

November 13, 2024, Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
Written Comments
Received between Monday, November 11th and Thursday, November 14th
Submitted via Written Comments Form

1	<p>In light of the political climate right now and the rumors and speculation related to the lack of federal funding and the dismantling of public education in America, can the board provide any insight into what the next four years will look like for families with disabilities?</p>
2	<p>**Statement on Acero Schools Closure Impact on Chicago’s Latine Community**</p> <p>My name is Sandra Santiago, and I am an ELPT, English Program Teacher, and Multilingual Coordinator. Today, I write as a representative of Acero Cruz, a K-12 school in Rogers Park, which mirrors the rich diversity of our community. We proudly serve students from over 17 language backgrounds and 15 different countries, creating a unique and inclusive environment for immigrant, refugee, and multilingual families. Cruz is the only K-12 school in our network, allowing entire families to attend together, from kindergarteners to high school seniors. This continuity fosters stability for families, especially those who are new to the country, offering siblings the comfort of learning under one roof. Our school has become a vital anchor for children who have overcome difficult journeys to the United States. Cruz is often their first experience with American education, where their academic and social journeys begin. The proposed closure risks uprooting students from this stability, affecting not only their education but also their sense of belonging and safety.</p> <p>Our performing arts program is another pillar of pride. With experienced, dedicated teachers who actively seek grants, we have been able to introduce theater and the arts as powerful tools for expression and language development. Productions like 12 Angry Men, Chicago, Shrek, and Beauty and the Beast have given our multilingual students an opportunity to practice English, break social and cultural barriers, and truly become part of a community. Acero Cruz is not just a school; it is a family and a safe space where students can grow, learn, and belong. I urge you to reconsider this closure and recognize the profound impact it would have on our community and the futures of these resilient young people.</p> <p>The impending closure of our school as well as the other 6 Acero schools in Chicago threatens 2,000 students, predominantly black and Latine, and leaves many Multilingual learners with students with special needs, English language learners, and newcomers / SLIFE (students with Limited Interrupted Education) without clear future options. With CPS funding and oversight already in place, CPS has the capability to take action, just as they did in response to potential Urban Prep charter school closures, where the district intervened to avoid harm to students and communities.</p> <p>Acero’s decision, made without community consultation, ignores its renewed charter commitment to CPS and its families through 2026. Prioritizing investor assurances over student needs, Acero approved new land purchases while announcing closures, even though many schools maintain strong enrollment. Acero’s claim that closures are due to lower enrollment and rent costs neglects efforts to explore more sustainable alternatives, such as renegotiating leases with the Archdiocese.</p>

	Without intervention, neighborhood CPS schools face increased overcrowding, placing strain on students, families, and resources already stretched thin. Given CPS's funding role and its duty to students in Chicago, CPS must take action to protect these schools, ensuring stability for families that rely on them as a vital community resource.
3	My child is thrive at Tamayo. My child loves going to school. Tamayo is a top performing school in our community fully enrolled.
4	Hola soy Janet Arzate soy mamá orgullosa de tres niños estudiantes de acero Tamayo, dos de ellos se graduaron exitosamente de ahí pero aún tengo un niño en 5 grado el cual con la noticia de el cierre y la incertidumbre me sentí devastada y forzada a aceptar un asiento en otro plantel en el cual al estar haciendo el trámite para mi hijo me sentí tan triste, aislada y no aceptada y es en ese momento cuando me pude imaginar a mi hijo pasando por esa misma situación pues me exigían que mi hijo comenzara en el nuevo plantel de Acero al día siguiente, así que decidí no continuar con el trámite y estar aquí presente para hacerles ver saber a ustedes que renuncio a la propuesta de cerrar la escuela. Mi hijo merece una educación de calidad por que es lo que yo busco para mis hijos y su futuro , Tamayo le ha ofrecido educación de calidad y por este motivo apoyo a que la escuela continúe abierta.
5	<p>Good Afternoon members of the Board of Education,</p> <p>My name is Ileana & I am a bilingual teacher, parent & community member of Brighton Park where our school Sandra Cisneros is located. I recently made the decision to reach out to Sandra Cisneros to speak on the devastating news of our school closures, in which Sandra Cisneros gladly spoke on stating, " where is the love? For those in charge I would like to think you care about the welfare of these students and where their school is located" and I stand before you today, not just as a parent or a teacher, but as a voice for the over 2,000 ACERO students whose schools are being ripped away from them. Just like Esperanza in Sandra Cisneros' "The House on Mango Street", we are a community that, despite our flaws and struggles, has found a sense of belonging and identity within the walls of our schools. Esperanza's Mango Street is not a place of luxury, but it is hers. It is a place where she has learned to navigate the challenges of growing up as a Latina in a poor Chicago neighborhood. It is a place where she has experienced joy and heartbreak, where she has discovered her voice and her power. And it is a place she fights to escape, yet simultaneously longs to redeem.</p> <p>We, the students, parents & members of ACERO, understand this paradox intimately. Our schools may not have the newest facilities or the largest budgets, but they are ours. They are a place where we have found community and support, where our students have been seen and heard, where they have been challenged to grow and thrive. They are a place where they have learned to navigate the challenges of growing up as Latinos in a city that often seems designed to hold us back. We have had to fight for every resource, every opportunity. We have had to prove ourselves again and again, to show the world that we are more than the stereotypes and statistics that seek to define us & yet here we are again, fighting to keep our schools open.</p> <p>But the power of a place like Mango Street, like our ACERO school, lies not in its physical structure, but in the sense of belonging it fosters. It is a place where our students can be themselves, without apology or explanation. It is a place where they can dream big, where they can imagine a future beyond the limitations of our present circumstances.</p> <p>And that is precisely what makes the decision to close our schools so devastating. It is not just about the loss of a building, but the destruction of a community. It is a statement to our students & community that their dreams, struggles, or very lives do not matter. I ask you, is this the legacy we wish to uphold when we honor the name of Sandra Cisneros? A woman who has dedicated her life to amplifying the voices of the</p>

marginalized, to celebrating the resilience of Latino communities, to affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every individual.

The decision to close our schools is a betrayal of the very principles that Sandra Cisneros embodies. It is a betrayal of the trust we have placed in our leaders, in our community. But most of all, it is a betrayal to our students, who have poured our hearts and souls into creating a sense of belonging within those walls. So I beg the cps board of education to step in and stop ACERO from making this decision. See us, hear us, believe in us. Recognize that our schools are not just institutions, but living, breathing communities that nurture the minds, hearts, and spirits of Latino students.

6	If you decide to close our schools not only will you break our students heart, but you will also crush their dreams and hopes. Our students do not deserve this. Please I beg you that you do not close our schools. These schools are a safe haven for our students.
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