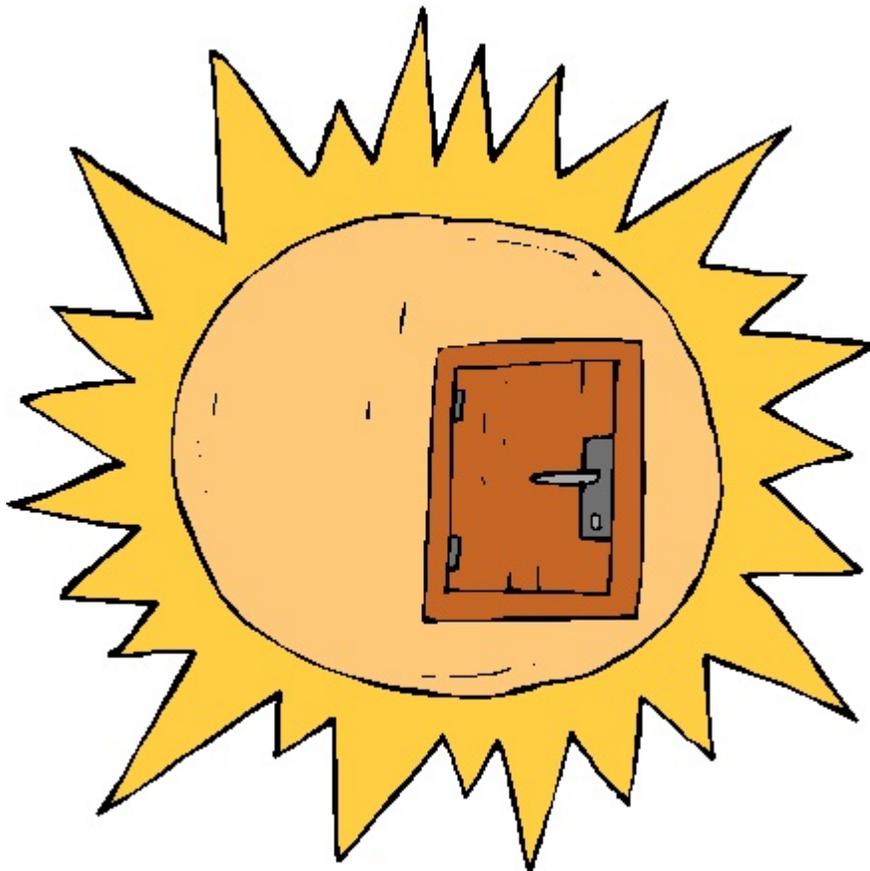


Public Accountability and Renaissance 2010



A report of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE)
by Julie Woestehoff
November 2008

Forward

This report is based on the membership lists, by-laws and meeting minutes of the governing bodies of 18 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Renaissance 2010 schools. These are public documents which PURE obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the schools.

We thank the 18 schools which complied with the state FOIA law and provided these documents at no cost to PURE.

We also thank the Office of Attorney General Lisa Madigan, and that office's Public Access Counselors Terry Mutchler and Amanda Lundeen, for their patience and assistance.

Two-thirds of the Renaissance 2010 schools did not comply with our request, which is considered by law a denial of the request. We will continue to work to obtain their documents, if any exist.

It may seem unfair to focus this study on the issues raised in the documents of the 18 schools that followed the law rather than on those schools that did not comply. Additionally, the minutes of the complying schools' Boards varied widely in the amount and type of detail that was included. Some minutes provided a lot of information, some were more terse. We learned a lot about some schools and very little about others.

However, we embarked on this study to try to bring some light on the operations of Renaissance 2010 schools. Since 2004, CPS has been closing traditional neighborhood schools, firing entire school staffs, dismantling elected parent-majority local school councils, and disrupting children's lives and the fabric of communities, all in the name of Renaissance 2010. While costly CPS and City Hall public relations operations paint a bright picture of success, independent research has raised troubling questions about whether there has been any substantial benefit from Renaissance 2010, especially for the most at-risk students. Yet CPS and Mayor Daley are determined to continue with this program.

Therefore, we believe that the public must begin to cast a more skeptical and discerning eye on the Renaissance 2010 program. PURE hopes that this report will help shed some much-needed light on the subject.

