Chicago students, teachers protest school closings, 2013

Time period notes: March 21st, Mayor Emanuel announced the plan to close of 54 Chicago Public Schools. May 22nd, the Chicago Board of Education voted to close 50 schools.

March 21st 2013 to: May 22nd 2013

Country: United States
Location City/State/Province: Chicago, Illinois
Location Description: The Chicago Metropolitan Area

Goals:
The campaign sought to defend the existence of the public schools threatened by closure.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 051. Walk-outs
- 062. Student strike
- 063. Social disobedience
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:
• 001. Public speeches
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 037. Singing
• 038. Marches
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 051. Walk-outs
• 062. Student strike
• 063. Social disobedience
• 162. Sit-in

Classifications

Classification:
Defense
Cluster:
Democracy
Human Rights
Group characterization:

• parents and other members of the affected communities
• students
• teachers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Not Known
Partners:
Voices of Youth in Chicago, Chicago Teacher's Union, Blocks Together, Chicagoland Researchers and Advocates for Transformative Education
External allies:
Not Known
Involvement of social elites:
Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

• Parents and other concerned members of the Chicago Metropolitan community
• Students
• Teachers

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Segment Length: Approx. 10 Days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the Chicago Board of Education, District CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Campaigner violence:
Not Known

Repressive Violence:
Arrests

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
0 points out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
2 points out of 3 points

21 March 2013 Chicago Public School officials announced a plan to close 54 schools with the goals of reconciling a $1 billion dollar deficit, making better use of resources, and improving education. District CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel said that the plan addressed the underutilized and under-resourced schools in order to raise the quality of education in the remaining schools. The plan was expected to affect 30,000 students in the Chicago Metropolitan area and cost 300 teachers their jobs. It was the largest mass district closing of schools in the United States.

Parents, teachers and students protested outside of the home of Chicago’s Board of Education President David Vitales on the same day. They said that school closures would cost the city as much as the plan proposed to save, and harm communities. They also said that 90% of the students that would be affected by the plan are black and closings disproportionately affected minority neighborhoods where schools are central to the stability of the community. Additionally many worried about the repercussions of students having to cross gang lines to get to school, and that vacated buildings will harm already struggling communities. For his part, Mayor Emanuel asked for ideas about how to fix the 60% rate of graduation from high school.

The Chicago Teacher’s Union (CTU) announced a rally for 27 March. Hundreds of students, parents and members of the Chicago community marched with the CTU to the Daley Plaza where they held a rush hour rally. The CTU stated that the demonstration would be nonviolent and that they would have their own marshals on hand to ensure that it stayed nonviolent. Protesters participated in a blockade across LaSalle Avenue that disrupted rush hour traffic. Police made over 50 arrests; there were no reports of violence.

On 2 April parents and community activists rallied outside Mayor Emanuel’s office asking for him to “walk the walk” -- to join them for a walk from the schools set to be closed to the schools students will be relocated to. The walks would shed light on the reality of the distance students would have to walk, the safety concerns and the potential for overcrowding.
Cecile Carrol, a director for Blocks Together, addressed the Mayor’s call for ideas and proposed that the schools that act as anchors for the community, could be split: half of the space for the school, and half for a community center to house GED programs for adults. The Mayor did not respond.

On 24 April students, teachers, parents and other members of the community protested outside of the Chicago Public School headquarters. Students stated that they would boycott the state PSAE test, to protest the role testing has played in the closure decisions. Students formed a chain around the room that held the board meeting but were pushed out by security personnel.

In the month of May there was a series of public hearings over school closures, during which the community voiced their opinions.

On 20 May members of groups such as the Chicago Students Organizing to Save Our Schools, Chicago Teacher’s Union and Voices of Youth in Chicago began a 3 day march and protest. Protesters marched from the South and West sides of Chicago to downtown. A group of protesters occupied the lobby of city hall. Twelve protesters were arrested for blocking elevators. The protesters held a rally in Daley Plaza, across from city hall.

The Mayor’s hand-selected board of education voted on 22 May to close 49 schools. District CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett took four of the schools off of the table because she perceived that the board might fight to save them.

The campaign in defense of the Chicago Public Schools threatened by closure failed since 49 of the 54 suggested schools have been closed. Campaigners said they would persevere with a shifted set of goals.

Research Notes

Sources:


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy: 
Mckinley Bleskachek, 13/10/2013

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