*

Effect on students in receiving schools

All students within a school can be affected by a move. Excessive mobility also harms those students who do not move by slowing down the pace of the curriculum in order to accommodate incoming students transferring into the school. A California study revealed that the average test scores for stable students were lower in schools with high mobility rates (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999). Students we interviewed noted that many incoming classmates from closing schools, as well as those currently attending the receiving school, were frustrated and confused because it seemed the curriculum and lesson plans would frequently change to adapt to the incoming students.

Student: *"I saw a lot of confused young people. The transfer students along with the [school C] students. They are wondering why things aren't the same anymore? This is taking you away from learning on both parts. The young people from [School D] are just confused all around. They couldn't catch up or they were too far behind in certain situations which is impossible for them to play catch up in an environment like [school C] and that's sort of on the teachers too because their lesson plans and curriculum are not built to work on something like this....It was kind of like which system are we learning, are we going to learn this way or that way. It was confusing all around the board. Lucky for me I was getting ready to get out of there. The incoming students are the ones who...bear the brunt."*

Student: *"You have your demoted students and then you have another set of demoted students coming in [from closing schools], it's not right. You got to help move these people on instead of moving them down from one school to another."*

- **PROBLEMS WITH SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE**

"...so now young people are coming from different places. [With all these different high school kids coming together] You do see a more volatile type of environment....."

Parents, teachers, administrators and students at receiving schools report increasing concerns about the rise in discipline and safety issues resulting from an influx of new students. Concerns centering on these issues are twofold: an increase in discipline and behavioral problems in receiving schools and classrooms, and an increase in violence in and around receiving schools.

In March, April, and May 2006, a series of articles in both major Chicago newspapers highlighted the escalating violence in schools receiving displaced students. In

some instances they reported that teachers were quitting out of fear, yet CPS officials vowed to continue the school closings. The Chicago school reform journal *Catalyst* also reported increase in violent incidents (Duffrin, 2006) in all receiving schools in the Midsouth. Interviewed members of Midsouth school communities confirm this, reporting an escalation in violence at Midsouth high schools that have received displaced students as a result of Renaissance 2010 school closures.

Midsouth LSC member: “...so now young people are coming from different places. [With all these different high school kids coming together] You do see a more volatile type of environment....”

The focus has been on high schools. There has been little public information on increased violence in elementary schools. In our study, interviewed elementary school teachers, administrators, and support staff report that the transfer of students from closed schools has resulted in an increase in behavioral and discipline problems and violent incidents. Our interviews suggest that discipline and safety issues due to school closings and student transfers affect elementary and high schools.

Teacher School B: “... kids that come in are generally the kids that are having problems...discipline problems, behavior problems...so we are inundated, sometimes overwhelmed, with these kinds of students. So how do we get to them? How do we help them to be better students, when you first have to deal with the discipline? In my opinion, 95 percent of the day is dealing with discipline. You can't teach like you want to because you are dealing with the discipline problems.”

Teacher School B: “...discipline has always been kind of a challenge here but it seemed to be kind of going okay, then kind of this year and last year...a little more discipline problems...just challenges everyday with just getting everybody to get along in the classroom, and with the teacher. So it's, it's been kind of tough dealing with discipline issues.”

These perceptions parallel research that indicates that children who have moved frequently are not only more likely to be low achievers, but the effects on the child's world makes them more likely to have behavioral and discipline problems than students who do not move. Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck & Nessim (1993) report:

A family move disrupts the routines, relationships, and attachments that define the child's world. Almost everything outside the family that is familiar is lost and changes. Even a short move, which may allow the parents to maintain their network of supports and relationships, may force the children to change schools and friends. Thus, the child has to develop new friendships and adjust to a new curriculum and new teachers (p.133).

Increase in violence

Staff and administrators report an increase in violent incidents coinciding with the influx of new students from closing schools.

Staff School A: "...then once we grew to 850, here what they're saying to me now is that looking at incidents you [have] gone from 110 a year, which, you know is still, well it's kind of high, to I think last year we were at 218, and thus far this year I'm at about 400 probably 450."

