

Guggenheim Elementary Parents and Teachers Fight to Save Their School



The Guggenheim community holds a candlelight vigil after their closing hearing Wednesday, February 3. Photo courtesy Substance News

by Jim Vail

The Guggenheim community packed the Board chambers and cried loud and clear that Ron Huberman's data numbers are false and in no way reflect the excellent public school where students feel like family.

At their Board hearing January 28, 8th grader Robert Campbell's oratory recalled past civil rights leaders - his voice calm in the beginning, then rising in intensity and emotion, until he had to eventually be carried from the podium, tears streaming down and his little body shaking after a speech that rocked the Board chambers. "Sir, Guggenheim is a family," Campbell told the hearing officer. "And when you separate us, which you are trying to do, you are breaking up this family. It is like a divorce. And we will not allow our family to be separated."

CORE- who actively organized protests against the school closings

last year that resulted in 6 schools being taken off the list - has inspired the schools set to close this year to fight back. Guggenheim teachers contacted Lara Krejca - a CORE member and teacher at Holmes Elementary which was taken off the list after a strong fight. She and CORE are helping them organize.

On February 3, Guggenheim's community hearing was held at the school. Though Board member Roberto Carrero attended the downtown meeting, no Board member was willing to venture to Englewood for the community meeting. The packed gymnasium hear speaker after speaker testify against the closing that night. One Guggenheim graduate even flew from Los Angeles, where he works as an actor, writer, former teacher, and law maker, to defend his school.

Assistant Principal Gervais Clay re-

butted the Board's claims about Guggenheim's "failures" showing that the school had made significant improvements in the past years. Students demonstrated eloquently the knowledge they'd developed at Guggenheim. LSC members Bette Plair and Ernest Jones decried the neglect of the CAO for their school, despite their pleas for more resources.

Despite the stone-faced bureaucratism of the hearing officer, the evening ended on a positive note. Chanting "Save our school," and "Hey Ho, Renaissance 2010 has got to go!" the students, teachers, and parents marched in front of the school in a defiant candlelight vigil after the hearing. "This fight doesn't stop tonight," promised former Guggenheim principal, Michael Alexander. "We know how to create political pressure."

CORE
Events
Coming
Soon

Wed, Feb 10, 4pm
Protest School Closings
CPS HQ
125 S. Clark St.

Thu Feb 11, 7:30p
Master Harold and the Boys
Timeline Theatre
\$35 ticket benefits CORE
coreteachers@gmail.com

Tue, Feb 16, 4:00p
CORE General Meeting
1141 S Jefferson
Manny's Deli

Wed, Feb 24
Board of Education Meeting to Close Schools
125 S Clark St.

Meet CORE's 2010 Candidate

for
Financial Secretary

Kristine Mayle



When Kristine first considered becoming a teacher, she balked at the idea. "I was terrified of public speaking," she admits. That's all changed since she made the leap from corporate temp to inspired instructor four years ago. Since her cousin has Down's Syndrome and she'd grown up around kids with disabilities, she had a unique ability to relate to kids that others dismissed. So, special education was a natural for her.

De La Cruz Academy was her first school. The little school in Pilsen

provided a warm, family experience until word came that the Board planned to break up the family. That year, she says, everyone was sad but united to oppose the closing. That unity actually helped students achieve better. Though activism won one more year of eighth grade for student stability, the school was doomed. That last year students were confused and angry, alternately acting defiant then breaking down in apologetic tears.

Kristine became defiant, too. Initially, she resented being part of a union. She felt the CTU had done nothing for her or her colleagues at De La Cruz. But when a Pilsen Alliance activist suggested she attend a CORE meeting, she got a new perspective on the Union's potential. When CORE members first convinced her to speak at a Board meeting others were impressed by her passion and eloquence. Yet, on the inside, "I actually experienced tunnel vision. I thought I was going to fall over," she laughs. She's learned to love public speaking and wants to bring the skills she's acquired in this fight to building the union.

Meeting teachers from all over has empowered her and made her a better teacher. She's gained confidence by helping others facing similar crises and has expanded her teaching techniques by collaborating with teachers she met through union work. Kristine sees the role of Financial Secretary as greater than just collecting dues. She wants to grow and empower the membership. She sees her next role in the union as uniting us for the challenges ahead. Vote for CORE and bring Kristine's fresh perspective to the CTU.