Julie Woestehoff
Executive Director
Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE)
Chicago, IL

November 19, 2008

Public Accountability and Renaissance 2010

Executive Summary

The present study is the latest effort by Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) to bring some light to the issue of parent involvement in the governance of Renaissance 2010 schools and how that impacts public accountability.

Overall, we believe the report offers a useful glimpse into the operations and governance of some Renaissance 2010 schools using words taken directly from the governing board minutes we obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The report also raises some serious concerns.

Fifty-seven schools or charter networks were contacted. More than two-thirds of these Renaissance 2010 schools failed to respond to our FOIA requests. We therefore conclude that **these schools have no governing bodies**, which violates the law and CPS policy.

Within the smaller set of 18 responding schools/networks, we found more reason for concern:

- ▶ Only 7 of the 152 board members of the responding charter schools are parents, or less than 5%. This indicates a major lack of legally-mandated parent involvement in school governance.
- ▶ There are problems with student retention, enrollment, attrition, and “push-outs”.
- ▶ There is evidence of questionable accountability regarding testing, discipline, etc.
- ▶ There are problems with teacher attrition.
- ▶ The by-laws of most of the schools were in violation of the Open Meetings Act.

Our recommendation

Non-Renaissance 2010 schools in CPS have been governed by elected parent-majority local school councils (LSCs) since 1989. LSC operations follow a set of guidelines established in the School Reform Act. LSC members are trained every two years to understand and follow those guidelines. We believe that LSCs have improved the level of accountability in Chicago schools and system wide. In addition, studies have shown a correlation between active LSCs and significant improvements in student achievement.

Governance of Renaissance 2010 schools is far less clear. In fact, CPS has changed its policies regarding governance of these schools at least once a year for the last seven years. Research on the Renaissance 2010 program has shown mixed results for student progress and equity of opportunity.

CPS claims that Renaissance 2010 school are more accountable because they can be shut down after five years. We find that to be an unacceptably low standard of accountability. Indeed, our report offers evidence that there is little direct public oversight of these schools.

We recommend that all CPS schools, including any Renaissance 2010 schools, have the proven accountability system of elected, parent majority LSCs.

Public Accountability and Renaissance 2010

Looking at Mayor Daley's new schools program through meeting minutes

A report of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE)

by Julie Woestehoff

November 2008

Purpose of the project

In 2006, Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) surveyed parents of students enrolled in a number of “regular” Chicago Public Schools (CPS) schools and in the schools CPS labeled “Renaissance 2010 schools” which included all CPS charter schools. We hoped to gain some insight into the similarities and differences in parent involvement within these sets of schools. The report of our results, “*Effective Parent-School Partnerships*,” is available on our web site.

While we did learn some valuable information about the effectiveness of different types of parent involvement in relation to student achievement and parent satisfaction, we didn't learn much about one of PURE's main interests, that is, the amount and effectiveness of parental involvement in school governance at the various schools. Responses to questions related to that area were muddled; for example, parents seemed unclear about what form of governance existed at their schools. In the end, we were unable to use any of the data from that section of the survey.

The present study is our latest effort to bring some light to the issue of parent involvement in the governance of Renaissance 2010 schools and how that impacts public accountability.

Since 1989, CPS schools have been governed by elected parent-majority local school councils (LSCs). LSC operations follow a set of guidelines established in the School Reform Act. LSC members are trained every two years to understand and follow those guidelines. Among other responsibilities, LSCs report to the public twice a year on school and student progress. We believe that LSCs have improved the level of accountability in Chicago schools and system wide. Research shows that LSCs are related to significant growth in student achievement.

The governance of Renaissance 2010 schools is not so straightforward. In fact, CPS has changed its policies regarding governance of these schools at least once a year for the last seven years. Yet CPS leaders claim that Renaissance 2010 schools are more accountable, because they can be closed down.

The public generally learns only what CPS and City Hall want us to know about Renaissance 2010 schools. We decided to get our information from the horse's mouth, that is, from the official documents of the governing bodies of Renaissance 2010 schools.

FOIA process, timeline and results

Getting the documents was not easy.

On April 25, 2008, PURE sent Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request letters to all 85 of the schools that were listed as Renaissance 2010 schools on that date on the CPS web site.

They included 57 charter schools (including the various “campuses” of multi-branch charter schools), 4 “contract” schools, 19 “performance” schools and 5 “professional development” schools.