Administrator: "I lost more than 500 days of suspension due to the incidents..."

Crossing another gang's territory is not to be taken lightly, and when students attend a new school, it is difficult to discern who is friend and who is foe – sometimes with dangerous consequences. Teachers, staff, and students report that incoming students are traveling outside of their neighborhood, often crossing different gang boundary lines. As one parent stated, "We have a lot of issues with gang fights. This is the bottom line."

Staff member School A: *“We have a lot of issues with, like, a kid can’t cross this [boundary] it’s a gang problem, like Douglas and King drive over here. So we, at security, we have our hands full with the fights from the different kids coming over from different schools causing a problem that [is] stopping kids from learning because [children are thinking] ‘I’m worried, Whoa, it’s almost time to get out and I wonder if he’s going to beat me up today.’”*

This fear was voiced by a high school student who transferred to an alternative school partly for this reason: *“Going to another school was about being in a less dangerous atmosphere to be in.”*

Students and staff members at one of the receiving schools report that incoming students repeatedly clash with current students.

Staff School B: *“...they are coming into the building...and already feeling like they’re going to have a hard time, so naturally they are going to lash out, at first [at] the staff, and then their classmates. That’s the way it goes, you know, coming into an environment that you heard was hostile or that you feel is hostile, you’re going to be hostile. It’s just a natural reaction. No one took that into account when they started closing down these schools and just bunching us all together.”*

Although there were safety issue at one high school prior to Renaissance 2010 school closings, the students that we interviewed said school violence escalated when students were transferred to the school from [School D].

Student: *“There’s always so much fighting. It was in my last year at [school C]. This was when a lot of the schools closed and changes started to happen. We had all these kids*

getting bused or having to pass these different gang territories....You're creating violence and that's all. We should be able to interact and get along but that's not the case and we already know that's the case."

Student: *"It was forced to be a school like that, a school of violence".*

Student: *"When they started to come, before the school closed down, there were a select few that they decided to shuffle to different schools. A certain amount came to our school, a certain number [of students] went here and there. Certain amounts [referring to incoming students] that shifted into our school had to be shifted out the very next day because of the school fights...."*

- **SCHOOLS FEEL THEY WERE "SET UP FOR FAILURE"**

"And you're actually expecting to teach a ... child who has been labeled LD [learning disabled] with 16 other children with one teacher. You're lying to me because you don't expect that child to learn. You expect them to fail. You want that community roused...."

A recurrent theme in the interviews of teachers and administrators is that Midsouth schools have been "set up for failure," laying the basis for them to be closed under Renaissance 2010. People we interviewed described a process of disinvestment in their schools prior to Renaissance 2010. This included reduction of the teaching staff, cuts in programs that supported student learning and parent involvement in the school, cuts in vital support staff, and lack of basic resources such as chairs, computers, and science labs. They said deprivation of resources contributed to making Midsouth schools targets for closure under Renaissance 2010. This has been compounded by the lack of resources and support to receiving schools. While adults say that they are being "set up for failure," it is the children who are the ultimate losers.

Student: *“If you really think about it, [school C] was set up for failure. You don’t open a high school where young people have no place to sit.”*

Teacher school B: *“The ESP [education support personnel] played a big factor with our kids, giving them that one-on-one they needed....You had a teacher’s assistant come in and work with the kids while you worked with another group....they got rid of that. And, that’s been about four years ago. Then the next wave of course, they started cutting staff. So now they’re cutting staff even more.”*

Interviewer: What is the rationale for cutting personnel?

Administrator: *“Lack of funding, plain and simple.”*

Interviewer: What will be the impact?

Administrator: *“We will have even less teachers than we do now, which means there will be more students in the classrooms next year...We already have one classroom with 34 students [in the seventh grade].”*

The lack of resources to support the addition of transferred students compounds the effects of previous and on-going cuts in personnel and programs. While school personnel we interviewed saw cuts over the past few years as extremely detrimental, they see them as disastrous in the face of the challenges posed by the receipt of students from closed schools. And they reported that additional cuts are planned. This further “sets them up for failure,” making it more likely their school will be closed next.

