



December 16, 2011

sent by electronic mail

Jean-Claude Brizard
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Schools
125 South Clark Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60603

Dear Mr. Brizard,

On November 30, we became aware of CPS' intention to close Crane Technical Prep High School by a phase out process through the press release issued on November 30, 2011.¹ The press release stated that "incoming freshmen that would have attended Crane will be reassigned to Wells High School." We wanted to bring to your attention our opposition to this action, given that Wells has been on Academic Watch Status for 10 years.² The author of this letter monitored Wells High School during his time as part of the Court appointed Corey H monitoring team and Access Living has also had families of Wells students with IEPs contact our organization in the past about service provision problems at this high school. Below we discuss the reasons for our opposition in detail. We also discuss, in our recommendations, our qualified support for placing the Talent Development Charter High School in the Crane facility.

We are well aware of CPS' internal metrics argument for why Wells is a preferable placement for Crane intake area students. We respectfully disagree with that assessment. Starting on the next page, we will discuss in detail our own findings in that regard. We will also discuss why we see the current failures at Crane being directly related to the concentrating of students with disabilities in academically weak general high schools by prior CPS administrations. We make some recommendations to CPS on possibilities for improving educational outcomes for these

¹ http://www.cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/11_30_2011_PR1.aspx and apparently Crane Achievement Academy High School which is also located in the same building is also going to be closed.

² http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2011&code=1501629900049_e.pdf

students without their being moved from Crane to Wells. Access Living urges the new administration not to follow in the footsteps of past administrations.

Roots of Crane Tech's Academic Failure for Students with Disabilities

In 2002, the Consortium on Chicago School Research published an important research paper titled "Changing Special Education Enrollments: Causes and Distribution Among Schools."³ This paper found that:

Students with disabilities were heavily concentrated in neighborhood high schools (rather than selective admissions, charter, small, or extended elementary schools). Eleven neighborhood high schools, all on probation and located in areas with disproportionately high levels of low-income residents experienced an especially large increase in their enrollment of students with special needs.

In 2008, students with disabilities made up 15.7% of all students at Crane, which was actually below the 15.9% mathematical mean of students with disabilities in all CPS high schools.⁴ By 2011, Crane had 25.8% students with IEPs, during the same period that the district's mathematical mean of students with disabilities in high schools declined to 14.9%.⁵ The reality of Crane is exactly what the Consortium was writing about when it discussed the heavy concentration of students with disabilities in certain CPS high schools.

In 2008, Crane had a total of 174 students with identified disabilities; in 2011 Crane had 166 disabled students.⁶ The reason for the increased percentage of disabled students at Crane was a decline in regular education students, not an increase in students with disabilities. Crane's regular education student population has declined in three years by 51%, creating a totally unnatural student population. There are no doubt many reasons for the decline in non-disabled students at Crane, including the increased enrollment in charter schools and the decline in population in the community around Crane. However, the March 2008 killing of the student Ruben Ivy outside the doors of the school during a large fight among students appears to have dramatically impacted enrollment at Crane. Students with disabilities were effectively left behind by their non-disabled

³ http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=29

⁴ Special Education data filed with US District Court for Northern Illinois on 6/26/2008 by CPS in the Corey H case Document 574-2.

⁵ ISBE 2011 report card for CPS and 2011 court filings by CPS.

⁶ This does not include students with disabilities attending the Crane Achievement Academy High School. There were in 2011, 13 additional students with IEPs attending this school.

peers who fled Crane en masse. Apparently, many disabled students had nowhere to flee to because few other high schools wanted these lower performing and more expensive inner city minority students.

Crane's performance data for students with disabilities has been simply horrific and borders on a mass denial of these students' right to a free appropriate public education under the law.

Year	# Crane students with IEPs tested on PSAE for reading	# reading at or above state standards	# reading below state standards	# reading at state warning level
2011	19	0	4	15
2010	32	1	5	26
2009	26	1	11	14

Over a period of three years, Crane tested 77 students with disabilities on the PSAE. In reading, the majority of these disabled students tested at the academic warning level.⁷ Illinois law requires that PSAE scores appear on students' transcripts, so such low test scores will affect students' employability well after leaving CPS. The PSAE as a test does not measure low-performing students well in terms of their reading skills because the test has what is called a "floor effect."

