Document A:
The CEO of CPS Explains School Closings

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Date: Fri, Jan 18, 2013 at 3:01 PM
Subject: Message from CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett About Upcoming Community Meetings Around School Utilization

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Since I became CEO of Chicago Public Schools last October, I’ve made it my mission to rebuild trust with our school communities. That’s why from day one I’ve made it my priority to involve our parents and school communities on the front end of the work we’re doing to address our utilization crisis. We cannot and will not do this work without all of you.

This utilization crisis is very real, and very daunting. Over the last 10 years, our city lost 145,000 school-aged children. The greatest losses happened on the South and West Sides of the city, and have understandably impacted our enrollment. Today, CPS has room to serve 511,000 students, but only 403,000 are enrolled. About 50 percent of our schools are underutilized and nearly 140 are half-empty. In the most underutilized parts of our city, 65 percent of enrollment drops at elementary schools are due to population decline.

We simply have too many buildings, and too few students. This is stretching our limited resources much too thin. And in the face of a $1 billion deficit next fiscal year, we have to address our utilization crisis and take action this year.

To make sure our communities have the stability and peace of mind they deserve, I’ve committed not to close any additional CPS facilities for five years starting this fall after we develop and enact a comprehensive plan to address these utilization challenges. In addition, none of the schools closed as part of these efforts will re-open as a charter school or as another public school. Our goal is to remove these facilities permanently from our footprint so we can redirect resources to all of our children and invest in providing access to more nurses, counselors, libraries, art, math, technology and other supports critical to student success.

Recently, the Commission on School Utilization, which I formed to evaluate our utilization challenges, completed its first level of community engagement. After hearing from hundreds of parents and school community members at 10 public meetings, they issued me a series of recommendations to remove schools from consideration as part of this process.

I have embraced some of these recommendations in full, including taking high schools and Level 1 schools off the table. I believe that we must ensure the safety and security of our students and continue to provide them with as many high-performing school options as possible. To view a copy of my response to the Commission, please visit cps.edu/qualityschools.

Sincerely,
Barbara Byrd-Bennett
CEO, Chicago Public Schools