Teacher school B: *“...by [increasing class size] and cutting money for next year, I guarantee they’re talking about setting us down [closing the school] in the fall.”*

Teacher school A: *“And you’re actually expecting to teach a ... child who has been labeled LD [learning disabled] with 16 other children with one teacher. You’re lying to me because you don’t expect that child to learn. You expect them to fail. You want that community roused....”*

Closing schools and transferring students also puts additional academic pressures on receiving schools, including schools that have demonstrated significant improvement over the past few years. So while their academic improvement may have shielded them from closure under Renaissance 2010 thus far, the transfer of large numbers of low-achieving students put them in potential jeopardy. School A has received students from a succession of closed schools. These transfers, particularly from schools with a very low percentage of students at or above grade level, make it more difficult for a school A to meet CPS's annual benchmarks for academic improvement. Even when students are transferred from a school that is stronger academically, the students are likely to lose academically in the transition. This point was echoed by teachers, and an administrator and students we interviewed perceived the same problem:

Teacher School A: *“And so what you’re doing to us academically each time a school closes that is below us, it’s just bringing us down.”*

Teacher School B: *“The kids that are being displaced are low-performing, and so when you bring them into your school now there’s just a little more pressure on you. You know you already have some kids or a large group of kids that are low-performing. So you almost feel like you are being set up for failure when you’re trying to move forward....”*

Student: *“It should have been well-prepared for from the beginning. Because not having supplies to start off with in the first place and to ship more students in and having us struggle more, where is this coming from? Why?”*

- **LACK OF CONSULTATION WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND DISREGARD FOR THEIR KNOWLEDGE**

“...they didn’t give us time to prepare ourselves, prepare our children, you know, where [are] they going to go?”

A consistent criticism was that the school community was not consulted about Renaissance 2010 plans and the effects on children and schools in the Midsouth. This demonstrated a lack of respect for the families, teachers, and school staff who were not included in decisions which directly affected them. The lack of information was also highly disruptive. Further, CPS authorities failed to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of those who live in the community and who know and work with the students in the Midsouth. As a result, CPS authorities with little knowledge of the community made decisions which have negatively affected students, families, teachers, and schools. These consequences might have been avoided had they consulted with and listened to the advice of school community members. This stance is counter to the spirit of Chicago’s 1988 School Reform which institutionalized parent and community participation in school decision-making through Local School Councils. A key assumption of the 1988 Reform was that those with a direct stake in their children’s education and knowledge of the community are qualified to participate in important school decisions.

Lack of information

CPS did not inform the schools about Renaissance 2010 decisions which affected them. Some school staff reported that they were not informed in advance of decisions to close their school. Others had no advance warning to prepare to receive students from closed schools. An administrator at one school reported that she found out by reading the newspaper that her school was slated to be closed in 2005.

Administrator: “I read it in the Tribune that this was supposed to be our last year....It’s just, you know, a work of God that our school is remaining open right now.”

Interviewer: And you don't know what will happen next year?

Administrator: "No."

Professional staff School A: *"We weren't notified until June. So therefore we didn't have a chance to put in place a smooth transition for the students that were coming here."*

Support staff school A: *"...nobody down here was really taken into account when they were doing it [closing the school]. No one in this community was supposed to even know about it until it was time to slap it on us."*

Parents we interviewed also reported that they received little warning that their children's school was to be closed. They were not consulted about which schools their children would be transferred to or about the plan itself.

Parent: *"We were not informed a month ahead of time. It was like a couple of weeks. And we were not informed by word of mouth. We had a flier. Basically, it was like this. Read this. Take it home and read it. And I mean, it's like, it's closing and there's nothing we can do about it. No voting, no taking a stand or nothing. This is law. ..And that was like a couple weeks before school was actually out, so they didn't give us time to prepare ourselves, prepare our children, you know, where [are] they going to go?"*

Lack of respect for the school community

The lack of consultation and lack of information was described by teachers, parents, and students as deeply disrespectful.

