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Emily Weinstein/MEDILL

A man braves the negative windchill Tuesday to show his opposition against charter school expansion during a march and vigil organized by the Chicago Teachers Union.

Board of Education OKs 7 charter schools despite controversy

by **EMILY WEINSTEIN**

Jan 22, 2014

The Chicago Board of Education voted Wednesday to approve five proposals that would allow the creation of seven charter school campuses.

During the meeting, Jack Elsey, the chief innovation and incubation officer for the Chicago Public Schools, discussed the nine charter proposals for 18 campuses. Elsey said that his committee, along with the Neighborhood Advisory Councils, recommended approval for five charter proposals that would create seven new campuses.

“We believe that the Board’s decision to move forward with conditional approvals,” Elsey said, “will provide for the best outcome for children, allowing CPS to ensure the highest quality of schools for all students in Chicago by managing quality and ensuring equitable distribution of funding.”

Two of the approved charters for fall 2014 were from the Noble Network, which has 14 campuses in Chicago. The spokeswoman for Noble said that parents should be able to make a school choice that is right for their families.

"We don't feel that parents or children should be forced to stay in schools because there are no other options," she said.

Although charter expansion has a large number of supporters, not everyone is excited about the new campuses. The Chicago Teachers Union organized a march to Chicago Public Schools' headquarters Tuesday followed by an overnight vigil to protest the proposed charter expansion.

Eric Sarb, a science teacher at Mariano Azuela Elementary School in West Lawn, said that too much change has happened in Chicago public education in the past year.

"After the closure of the 50 public schools at the end of last school year, and the approval of 10 new charter schools already, I think it's a really drastic change to be making within one school year," Sarb said Tuesday at the vigil.

A community activist, Cata Truss, who also attended the vigil, said she believes the opening of new charter schools is an injustice.

"The issue is that, yes, our schools are broken, but instead of trying to fix or repair the problems that we have, [CPS] opted to close some of the schools," Truss said Tuesday.

Although some see the charter expansion as an injustice, others see it as an answer.

Noble's spokeswoman said that the charter school network serves more than 9,000 students.

"There are thousands on the waitlists," she said. "Parents want these choices, and we're responding to the parents' demands."



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Rousemary Vega, a CPS parent, chooses the sign Tuesday she will hold for the march to Chicago Public Schools' headquarters in downtown Chicago.