

JOCSC Proposed Merger of Jenner and Ogden, Community Meeting #1 Notes

Held at [Ogden International School](#)
[24 West Walton, Chicago, IL, 60610](#)

Wednesday, February 15, 2017, 5 - 7 PM

Preface

This is the first of three scheduled meetings on the Proposed Merger of Jenner and Ogden schools. [More information here](#), including the "[Jenner/Ogden Community Steering Committee Analysis of Options and Recommendations for The Jenner Academy of the Arts and The Ogden International School](#)".

Setup

The meeting is held in the 2nd floor gymnasium of the school. Chairs are arranged in two sections on the court, facing a stage, with an aisle down the center and on either side. There is a table with four chairs, on the floor, in front of the stage. There is a microphone on the right-hand side of the stage, at the end of the aisle and in front of a set of bleachers.

Attendees are encouraged to sign in at a table in the back of the gym, as they enter. When signing up to speak, each person is given a numbered card, which allows them to know the number of speakers. The cards are not indicative of speaking order. Speakers are encouraged to line up on the right side of the auditorium.

Speakers are limited to two minutes. A person is stationed in line of sight of the speaker, and they hold up time cards to let them know how much time remains, in 30 second increments. If there is time, people can speak again. If one does not want to speak, there are comment cards, some of which will be summarized by a CPS staff person. There is also an email address for comments: transitions@cps.edu

Welcome, by Patrick Payne 5:04 PM

Introduces Chip Johnson.

Welcome, by [Herald "Chip" Johnson](#), CPS Network 6 Chief of Schools 5:06 PM

Thanks Dr. Michael Beyer Principal of Ogden, and Mrs. Kelly Anne Shelton, Acting Principal of Jenner. Says, "we are here to talk with you about two outstanding schools". References a number of noted Jenner alumni including [Ramsey Lewis](#), [Mary Alice](#), and [Jesse White](#). He also references a number of Ogden people, including [Mellody Hobson](#), Bobby Pirrilo, and Corey Jones.

Speaks about how it is important to hear from all "in a respectful manner" so as to make the best decisions for our children. Calls for the recognition of leadership for a leader who is in the hospital

References how political and administrative officials will want to make the best decision for the children.

Welcome by Patrick Payne 5:09 PM

Talks about the agenda and structure, as described above. He also reviews the proposal at hand. Says that every year CPS releases guidelines on school actions— closings or relocations. “Proposals submitted by the community will be considered by the board of education”. Two years ago this community submitted a merger proposal.

He describes the Ogden campus: K-5 here on the East campus, grades 6 - 12 in the west. He says that there are concerns about underutilization at [Jenner Elementary Academy of the Arts](#) and overcrowding at [Ogden International](#).

Describes Ogden as diverse, and having an International Baccalaureate curriculum. Jenner is majority African American, with no access to IB curriculum

The [Jenner-Ogden Steering Committee](#) “mutually supported merger”

He briefly characterizes the proposal: two principals, no dominance, one single boundary, building configurations (a one-building solution and a three-building solution). Total distance among the buildings is 4 miles. They seek feedback. He references the format.

They are prioritizing speakers as parents of Jenner and Ogden. Others are part of the community as well. The proposal has been in the community for a while. Raises issues and challenges. There are four issues on which they seek guidance:

- Topic 1: How a Transition Could Work: what does it look like
- Topic 2: Potential Facility configurations
 - Prek-12 school within 3 different schools
 - 4 miles distance between all three sites
- Topic 3: Demographics
 - Ogden is diverse— 10th most diverse in the district
 - Jenner is 97% African American
 - Combined schools would be among the top 10 most diverse schools in CPS
- Topic 4: Programs & Curriculum— how to respectfully go through that process
 - Combined schools curriculum would be IB

[Herald “Chip” Johnson](#)

Acknowledges that Alderman [Brian Hopkins](#) and Alderman [Walter Burnett](#) are present.

