



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Chicago residents sit-in to prevent Dyett High School closure, United States, 2013-14

1 November

2013

to: 23 October

2014

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Chicago, Illinois*

Goals:

Prevent closure of Dyett High School and get district to provide more services to current students

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 162. Sit-in › Parents camp outside of Alderman Burns' office

Methods in 4th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 5th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 162. Sit-in

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Dyett High School students and parents
- local residents

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School

Involvement of social elites:

In October 2014, Will Burns, Alderman for Dyett High's ward, came out against the school's closure.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School
- Kenwood Oakland Community Organization

Groups in 2nd Segment:**Groups in 3rd Segment:****Groups in 4th Segment:****Groups in 5th Segment:****Groups in 6th Segment:**

Segment Length: 2 Months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Chicago Public Schools System

Campaigner violence:

No campaigner violence.

Repressive Violence:

No repressive violence.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

CPS decided to close the school for one year and provided most, but not all, of the student services campaigners demanded.

In 2012, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) voted to “phase-out” Walter Dyett High School, the only open-enrollment high school in the African-American south side neighborhood of Bronzeville, due to poor academic performance. Opponents of the closing said that CPS and Mayor Emanuel had caused this poor performance by cutting Dyett’s funding. The decision to shut the school came amidst a series of closures throughout the CPS system that disproportionately affected poor, black neighborhoods. In the largest mass school closing in American history, the district closed 150 schools between 2001 and 2013, including 49 during the summer of 2013, affecting 30,000 students throughout the city. Eighty-eight percent of the students affected were black, and 94% came from low-income families. The city opened charter schools to replace many of the closed schools.

After the school district officially announced a closure date for Dyett of July 1, 2015, the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett formed in November 2013. Residents blamed lack of funding for the poor performance. In response to what they called a "dramatically deteriorated" situation at the school, several Dyett students filed a formal Title VI Civil Rights Act complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights on 12 November. They argued, “the Board has deprived our school of resources and undermined numerous promising attempts by our community to improve the school. What was the board’s response when, as late as 2008, we had the largest increase in students going to college in all of Chicago Public Schools? What about in 2009 when we had the largest decrease in student arrests and suspensions? Disregard and disinvestment.”

On report card pick-up day later in November, 300 parents from Dyett’s feeder elementary and middle schools signed a petition in support of the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett’s proposal for the Global Leadership and Green Technology High School. As resident and education activist, Jitu Brown described, "if Dyett closes then this neighborhood will no longer have any open enrollment neighborhood schools. We believe that the needs of children, regardless of their income bracket, should be high priorities for the school system, and it's not.”

Following the phase-out decision by CPS, many students took the opportunity to transfer to another school outside the neighborhood, and the middle schools stopped sending students to Dyett. CPS allowed students graduating in the class of 2015 or earlier to remain, only 12 from the class of 2015 chose to enroll at Dyett for the 2014-15 school year. As the student body declined, the school stopped providing services, such as college counseling, art, physical education, and sports, and students had to take mostly online classes.

After Alderman Will Burns and CPS refused to prevent the closing, parents began a three day camp-out outside Alderman Burns’ office on 16 June 2014, demanding a public hearing about keeping the school open. CPS told the protesters that they had no plans to change their decision.

After Burns and CPS continued to ignore the parent’s demands, 50 residents began a sit-in at City Hall on 23 September demanding that Dyett remain open and that current seniors have access to extracurriculars, college counseling, and other services taken away from the school amidst the phaseout. They held a rally in the evening with current Dyett students speaking about their experiences at the school. At 6:00 p.m., police ordered them to leave, but 11 activists remained in the lobby, chained together around a statue of George Washington and refused to leave until the city met their demands. Police arrested all 11, and they were released early the next morning.

The next day, the mayor’s office announced that CPS would provide Dyett students with after-school tutoring, college tours, and college form assistance, and senior year events, such as a prom and luncheons.

On 23 October, after residents delivered 3,000 petition signatures, CPS reversed their decision, announcing that, though Dyett would not be in operation during the 2015-16 school year, the closure would not be permanent, and that it would reopen the school in the fall of 2016. They announced that they would consider proposals for a new school including residents’ “Dyett

Green Technology and Global Leadership High School,” an open enrollment school. Little Black Pearl, a non-profit arts organization proposed a contract school at the site. Local residents continued to fight for approval of their proposal instead of Little Black Pearl’s proposal, saying that another contract school would be bad for the community and provide subpar educational services for students.

Research Notes

Sources:

Works Cited

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