Teacher School A: *“If you can come in and just get rid of all the teachers and close a school down and just move them anywhere, then in a sense you are, they are not looking at you as a person. Always looking at you as things on paper, and a lot of people are making decisions based on what’s on paper, but they don’t really understand what you are trying to do at the school.”*

Parent: *“They are treating our children like cattle.”*

Student: *“I cannot stress enough to CPS that you do not try to create a high school or anything for young people and they do not have a voice in it.”*

Parent: *“Basically what they were saying was wherever we put them [children] that’s where they have to go. We didn’t have a chance to decide where we wanted to place our children. This wasn’t an option. Whatever they said, that’s what it was.”*

Dangerous consequences of failing to draw on local knowledge

Our interviews suggest that one of the most serious consequences of CPS’s failure to consult with the community was that district officials jeopardized the safety of students by transferring them to schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods. These transfer decisions were made without the benefit of community wisdom. Community members predicted that these transfers would create real dangers for children who were sent to schools across gang lines. People we interviewed contended this actually resulted in the death of a student.

Community resident: *“The lack of respect became profoundly clear when they closed [School D] and dispatched all the children to [school C]....when they closed DuSable... they stopped taking freshman at DuSable and sent those children to Phillips____. Well I know... 39th ... so I know that 49th and Wabash is a completely different gang territory than 39th and Vincennes, 39th and Giles. You know...So, it’s completely different. Anybody who is a resident of the South Side of Chicago knows that a child that lives on 63rd and Lowe and they have to go to school at 51st and King Drive, they’re going to have problems when they get off that third and King Drive bus....And [CPS’s] response was, ‘We did a security audit.’ You know, ‘and the security audit said that there is a minimal security risk.’ And we were like, do you realize what’s happening in Hyde Park High School right now? [There were violent confrontations and a student was thrown from a balcony at Hyde Park High School.] Do you know what’s going on at [school C] right now? That child that got murdered on 51st and King Drive is a result of that climate.”*

Support staff School A: *“You know [names two Midsouth schools affected by Renaissance 2010 closings] have always been rivals from when I was a student here. And not only are they rivals, but to touch on that a little bit deeper, there are different gangs....You’re trying to force them to relate to one another, to learn with one another. You’re really asking for trouble. And that is absolutely why, you know I was just talking to some security right here, that is like 80% of the reason why our [discipline] incident level has risen....You know, the people who came up with the Renaissance 2010, you know they really didn’t take any of the communities into account when they were doing this.”*

Our interviews with parents and teachers also indicated that school closings created hardships and safety concerns that were less visible than fights at schools. These hardships were the result of decisions that were made without consulting parents and without knowledge of the actual conditions of families. They point to less obvious effects on families of closing schools and transferring children to schools farther from their homes. One of the most serious was that siblings were transferred to different schools,

making it difficult for parents to ensure that younger children would arrive at school safely and nearly impossible for parents to pick up all their children at their separate schools.

Parent: *“Children were separated, because my boys were separated...My younger son [age four] was sent all the way to [unnamed school]. It feels like all the way because when I got tired of stepping on needles in the projects, taking a shortcut, I rode the bus. So that was money that was spent on a daily basis. But they were getting out at the same time, which was hard on me, you know, because my older son [age seven] couldn't get out on time to come get [younger son]. So [my younger son] he's over here being let out amongst the crowd... it was very frustrating that whole year.”*

Teachers said that the disruptions caused by these uninformed decisions also affected children academically as older children often arrived late because they had to walk younger siblings to their schools and ensure that they were safely in their classrooms. Again these were consequences that could have been avoided had community and school personnel been consulted.

Teacher: *“...they [CPS] didn't even look at that kind of information to see if they were going to place all the siblings together or what they were doing....the children that have sisters and brother had to make sure they got to school first, then they came here. So that was like a struggle trying to get there and trying to get here on time. It was a mess.”*

Conclusion

There was remarkable similarity in the issues and concerns voiced by all those we interviewed. The teachers, administrators, students, and parents we interviewed were all “singing the same note.” Substantial research documents the negative consequences of student mobility (see Appendix C), and our findings illustrate those consequences – in human terms. In our view, they warrant further investigation and immediate action in the interim.

