



Chicago Coalition  
for the Homeless

## STATEMENT OF THE CHICAGO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS REGARDING THE WELL-BEING OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

May 20, 2013

From the inception of Renaissance 2010 through the present, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless has opposed school closings and other de-stabilizing school actions. Our reasons are simple:

- More than a decade of this school closing, consolidation and turnaround activity has shown no measurable benefit to homeless students.
- A rule of thumb for educators is that every time a child changes schools, he or she can lose 4-6 months of academic time. Often, homeless students –due to trauma, disruption of school placement and lack of access (e.g., no transportation) are already behind academically and require greater supports, not another setback. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which governs the educational rights of homeless students requires that school districts remove “barriers” to the “enrollment, attendance and success” of homeless students. School placement mobility is such a barrier.
- Students experiencing homelessness especially need stability, not change, not chaos. But past school closings in Chicago have been confusing and chaotic for homeless students. Indeed, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires that such students be allowed to remain stably in the same school (the “school of origin”) despite multiple living arrangements. This allows the student to maintain important, nurturing adult relationships, gain a sense of normalcy, experience consistent uninterrupted instruction and supports and maintain friendships. If a homeless student’s school is closed, consolidate or turned around, all those important elements of stability are often destroyed.

- The proposed mass school closings and actions –which hurt and endanger all students—will impact more than 3,906 students experiencing homelessness in Chicago. See <http://www.chicagohomeless.org/cps-school-closures-impact-homeless-children/> Indeed, homeless students are over-represented: normally 4% of the Chicago Public School’s students are identified as homeless but more than 8% will be impacted by these school actions. For example, Overton Elementary school proposed for closure has a homeless population of 99 homeless students, 24% of its population. Attucks Elementary has 129 homeless students merging with Beethoven Elementary which has 74 homeless students for a combined student population that is 33% homeless! Placing very high risk students together into larger classrooms with greater transportation and safety challenges is not a responsible strategy for educators.
- Finally, recent, important research shows that for elementary students “the combined experience of homelessness and school mobility was related to both poor academic achievement and problems in the classroom” and that the combination of school mobility and homelessness was associated with higher risk for “poor educational well-being” than either mobility or homelessness alone. (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse & Culhane 2012). In short, these mass school actions will predictably set our most vulnerable learners back.

For these reasons and more, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless opposes these ill-conceived school actions.