

# Repurposed or Unpurposed?

## The Evolution of Chicago Public School Buildings Closed in 2013

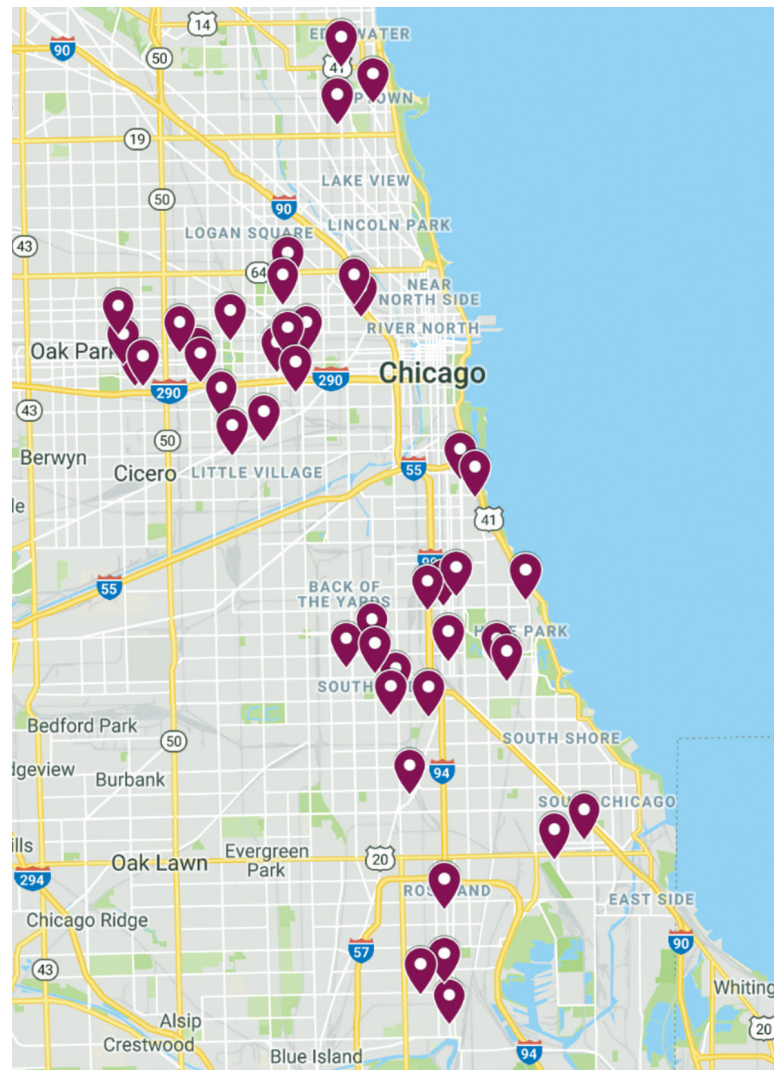
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### Introduction

In 2013 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) closed forty-four school buildings, which housed fifty schools, and relocated nearly twelve thousand students (Gorden et al., 2018). It was the largest mass closing of schools in the United States (Gorden et al., 2018). This study investigates the process of repurposing these buildings and the extent to which they still serve their respective communities. I interviewed eighteen people connected to the closings: academics, journalists, CPS personnel, community members, and building buyers. The three factors that influence the closing and repurposing of buildings are differences in the vested interests of stakeholders; inadequate communication; and physical and structural obstacles. This study concludes that the influence of these factors has prevented the majority (thirty) of the forty-four school buildings closed in 2013 from being successfully repurposed by 2018–19, the time of this study.

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district is composed of 644 schools serving 361,314 students as of the beginning of the 2018–19 school year (Chicago Public Schools, 2019). Nearly twenty years ago CPS enrollment was over 435,000, and enrollment has dropped by 16.9 percent since then. Declining enrollment mirrors the declining





**Figure 1:** Location of forty-four school closed in 2013. Google map by author.

population of the city of Chicago and is expected to continue into the near future (Emmanuel, 2019).

Mayor Rahm Emanuel led the movement to close fifty Chicago schools with low enrollments and to repurpose the buildings. The Chicago Board of Education said it faced a “utilization crisis” and deemed a school efficiently utilized if enrollment was 20 percent above or below the school’s ideal enrollment, which was calculated as the ideal number of students in a fourth-grade classroom of thirty (Weber, Farmer, & Donoghue, 2018, p. 10). Using this rationale, the grand shake-up of 2013 saw some schools and school buildings close indefinitely. Some schools, including faculty, students, and school identities, were kept intact but moved into other school buildings of higher quality, while other students and staff from closed schools were dispersed to different schools. Therefore, this study will distinguish clearly between *schools*, defined as the students and staff that make up a school community, and *school buildings*, defined as the physical space that houses a school community. The process affected 133 schools and 47,000 students in closed and receiving schools (Weber et al., 2018, p. 10). The forty-four closed buildings are largely clustered on the South and West Sides of Chicago (Fig. 1). Some researchers find the rationale of underutilization empirically valid (Weber et al., 2018, p. 28); others question this rationale, as well as the district’s formula to quantify underutilization, citing the history of racism in the management of the education system in Chicago as a main reason for school closures (Ewing, 2018; Kunichoff, 2019).