Hundreds Gather at January 9 CORE/GEM Education Summit

At Malcolm X College Saturday, hundreds of people stepped forward to demand the the city stop privatizing our schools and end Renaissance 2010 once and for all. The day began with keynote speeches by Lily Gonzalez who helped lead the fight against closing Peabody School last year, Kellina Mojica of Chicago Youth Initiating Change, Lois Ashford and Karen Lewis of CORE, Pauline Lipman from Teachers for Social Justice, and Cheryl Johnson and Marguerite Jacobs from the Committee for Safe Passage, Altgeld Gardens.

All of the speakers were compelling as they told of their fights against privatization, but it was the young Kellina Mojica who seemed to speak for all the parents and the students in attendance when she demanded, "we have a voice and want to be heard...whether you like it or not."

Lois Ashford told the crowd about her personal experiences explaining, "'My school was turned around, I got angry, and joined CORE."

Ashford then went on to introduce the CORE slate for the May union election to a loud round of applause. Core Presidential nominee Karen Lewis excited the crowd exclaiming, "Teaching is a privilege and learning is a right"

After the keynote addresses, the attendees split into workshops to discuss plans for moving the agenda forward. The summit achieved has already achieved at least one thing. The list of school closings was supposed to be announced on the Friday before the summit, but was delayed in an effort to diminish turnout. Over 400 people raised their voices loudly to let Ron Huberman know it didn't work.



Fighting School Closings

by Joe Linehan

In January, the Chicago Board of Education recommended 14 schools for closing, turnaround, or phase out. Last year, the Board targeted 22 schools, but a massive mobilization effort by CORE and GEM helped spare 6 schools. With 18 hearings scheduled until February 11th, the two organizations have already been busy.

CPS, still stinging from bad publicity and being forced to back down on a half-dozen schools last year, has tried to get smarter this year. They delayed the announcement of the closings list until after the CORE/GEM summit at Malcolm X. They also instituted a Student's Bill of Rights after the death of Derrion Albert at turnaround Fenger this year and more research showing that turnarounds do nothing to improve student achievement.

The community has also gotten smarter. In the past, CPS has been able to use a divide and conquer strategy to face down 15 or 20 small protests individually, but parents, teachers, and students in all affected schools seem to be coming together against this misguided business plan disguised as an education plan. It has been the school children themselves who have made the most convincing case for saving the schools. University of Pennsylvania sophomore Kara Crutcher wrote letters to Board members calling her time at Guggenheim Elementary, "more than a school in that it was a place of warmth,

friendliness, and security amongst the dangers that surrounded its doors."

At the January Board of Education meeting, Social Justice High School student Azucena Lopez complained about CPS's new Student Bill of Rights, "The thing is we get the rights our school gets closed down."

Many members of CORE also spoke out at the same meeting. CORE's candidate for CTU Financial Secretary, Kristine Mayle, personally urged Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins to adopt the model that the Consortium of Chicago School Research has shown works to positively change schools. Mayle passionately stated, "Dr. Watkins, as an educator, I implore you to stand up for our students and tell the members of the Board what we know is true: the current reforms aren't working. Let's adopt this Five Fundamentals model, which has been proven to help our students."

CORE and GEM will continue to make their voices heard at every school hearing throughout the city. There is still a lot of work to be done. It is only through communities coming together and making their voices heard that we can put enough pressure on the Board to reverse their destructive plans.

The following hearings have yet to take place between now and the February Board Meeting to vote on the school closings. Please get out and let your voice be heard:

HEARINGS (125 S. Clark)
 Wednesday, February 3, 2010. TILTON AND MARCONI ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Tilton and Marconi Elementary Schools (TO BE CONSOLIDATED BECAUSE OF UNDERUTILIZATION/ UNDERENROLLMENT).

Wednesday, February 3, 2010. PRESCOTT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Prescott Elementary School (TO BE CONSOLIDATED BECAUSE OF UNDERUTILIZATION/ UNDERENROLLMENT).

Thursday, February 4, 2010. GILLESPIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Gillespie Elementary School (TO BE TURNED AROUND BY AUSL)

Friday, February 5, 2010. PADEREWSKI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Gillespie Elementary School (TO RELOCATED CONSOLIDATED)
 Monday, February 8, 2010. DENEEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Deneen Elementary School (TO BE TURNED AROUND).

Monday, February 8, 2010. MOLLISON AND WELLS PREP ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Mollison Elementary School (TO BE RELOCATED/ CONSOLIDATED).

Tuesday, February 9, 2010. SCHNEIDER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Schneider Elementary School (TO BE PHASED OUT).