Each FOIA letter requested the same information:

- ▶ Copies of the minutes of the local governing body from June 1, 2007 through April 1, 2008.
- ▶ A list of the names, addresses, and affiliations of the governing body members, including specific information about which members are parents of students enrolled in the school.
- ▶ A copy of the current by-laws for the governing body.

The FOIA law requires a response within 7 business days unless an extension is requested in writing. By May 9, 2008, nine business days after the letters had been sent, only **one Renaissance 2010 school had complied with the law**. Two called to say they had no governing body. All others failed to respond.

**Only one school
complied within
FOIA's legal
time period.**

FOIA appeal to Arne Duncan

On May 9, 2008, PURE sent an appeal letter to Arne Duncan. As the administrative head of CPS, he is the responsible party under FOIA when a CPS school fails to respond to a FOIA request.

We received a response from Mr. Duncan on June 9, 2008. He claimed that our request was not filed properly, because contact for all non-charter schools should have been made through CPS, not the individual schools. (Mr. Duncan’s charge was undercut in a subsequent letter from the Illinois Attorney General.)

Despite our supposed procedural error, Mr. Duncan provided the full extent of his information about two of these non-charter schools, Sherman and Harvard. The information consisted of a list of their governing body members and their addresses, and meeting minutes from one of the two schools. The CPS letter concluded, “We have not located other responsive documents.”

Appeal to the Illinois Attorney General

On June 17, 2008, PURE sent a letter to Terry Mutchler, the Public Access Counselor for the Illinois Attorney General's (AG) Office.

We have been consistently impressed with the efforts of AG Lisa Madigan's office in the area they call "Open and Accessible Government." In 2007, PURE had invited Ms. Mutchler to present two workshops for LSC members on the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and Freedom of Information Act. Her workshops were very well- received, and she helped us clear up several points of OMA debate with CPS.

By the time we wrote to Ms. Mutchler about our denied FOIA requests, a few more schools had responded, no doubt as a result of our May letter to Arne Duncan. Our letter to Ms. Mutchler asked for her assistance in encouraging the rest of the schools to comply with our request.

Attorney General letter to charter and other Renaissance 2010 schools

On July 25, 2008, we received two letters from the AG's office, one for charter and the other for Renaissance 2010 schools. These letters stated that the schools must comply with our FOIA request. It was PURE's task to copy and send these letters out to all the non-compliant schools.

By August 25, 2008, we had sent the AG's letter and a cover letter of our own to the 75 non-responding schools.

Which schools responded – and which did not?

After receiving the AG letter, several schools contacted us to say that they had never received the first letter.

Also, many of the 57 charter schools listed as Renaissance 2010 schools are branches of large, multi-campus charters. Only the "central office" of these charter schools was required to respond. For example, there were 11 schools listed as branches of Chicago International Charter School (CICS), and only one response from CICS was required.

**We conclude that
two-thirds of
Renaissance 2010 schools
have no governing body.**

So, taking multiple campuses into consideration, we received responses from 18 of the 53 schools/school networks. A full two-thirds of the Renaissance 2010 schools never responded to our FOIA requests. We therefore conclude that these schools have no governing body.

Charter schools that DID respond were:

1. Academy of Communication and Technology High School (ACT)
2. Architecture, Construction, and Engineering Charter School (ACE Tech)
3. Bronzeville Lighthouse
4. Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS)
5. Chicago Math and Science Academy
6. Erie Elementary
7. KIPP Ascend
8. Legacy
9. Namaste
10. Noble Street Charter Schools
11. Passages
12. Providence-Englewood
13. Youth Connection Charter School

Non-charter Renaissance 2010 Schools that DID respond were:

14. Harvard (via Duncan letter)
15. Marine Military (responded that it had no governing body)
16. Pershing West
17. Sherman (via Duncan letter)
18. UPLIFT (stated that there would be no governing body until after April, 2008, election)

Charter schools which did NOT respond were:

1. ASPIRA
2. Catalyst
3. Chicago Virtual K-12
4. Choir Academy
5. DuSable Leadership/Betty Shabazz
6. Galapagos
7. L.E.A.R.N.
8. Alain Locke
9. North Lawndale College Prep.
10. Perspectives (e-mailed a comment but did not provide the requested information)
11. Polaris
12. University of Chicago charter schools
13. UNO charter schools
14. Urban Prep for Young Men
15. Young Women's Leadership HS

Non-charter Renaissance 2010 schools which did NOT respond were:

16. Austin Business and Entrepreneurship HS
17. Frazier Prep
18. Prologue Early College Prep
19. Austin Polytechnic HS
20. Bronzeville Scholastic HS
21. Collins Academy HS
22. Infinity Math, Science, the Tech HS
23. Lindblom Math and Science HS
24. Multicultural Arts HS
25. Rickover Naval Academy
26. School of Social Justice
27. Suder Montessori
28. Tarkington School of Excellence
29. TEAM Englewood Community Academy HS
30. D. H. Williams Prep School of Medicine
31. World Language at Little Village
32. Chicago Academy
33. Dodge Renaissance
34. National Teachers' Academy
35. Williams

What do the minutes show?