The term *repurposing*, sometimes called adaptive reuse, refers to the process of recycling school buildings for other uses. Chicago is not new to repurposing. The fall of industrialism in the mid-twentieth century left the city with a multitude of vacant manufacturing buildings (Lindberg, 2017). Many of these buildings have been repurposed as apartments and condominiums, some of which now comprise a large proportion of the most desirable real estate in the city (Bergin, 2015). This successful repurposing shows that it is possible to repurpose vacant school buildings as well (Cox, 2017; Feldman, 2017; Harvey, 2018; Nitkin, 2018; Rodkin, 2018).

This investigation explores the actions and interactions between communities, school building buyers, CPS personnel, researchers, and journalists regarding school closings in an attempt to understand how the repurposing of these buildings has and will affect communities. The goal of this investigation is to contribute to the understanding of the importance and use of institutional school buildings within a community. The majority of these buildings have the potential to serve communities in new ways. In this research, I want to find out if and how these school buildings will continue to serve their communities in order to further understand the evolving role of institutional buildings within Chicago neighborhoods. This study has the potential to improve and inspire the process of repurposing of the remaining vacant school buildings from the series of Chicago school closings that began in 2002 (Vevea, 2018).

## Literature Review

### Academic Scholarship

Most scholarship on school closings focuses on the impact of closings on the child and family. The UChicago Consortium on School Research (UCSR) found that 66 percent of students enrolled in their designated welcoming school and 34 percent chose another school for varied reasons, although the proximity of the new schools to the families' homes and communities was a paramount concern (Torre Moore, & Cowhy, 2015). Another UCSR report found that CPS poorly executed the school closings, the school movements, and the general transition process (Gordon et al., 2018). The report cited a period of mourning after school closures, which was caused by the severing of the "long-standing social connection" between families and schools (Gordon et al., 2018, p. 36). The effect of school closings on students and families has been understandably the primary concern of researchers. A school's most apparent and essential function is to promote learning and academic success, and a decline in learning and academic success has indeed been the most detrimental

consequence of the school closures for some students who enrolled in schools of lower quality than their previous school (Torre & Gwynne, 2009). However, another consequence of the closings has been the extended vacancy of school buildings across the South and West Sides of Chicago (Belsha, 2017a–d; Belsha 2018).

Schools play a large role in the community. Various studies show the connection between high or improved academic achievement and strong community ties. Strong relationships between schools and families help families to better support their childrens' school learning and access to social services and community agencies (Henderson & Mapp, 2002); close ties between schools and the community improve community development, vitality, and environment (Sobel, 2008, p. 6); and students exhibit better behavior and experience more academic success if they feel like a true member of their school community (Osterman, 2000). According to the most recent UCSR report, communities were damaged by the school closings and CPS administration did not do enough to mitigate the damage (Gordon et al., 2018).

### Journalism and Nonprofits

New articles provide the most information about the 2013 CPS school closings. The *Chicago Reporter*, for example, has a more comprehensive inventory of schools closed, for sale, and sold than can be found on the CPS website (Belsha & Kiefer, 2017). The *Chicago Reporter's* series of articles, "Empty Schools, Empty Promises," has chronicled the evolving process of school repurposing in Chicago (Belsha, 2017a–d; Belsha 2018). The *Chicago Tribune* interviewed community residents (Perez, 2018a; Perez, 2018b) and reported extensively on upcoming school closures in Englewood and the neighborhood's subsequent backlash (Perez, 2018b). These reports were supplemented by interactive maps (Epton, Richards, & Courtney, 2013; Belsha & Kiefer, 2017). The Chicago radio station WBEZ analyzed the shake-ups caused by a "generation of school closings" beginning in 2002 and delved deeply into the data on school

closures, concluding that approximately two hundred schools and 70,160 students have been affected by school shake-ups (Lutton, Vevea, Karp, Cardona-Maguigad, & McGee, 2018). Social organizations and non-profits, such as Creative Grounds, which was founded by the architect Paola Aguirre, have compiled information on the state of Chicago schools closed in 2013. Creative Grounds briefly repurposed Overton Elementary as an art gallery in an attempt to bring attention to the state of and potential reuses for closed schools (Creative Grounds, 2017; Robinson, 2017). CPS has failed to publish any account of the success stories of school repurposing or to create an online map of their properties.

## Urbanism

Some urbanism literature, including the work of Clarence Perry, Jane Jacobs, Emily Talen, and Sharon Haar, focuses on the purpose of schools within a neighborhood. According to Perry's seminal model of neighborhood design, *The Neighborhood Unit*, the elementary school should be the central feature of a neighborhood and should serve as a community center, offering services to all neighborhood residents within a half-mile radius of the school (Perry, 1929). According to Perry, a "vigorous local consciousness would be bound to arise and find expression in all sorts of agreeable and useful face-to-face associations" in a neighborhood with a successful community center and, thus, elementary school (Perry, 1929, p. 41). Although *The Neighborhood Unit* is a prescriptive account of what an elementary school should be, it does offer insightful background information on the rationale behind the construction of elementary schools. In her seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs delves deeply into urban planning of the 1950s, criticizes it, and proposes an alternative theory of urbanism. Jacobs argues that thoughtful city planning, including the presence of parks and sidewalks, could result in a more useful, healthier, and welcoming city (Jacobs, 1961). Although, Jacobs's theory is not empirically grounded, it could be applied to schools as physical spaces that should serve the community to the best of their

abilities. Elizabeth Moule argues that if all spaces serving a community's daily needs are centered around children and schools, then commutes would be reduced and time for "caring for one another," work, and personal growth would increase (as cited in Talen, 2013, p. 157). This argument relates very closely to Perry's (1929). I will apply these theories of the centrality of schools to my investigation of modern neighborhood schools.

