

March 1, 2010. By Gary Ossewaarde

HPKCC Schools Committee holds rousing biennial recognition ceremony, hears how grass roots school upgrade can be done

Over 60 parent volunteers, school council, PAC and PTA members, principals, residents and notables crowded Kenwood Academy's Media Center February 23, 2010 to celebrate parents engaged in and working in their schools. Among attendees were Phil Jackson and others from the Black Star Project, Ald. Preckwinkle who said a few words, Ronald Raglin, the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) director for CPS and Abigail Hymen, Director of Youth Programs at the Hyde Park Neighborhood Club.

Highlights included a energetic, professional performance by the Kenwood Jazz Band under the baton of Gerald Powell; introduction the work of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference by President Jay Ammerman and the work of the Schools Committee by member and HPKCC board member Ismail Turay; the roll call of each school (to great applause) to receive the packets of with the individuals' certificates; a few words from the Director of the CPS AVID Program and Alderman Toni Preckwinkle (4th); our speaker, and a fine repast. Attendees received packets with materials about the sponsors and how to run for an LSC, and Black Star Project distributed a report on the challenges faced by our inner city schools.

Our speaker, **Jacqueline Edelberg**, author of ***How to Walk to School: Blueprint for a Neighborhood School Renaissance***, described in talk and a video the steps by which, without a lot of money or hoopla, parents were recruited and organized to work with the principal of a Chicago neighborhood school to transform the school's physical appearance, culture, learning experience, and performance. The school was changed from a place that no one from the neighborhood would attend or own as part of the community to a fun and productive place parents and the community owned and inhabited from 8 in the morning to 10 at night. Again, it wasn't rocket science, it used the neighborhood public school model that worked for 100 years, it's been shown elsewhere, too to be replicable—and fast and without ousting the kids or removing all the adults. More information in <http://www.howtowalktoschool.com>.

Here are some of the elements critical in the transformation and success:

- A principal who is an educational leader and who listens and welcomes parents, community, help
- Parents who work with their kids and in the school, and hustle to get supplies and other help donated and work help make classrooms work
- In and out of classroom enrichment activities that in effect extend the school day and opportunities to apply learning. This includes student projects
- Creating a climate where excellent teachers want to be and poor teachers don't and a physical place that is fun for kids and says they are important.

The Schools Committee, Nancy Baum Chair, thanks Kenwood Academy and Liz Kirby, Principal; the Kenwood Jazz Band; the many volunteers who made the event happen and work; Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference; Hyde Park Herald; Computer Resource Center, and the United Church of Hyde Park.

Schools honored: Canter, Carnegie, Dyett, Harte, Hyde Park, Kenwood, King, Kozminski, Murray, North Kenwood-Oakland, Price, Ray, Reavis, Robinson, and Shoemith.

The Kenwood Jazz Band members were as follows: Tyler Brooks, Piano; Andren Johnson, Drums; Michael Murray, Congas; Ch Kieya Richmond, Alto Sax; Quachard Sloan, Bass; Lavon Weaver, Tenor Sax, and Tylan Williams, Flute.

Committee members: Nancy Baum (Chairperson), Irene Freelain, Annika Frazier-Muhammad, Camille Hamilton-Doyle, Zoe Mikva (Emerita), Ted Fetters, Gary Ossewaarde, Ismail Turay, The Reverend Larry Turpin, Sheila Wesonga, Julie Woestehoff (Emerita).