

GazetteOnline

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.gazetteonline.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Article published: Aug 12, 2008

Taylor school families scold school leaders

CEDAR RAPIDS Taylor school families threw the book at school leaders last night.

Five Cedar Rapids women — mothers and a grandmother of students who used to attend Taylor school — addressed the board.

The school, at 720 Seventh Ave. SW, was seriously damaged in June when 3 feet of floodwater rose on the first floor. The school will not be open for the 2008-09 school year.

Mary Belcher of Cedar Rapids pointed to school board regulation 601.1 on homeless children. According to the regulation, the homeless liaison should work to ensure that "parents and guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of available educational and related opportunities provided to their children and of the opportunity for the parents and guardians to participate in the education of their children."

"We had no participation in this decision" to close the school this year, Belcher said.

Michele Kaplan pointed to board policy 208. The policy is a position statement about shared decision-making. It says: "The school board empowers school communities to utilize a shared decision-making process where decisions are made at the level closest to the issue being addressed. ... Individuals affected by the decision are part of the process."

Kaplan said the community has not been involved in decisions about Taylor.

Policy 208 also says that "the process needs to be efficient and sensitive to time demands."

The other three people who addressed the board did not bring specific policies.

"I feel like (we were) deliberately kept in the dark about this," said Sheila Schoenherr of the decision to close Taylor.

Anna Atkins' son will be considered homeless this year because she and her son were flooded out of their home and are doubled-up with Atkins' sister in Hiawatha. She wondered where her son will attend school, since they will have moved three times by the time they eventually make it back to their home again.

Jay Marino, associate superintendent, said students who are homeless under federal law — such as Atkins — will all have a school identified by Monday.

Already, most of the 68 students who still live in the Taylor neighborhood who were not displaced by the flood have been placed. Of those, 24 will attend Harrison, 22 will attend Grant or Wilson, and 10 will attend Cleveland. The remaining 12 are still waiting for placements, mostly because they need to be in a school that has special education or other programs.

After homeless students are placed, district leaders will start working on students in other situations, Marino said.

School board members also found out all their buildings that were flooded — including Taylor and the

Educational Service Center — are considered repairable. Flood damages did not exceed half of the cost of replacing them to their pre-flood condition, said an Adjusters International spokesman.

It would take about 16 months to bid, build and move back into the buildings under normal circumstances, added George Kanz of Shive Hattery. If school leaders paid more, the process could likely be sped up to take six months, he said.

Edi Chase pleaded to the board, "Please reopen Taylor Elementary. Sixteen months is going to be too long to wait to reopen our school."

School board members have not decided what to do with the flooded buildings.

[Click here to go back to the article](#)