More recent work, such as Sharon Haar's, has examined the role that schools play within cities. Haar characterizes schools as "vital community anchors" (Haar, 2003, p. 8) that both educate students in the most conventional sense and provide an "education for today's students about neighborhood and community development" (Haar, 2003, p. 9). Haar focused on the construction of schools, but I contend that this understanding of schools as community anchors should also be considered in the demolition, closing, or repurposing of schools. These urbanists provide a grounding for my research as I analyze how schools as institutional buildings serve their communities.

## School Closings and Repurposing

Eve Ewing's *Ghosts in the Schoolyard* focuses on the racism of the 2013 school closings in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago. She also explores the role that the physical buildings themselves played in the community and the pain inflicted by the closings. Ewing uses the term "institutional mourning" to describe "the social and emotional experience undergone by individuals and communities facing the loss of a shared institution they are affiliated with ... especially when those individuals or communities occupy a socially marginalized status that amplifies their reliance on the institution or its significance in their lives" (Ewing, 2018, p. 127) and questions the fate of the physical buildings: "What should we do with the vacant school buildings across the city that have yet to be repurposed?" (Ewing, 2018, p. 161). With this research, I hope to address the question of how repurposed schools could heal some of the damage caused by closures.

Policy studies on the repurposing of school buildings are limited. When closing schools in 2013, Mayor Rahm Emanuel commissioned an Advisory Committee for School Repurposing and Community Development, which produced a framework for school repurposing (Millhouse, 2014). However, the committee's guidelines have not been heeded. In contrast, Kansas City Public Schools (KCPC), which closed half its schools in 2009–10 (Belsha, 2017b), implemented numerous repurposing guidelines produced by urban planners that were “community-driven” (KCPC, n.d.). The University of North Carolina School of Government found that vacant school buildings can be effectively repurposed as charter schools, affordable housing, senior housing, and retail (Patterson, 2015). A Pew Charitable Trusts study of the mass closings and sale of school buildings in Philadelphia identifies size and location, state and local policies, marketing, and public engagement as the foremost factors contributing to the repurposing and sale of former school buildings (Dowdall & Warner, 2013). Architect Lilane Wong asserts that past identities and experiences of the building, or “ghosts” as she calls them, will inevitably influence the repurposing process (Wong, 2017, p. 147). Ariel H. Bierbaum analyzes the “divergent narratives of school closures and building dispositions” in Philadelphia and connects these narratives to the “material stakes of urban change” (Bierbaum, 2018, p. 11). Bierbaum identifies two opposing narratives, one focused on quantification and business efficiency and the other focused on the relational meaning of school buildings, specifically on the “educational, social, and political infrastructure in neighborhoods” (Bierbaum, 2018, p. 11).

At this juncture, the existence of academic research on school repurposing and sale processes in Chicago does not exist. Using the lens of urbanism, my research intends to focus academic research and refocus citywide action regarding school repurposing on the communities where schools closed in 2013.

## Methods

From October 2018 to January 2019 I conducted eighteen interviews with stakeholders in the 2013 Chicago public-school closings that I classified into three groups: A) individuals with knowledge of the process of school closings and repurposing, including CPS personnel, academics, and journalists; B) community members affected by the closures; and C) buyers of school buildings. Recorded interviews were conducted in person or over the phone and lasted approximately thirty minutes. The interview format was semi-structured (Kvale, 2007). Each interview began with the individuals' connections to the 2013 school closures, moved on to their opinions and experiences throughout the closure and repurposing process, and concluded with their thoughts on how the process of school closures and repurposing could be improved in the future (see Appendix 1). The objective of the interviews and the study at large was to understand the role that closed school buildings play within neighborhoods. The interaction and communication among stakeholders were of particular interest, because they shed light on the agency of the stakeholders in the evolution of the school buildings and the way in which the buildings served or continue to serve their neighborhoods.

I began with convenience sampling and then progressed to snowball sampling. I first interviewed researchers at the UChicago Consortium on School Research and other connections made within the University of Chicago. These interviewees introduced me to Chicagoland education journalists and activists, who in turn connected me to more school and neighborhood interlocutors (see Appendix 2).

The second wave of interviewees helped me select five case study schools: Key Elementary and Leland Elementary in the Austin neighborhood on the West Side; Dodge Elementary in the East Garfield Park neighborhood on the West Side; Drake Elementary in the Douglas neighborhood on the South Side; and Stewart Elementary in the Uptown neighborhood on the North Side. Each case study building serves a different role within their neighborhood. Except for one building that is

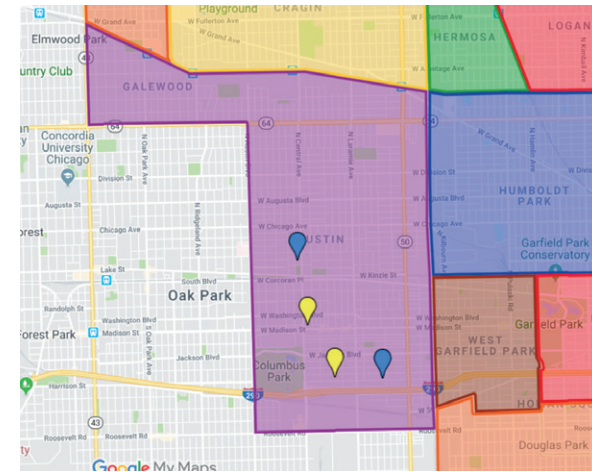
currently under construction, the case study schools have been successfully and completely repurposed. The city has sold a total of seventeen school buildings to private buyers. The buyers have repurposed or are in the process of repurposing eight buildings; the other nine remain vacant (see Appendix 3).