The data indicate that the forced student mobility caused by school closings and transfer of students under Renaissance 2010 affected children’s academic progress, safety, and sense of security and well-being. Teachers and administrators also reported they face additional challenges as they strive to educate a large number of transfer students without adequate resources or additional support from CPS. In fact, educators we interviewed were frustrated and dispirited by the daunting challenges and lack of district support that accompanied mass mobility of students. Parents reported significant, but predictable, hardships. Across the board, the people we interviewed spoke of the failure of CPS to adequately inform and consult them about a plan to close public schools in their community and move children from one school to another. A number of those interviewed perceived that they were set up to fail and eventually to be closed by a history of disinvestment in their schools, lack of resources, and by a transfer plan that was unworkable from the beginning. We were surprised to learn the degree to which the plan was devised without benefit of the knowledge and experience of school and community members. Failure to consult them not only resulted in serious missteps by uninformed CPS officials but it is deeply disrespectful of the wisdom and experiences of those who live and work in the community and the schools.

We are alarmed by reports of increased violence and stress on young children in receiving schools. The frustration and demoralization expressed by teachers and administrators committed to the education of Midsouth students is also deeply concerning. We heard young people who deeply desire an education testify to the failure to provide them

Although this is an initial study in one area of the city, like a canary in a mine, its findings sound a warning note. CPS has embarked on a plan to close up to 70 schools, transfer thousands of students, and open schools that are not run as public schools. Are children collateral damage in an experiment being conducted with little genuine input by those affected and no evidence that it will result in educational improvements? We believe the results of this study warrant the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- **A freeze on school closings pending results of a comprehensive impact study.**

There should be a freeze on all school closings under Renaissance 2010 until a comprehensive, qualitative and quantitative impact study can be conducted and the public can weigh the results. The study should be conducted by a body of expert researchers independent of CPS with full access to CPS data. Draft guidelines proposed by the Impact Study Sub-committee of Chicagoans United for Education coalition are a good place to start (see Appendix A).

- **School/community-centered school transformation process.**

Schools showing poor academic improvement should begin an immediate process of comprehensively evaluating their school's strengths and weaknesses, using qualitative and quantitative data, and develop a comprehensive plan for school transformation. Evaluation and development of the plan should involve teachers, administrators, support staff, the local school council, concerned community members and organization, students, CPS staff, parents/guardians, school employee unions, and invited outside experts. CPS should provide adequate resources for evaluation, planning, and implementation of a plan for transformation.

- **Receiving schools should be given additional resources and support.**

Schools that have received transferred students should be provided with additional material resources and professional and support staff to meet increased academic and social needs. These resources should be defined by those doing the work and facing the challenges: teachers, administrators, educational support personnel, professional staff, security staff, parents/guardians, and students (when age appropriate).

- **Schools are public community spaces. Instead of closing them they should be expanded as full-service community schools.**

Rather than close public schools in low-income communities, CPS should expand services in underutilized school buildings in collaboration with community organizations and agencies. School enrollments fluctuate with demographic trends but schools remain centers of community. In a context in which there is a need for a full range of programs in low-income communities, schools with unused space should be made full-service community schools to house, for example, adult education classes, after school programs, youth development programs run by community organizations, computer literacy classes and public computer access, parent centers, mental health and public health centers, and community safety patrols.

- **Under-enrolled schools should be transformed into small public schools with elected local school councils.**

CPS is creating “small schools” across the city. Under-enrolled schools should become small public schools with elected local school councils and small enrollments. To make this transition, these schools should engage in a school/community-centered transformation process involving the present school community.

APPENDIX A

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY OF RENAISSANCE 2010 SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND STUDENT TRANSFERS*

GUIDELINES

1. Chicago Public Schools should make all relevant data available to the public for examination, including data on students over time (1998-2006). Note: These data on closed schools have been removed from the CPS website and are not available for examination by the public.
2. An impact study should be conducted by an independent group of qualified evaluators that includes, in addition to established education researchers, members of concerned community and education groups calling for this study (CUE) including parent and community organizations, teacher and school employee unions, advocates for homeless children.
3. The study should examine the multiple impacts of school closings listed below using both quantitative and qualitative research methods (interview of teachers, school staff, administrators, students, parents).

