RECAP — PERCEPTIONS VS. REALITY: WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A CPS HIGH SCHOOL

APRIL 3, 2017

“It’s not always the schools with the highest test scores that have the best teaching.”

That was one of several takeaways that elicited a round of applause at a forum held at Wells Community Academy High School on March 29. About a hundred parents, principals, and community members gathered at the invitation of Generation All and Raise Your Hand to learn about the factors that families should consider when choosing a Chicago Public Schools high school.

“Neighborhood high schools have seen the biggest improvements in high school graduation rates, ACT scores, and college persistence,” said University of Chicago Consortium for School Research director Elaine Allensworth.

“It can be really hard to figure out if a school is strong academically or if it looks strong because it gets a lot of academically strong students in the first place. … What we’ve found is that selective enrollment schools don’t add much value in academic outcomes beyond what students in high-performing neighborhood high schools are receiving.”

Allensworth presented recent Consortium research on the outcomes of students who attend selective enrollment versus neighborhood high schools while touching on the success of International Baccalaureate programs and on the importance of school climate and culture on student outcomes.

A fishbowl discussion followed, featuring some of Generation All’s youth council members, students and recent graduates from Foreman High School, UNO Charter School Network Soccer Academy High School, Curie High School, and Roosevelt High School.
Ray Burns, Stefany Boyas, Karina Martinez, and Danely Quiroz discuss their high school experiences.

“If I could go back and had a chance to go to a selective enrollment school, I would choose to attend my neighborhood high school again,” said Danely Quiroz, a senior at Roosevelt High School.  

“I wouldn’t have met all the amazing people and teachers I’ve met, I wouldn’t be graduating in the top ten of my class, I wouldn’t have been accepted to a lot of the top universities I’ve been accepted to, and I wouldn’t have met the amazing leaders at my school. My neighborhood school has really shaped me and shaped what I want to do for my community and my people.”

WBEZ education reporter Linda Lutton next moderated a panel discussion between Wells Principal Rita Raichoudhuri, Kenwood Academy parent Steven Posey, Amundsen High School parent Beneen Prendiville, and Allensworth.
“The best way to change perceptions about your school is to get people inside your building,” said Raichoudhuri in response to how she raises the profile of her school. “People don’t expect neighborhood high schools to even be clean much less full of teachers who deliver rigorous instruction and students who help and take care of one another.”

The panel discussion featured Kenwood parent Steven Posey, Wells Principal Raichoudhuri, future Amundsen parent Beneen Prendiville, moderator Linda Lutton from WBEZ, and Consortium director Elaine Allensworth.

“We chose Kenwood because we wanted freedom and diversity for our son, and it was just a couple blocks away from our house. We wanted out of the rat race and now our son will be attending Florida A&M University in the fall,” Posey said to a round of applause from the audience.
Prendiville’s process of choosing Amundsen occurred over a decade, including a period of “spying” on the teachers and the school’s culture while her children learned to swim at the adjacent park district pool. Not only was she pleased with what she saw in and outside of the building, but she liked the idea of not spending thousands on test prep and having the breathing room to keep her kids home when they were sick.

After her daughter announced a desire to attend Amundsen, however, other students and teachers pressured her to change her mind. “They told her she was throwing her life away, but the other kids started getting stressed, and their hair was falling out. Once I told her it’s like the Hunger Games, the switch went on and she got it. She’ll be attending the IB program in the fall, but she would have attended Amundsen’s neighborhood program as well.”

The program concluded with audience Q&A, during which several participants expressed a desire to spread the message of getting to know and invest in the neighborhood high school.
Alliance Bakery’s Chance the Rapper cookies were sold at the event. $1 of every purchase goes towards Chance’s #SupportCPS fund for arts enrichment, which benefits many neighborhood high schools.

Watch the entire event [here](#).

Download Elaine Allensworth’s slides [here](#).

Other materials given out at the event:

[Chicago Public Schools parent says not to base high-school selection on test scores](#)
Who needs selective enrollment when your neighborhood high school has an IB program

Test scores don't always reflect a child's potential

Will a single application for high schools help expand equity in Chicago Public Schools?

What are the benefits of attending a high-performing neighborhood high school?
PERCEPTIONS V. REALITY:
WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A CPS HIGH SCHOOL

Join Generation All & Raise Your Hand for an honest discussion on what matters beyond test scores and reputation when choosing a high school.

Elaine Allensworth of the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research will present two recent studies on outcomes at CPS high schools, including the effects of attending selective enrollment schools for low-income students.

A panel moderated by WBEZ’s Linda Lutton will follow, featuring Wells Community Academy Principal Rita Raichoudhuri and CPS high school parents and students.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 29
6:30 - 8:30 PM
WELLS COMMUNITY ACADEMY
936 N ASHLAND AVE.