



PURE *perspectives*

What's wrong with CPS's Renaissance 2010??

Renaissance 2010 is Chicago Mayor Daley's plan to close at least 60 public schools and replace them with 100 new charter and other novelty schools by the year 2010. PIRE agrees that the Chicago Public Schools need help. All of our children deserve a high-quality school in a safe neighborhood where families can find homes, jobs, health care, recreation, transportation, and cultural activities. We are very far from reaching that goal, but Renaissance 2010 does little to address it, especially for low-income minority children who bear the brunt of CPS's failures – and its “reforms”. Here are some specific problems with CPS's Renaissance 2010 plan:

▲ Forcing student transiency

Renaissance 2010 has already forced thousands of children to move from school to school. Research is very clear that moving a student from one school to another can cause significant academic regression. Some affected children have already moved two or three times or more.

Yet CPS has never targeted these students for special support, or tracked them students to determine how the multiple moves affect their lives.

Education advocates won a partial victory in 2007 with a new CPS “turnaround” policy which leaves the children in the school while changing the staff. However, this does not address all the problems with transiency, since the stability of adult relationships is a major part of what makes students feel connected, safe, and known.

The spring, 2008 Renaissance 2010 closing, consolidation, and relocation of 18 schools will result in even more forced transiency of children whose schools are being closed or consolidated.

▲ Disrupting communities

The expanding number of school closures is leaving more and more communities without a neighborhood school. On the west side, there are reportedly some 1400 students who graduate from elementary schools in the community who have no home high school since Austin HS was closed. These students must travel a long way to get to Wells, Clemente and other high schools, and cross gang boundaries in the process. The uptick in school-specific violence and student murders have been connected to school closings and student transfers.

Student violence is in part a response to a lack of community and adult supervision or connection. Closing down the only community high school in an area simply exacerbates young people's sense of disconnection and alienation.

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▲ Skimming students

Renaissance 2010 schools serve fewer low-income, special education, and limited English speaking students.

Special enrollment procedures, boundaries, transportation challenges, fees, etc. which are characteristic of charters and other non-traditional schools can act as barriers to exclude students with parents who are less capable and have fewer resources.

Charter/contract schools are not required to waive student fees for low-income families. In some schools this can be several hundred dollars. If parents can't pay, their children must leave the school. Regular public schools must allow fee waivers for low-income families.

Too many students pushed out: Students have fewer rights in charter/contract schools. These schools can get rid of almost anyone at any time. We have heard from many parents of charter school students who are abruptly transferred out and back to the neighborhood school without due process and against the parent's wishes. Parents of special education students have told us about their constant fight to keep charter and other schools from pushing their children out. This can lead to a situation where parents are afraid to complain, raise concerns, or ask for extra help for their children. There is also no place such as an LSC, an Area Officer, or a central office department where parents of students in these schools can turn for help.

▲ “Dramatically better” schools no better than “failing” schools CPS closes

Two-tiered school system: CPS has long maintained a two-tiered school system. There is a small system of high-quality schools for the already-advantaged, including magnet and selective enrollment schools, which receive special treatment in terms of repairs, teaching positions, waivers, and other perks and prerogatives. Then there's the rest of the system which primarily serves poor students of color. These schools are seriously under-resourced and experience intensive intervention and interference from CPS which has nevertheless failed to help them improve.

Now CPS has added many Renaissance 2010 schools to the upper tier. These favored schools receive more than their fair share of resources (for example, they received a disproportionate percentage of capital funds in 2007) but are held to a lower standard.

For example, an analysis of the “turnaround model” for 2007-08, Sherman School, shows that it is performing no better than many of the schools CPS closed this year for low performance (see <http://pureparents.org/data/files/Shermancharts2-08.pdf>). At the January, 2008 Board of Education meeting, Sherman's principal was invited to tell the world about the great turnaround. His presentation was focused on the success of having made toilet paper available in the washrooms.

It's important to note that there has been a different turnaround “model” every year since Renaissance 2010 began.

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At every Board of Education meeting, people representing charter and other Renaissance 2010 schools are petted and praised while LSC members and parents from regular neighborhood schools are insulted and demeaned.

