



Statement on ISBE denial of Urban Prep appeal

Yesterday, Wednesday, April 19, 2023, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), rejected an appeal from Urban Prep Academies to be chartered by the State, an appeal that was made after the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Board voted to discontinue the charters of Urban Prep Academy's Bronzeville and Englewood campuses on Wednesday, October 26, 2022, a move strongly denounced by COAL and the families of Urban Prep students all across our community. Chicago Faith-Based Leaders, Chicago Teachers Union, Chicago Tribune Editorial Board and many others expressed support for keeping Urban Prep open and educating our children.

To state that COAL is very disappointed in this decision by the ISBE is a severe understatement, however not wholly unexpected. CPS held a meeting last month, at which one of the topics was potential name changes for Urban Prep schools once the ISBE made yesterday's decision. It appears that CPS was made aware of the ISBE decision to deny urban Prep's appeal, weeks before yesterday's meeting.

This does not end COAL's efforts to have Urban Prep remain Urban Prep, a Black managed and operated school which successfully educates Black boys and young men.

COAL is immediately reaching out to meet with Governor Pritzker's State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders and ISBE Chair Dr. Steven Isoye, to challenge the ISBE decision, to probe into what discussions were held with CPS Board members, giving them confidence to begin last month's planning for the takeover of Urban Prep, and to understand the alternative ways educational institutions can be authorized to operate in Illinois.

COAL is immediately reaching out to meet with the Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools, Pedro Martinez, to discuss Urban Prep and what appears to be a lack of engaging with the Black community, on this and other issues, in a timely and respectful manner.

COAL will meet with Urban Prep leadership to understand planned next steps towards continuing to operate independently. #SaveUP!

COAL will also consult with its members and partners who are experts in the field of education administration for their ideas on paths forward.

To Urban Prep Academies: COAL will continue to support your fight to exist and to continue educating our Black boys and young men, something Urban Prep has been doing for over a decade. We will fight along with you.

To our members and the community:

Let us be clear,

- This is not a charter versus public schools issue, rather this is about a community institution of learning that successfully educates our children, being wrongfully treated and disciplined.
- This is about the CPS Board taking ultimate steps to punish a Black-managed institution of learning for demonstrating its independence;

- This is about CPS not recognizing the importance of the successful education of Black boys being a priority over its desire to assert its authority over Urban Prep;
- It's about the ISBE, in turn, following along with this disrespect of our community and the importance of education in providing Black boys and young men an increased opportunity to succeed in life. Surely, the successful education of our youth must trump other issues that can be addressed if there are other issues at Urban Prep, and;
- It's about an educational institution being allowed to make management and process adjustments, as needed;
- And we note that business entities make management and process adjustments on an ongoing basis, as required. If its bottom line is sufficiently positive (in this case, the successful education of students) then a hostile takeover is not in order;

We, as a community, cannot accept this outcome without further challenging the systems that do not prioritize the education of our children, that devalue our community institutions, and that do not listen to the voices of our community who strongly support Urban Prep Academies.

Importantly, COAL finds it difficult to understand why Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus and Black members of the ISBE do not find the education of our children important enough to speak out on this issue.

Black youth matter. Black institutions matter. Black voices matter.

And that is the 'Stone COAL truth'.