Dominica McBride: Facilitator and Listener

Speaks of the birth of her first child, her empathy for the parents, and asks for a show of hands “because you are here for the best education for your kids”, then “neighbors”, then “students”. “We want and need the experience from all of you”. “We only have an hour and a half, so we can’t hear from everybody”.

Talks about how flashcards are a way to contribute. Brian and others have the flashcards; they are placed around the room. Talks about the four topics, and gives ideas on the types of feedback:

- When thinking about transition: how can physical space lead to comfort?
- Demographics: what obstacles are there?
- Program and Curriculum: from the perspective of students, what types of options set them up for success and happiness

Speakers begin at 5:37

[Student 1], Senior at Ogden West: “Student voice has been lacking”. Speaks of the importance of racial, economic, and learning level diversity. References the fear that academic achievement will be lowered. Cautions against continuing to think of the “what ifs and what wills”. “I implore you to” move forward with the merger, the student urges.

Kevin Shellenhammer, son is a fifth grader at Ogden West. Applauds the administrators. The proposal has a “thorough review” of safety and performance. Believes this would be in the best interest of his son. Change is hard at first, messy in the middle, and beautiful in the end”. Says there are a lot fo decisions to be made.

Yana Kitouris - Mother of a 1st grade student at Ogden Orent. Strongly supports. All four issues are solvable: IB curriculum. Strong arts is a good addition. Suggests that each of the schools have k-8 and one single high school campus. Racial equity changing. One single LSC, just like in the report. Address “the enduring legacy of segregation in our city” with the merger

Nora Duncan— two boys, fifth and first grades. Has friends on both sides. One child per classroom from Jenner. She speaks of visiting Jenner. “Data can be manipulated” References Justin Faberman— data for the fed. He did a data analysis. Says the ““96% of the teachers voted in favor of the merger last year”

Escalante. Parent of second grader. Strongly supports a merger. “Consistent with IB values”. Asserts that education cannot be summarized by test scores.

No Name. Child in kindergarten. Female in black coat. Not on one side or the other decidedly. Learning a lot. What about rezoning Ogden East boundaries? “From Orleans going west”.

Throwing out an idea. Something to think about. Is asked by the facilitator what the advantage is. "Go a more diplomatic route and rezone"

Kitouris Flores: "clarifies" that what was presented, indicates that the author of the report is here. The recommendation is one LSC, not two. "The high school is something I am committed to". Funders to help with the merger— there is at least one. Parent of a second and fourth grader. "We are in a position of privilege. I'm not going to let this go"

[Student 2]. Walter Payton High School— 250 signatures. "It is not fair" -- references the February 7 attack. "It's been an honor to work on the student committee." "Lets work together so we can grow together"

Mark Brownstein. Parent of a first and third grader. Wife and he are open minded. Says the process is out of order. Says it is impossible to make a decision w/o knowing if any teachers would be fired. Also interested in whether there will be enough budget for aides to help with differentiated learning. "It is hard for us to have confidence" that they will have the resources to have a successful merger.

Each of these students were proctored by a teacher from Jenner.

[Student 3]: Jenner Academy first grader. "I am truly into this merger". "Our kids are suffering" that they don't have a good education. Wants everything to be equal and fair. We want a budget, Title I budget to be fair if you are going to combine.

[Student 4]: 8th Grade-- Jenner. "It will be better for the young people" at Jenner "Bring new things to our school will help us."

[Student 5]: 8th grader at Jenner. Good to "have different education standards" and work together with others. Looking forward to more technology and books.

[Student 6]: 7th grader at Jenner: "they will have a richer education", will meet new people. "Tired of seeing the same people every day"— make new friends.

[Student 7]: 8th grade Student at Jenner— "Jenner has a very big legacy". He talks about how many people love him there. Would look forward to the diversity— more than just having African American friends. And teachers will have more budget, and "do more fun things"

[Student 8]: 7th grade student at Jenner— "I think the merger should happen". Was reading the paper and saw his school in the paper. Asked his teachers what it meant. They said it meant he would be shut down.