The schools that responded by sending their minutes and other documents have provided a fascinating glimpse into the variety of governance and education operations taking place in Renaissance 2010 schools across the city.

Much of what we read shows organizations working somewhat well to fairly well, and clearly doing their best to educate students, as would be expected.

But there are also telling comments and situations that shed a lot of light on Renaissance 2010. Our review shows

1. A major lack of legally-required parent involvement in school governance.
2. Problems with student retention, low enrollment, attrition, and “push-outs”.
3. Significant accountability issues regarding testing, discipline, etc.
4. Problems with teacher attrition.
5. Violations of the Open Meetings Act.

1. Lack of parent involvement in governance

A major finding of this study is that there is almost no parent involvement in governance in the responding schools, despite state law and CPS policies that require parents to be involved in school decision making.

The Illinois law governing charters requires that their charter include “a description of the governance and operation of the charter school, including the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and operation of the charter school.”

Our 2006 parent survey actually came about because of a PURE complaint to Arne Duncan that charter schools were not being held accountable for involving parents in school decision making despite the legal requirement that they do so. To date, activities and results in this area are not included in the charter school annual report.

In fact, most of the reporting charter schools’ governing bodies are made up of lawyers, business people, and educators. Parent members are as scarce as hen’s teeth.

**Parent members
on charter school
boards are
is as scarce
as hen’s teeth.**

Many non-charter Renaissance 2010 schools are housed in buildings which previously had an LSC, but the new school has no LSC. After a few years of operation, CPS may allow these schools to form an “Advisory LSC”, or ALSC, which is appointed by CPS and has little real power. PURE and a number of other plaintiffs have filed a lawsuit against CPS to challenge this practice.

Even if the law allows CPS to create new schools without LSCs, in those cases CPS is still required to “develop appropriate alternative methods for involving parents, community members and school staff to the maximum extent possible in all of the activities of those schools, and... delegate to the parents, community members and school staff so involved the same powers which are exercisable by local school councils with respect to other attendance centers.”

CPS’s own policy on governance in Renaissance 2010 schools established Transitional Advisory Councils in buildings where new schools are slated to be housed, and Interim Advisory Committees to operate “until a permanent governing body is established.” We must assume that the schools which did not comply with our FOIA request have no governance structure at all, and so there is no vehicle for parents and the public to hold the schools accountable.

The following is a listing of the numbers of parent representatives on the governing bodies of the responding schools, discerned to the best of our ability from the Board lists and minutes that were provided. By contrast, Illinois law requires 6 parents on every 11- or 12-member LSC, which constitutes a voting majority.

Parent involvement in Renaissance 2010 school governance, school by school

Charter schools which responded

1. ACT: 15 members, 2 parents.
2. ACE Tech: 17 member board, no identified parent member.
3. Bronzeville Lighthouse: No member list was provided; an average of 5 Board members attended the meetings; in December, 2007, a parent member was appointed; the minutes state that this was a requirement of the by-laws (which we also did not receive).
4. Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS): 10 members, no identified parent members.
5. Chicago Math and Science Academy: No member list provided. No identified parent members; an average of 4 members attended meetings.
6. Erie Elementary: 21 members, 2 parents of EECS students, perhaps one other parent
7. KIPP Ascend: 12 member board, 1 parent slot.
8. Legacy: 16 members, no parents.
9. Namaste: 10 members, no parents.
10. Noble Street schools: 17 members, 1 parent added in April 2008.
11. Passages: Board is for umbrella agency Asian Human Services (AHS), which declined to provide addresses and affiliations of its members; there is a "Passages Committee" of the AHS Board which seemed to have one parent member.
12. Providence-Englewood: 14 members, no identified parents.
13. Youth Connection Charter School: 11 members, no parents identified; discussion at one meeting about adding a parent member.

