

Report: CPS should improve communication

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Chicago Public Schools officials should do a better job of informing parents about how the district is performing academically, should give families better information about school closings and share more safety and violence concerns with parents, according to a report to be released today.

The survey of nearly 1,400 parents in 43 neighborhoods in Chicago and six neighboring suburbs found that parents believe they often get incomplete information from school officials and are forced to rely on unofficial sources such as the news media and individual teachers, said Rev. Patricia Watkins, executive director of Target Area DevCorp.

The report, titled "Parent Perceptions, Student Realities in Chicago Schools," was prepared by Watkins' group, which worked with 12 other community organizations.

The groups conducted the surveys late last year and held focus-group discussions this year with about 200 parents, students and community officials. The project was paid for by the Joyce and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundations.

"I think CPS needs to invite the community in to help make decisions about what happens to these schools," Watkins said. "They are missing the mark when it comes to making changes in these neighborhoods without having honest conversations."

The report concluded that the district needed to do a better job of warning parents and communities about future school closings and letting them know where children will attend schools. This recommendation comes after the board voted this week to consolidate nearly a dozen schools and last month voted to close or consolidate 16 schools.

Board of Education President Michael Scott vowed to do a better job of informing the community about future closings.

--*Carlos Sadovi*