KEY AREAS OF STUDY AND CENTRAL QUESTIONS

Effects on Children in Closing, Receiving, and New Schools

1. Academic progress

Achievement, retention, dropout/pushout, failure, attendance

2. Safety

Number of Discipline referrals, suspensions, expulsions, violence

3. Mobility

Travel distances, multiple displacements, quality of schools children are transferred to
(are transfer options an improvement?)

4. Special needs

Special education, effects on students with referrals in process (e.g. Spaulding Elementary School is a case to be studied), manifestation hearings (expulsions and suspensions)

5. Emotional and psych trauma

6. Specific impact of closings on Homeless children

Effects on Schools (Data should be compiled on individual schools and compared)

1. Closing Schools

Teacher instability: % of teachers who are substitutes, teacher qualifications, teacher flight

History of disinvestment (building maintenance, quality of texts, academic facilities such as science labs)

History of academic progress “over time” 1998-2005

Effects on non-professional staff.

2. Receiving Schools

Resources: staff, materials, class size, special services

Teacher instability and moral

Safety and discipline

Academic progress

3. Renaissance 2010 Schools

- Student access, selection process, right of return to original school
- Governance (e.g., community and teachers through LSC, private board, etc.)
- Teacher qualifications
- Resources: books, academic facilities, materials, teacher student ratio

Evaluation process: Data CPS requires charter and contract schools to collect and report. How they are evaluated.

****These draft guidelines were developed by the Impact Study Sub-Committee of Chicagoans United for Education.***

APPENDIX B

EFFECTS OF RENAISSANCE 2010 SCHOOL CLOSINGS IN THE MIDSOUTH

Interview Questions

Pauline Lipman, Ph.D., University of Illinois-Chicago

Alecia Person, DePaul University

- 1.) Which school did your child attend/at which school do you work?

- 2.) For those from closed schools: We know that the school closed. When were you informed of the closing? How were you told about (or informed of/about) the closing?

- 3.) Was this your first involvement in (or experience with) a school closing?

- 4.) Please tell us how the closing has affected your student (child). For those at receiving schools: please tell us how transferring students has affected your student (child). Use the following areas to focus your answers:
 - a.) Academic performance at the receiving school
 - b.) Safety at the receiving school
 - c.) Classroom/school climate in relation to your child's experience at the receiving school
 - d.) Support for special needs

- 5.) How would you describe the academic progress of your child (children you teach) at the receiving school?

- 6.) How far does your child have to travel to get to their new school? Are they passing schools that are closer to home to get to their new school?
- 7.) Do you have safety concerns regarding school closings and transfers? (gang issues, transportation)
- 8.) In your opinion, how did the closing affect the teachers with regards to classroom instruction and teacher morale?
- 9.) Please talk a little about the teachers at the receiving school with regards to quality of classroom instruction, teacher turnover and teacher morale. For teachers: Please talk about effects of transfers on instructional issues, teacher turnover and teacher morale.
- 10.) What resources must a school receive to address the needs of incoming students from a closed school? To your knowledge, has your school received the necessary resources to meet the needs of the incoming students?
- 11.) Are there any additional issues created by the school closing that you would like to mention?

Appendix C

Research on Student Mobility

Mobility in schools has been shown to negatively effect student achievement, emotional health, and other aspects of their well-being (Engec, 2006; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994; Kerbow, 1996; Kerbow, Azcoitia & Buell, 2003; Minneapolis Family Housing Fund, 1998; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy, 1999). Many of the nation's high mobility urban schools face low test scores, negative social environments, school violence, and low teacher and administrative morale. Students, parents, and teachers alike have discussed the hardships that go hand-in-hand with mobile populations. Student mobility makes it difficult to resolve problems in the nation's urban schools.