**Only 7 of the 152
charter board
members
are parents,
or less than 5%.**

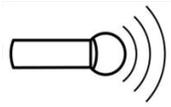
Only 7 of the 152 charter board members are parents, or less than 5%.

Non-charter Renaissance 2010 Schools that DID respond were:

14. Harvard: 7 people on "LSC" - not clear which are parents but presumably some are.
15. Marine Military: responded that it had no governing body, is not required to have one.
16. Pershing West: ALSC has 11 members, 6 parents, 2 community, 2 teachers, 1 principal.
17. Sherman: 4 members on Sherman "LSC", 3 parents and 1 community.
18. UPLIFT: stated that there would be no governing body until after April, 2008, election.

Non-charter schools have at least 9 and as many as 16 parent members out of a total of 22 members.

Keep in mind that two-thirds of the Renaissance 2010 schools did not respond at all to our FOIA requests. Given this lack of information, we have concluded that these schools have no parent involvement in school governance.



Hot mike moments

- !! Regarding student discipline, a Board member at ACE Tech opined that “parents have no idea what to do with these kids” (minutes, June 18, 2007).
- !! The August 21, 2007, minutes for KIPP reflect a need to fill the vacancy in the parent representative position. A parent was introduced at the October 16, 2007 meeting as a potential board member. There is no indication in the minutes submitted that she or any other parent was appointed to fill the parent vacancy on the Board at subsequent meetings.

2. Problems with student retention, low enrollment, attrition, and “push-outs”

Renaissance 2010 boosters assert that these schools must be better than regular schools because they have waiting lists. We found that this is not the case for many of the responding schools. In fact, some schools struggled to keep up their enrollment, a critical number for their bottom line because CPS pays them a per-pupil allotment.

CPS leaders also make a broad claim that Renaissance 2010 high schools have a higher graduation rate than regular high schools. The minutes from some responding schools show some possible “massaging” of this data.

Public concerns that Renaissance 2010 schools are looking to enroll “better students” and push out less wanted students also receive some substantiation in the schools’ minutes.

► The August 20, 2007 minutes for ACE Tech state that “the ED reminded the board that ACE Tech began with an enrollment of about 142 students and currently there are approximately 100-105 that may be graduating. (Member) said he wants to work out those statistics because some of those students moved away from the area, i.e. Mexico, and other transfers that didn’t include dropping out. (Member) felt the measure of success was 125 students.... (Member) asked the board to look at the fact that we are very reluctant to transfer students in, whereas most schools that start with 150 students and graduate 135 have been transferring kids in.”

In the November 19, 2007 minutes, ACE Tech reported the following numbers:

- ▶ 142 Seniors began in 2004, current enrollment is 94
- ▶ 148 Juniors began in 2005, current enrollment is 109

- Enrollment at KIPP Ascend declines in the upper grades.

Numbers reported at its Sept. 18, 2007, meeting were:

- ▶ 90 students 5th grade
- ▶ 92 students 6th grade
- ▶ 73 students 7th grade
- ▶ 59 students 8th grade

**"In our school
the upper grades'
% of attrition is high."**

The KIPP Board spends quite a bit of time discussing attrition at the school. "MC asked for the most common reasons that students leave the school. JL also asked how it compares to previous years. NB to investigate and report back. DC stated that KIPP-wide the highest % of attrition is in the 5th and 6th grade and he feels that 'In our school the upper grades' % of attrition is high' " (October 16, 2007 minutes).

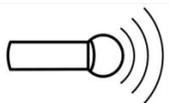
In March, 2008, staff reported that "Last month we lost one 5th grade boy...CPS has stopped counting kids, and we're not losing money for kids who leave at this point in the year."

➤ September 18, 2007, minutes of the CICS Board state that "Bucktown and Irving Park campus was underenrolled and have had a significant number of transfer outs with 30 transfers at Bucktown. The waiting list at Bucktown is not very long and has a lower Kindergarten enrollment."

➤ Passages reports (Oct. 19, 2007, minutes) openings in kindergarten. "This is the first time this has ever happened - we have always had over 20 students on the waiting list."

**"The waiting list
is exhausted."**

➤ Providence-Englewood reports on Dec. 1, 2007 that enrollment is 298 and "the waiting list is exhausted." In March, 2008, they report that enrollment is 288, "202 are returning and there are currently 50 new applications. The enrollment deadline was 2/14/08.