I transcribed electronic interview recordings using Temi Software and quality checked and edited transcriptions by hand. I analyzed the interview data using grounded theory, a theory developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, which aims to “generate theory from data” (Walter, 2013, p. 327) through an inductive process. I kept notes throughout the interview process. I began the coding process with open coding (identifying, naming, and describing categories) by hand, in order to address the similarities, differences, and themes across interviews. I then used axial coding—“the process by which the codes that are developed are more vigorously specified and elaborated” (Walters, 2013, p. 328)—to form relationships between the codes. I finished with selective coding, in which I identified a core category and organized the other categories around it (Walters, 2013, p. 328).

## Case Studies

**Austin** is one of the largest community areas of Chicago and is on the western edge of the city. Until the white flight of the 1960s, Austin was almost completely white. Currently, its population of 97,611 is approximately 82 percent black and has a median household income of approximately \$31,920.<sup>1</sup> Austin was greatly affected by the 2013 school closures, with four closed elementary schools: Emmet, Key, Leland, and Louis Armstrong (Fig. 2). Leland has reopened as Kidz Express, an after-school program associated with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (Fig. 3); the Field School, a private Christian grade school, purchased Key, and

1. All the data in this section data is from 2016, the most recent year available (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2019).



**Figure 2:** Austin’s closed elementary schools, with two case study school in blue: Key (north) and Leland (southeast). Google map by author.



**Figure 3:** Leland Elementary, now Kidz Express. Photograph by author.



**Figure 4:** Key Elementary. Photograph by author.



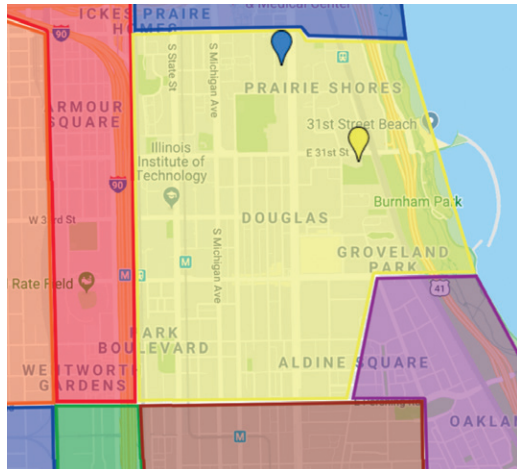
**Figure 5:** Emmet Elementary. Photograph by author.

it is currently being repurposed (Fig. 4); the nonprofit Westside Health Authority purchased Emmet, which is currently vacant (Fig. 5); Rivers of Living Water Ministries failed to close on Louis Armstrong, and it remains vacant.

**Douglas** is a community area located on the South Side. It is named for the Illinois politician Stephen A. Douglas and experienced significant development in the early twentieth century. Currently, its population of 20,559 is 70 percent black, with a median household income of \$29,398. As spotlighted in Eve Ewing's *Ghosts in the Schoolyard* (2018), Bronzeville, a neighborhood that straddles the Douglas and Grand Boulevard community areas, was plagued by school closures and shake-ups for over a decade. In 2013 two elementary schools closed (Fig. 6): the school district repurposed Pershing as the Pershing Magnet School for Humanities; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 134 purchased Drake and repurposed the building as a union hall (Fig. 7).

**Uptown** is a community area located on the North Side. It has a population of 56,296, is racially diverse and 54 percent white, with a median household income of \$45,644. Historically an entertainment district, Uptown was home to a number of immigrant groups in the twentieth century, but more recently it has experienced gentrification. In 2013, only Stewart Elementary closed in Uptown (Fig. 8). A for-profit real estate firm purchased and quickly repurposed the building as the Stewart School Lofts (Fig. 9).

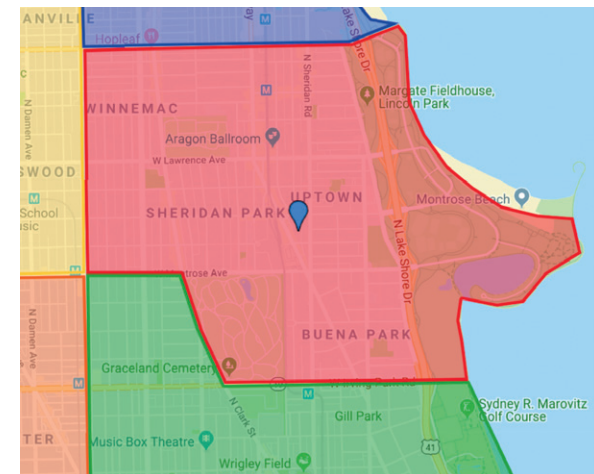
**East Garfield Park** is a community area located on the West Side. It has a population of 20,225, is 90 percent black, and has a medium household income of \$24,000. In 2013, two elementary schools closed (Fig. 10): the nonprofit Heartland Housing's purchase of Calhoun is pending; the school district repurposed Dodge Elementary as administrative offices (Fig. 11).



