

June 20, 2017

Dear Mayor Emanuel, Alderman Dowell, Dr. Jackson, Mr. Claypool, and Mr. Clark,

As parent and neighborhood leaders in the National Teachers Academy community, we are writing to express our deep disappointment that our families have not been given the respect or consideration they deserve since CPS has announced its proposal to convert NTA to a high school. In fact, while these plans have been simmering for 18 months, our community has been informed of them in a slow trickle of information that started two months ago. After hearing of a proposed shift to our attendance boundary at our Alderman's community forum, we waited a month for CPS to respond to our requests for a meeting. Fed up, we organized our own town hall to elevate the voices of our community members. Two hours before the start of our public forum, CPS announced their town hall schedule -- three meetings crammed into the month of June. The first of these meetings was scheduled on kindergarten registration, the second on the last day of school, and the final meeting, at NTA, was scheduled for June 28th, one week after the start of summer vacation.

These current efforts at engagement continue a trend of poor planning and a lack of respect for community voice. In addition to these town halls, CPS has now scheduled three additional private meetings with little to no notice given to residents. On Friday morning, members of our community woke up to a slip of paper slid under their door sometime after 8 pm -- advertising a CPS forum to be held on Saturday afternoon. Still, the children in these buildings grabbed the hands of their relatives at 2 pm, headed to the meeting. They found the location changed -- without signage -- this time to a room in the back of the complex with a locked door. Just like in their educational lives, they persisted despite all the obstacles in their path, eventually making it to a room full of neighbors who were unanimous in their opposition to the plan that would shut down their beloved school.

In the same week, the NTA community was surprised once again to be told that the Town Hall on our campus would now no longer take place on June 28th. After preparations had been made -- and shared with CPS -- for a Community BBQ to invite back families and increase community participation, CPS notified NTA that the date had been changed, this time to July 10th, even further in the summer.

In short, CPS has actively and systematically disenfranchised our families' voices for over a year and a half while developing plans to seize our school, despite our proven ability to provide a high quality education to low-income children. We do not accept that this is the best our government can do for its people.

The services we pay for and leaders we elect must be held to a higher standard. No child deserves to have the quality of their public education threatened by the political clout of special interests. The development of attractive real estate cannot be the reason for lowering the quality of the public education that is so critical to the future economic mobility of otherwise neglected communities. We will not be excluded from planning our children's future and will take any actions necessary to protect their interests against the forces of racism, classism, and segregation.

As parent and community leaders at NTA, we cannot and will not stand by as CPS pushes forward with this false narrative, insisting that this poorly constructed proposal is in the best interest for the community long term, and that it is the perfect opportunity for integration. When you begin a process by disenfranchising another community, you are not setting the stage for integration. You are ensuring that systemic inequality will continue. In observance of the values of our school, we will not allow that to happen.

Sincerely,

Sarah Cockerill
Friends of NTA

Elisabeth Greer
ALSC Chair

Audrey Johnson
Longtime Resident

Veronica Schmitt
PAC President

Caren Taylor
Hilliard Parent