Researchers generally agree that low-income and "minority" students in urban school districts are more likely to experience difficulties due to excessive classroom mobility (Rumberger, 2003; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Crowley, 2003). For these students, high mobility is yet another barrier, among others, to an adequate education; and the long-term effects of high mobility include lower achievement levels, a slower academic pace, and ultimately, the reduced likelihood of high school completion (Rumberger, 2003; Kerbow, Azcoitia & Buell, 2003; Nichols & Gault, 2003; Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

Mobile students in elementary school experience both social and academic problems that have an enormous impact on their classroom success (Tucker et al., 1998; Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy, 1999). At the secondary level, mobile students are less likely to complete high school than those students who are stable Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Rumberger et al, 1999). Even after accounting for student characteristics that may also have a hand in student mobility and student achievement – such as poverty or family social standing – students who change schools experience lower academic achievement than students who do not change schools (Kerbow, 1996; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Rumberger et al, 1999).

Mobility has a negative impact on a child's individual academic achievement and progress, but it also generally has a negative impact on schools and districts. In a study of rural mobility, Fitchen (1994) reported that school personnel complained that "children who move frequently and who enter any given school during the year are unable to do well on standardized testing, which reflects badly on the school's performance rating" (p. 427). Scollay and Everson (1985) also argued that it was questionable to measure school performance with composite student achievement test scores if there was a high student mobility rate.

References

Crowley, S. (2003). The affordable housing crisis: residential mobility of poor families and school mobility of poor children. *Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1), 22-38.

Duffrin, E. (2006). Slow progress amid strife. *Catalyst*. On-line <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=1935&cat=23>

Engec, N. (2006). Relationship between mobility and student performance and behavior. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99(3), Jan/Feb, 167-179.

Fitchen, J.M.(1994). Residential mobility among the rural poor. *Rural Sociology*, 59(3), 416-436.

Forte, L. Anderson & Kelleher, M. (2004, June). WebExtra: Uncertain funding for 100 new schools. *Catalyst*. <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=2120&cat=23>

Haveman, R. & Wolfe, B. (1994). *Succeeding generations: On the effects of investments in children*. New York: Sage Foundation.

Karp, S. (2006, Oct.) Leaving special ed kids behind. *Catalyst*. On-line: <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=2061&cat=23>

Kerbow, D. (1996). Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 1(2), 147-169

Kerbow, D., Azcoitia, C. & Buell, B. (2003). Student mobility and local school improvement in Chicago. *Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1), 158-164.

Minneapolis Family Housing Fund. (1998). Kids Mobility Project. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

New Coalition for Economic and Social Change. (Oct. 2006). *Chicago Public Schools Cuts Special Education Teachers and Aides*. On-line: <http://www.newcoalition.org/Article.cfm?artId=19815>

Nichols, L. & Gault, B. (2003). The implications of welfare reform for housing and school instability. *Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1), 104-116.

Pribesh, S. & Downey, D. (1999). Why are residential and school moves associated with poor school performance? *Demography*, 36(4), 521-534.

Rossi, R. & Spielman, F. (2006, June 28). "Officials to Track Renaissance 2010's Effect." *Chicago Sun Times*, Final Edition, News, p. 20.

Rumberger, R.W. (2003). The causes and consequences of student mobility. *Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1), 6-21.

Rumberger, R.W. & Larson, K.A. (1998). Student mobility and the increased risk of high school drop out. *American Journal of Education*, 107, 1-35.

Rumberger, R.W., Larson, K.A., Ream, R.K. & Palardy, G.J. (1999). The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools. *Policy Analysis for California Education*. University of California, Berkeley, California.

Scollay, S.J. & Everson, S.T. (1985). Measuring School Improvement: A few Experientially Based Words of Caution. *The Urban Review*, 17(3), 201-209.

Tucker, C.J., Marx, J. & Long, L. (1998). Moving on: residential mobility and children's school lives. *Sociology of Education*, 71, 111-129.

Williams, D. (2004, June). Mid-South: Linking schools, communities. *Catalyst*. <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=1284&cat=24>

Williams, D. (2004, July). "Plan for Mid-South Schools Draws Support, Ire From Community Groups." *Catalyst*. <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=1299&cat=23>

Wood, D. Halfon, N., Scarla, D., Newacheck, P., & Nessim, S. (1993). Impact of family relocation on children's growth, development, school function, and behavior. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 270, 1334-1338.