**Figure 6:** Douglas’s closed elementary schools, with the case study school, Drake, in blue. Google map by author.



**Figure 7:** Drake Elementary, now the IBEW Local 134 Union Hall. Photograph by author.

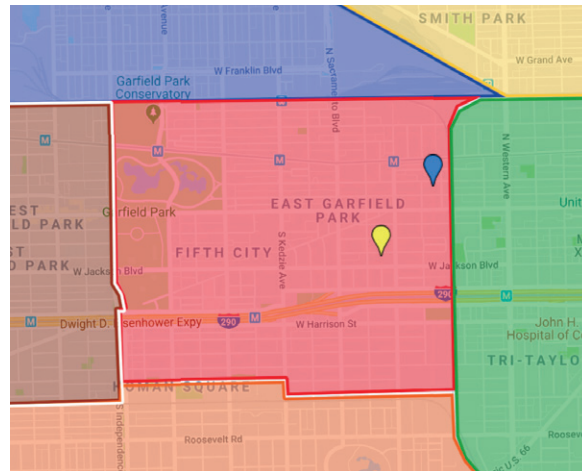


**Figure 8:** Uptown’s closed elementary school, Stewart. Google map by author.



**Figure 9:** Stewart Elementary, now the Stewart School Lofts. Photograph by author.





**Figure 10:** East Garfield Park's closed elementary schools, with the case study school, Dodge, in blue. Google map by author.



**Figure 11:** Dodge Elementary, now the CPS Garfield Park Offices. Photograph by author.

## Findings

The initial purpose of this study was to determine how the forty-four school buildings closed in 2013 were serving their communities, and this question remains relevant to the fourteen schools repurposed or undergoing repurposing. However, thirty buildings remain vacant for a number of reasons: eleven have yet to sell; seven have pending sales; sixteen sold, but remain vacant; and three were transferred to the City of Chicago and remain vacant (see Appendix 3). Due to these persistent vacancies, this study also investigated the process of and obstacles to school sales and repurposing. Throughout the eighteen interviews, three main themes emerged: differences in the vested interests of stakeholders in the closing and repurposing process; inadequate communication regarding the process; and physical and structural obstacles to successful sales and repurposing.

## Stakeholder Differences

There are a significant number of stakeholders in the process of school closures and repurposing whose vested interests differ greatly based on background and profession, as well as their goals and expectations from the school closures and repurposing. In some cases, these interests are in direct opposition to one another. Overwhelmingly, school buyers and CPS personnel distance themselves from the closures, while community members still feel a great sense of closeness to the schools and school buildings that were left behind.

The stark contrast among stakeholders is evident in the opinions of Anna Solomon<sup>2</sup> and Henry Bienen. Solomon is a CPS teacher and an activist with Northside Action for Justice, which works to prevent all school closures; Bienen is a former member of the Chicago Board of Education who served throughout the school closings in 2013. When asked how she thought the process of school closures and repurposing

2. Anna Solomon is a pseudonym.

could be improved, Solomon responded: “That supposes that it is okay to close schools, so I can’t say that I would endorse that point of view.” Bienen’s interest throughout the school closings was to ensure the district’s economic efficiency. In an attempt to cut costs caused by under enrollment, Bienen said that the board “should have closed another thirty [schools]” in addition to the fifty that were closed in 2013. With respect to the sales process, Bienen acknowledged that the board “knew a lot of those buildings could not be easily sold” and that the district’s first strategy was to “sell where you could.” Solomon criticized the process of school repurposing for its lack of genuine community involvement, while Bienen was surprised that any of the school buildings had been repurposed.

In very few cases did the interests of the school board and city, the community, and a buyer converge. One example of a convergence of interests is the repurposing of the Drake Elementary building in Douglas. Ted Fitzgibbons, president of the IBEW Local 134, stated that Mayor Rahm Emanuel played an instrumental role in encouraging Local 134 to move from the West Loop to Drake. Emanuel, who was negotiating with S. C. Johnson & Son to bring its North American Regional Headquarters to Chicago, thought that Local 134’s West Loop location would appeal to the company. According to Fitzgibbons, “through negotiations with [Emanuel’s] real estate team” the union sold its West Loop building and purchased the Drake building. Fitzgibbons explained that the union gained community support by sharing space in the new union hall with the Terry Allen Community Center, which hosts such events as senior mixers and soccer practice. The union also developed a partnership with nearby Dunbar High School, which offers students four years of electrical-training classes and guarantees students a place in an electrical workers apprenticeship program upon graduation. The repurposing of the Drake Elementary school building is an excellent but rare example of the convergence of interests of different stakeholders.

## Inadequate Communication

The greatest complaint from community members, education researchers, journalists, and some school buyers about the process of school closures and repurposing was inadequate communication and the overall opacity of the school district. Dwyane Truss, the runner-up in the 2019 election for 29th Ward alderman and a member of the Austin Community Action Council, stated that the process of school repurposing went “poorly because CPS did not have the intention to work with the community. The buildings just sit empty and deteriorated.” Even in cases of successfully repurposed school buildings, such as Leland’s transformation into Kidz Express, Truss stressed that “the process should always be open and transparent,” but that the district’s sale of Leland and other former school buildings in Austin was not. Pastor Michael Neal, who leases a former school building from CPS and is familiar with school closures on the South Side, echoed Truss’s sentiments, explaining that “people [in the school district] can cherry pick which buildings they want to sell and which ones they don’t. From my understanding, it’s still not totally clear when or if they’re going to sell what.” Given that thirty of the forty-four school buildings remain vacant six years after the 2013 closings, community members are calling for a clearer and more transparent process of building sales and repurposing.