[Student 9]: 7th grade student at Jenner— people can go in the wrong direction or the right direction. “We need a good education so that we can get a good job ...have a quality education”. “We need more people getting a good education”, so they choose the right direction.

Facilitator references the youth presence. “They are brilliant.”

African American man calls for a round of applause for the children. Says he is a community activist. “We need to get with each other. We need each other”. “Isn’t that why we’re here?” “7 blocks away from each other? Are you kidding me?” Calls for people present to “put down our pride and pick up” the kids.

Leslie Firebird, Ogden alumni, has a student here. Started as a supporter, now is skeptical about the money issues. Not enough professional development days. Who will fund this? Jenner has \$300,000 in discretionary money that they have now and will lose that discretion once the merger takes place.

Two children with IEPs/ diverse learners. “Not in favor of consolidation”. References an email from December 1. The greatest concern is what would happen to their teachers. The news media “used to be in our corner”. References an incident where a teacher who took video at the school and was now on trial. [This news story appears to be a reference to that incident](#). “This school needs to fix themselves before we mix with anyone else”

Paul Jepson— has a first grader, Ogden. “Merger was first proposed as a way to handle overcrowding at Ogden”. “Next level report makes that assertion questionable” Ogden has seen declining enrollment. Smallest kindergarten class in six years. Both Ogden and Jenner stand to lose a walk-to-school attitude. If we’re doing this for social justice, it has to be a citywide issue first

Mike Arnold, a parent who lives in the Ogden boundary. Logistical issues of three campuses. “What the kids will gain and lose.” Says Jenner kids will get less funding. Attainment in the 14th percentile and Ogden has it in the 90th percentile. This will make it very difficult for teachers to reach all students. “They’re telling me to stop talking” (references the timekeeper) “Is CPS capable of delivering the promises... I doubt that CPS can deliver on that.

Candace Voltaire— “I’m concerned”. CPS has no money or manpower. “I have overseen mergers— there is always fallout, even in the best merger and consolidation”. Says she doesn’t want “my girl” to be caught. Stressed that the supports for this merger are not present.

Nancy Curran— has a third grade “cutie patootie”. Wants to walk her child to school, not get bussed. “What will we do with our diverse learners”. “Does Jenner have a lot of behavioral issues? I’m not sure” She would need more information from CPS before making a decision.

Angie Angelopolous: the merger idea came, went, came back— needs to be thought through and planned. Needs to be transparent. There are many parents who do not know what's going on in the schools.

Concepcion Prado, 2 children at Ogden East, 2nd on East, 7th in West. “Philosophically, I agree”. “This program is at risk.” Issue on demographics: classrooms would be split amongst three campuses. This is not physically possible for parents. Second issue is on the educational and academic: The IB program is a good educational program, however this program would not be possible with the split grades proposed.

Dave Huntley, third grader at Ogden. He runs and bikes this area. 0.8 miles is not big. Has not heard a compelling argument why this isn't a good idea. Says he is not moving to the suburbs and does not want a homogenous environment for his son.

Juan Halperez and wife. Lives directly across from Jenner. Says it is important to maintain a neighborhood school. The two buildings are close to each other (the third one is farther). Supports the school and is pleased with the work that [Robert Croston](#) has done. “I choose to stay in the city, this is my investment.”

Rebecca Wells— “you may have heard my name”. Acknowledges the concerns of those who are opposed. They had a plan that they did not share prior to tonight. She went to an Ogden LSC meeting to talk about overcrowding. “Fighting for equitable education is important, and worth fighting for”. Her research has shown that many schools in the city are in similar situations with high performing white schools near lower performing brown and black schools.

[Marissa Novara](#), VP of the [Metropolitan Planning Council](#). Says that she is publishing a report that talks about the economic impact of segregation. There is need for training on implicit bias and that people of all incomes are treated the same. This is a rare opportunity. We can do this to make a difference.

6:39— opened up to talk about all issues

Sharing of the written items, including, “what does gentrification mean for Jenner” and “stability”.