This means these students earned the lowest possible score. We do not know the functional literacy level of the majority of these students with disabilities, but it is very possible that all of these disabled students who scored at the academic warning level in reading do not have the literacy skills necessary for 90 percent of jobs in the United States.⁸ The graduation rate for Crane students with disabilities in 2011 was only 31.7%, which was more than ten percent lower than the citywide average for students with disabilities.

⁷ 71.4% tested at the warning level.

⁸ See Ponisciak, S. M. (2005, September) "Understanding the Prairie State Achievement Exam" Consortium on Chicago School Research for a discussion of the PSAE. The 2011 Workkeys scores for Crane students indicates that 39.4% of all students were functioning in work place related reading at a level 3 or lower. Level 3 proficiency in reading means that students testing at that level would qualify to work in only 35% of the jobs in the economy those below that level have reading skills below what is necessary to work in 90% of the jobs in the US economy. see <http://www.act.org/workkeys/careerseekers/scores.html>

The Troubled Special Education Program at Wells High School

As we have noted above Wells Community Academy High School which has been on Academic Watch Status for 10 years. Like Crane, Wells' performance data for students with disabilities has been simply horrific.

Year	# Wells students with IEPs tested on PSAE for reading	# reading at or above state standards	# reading below state standards	# reading at state warning level
2011	33	1	12	20
2010	31	1	9	21
2009	40	0	7	33

Over three years, Wells tested 104 students with disabilities on the PSAE. Of these students, 71.2% tested in reading at the academic warning level, **which was virtually the same as Crane's three year average.**⁹ The graduation rate for Wells students with disabilities in 2011 was only 30.7%, **which was again very similar to the rate for Crane.** In 2011 according to the ISBE, 23.4% of students at Wells had IEPs.

Based on the existing public data, Access Living can see no advantage in sending incoming freshmen that would have attended Crane to Wells. Yet not to do something to improve the educational outcomes of students with disabilities attending Crane (or Wells, for that matter) is also not acceptable.

The Chicago Talent Development Charter High School Proposal and Students with Disabilities

CPS is proposing a school action to co-locate Talent Development Charter High School with Crane Technical Preparatory High School in the same CPS facility.

Talent Development first opened in the fall of 2009 with 94 students and is currently located at 4319 W. Washington Blvd. It currently serves only 200 students from 9th to 11th grade;

⁹ The 2011 Workkeys scores for Wells students indicates that 31.3% of all students were functioning in work place related reading at a level 3 or lower. This was slightly better than Crane's results, but there is no breakdown of the Workkeys for disabled students.

however, according to CPS, the school expects to serve up to 600 students from 9th to 12th grade next year if provided with the space in the Crane facility to do so.

According to the CPS transition plan for Talent Development, the Crane Tech facility has 74 classrooms. Crane, with a current enrollment of 638 students, is anticipated to need 22 homerooms, as well as 6 additional classrooms for special programming, such as science, art, music, and special education—for a total of 28 classrooms. There is no reason to believe if incoming freshmen are accepted into Crane, that the total enrollment will grow much beyond 638 students.

Talent Development, according to CPS, anticipates an enrollment of 600 students for the 2012-13 school year, and it should require 25 homerooms, as well as 7 additional classrooms for special programming, including science, art, music, and special education—for a total of 32 classrooms. The facility has enough space to accommodate the combined 60 classrooms required to serve both Crane and Talent Development for the 2012-2013 school year.

Talent Development High School is under the control of Union Park High Schools, Inc. According to the Union Park website, the not-for-profit was born from a vision shared by Christine Boardman of the Service Employees International Union Local 73, John Ayers and Kirby Girolami Callam. They created partnerships with the Illinois Federation of Teachers and Talent Development High Schools at Johns Hopkins University.

These organizations recognized the need for radical change in Chicago's schools, and established Union Park to design, open, and operate a network of what the website describes faculty-friendly charter high schools, each implementing John Hopkins University's Talent Development High School reform model. Talent Development was created by practitioners and researchers at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR), based at The Johns Hopkins University; the model operates in 33 schools nationwide.