Academics and journalists agree with community members that the process of sales and repurposing remain unclear. During our interview, education researcher Eve Ewing said that she advocates for a “genuine inquiry-based process wherein people who are impacted by a proposed policy have the chance to think through, talk through, research, and debate all the potential implications of that policy [of school closings].” Ewing also described the process of repurposing as a “mess” and that “it was never clear what the process was.” Initially, aldermen conducted community meetings and ran the process of bidding on vacant buildings in their wards. According to Ewing, the aldermen’s commitment to the process was “inconsistent.” After this process failed, the CPS was forced

to centralize the bidding process in 2017, nearly four years after the 2013 closures. Andrea Zopp, a former member of the Board of Education, said that her greatest memory of the aftermath of the school closures was about “who would own the process.” Zopp stated that the board resolved the issue after she left the board, but that, to this day, confusion about the process of bid solicitation persists.

The Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) Repurposing Initiative is an example of successful communication by a school district and a more straightforward process for school sales and repurposing. Shannon Jaax, director of the initiative, began the repurposing process with a three-month investigation about the buildings themselves and the needs of respective communities. Next, the initiative focused on “pushing out” its research at open houses for all thirty “surplus buildings.” One of Jaax’s foremost goals was to “make sure we were very transparent informing the community.” The initiative also has a marketing strategy for sales, sets deadlines for bid solicitation, and maintains an online inventory of school buildings with a status dashboard (KCPS, n.d.). CPS did provide buyers with an initial online inventory, a bidding process, and deadlines, but does not have a marketing strategy or status dashboard (CPS 2018a–b; CPS n.d.a–b). Districts such as KCPS demonstrate that clear communication and thoughtful engagement between the district and the community are possible and ultimately successful.

## Obstacles to Sales and Repurposing

This investigation revealed a number of physical and structural obstacles to the sales and repurposing of school buildings.

Physical obstacles include the sheer number of buildings that needed to be sold, their locations, their disrepair, and the cost of repairs. The district purposely closed school buildings in the greatest state of disrepair and in some cases transferred a school from a run-down building to a building in better condition. Board member Bienen stated that many potential buyers “underestimate the cost of repairing these buildings.”

Jeremy Mann, principal of the private Field School, estimates that renovating the Key building in Austin will cost \$5–6 million; the IBEW leader Fitzgibbons said renovation of the Drake building on the South Side cost about \$25 million. The IBEW has completed its renovation, and the Field School is on track to stay within their renovation budget. Other school buyers have not been as successful. The architect Paola Aguirre works closely with the community development organization that purchased Overton Elementary (Borderless, n.d.); she said that progress has stalled due to a lack of funding. Other stakeholders have questioned the scale of the closings. Education reporter Kalyn Belsha said that “the sheer number of buildings ... made it more difficult to sell any one of them.” The administrative legwork required to close fifty schools and sell forty-four buildings is immense (Belsha, 2017a–d; 2018), and others (Gordon et al., 2018) have noted the district’s lack of preparation and planning for such a large-scale closing.

Chicago politics was the main structural obstacle to the sale and repurposing of school buildings. The backing of the mayor or other political players helped some bidders, such as the IBEW, to the disadvantage of others. Mann, the private school principal and buyer, noted the “politically charged” tension among the parties who gathered together to make bids. Ewing called the bidding process an “arcane labyrinth” that is difficult to navigate for those without strong social capital in Chicago politics.

## Discussion

Of the forty-four buildings closed in 2013, thirty remain vacant six years after their closing. Through a series of eighteen interviews with various stakeholders in the process of school repurposing, three major themes emerged: the differing interests of stakeholders; inadequate communication; and physical and structural obstacles within the process. Further investigations into the process of school repurposing should include an even greater range of stakeholders, such as current CPS board members,

city aldermen who have vacant buildings in their districts, and a greater number of school community members.

Chicago news outlets, such as the *Chicago Reporter*, WBEZ, and the *Chicago Tribune*, have conducted the majority of contemporaneous investigations into the city's school vacancies. This investigation is one of the first formal academic studies of the process of school repurposing in Chicago. Although much education research has focused on the impact of school closings on the academic outcomes of students affected by closures, community impacts are also of great importance and should be investigated with similar rigor. This investigation begins to scratch the surface of the current process of school repurposing in Chicago, and its inclusion of the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders is significant. Future investigations should maintain the diversity of opinions and positions presented in this study but should be conducted at a greater scale and should cover all forty-four school buildings closed in 2013, instead of focusing on five case studies.

## Conclusion

Overarchingly, vacant school buildings in Chicago impede growth and progress. It is imperative that Chicago thinks critically about how to address the number of vacant school buildings on the West and South Sides before it is faced with future school closures. Critical consideration about the future of so many buildings across the city requires the collaboration of a large and diverse group of people, including community members, CPS personnel, school buyers, city planners, and researchers, among others.

The findings of this study call for interventions to address factors impeding the repurposing of schools, especially in light of impending political changes in Chicago: the end of the moratorium on school closings in 2018 (Masterson, 2017) and the election of a new mayor, Lori Lightfoot, in 2019 (Stewart, 2019).

Each of these recommendations is informed by the data and findings of this study with the aim of improving the process of school repurposing in the city of Chicago. First, CPS should facilitate interactions and conversations among the various stakeholders—community members, CPS personnel, school building buyers, among others—about the process of repurposing. Second, it is vitally important that CPS clarify its processes of school closures, building sales, and repurposing. For example, CPS could create a consistently updated online database with a dashboard inventory of their vacant properties and steps to be taken to purchase those buildings. This model is consistent with Kansas City Public Schools, a district that has undergone a similar mass school closing. Such interventions would mitigate some of the other physical and structural obstacles related to school repurposing efforts. Third, clear communication and transparent purchasing policies would ensure that buildings sell more quickly, without becoming dilapidated, and potential buyers who lack political connections or business acumen would not be disadvantaged. Fourth, school closures should not come in overwhelmingly large waves. A smaller scale of closings would allow the district to take greater care with the sale and repurposing of each individual building.