Wednesday, February 10, 2010. BRADWELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Bradwell Elementary School (TO BE TURNED AROUND).
 COMMUNITY HEARINGS...

Wednesday, February 3, 2010. GUGGENHEIM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Guggenheim Elementary School (TO BE CLOSED).
 LOCATION: At Guggenheim Elementary School, 7141 S. Morgan St.

February 4, 2010. LAS CASAS OCCUPATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL. 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Las Casas Occupational High School (TO BE CLOSED).
 At Ninno's Heroes Elementary School, 8344 S. Commercial.

February 6, 2010 (SATURDAY). PRESCOTT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Curtis Elementary School (TO BE CLOSED BECAUSE OF UNDERUTILIZATION UNDERENROLLMENT).
 LOCATION: At Prescott 1632 W. Wrightwood.

New Board Prez: "Give Her a Chance?"

by Xian Barrett

The newly appointed President of the Chicago Board of Education, Ms. Richardson-Lowry, has asked for a chance to get the Board in order and admitted that she hasn't the first clue about what is needed in education: "I am in the formative stages of developing how I will go through this journey of being a school board president. That opinion is evolving, and I suspect whatever I say today ... may not apply months from today."

I deeply appreciate the Board President's pledge to study and learn about education and to spend a great deal of time and energy pursuing the corruption in the credit card accounts. If she was taking up a new hobby like yachting or heading a new group that had no regard for children — the City Club of Chicago, for example — we might admire her maverick spirit in taking on something she admits she knows nothing about. If children's lives and community's futures weren't at stake, we might be amused by these henhouse follies as the new fox promises to "review the practices" of the old fox and "explore ways in which we function in a more responsible way".

However, we are currently in the midst of a one-month decision-making process on the fates of 14 community schools and thousands of children in the city of Chicago. Yet,

the person who is supposed to be leading the group suspects that she doesn't know what she's talking about, but may know better in a few months.

Ms. Richardson-Lowry personifies Chicago's education problem. It's not a few isolated incidents of "expensing" luxury cars and drivers, cappuccino makers, or office art. It's the whole dynamic of the mayoral-controlled system that awards powerful oversight duties to those who prioritize politically-connected "edupreneurs" over student growth. It's the kind of governance that thinks we should drop a couple of hundred million dollars on dysfunctional Instructional Delivery Systems while teachers can't get paper or copying services for the curriculum they have. It's the kind of management that blows tens of millions on untested software that teachers must waste our time slogging through instead of helping students. Meanwhile, many classrooms don't have the basic technological supports they need.

It's the pure madness of keeping promises to bank speculators in the hundreds of millions of dollars while students sit in classrooms without teachers because the Board won't fund the position. Refusing to invest in children because we owe debts to

speculators is like spending your kids' lunch money on a snuggie for Donald Trump because he might catch cold.

A wealth of taxpayer dollars is available for: a. performance management systems, b. loan swaps and bonds, and c. capital projects. Meanwhile students, parents, teachers, and classrooms constantly face "tough budget choices". Perhaps that's because the school system is run by: a. performance management experts, b. bankers, and c. real estate moguls.

The definition of madness, it's said, is doing the same thing twice and expecting different results. What is it called to appoint over and over again the same clouted, non-educator types and then act shocked at the resulting carnage?

So... no. Don't give Ms. Richardson-Lowry a chance... not if you care about our city's children. Mayor Daley and his cronies deserve no more chances. They've rolled the dice with our children's educations too many times already.

The solution to our education problems is not some hotshot financial, management, or legal expert. The solution is not new schools run by the same people who destroyed the old schools. We don't need more bond issues. We don't need teacher surveillance.

What we need is an investment in each student at the classroom level. Every school deserves the resources... to give every teacher the necessary supports... to provide every child in the city... a world class education. It's a monumental task and the only people with the expertise to do it are those who experience the classroom every day — the teachers, the students, and the parents who support them. We know how to improve the schools and have never been given the chance to do so. Give this chance to us.

CORE Pushes CTU Presidential Debate

CORE has gathered the signatures of over 140 delegates to call for a special meeting of the House of Delegates in April, which would be a debate among the CTU certified Presidential Candidates for the May 2010 CTU elections. This represents over 10% of the delegates. The SEA Caucus has also gathered signatures for a presidential debate. The debate would be open to all members of the Chicago Teachers Union who wish to attend a moderated debate between candidates.