

3 new magnet schools on tap

CPS | But one plan opposed by residents

BY ROSALIND ROSSI

Education Reporter/rossi@suntimes.com

A rare second round of magnet school lotteries could be held as early as March if Chicago Public Schools officials push through plans to create three new magnets — including some in half-empty school buildings.

Second campuses of the hugely popular La Salle Language Academy and Disney Magnet are expected to emerge this fall in the aftermath of a CPS proposal to shake up 19 schools — the first wave of as many as 50 school closings or consolidations over the next five years.

A third new school — focused on preparing elementary students for careers in engineering — is planned this fall on the South Side in the new Miles Davis Magnet building at 6740 S. Paulina, less than a mile from the current, half-empty Miles Davis.

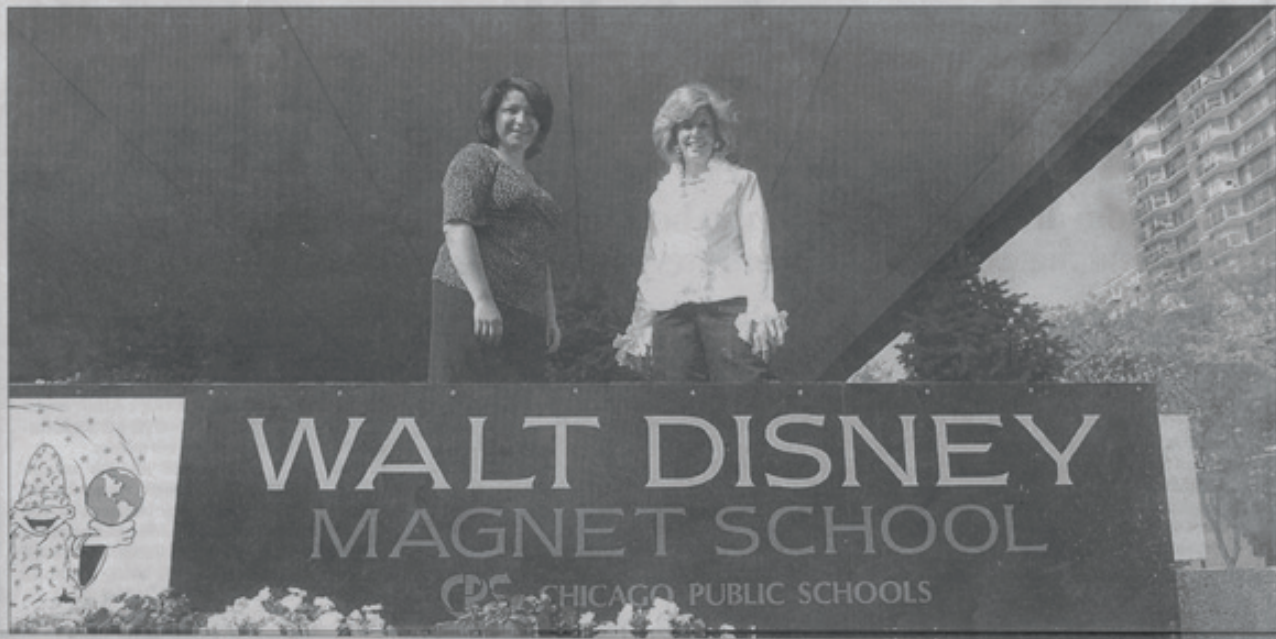
For years, the cachet of magnet schools has drawn middle-class families into CPS. But plans involving the new La Salle, or La Salle-2, face stiff opposition.

Six busloads of protesters crowded a public hearing last week to fight plans to replace Hans Christian Andersen Elementary at 1148 N. Honore, near gentrified Wicker Park, with La Salle-2. A School Board vote is set for Feb. 27.

Andersen scores double

Under the CPS proposal, Andersen would stop accepting new students and eventually phase out of existence. Its new students would be routed to the nearby Pritzker Elementary. This fall, Andersen would begin sharing its building with 120 La Salle-2 kindergartners through second-graders.

As pre-K-8 Andersen withers away, La Salle-2 would grow to a K-8 school. Andersen parents Carmen Soto and Mildred Rodriguez have



Disney-2 Principal Bogdana Chkoumbova and Disney Principal Kathleen Hagstrom stand outside Disney Magnet School in Uptown. | BRIAN JACKSON-SUN-TIMES

been leading the charge against the plan, saying Andersen's scores have doubled over seven years, despite holding 91 percent low-income kids.

"If it's not broken, why take it away?" said Rodriguez.

Andersen's success indicates CPS should add new programs to attract more kids rather than kill off the school, parents say.

They note that dozens of schools — more than 100, according to CPS data — are less filled than Andersen, which CPS lists as 47 percent full.

Parents estimate that, adjusting for special education, the building is 58 percent full.

"I feel the whole underutilization program is a big cop-out for what they really want to do," said Soto, whose first-grader is the third generation in her family to attend Andersen.

Rodriguez, mother of three Andersen students, worries that if her pre-K child doesn't win the magnet admission lottery at La Salle-2, her children will be separated.

"How can you offer this great

plan for certain kids and not the rest of the school?" Rodriguez asked.

Critics contend Andersen could become a "dead school walking." Rodriguez and Soto predict it will evolve into something inferior to La Salle-2, which will get extra teachers and resources under a federal magnet grant.

Attracting youths from outside

Even Ald. Manny Flores (1st) is concerned: "I don't want to see children from lower-income families not receive the benefits that others will receive."

However, to keep families together, said David Pickens, the CPS point man on school closings, CPS is considering an opening-year-only sibling lottery at La Salle-2 that would reserve 45 percent of new La Salle-2 seats for siblings of Andersen students.

Though Andersen's capacity is 1,200 kids, Pickens said, the school currently holds 565 students, but only about 150 of them live in the at-

tendance area.

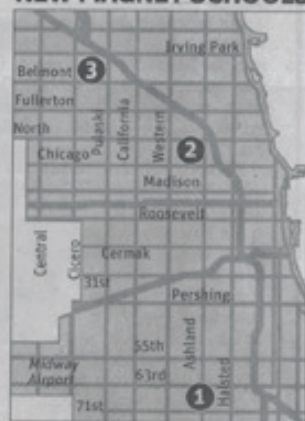
"Andersen is attracting a lot of kids from outside the neighborhood," Pickens said. "But if it does that, you might as well make it a magnet and have the resources that go along with it."

Seats awarded in lotteries for neighborhood kids will be expanded from the usual 30 percent set-aside to 50 percent at La Salle-2 and at Disney-2, which is expected to occupy the current Irving Park Middle School building, Pickens said.

All students from the old Miles Davis and Johns Middle, both targeted for closure, would be guaranteed slots in the new Davis Magnet. Admission lotteries for La Salle-2, which will feature four languages, and Disney-2, with an arts and technology emphasis, could be held as early as March, Pickens said. Lotteries at existing magnets are going on now.

"La Salle has a reputable name and a reputable concept," Pickens said. "We feel that it would be very attractive to parents."

NEW MAGNET SCHOOLS



- 1 Miles Davis Magnet School: In a new building at 6740 S. Paulina
- 2 LaSalle Language Academy-2: In current Andersen Elementary building, 1148 N. Honore.
- 3 Disney Magnet-2: In current Irving Park Middle building, 3815 N. Kedvale.