This research demonstrates that there are a number of ways to successfully repurpose school buildings across the city. Within the case studies addressed in this study, three vacant school buildings have great potential to serve their communities: Emmet Elementary (Austin), Louis Armstrong Elementary (Austin), and Calhoun Elementary (East Garfield Park). The commercial success of Stewart School Lofts has shown that housing is a viable option for repurposing large buildings. Many of the neighborhoods most affected by school closures, such as Austin or East Garfield Park, would benefit from the presence of more affordable housing. The large size of the Emmet and Calhoun Elementary school buildings on the West Side make them particularly well-suited to affordable housing. The success of Leland's repurposing as Kidz Express has shown the school buildings' potential as locations for after-school programs and community centers. Louis Armstrong Elementary has a similar layout to Leland and

could serve well as a community center due to its small size and location near a major park in Austin.

These broader policy recommendations and building-specific recommendations aim to improve and inspire the process of school repurposing and therefore facilitate the growth and progress of neighborhoods across Chicago. The process of school repurposing can be purposeful, well communicated, and accessible rather than haphazard, unclear, and inaccessible. ○

## Appendix 1: Guiding Questions for Interview

### **Class A: CPS Personnel, Academics, and Journalists**

- ❑ How do you identify yourself in relation to the process of school closings and repurposing?
- ❑ Can you tell me a bit about your professional journey?
- ❑ Will you allow me to use your name and professional title in my research? If not, may I use your professional title and credentials? Otherwise you may choose to remain completely anonymous and I will employ a pseudonym.
- ❑ To what extent were school repurposing efforts included in the deliberation process of school closings in 2013? Should it be part of the conversation?
- ❑ What do you believe is preventing some buildings from being sold and repurposed?
- ❑ Do you anticipate more school closures now that the moratorium is over?
- ❑ How could the process of school closings and repurposing be done differently or “better” in the future?

### **Class B: Community Members**

- ❑ How do you identify yourself in relation to the process of school closures and repurposing?
- ❑ Will you allow me to use your name and professional title in my research? If not, may I use your professional title and credentials? Otherwise you may choose to remain completely anonymous and I will employ a pseudonym.

- To what extent is the process of a school closure systematized (a predictable pattern was followed throughout)?
- To what extent was community input taken into consideration throughout the closing of your school? How about during the repurposing process?
- To what extent were school repurposing efforts included in the deliberation process of school closings in 2013?
- Were you able to make your voice heard during the process of school closures and the subsequent sales of the buildings? How?
- Do you agree or disagree with the closing of your school?
- How has the closing of your neighborhood school affected your community?
- What hopes do you have for the future of the building?
- What needs does your community have?
- Do you think the current identity of the school building serves any of these needs?
- Does the community at large have any access to the school building? What are the general sentiments of the community about the repurposed building?
- What are your views on future school closings?
- How could the process of school closings and repurposing be done differently or “better” in the future?

### **Class C: Buyers of School Buildings**

- How do you identify yourself in relation to the process of school closures and repurposing?
- Will you allow me to use your name and professional title in my research? If not, may I use your professional title and credentials? Otherwise you may choose to remain completely anonymous and I will employ a pseudonym.
- Can you walk me through the process you went through to purchase the building?
- Why did you purchase this building?
- To what extent did you engage with the community prior to purchasing this building?
- What has community’s reaction been to the repurposed building?
- What role does your building serve in the community?
- How does your building engage with the community?
- Who has access to this newly repurposed building?
- How does the building improve the neighborhood?
- How could the process of school closings and repurposing be done differently or “better” in the future?

## Appendix 2: Interlocutors

\*Indicates pseudonym

### Class A: CPS Personnel, Academics, and Journalists

**Paola Aguirre**, founder and architect, Creative Grounds

**Kalyn Belsha**, education journalist, *Chicago Reporter*

**Henry Bienen**, former member, Chicago Board of Education; president emeritus, Northwestern University

**Eve Ewing**, assistant professor of education, University of Chicago; former CPS teacher

**Molly Gordon**, education researcher, UChicago Consortium on School Research

**Shannon Jaax**, director, Kansas City Public School Repurposing Initiative

**Mary Smith**,\* education researcher, UChicago Consortium on School Research

**Rachel Weber**, associate professor of urban planning and policy, University of Illinois at Chicago

**Andrea Zopp**, former member, Chicago Board of Education

### Class B: Community Members

**Suzanne McBride**, founder, AustinTalks

**Anna Solomon**,\* activist, Northside Action for Justice; CPS teacher

**Mike Tomas**, executive director, Garfield Park Community Council

**Analisa Trofimuk**, journalist, AustinTalks

**Dwayne Truss**, member, Austin Community Action Council; 29th Ward aldermanic candidate

### Class C: Buyers of School Buildings

**Ted Fitzgibbons**, president, IBEW Local 134; buyer, Drake Elementary

**Jeremy Mann**, principal, Field School; buyer, Key Elementary

**Michael Neal**, pastor, Glorious Light Church; former volunteer, Drake Elementary; leaser, Price Elementary (closed in 2012)