Hot mike moments

**The CPS Office of New Schools
"told (the principal)
to counsel out these kinds of kids."**

!! At KIPP, there was a discussion on March 11, 2008 of "counseling out" difficult students. "JOC said half a dozen kids are at KACS (KIPP) who would have normally been counseled out of the school... this is a sign of how high our retention rates are compared to past years....NB said that SPED students have only 10 days of suspension to use each year. 9.5 hour school day isn't a good fit for many of our students. MC asked if we should counsel them out. NB said as a charter school that we can educate the same kids that other schools cannot educate them as well. ONS rep actually told NB to counsel out these kinds of kids." ONS is the CPS Office of New Schools.

!! At ACE Tech, “(Board member) asked if the applications are getting in early and if the school was getting better students” (minutes, August 20, 2007). ACE Board members also express concern that some of the school’s students are not adequately committed to the construction trades: “57% of students are applying for one of 3 (construction-related) majors. “(Member) said remember to make sure they want to go into construction – there is no sense wasting an opportunity on someone not really interested in construction.” Another member expressed concern that one student said he/she was interested in “liberal arts”. (Minutes, Dec, 17, 2007)

3. Significant accountability concerns regarding testing, special education, discipline, etc.

➤ ACE Tech Board members “asked about the special needs students not being counted and if ACE did the same, it would make a difference in the school’s overall score. (Member) asked if there was anything in the testing reports to indicate if the students were disabled” (minutes, Dec. 17, 2007). At the March 24, 2008 meeting, another Board member “asked what would happen if the Special Education students were taken out of the equation. The DOE said that if that were to happen, of course it would improve the average score, but the intent is to improve scores overall.”

At their December 2007 meeting, the ACE Board heard a presentation from another school about how to improve test scores. The guest said that “20% of junior students were reclassified as sophomores at first and this year about 24% of students were reclassified. This decreased the eligible students taking the standardized tests a great deal.”

“DOE indicated his view of what would be counted toward eligible students testing and concluded that (expulsions, suspensions, etc.) but not transfers bring the scores down even further” (Dec. 2007 minutes, ACE Tech).

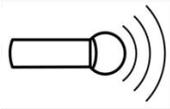
➤ July 17, 2007 minutes for KIPP state that “enrollment for the new school year is currently 336. He explained testing for placement in grades and noted that 14 students are repeating 5th grade.”

➤ Providence Englewood’s December 2007 minutes say, “Renaissance Schools Fund: Preliminary test results and standards reported by the RSF were reviewed internally. The results are confidential and are not to be disclosed publicly until permission is granted by the RSF.”

“(Test) results are confidential and are not to be disclosed publicly until permission is granted by the Renaissance Schools Fund.”

In March, 2008, the school reported that “The January CPS allotment of approximately \$450,000 is still outstanding due to unresolved student handbook issues....which are ... Special

Education, due process requirements, fines, and the reference to God in the mission statement.”



Hot mike moments

!! “(Member) indicated that the trend show (sic) more male (sic) are enrolled or enrolling and less Hispanics with a 2 ½: 1 ration (sic) of Hispanic to African-American. (Member) indicated his concern around the attrition rate of Hispanics and that he didn’t want the school to evolve to a predominantly ‘afro-centric’ (sic) environment. The DOE and ED noted the concerns and explained that the current recruitment strategy focuses on those very things” (ACE Tech minutes, Nov. 19, 2007).

4. Problems with teacher attrition.

► At Bronzeville Lighthouse, “Parent commented on staff absences. Said son had difficult time when his teacher went on maternity leave and son now has (another teacher), also on leave, and that her daughter’s teacher left last year” (minutes, January, 2008).

► At KIPP, “15 of 27 staff members returned for the 2007-08 school year....Increasing staff retention is a school-wide goal for the school year” (minutes, Aug. 2007).

In September, 2007, the school set a teacher retention goal of 85%, “that is, to keep 24 out of our 28 teachers.

By October, 2007, 3 staff members had left. The minutes say, “Regarding the issue of Staff Retention, DC inquired on the breakdown of voluntary and ‘involuntary’ departures of teachers and staff. NB to investigate and report back.”

In March, 2008, it was reported that “re: staff – we know which ones are intending to come back, on the bench, and not coming back....MC – how many teachers? 19.... MC asked about teacher turnover rate – NB said it was still a gray area.”