Waiting list boast: Charter advocates offer the existence of a waiting list as proof of charter school popularity, but regular schools can't have waiting lists. They are required either to enroll the student or, in overcrowded schools, assign him or her to another school.

Off-the-books operations: Many charter schools operate multiple campuses. Their state school report card is aggregated, that is, the data is for all campuses combined. Thus it is impossible to get an idea of the progress at any individual school in that network.

Charters and other Renaissance 2010 schools are supposed to have governing bodies which include parents, but these bodies are fairly invisible and, if they hold regular meetings and maintain minutes, few know about them.

Losing built-in accountability of LSCs: The school reform law requires schools with LSCs to hold at least two public meetings every year to report to parents and the community about test results, expenditure of funds, program success or failure, and other issues related to school improvement. Charter schools are held accountable once every five years.

LSCs provide a formal structure for any parent to raise a concern, find help for problems, and participate in the overall improvement of the school. Non-LSC schools have no such processes or structure. Parents in these schools often feel they have nowhere to turn for help. Their only option is to remove their child from the school, and many have done just that.

Advisory groups' role less effective: Expert independent analysis reports support the value of the "authentic accountability" structure that LSCs provide. For example, in his book, *Empowered Participation*, Fung finds that Chicago's LSCs have been especially successful in including and empowering low-income parents of color in school improvement.

▲ **Illegal diversion of State Chapter 1 funds**

The law requires CPS to set aside at least \$261 million in funds to be used under the authority of LSCs. Now called Supplemental General State Aid (SGSA), these are funds for low-income students, and are to be used only by a vote of the LSC. There is **no exemption** to this specific provision of the law which would allow charter schools, small schools, or so-called contract schools without LSCs to use a part of this entitlement. Yet for the past several years, CPS has diverted millions of dollars from the \$261 million to such schools. While we agree that all low-income students should receive supplemental funds no matter where they go to school, we assert that this money should come from CPS's own funds, not from the shrinking SGSA per-pupil allotments the law set aside for schools with LSCs.

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▲ Disregarding education research and best practice

Since 1995, the non-educators running CPS have inflicted many disastrous policies on our students and schools beginning with high-stakes testing and wholesale student retention, which research has proven to be a huge failure that damaged and didn't help the flunked children. Research has also exposed the failure of CPS probation, reconstitution, and re-engineering programs. Renaissance 2010 requires other damaging practices (forced transiency of students, e.g.) while embracing others which have either already failed or have failed to show why they should be models.

Four years ago, CPS led the cheerleading for small schools creation; this year they have declared the small schools they helped create at Orr High School a failure and they are closing them down.

Despite CPS's best efforts to spin local data, its charter schools have failed to significantly outperform similar non-charter schools, and too many perform the same or worse, mirroring results from numerous national studies.

Discarding a true model, Chicago's LSCs: The continuous efforts by CPS to disband, disempower, and disappear LSCs goes against the positive research about Chicago's version of site-based management. LSCs come as close as anything happening in CPS to being considered a true model for other districts to emulate. LSCs have increased parent involvement and strengthened local accountability, and they have done this in the poorest communities where civic engagement can be very low. Yet Renaissance 2010 will create scores of schools in currently poor communities which will not have LSCs.

Discarding progress under CTU partnership: Demonstrating its lack of interest in promising local models of progress in at-risk schools, CPS trashed the Partnership Program it had with the Chicago Teachers' Union which showed impressive results in just two years. For example, CPS has reportedly decided to close Attucks Elementary, a school which posted a 14.7% gain in reading comprehension ITBS scores from 2002 to 2004 under the CTU Partnership program.

Lack of long-term program evaluation: It's time CPS stopped basing educational decisions on "common sense," "gut feelings" and other political sound bites. It's long past time for CPS to become responsible by establishing a serious, long-term effort to evaluate programs based on scientific methods, evidence, and sound educational practices so that we stop damaging children and start using what we have learned to make every school work well for children.

For PURE's ideas about what to do instead, see "What should happen instead of Renaissance 2010?"

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