6:41

[Chris Conely](#), parent at Ogden. IIT professor. Company acquired by salesforce 15 years in community, 33 in Chicago. Has done fundraising. Board of [Metropolitan Planning Council](#). Fully supports the merger. There are challenges— he is into overcoming them so that value can be created. Let's not the merger

“What are the concerns you can't find a solution to?”. Urges us not to focus on how far you walk, but whether the children will grow.

Tara Schuberg— IB teacher at Ogden. Loves public schools. Internationally minded people. She did not realize how segregated Chicago is. She was surprised that any IB parent would be opposed to the merger. More diverse environments are better for students. “I refuse to stay silent and just accept the status quo.”

Brendan _____. Member of the school LSC, speaking as an individual. Speaks in favor of the merger. He speaks of diversity as a key.

Laura Duarte, has a senior at Ogden West. Son was first to be tested, says that the scores are being raised. Suggests that adults labor themselves as “the human race”. References the “no principal” situation at Ogden West. Dr. Beyer mentoring “the young men”

[6:51: announcement indicates that if you are in line at this time, you will be allowed to speak, notwithstanding a scheduled end time of 7:00PM]

Castle— works in Cabrini— references her “little sister”, Meisha, who lived across from her. She has been adopted into both the Cabrini and Gold Coast communities. Teaches at a school in the south loop— [“the responsive classroom”](#) approach to learning.

No name. “I want to challenge all of us as parents to put aside our fears”. She is an activist for human rights. Fear should not take over growth. “What I’ve seen here tonight, from some parents” is parents putting their own fears into their children. The children are going to integrate. She was concerned about the Jenner children. “Lets come together and make this happen, cuz it will.”

Aaron Balsa and wife Jenna— they live in the Jenner boundary. Three children. References “found money”. We have an opportunity to solve our joint problem.

[The Rev. Wes Smedley](#), Pastor of [St. Chrysostom’s Episcopal Church](#). Parent of three kids, “helping with the over-crowding” at Ogden. Acknowledges the Jenner youth who spoke. Tells the story of walking with a group to Jenner. They sang together. References MLK: have and shape consensus. Reads from a poem by [Gwendolyn Brooks: The Lovers of the Poor](#).

Elaine Smith, teacher at Jenner. She was a teacher at a place that merged into Jenner. What school was this? She is a diverse learner teacher.

Brian Grauer, kindergarten teacher at Jenner. Serves as the Chicago Teacher’s Union Delegate. Speaks of job security re: consolidation. He has asked— the contract is clear re: pecking order if there are layoffs. Jesse Sharkey.

Heidi Weigman— Sinai Congregation— support for the merger. Million Father March. Says that Jenner teachers are great. “All students benefit” from diversity. Urges them to accept the merger“

[Student 10]: Ogden, 3rd grade. “I think we should have this merge”

Katie Welsh— was an assistant principal. Here for her co-principal Croston, who can't be here but is here in spirit. She was inspired Her position was cut due to budget constraints. They went from a Level 2 to a Level 2+. Speaks in favor of the merger

[Student 11]: graduated from Ogden HS 6 months ago. She references “if you feel uncomfortable, that is one step”.

The public speaking portion of the meeting was completed at 7:12 PM. More comments from those who choose to complete a flash card were read:

- Vision plan— case studies of successful mergers. Evidence
- How can we maintain IB?
- Taxes
- Decade-plus

Patrick Payne speaks of next steps, 7:14 PM

They will review the feedback. References the note-takers and consolidating notes. All info will be published to the [website](#).

Alderman Burnett speaks, 7:15 PM

Speaks of how he attended Jenner. Talks of the history of Jenner, which merged with Bird. Shiller closed, Shiller is now Skinner North. Says the kids have had to deal with a lot of change. “They are resilient. They are strong”. Says he is proud of everyone with open arms and open hearts. Talks about the changes in the neighborhood. Commends parents “on all sides”. “These are babies”. He doesn't want his Jenner kids to be made to feel like Ogden kids have “better things than them”.

7:24PM meeting is adjourned.