**Alison Soloway**, marketing director, Stewart School Lofts

### Appendix 3: Current Status of Schools Closed in 2013

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	COMMUNITY AREA	SCHOOL STATUS	SCHOOL BUYER
<b>Armstrong, Louis</b>	5345 W Congress Pkwy	Austin	vacant, sale did not close	Rivers of Living Waters Ministries
<b>Attucks</b>	5055 S State St	Grand Boulevard	vacant, sold	KMIS Developers
<b>Bontemps</b>	1241 W 58th St	West Englewood	vacant, sale did not close	Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF)
<b>Buckingham</b>	9207 S Phillips Ave	Calumet Heights	vacant, for sale	
<b>Burnham</b>	1903 E 96th St	South Deering	vacant, for sale	
<b>Calhoun</b>	2833 W Adams St	East Garfield Park	vacant, sale pending	Heartland Housing
<b>Canter</b>	4959 S Blackstone Ave	Kenwood	repurposed by district	Kenwood Academy Academic Center
<b>Courtenay</b>	1726 W Berteau Ave	Lake View	repurposed, sold	German International School of Chicago
<b>Dett</b>	2306 W Maypole Ave	Near West Side	vacant, sale did not close	IFF
<b>Dodge</b>	2651 W Washington Blvd	East Garfield Park	repurposed by district	CPS Garfield Park Offices
<b>Drake</b>	2722 S King Dr	Douglas	repurposed, sold	IBEW Local 134
<b>DuPrey/Von Humboldt</b>	2620 W Hirsch St	West Town	vacant, sold	IFF Von Humbolt
<b>Earle</b>	6121 S Hermitage Ave	West Englewood	vacant, sale pending	Gorman & Company
<b>Emmet</b>	5500 W Madison St	Austin	vacant, sold	Westside Health Authority
<b>Fiske</b>	6145 S Ingleside Ave	Woodlawn	vacant, transferred to city	City of Chicago
<b>Goldblatt</b>	4257 W Adams St	West Garfield Park	vacant, for sale	
<b>Henson</b>	1326 S Avers Ave	North Lawndale	vacant, sale pending	Single Room Housing Assistance Corporation
<b>Key</b>	517 N Parkside Ave	Austin	currently being repurposed, sold	The Field School
<b>King</b>	740 S Campbell Ave	Near West Side	vacant, sold	Lex Polk LLC on behalf of Laura L. Llamedo
<b>Kohn</b>	10414 S State St	Roseland	vacant, for sale	
<b>Lafayette</b>	2714 W Augusta Blvd	West Town	repurposed by district	Chicago High School for the Arts
<b>Leland</b>	5221 W Congress Pkwy	Austin	repurposed, sold	Kidz Express
<b>Marconi</b>	230 N Kolmar Ave	West Garfield Park	repurposed, sold	Camelot Academy Garfield Park
<b>Mays</b>	838 W Marquette Rd	Englewood	vacant, sold	Shepherd's Hope
<b>Melody</b>	412 S Keeler Ave	West Garfield Park	vacant, sale pending	Single Room Housing Assistance Corporation



### Appendix 3: *continued*

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	COMMUNITY AREA	SCHOOL STATUS	SCHOOL BUYER
<b>Morgan</b>	8407 S Kerfoot Ave	Auburn Gresham	vacant, sale pending	Amalgamated Transit Union Local 241
<b>Near North</b>	739 N Ada St	West Town	currently being repurposed, sold	Svigos Asset Management
<b>Overton</b>	221 E 49th St	Grand Boulevard	vacant, sold	Washington Park Development Group
<b>Owens</b>	12450 S State St	West Pullman	repurposed by district	Jesse Owens Elementary
<b>Paderewski</b>	2221 S Lawndale Ave	South Lawndale	vacant, sale did not close	MR Properties LLC
<b>Parkman</b>	245 W 51st St	Fuller Park	vacant, for sale	
<b>Peabody</b>	1444 W Augusta Blvd	West Town	vacant, sold	Svigos Asset Management
<b>Pershing</b>	3113 S Rhodes Ave	Douglas	repurposed by district	Pershing Magnet School for Humanities
<b>Pope</b>	1852 S Albany Ave	North Lawndale	currently being repurposed, sold	Chicago Housing Authority
<b>Ross</b>	6059 S Wabash Ave	Washington Park	vacant, transferred to city	City of Chicago
<b>Songhai</b>	11725 S Perry Ave	West Pullman	vacant, sale pending	Songhai, LLC on behalf of VLV Development & Financial Services Corp.
<b>Stewart</b>	4525 N Kenmore Ave	Uptown	repurposed, sold	Morningside Equity Group; Stewart School Lofts
<b>Trumbull</b>	5200 N Ashland Ave	Edgewater	repurposed, sold	Svigos Asset Management; Chicago Waldorf School
<b>Wadsworth</b>	6420 S University Ave	Woodlawn	vacant, transferred to city	City of Chicago
<b>Ward, Laura S.</b>	410 N Monticello Ave	Humboldt Park	vacant, sold	Turnstone Development
<b>Wentworth</b>	6950 S Sangamon St	Englewood	vacant, sale did not close	MR Properties LLC
<b>West Pullman</b>	11941 S Parnell Ave	West Pullman	vacant, sold, now for sale through new entity	Cook County Land Bank on behalf of Celadon Holdings LLC
<b>Woods</b>	6206 S Racine Ave	West Englewood	vacant, sale did not close	Greater Southwest Development Corporation
<b>Yale</b>	7025 S Princeton Ave	Greater Grand Crossing	vacant, sale pending	Climate Leadership Innovation Center, LLC, on behalf of VLV Development & Financial Services Corp

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