The model requires what is called a Ninth Grade Success Academy. Within each Success Academy are self-contained teams that are composed of at least 4 teachers from several disciplines and 150-200 ninth-grade students. The teacher teams have common daily planning time, and students share several classes with the same peers. One problem for the model in relation to students with more significant disabilities is its college preparatory sequence for all students. Some students with disabilities will not be able to succeed in college, but many should be able to do so with appropriate supports in place. Access Living has examined two CRESPAR reviews of this program and found that they excluded students designated as special education "due to limitations in consistency of the data over time" which we found to be disturbing.¹⁰

We did look at special education data for the Baltimore Talent Development High School on the Maryland State Department of Education website and found that the high school had only 12.5% special education students in 2011, which is significantly lower than the average for CPS high

¹⁰ Kemple, J.J., Herlihy, C.M., Smith T. J. (2005, May) "Making Progress Toward Graduation: Evidence from the Talent Development High School Model" MRDC p. 39.

schools. We were only able to find reading performance data for 12 students with disabilities and 9 of these students were listed as "proficient." The school had an impressive 73% four year graduation rate for students with disabilities listed on its state report card. But it was impossible to tell how many of the Baltimore Talent Development students with disabilities were given the actual Maryland High School Assessment and how many were given the much more simple Mod-HSAs. Under Maryland law the Mod-HSA option is available for any student with an IEP who has received course credit but has failed the related HSA at least once and whose participation is approved by the IEP team. This is very different than in Illinois where the IAA may only be given to students who demonstrate the equivalent of cognitive processing impairments.

From our perspective the John Hopkins University's Talent Development High School reform model does not have an aggressive approach to special education reform. Although including special educators in the Ninth Grade Success Academy as part of a team that works together is a very good idea, it still does not break down the special education/regular education dichotomy. To get beyond this division and to address the learning needs of the majority of students with disabilities who do not have severe and profound conditions, a universal design approach to education has to be adopted.¹¹ This is especially true in a situation like Crane where 26% of students are disabled.

Recommendations

Access Living recommends that CPS take the following actions:

- For the 2012-2013 school year Crane should continue to accept incoming freshmen from elementary schools in the immediate intake area, but not from the city as a whole.
- The current Crane staff should be trained over the summer of 2012 in the John Hopkins University's Talent Development High School reform model for the Ninth Grade Success Academy, and be required to implement the model in the 2012-13 school year for incoming freshmen. Existing Crane staff implementing the model should be evaluated on their effectiveness, retained, remediated, or dismissed based on that evaluation. Over a period of three years, the current Crane staff should be evaluated and merged with the appropriately certified staff for Talent Development High School to create a unified model at the school. Whether or not this unified school would continue to be a charter school should be up to the staff, the community, and the LSC through a democratic process.
- All teachers in either language arts or math in a unified school should be targeted to be retrained and to have cross special education and regular education certification over a reasonable length of time. The Chicago Public Schools should apply to ISBE for a waiver on its rule requiring teachers to operate on either a regular or special education certificate

¹¹ See "A Route for Every Learner" (2011, March) Task Force to Explore the Incorporation of the Principles of Universal Design for Learning into the Education Systems in Maryland.

to allow the primary academic instructor to deliver non-self contained special education services to students with disabilities inside general education classrooms as defined in the existing administrative regulations.

A new Crane could eventually become Chicago Public School's first universal design school that has a focus on eliminating learning barriers in curriculum, instruction and assessment to maximize the number of students that will benefit. Teachers need access to a broad range of materials in a variety of formats to ensure flexibility for offering a range of choices for students. Teachers need to use multiple means of presenting information, different ways of engaging students, and provide options for students to demonstrate competence.¹² This flexibility also needs to go beyond academics and into vocational education.

- A unified Crane with a radically different perspective on teaching and learning for all students requires a highly skilled instructional leader and we believe a national search may be necessary to find a leader with the skills necessary to take on such a great challenge.

Access Living urges the Chicago Public Schools not to give students with disabilities—and low performing non-disabled students who will be impacted by the current proposal for Crane—more of the same failed practices and policies. Change is never easy, but it must start somewhere and we say, let it begin with Crane.

Sincerely yours,

Rodney D. Estvan
Education Policy Analyst
Access Living

cc: Marca Bristo, Access Living
Elizabeth Swanson, City of Chicago
Noemi Donoso, CPS
Dr. Richard Smith, CPS

¹² <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines>