

# Some parents see CPS's Ren Ten schools as the only viable choice

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"While some public schools in our city have improved, many in our communities have not... Only three of every 100 African-American and Latino males in Chicago Public Schools earn a college degree. Our children deserve a better future," according to a portion of the opening statement on a Parents for School Choice brochure.

PSC is an organization that raises awareness of new schools that have been opened under Mayor Richard Daley's Renaissance 2010 (Ren Ten) program.

Ren Ten schools are smaller than traditional Chicago Public Schools.

These schools are operated by outside organizations that introduce innovative and non-traditional programming.

Exactly 55 Ren Ten schools have opened since the fall of 2005 and 29 of those are charter.

According to Phyllis Lockett, president and CEO of the Renaissance Schools Fund, that provides up to \$500,000 of start-up money for each Ren Ten school - PSC has targeted six communities with notoriously poor school performance; West Humboldt/West Garfield Park, Austin, North Lawndale, Englewood, Grand Boulevard and Auburn Gresham.

Kim Ambrose, PSC's South Side liaison, is excited that parents in these communities finally have a choice.

"The mere creation of new schools... gives parents a choice. It also breeds competition because every administrative leader wants their school to be on the top. When you see new schools coming into the community, which are able to function out of the box and having success that makes that traditional school say, 'What can we do to step it up a notch?'"

According to CPS Spokesperson Malori Edwards, data comparing Ren Ten school performance to traditional schools does not yet exist.

The principal of a traditional school in one of PSC's target communities said that she is in full support of the right to choose, but is uncomfortable with what the partiality she believes Ren Ten schools are receiving.

"I'm not against charter schools. I think that option should be available to all students.

"I think that students should be able to make a sound choice with their parents of what type of future they want to have," she said.

"I also think that the funding and the rules that apply to one school should apply to all schools, be it public, charter or Catholic."

She also suggested that Ren Ten's matriculation was biased against students with special needs or a history of violence.

"They don't want those kids. These kids are left attending schools like mine, that people are bashing."

Both Edwards and Katheryn Hayes, director of communications at The Renaissance Schools Fund, refuted that claim.

Hayes said students are chosen by lottery.

Edwards did admit, however, that there is a difference in quality between traditional and Ren Ten schools.

"We do have existing neighborhood schools that are just not getting the job done right now," he said.

"We are working to provide support, but we understand that some kinds of things can be done in a Ren Ten school that can't be done in a traditional school."

He noted that charter schools have the autonomy to develop military or different learning models, something that traditional schools cannot do.

CPS is currently establishing tutoring and extra-curricular programs in traditional schools to close the gap, he said.

Parents like Ambrose are pleased that they are no longer forced to enroll their children in an undesirable institution.

"Any time you can take a private educational model and make it public, that's saying a lot," she said.

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