5. Violations of the Open Meetings Act.

Just as the governing bodies of all Renaissance 2010 schools must comply with the Freedom of Information Act, they also fall under the authority of the Open Meetings Act (OMA). And most of these schools seem as unaware of or unconcerned about their legal obligation under the OMA as they were to their FOIA responsibilities.

Briefly, the OMA requires that all business of public bodies (which includes Renaissance 2010 governing bodies) must be conducted in public, except for specific limited discussions (not

votes) on issues such as confidential personnel matters and lawsuits. It also requires that the public be made aware of the dates, times, locations, and business of these public meetings through timely posting of schedules and agendas.

Most of the by-laws we received addressed only the notification of Board members, and not the public, and allowed actions to be taken outside of meetings.

So many of the schools's by-laws specifically allowed for what they call "Informal Action" or "Action Without a Meeting" using the same or very similar language to describe it, that one wonders if they used the same template. This language allows for votes to be taken outside of a meeting "if all the members entitled to vote with respect to the subject matter thereof consent to the action in writing."

Legacy Charter's by-laws, which includes a section titled, "Informal Action by Directors," also state that "Neither the business to be transacted at, nor the purpose of, any regular or special meeting of the Board of Directors need be specified in the notice or waiver of notice of such meeting, unless specifically required by law or these by-laws."

One bright spot was Youth Connection Charter Schools, a network of alternative schools for drop outs, whose by-laws were fully compliant with the OMA.

One bright spot was Youth Connection Charter Schools, a network of alternative schools for drop outs, whose by-laws were fully compliant with the OMA.

Inequities within a charter network?

One more troubling issue raised in these minutes: it was reported at the January 22, 2008 meeting of the CICS Board that "The extreme cold weather is taxing our older buildings as is seen by systems failures on multiple campuses, especially the CICS Prairie and Washington Park campuses." The next month, the Board learns that Prairie and Washington Park are the only two schools which are projected not to meet their math or reading targets (minutes, February 19, 2008). Is this a case of resource inequity within the charter network? If so, that's the kind of issue that an LSC or other governing board with parent participation would likely want to look into.

Where to go from here?

PURE plans to enlist the support of the AG's office to access the public information we did not receive from the two-thirds of the Renaissance 2010 schools that denied our FOIA request. As mentioned in the Forward to this report, it seems a little unfair to target our research only on

those schools that obeyed the law. However, we believe that it is important to shed light in an area so little known by the public. So much of the information we hear about CPS and the media regarding Renaissance 2010 has turned out to be false, and studies are showing that students do not seem to gain enough benefit from these schools to make them worth the disruption and cost, yet CPS continues its breakneck expansion of the program.

When we began our 2006 parent survey, our biggest obstacle was getting a list of the various categories of schools from CPS. As we wrote in our survey report, “Effective Parent-School Partnerships,” it took us several weeks and outreach to several CPS departments to assemble a list of what we then called “non-traditional” schools and now call Renaissance 2010 schools.

We are concerned that this accountability gap continues. The Renaissance 2010 schools list that was posted on the CPS web site last year, and which we used to identify the schools in this study, has changed, and not just by the addition of more schools. For some reason, some of the schools on last year’s Renaissance 2010 list have been “disappeared” from the current listing including ACT, ACE Tech, Chicago Math and Science, KIPP, Namaste, and YCCS. This makes the already weak accountability of Renaissance 2010 even more problematic.

Conclusion

CPS claims that Renaissance 2010 school are more accountable because they can be shut down after five years. We find that to be an unacceptably low standard of accountability. Indeed, our report offers evidence that there is little direct public oversight of these schools.

We recommend that all CPS schools, including any Renaissance 2010 schools, have the proven accountability system of elected, parent majority LSCs.

What is PURE?

Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) is a parent-organized, parent-run public school advocacy group established in 1987 and based in Chicago.

PURE's overall goal is to assure a high-quality education for all children. Our main strategy is to support active, informed, meaningful parent participation in the public schools.

Each year, PURE assists hundreds of parents and Local School Council (LSC) members with school problems and concerns. We offer empowering workshops for LSCs in all areas of their responsibility and a variety of parent workshops which address parents' needs and concerns. We provide an extensive education, information and advocacy service through the internet, cable-tv, telephone and written materials communication. We support our members as strong advocates for high-quality school policies and practices.

For more information, please visit our web site, www.pureparents.org.