



City of Chicago



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Meeting Date:	6/25/2014
Sponsor(s):	Harris (8)
Type:	Resolution
Title:	Recognition extended to Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In on 52nd anniversary
Committee(s) Assignment:	

**RESOLUTION HONORING THE
BURNSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
DESEGREGATION SIT-IN 52nd ANNIVERSARY**

WHEREAS, The Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In, which honors a watershed moment in modern local civil-rights history, is celebrating its 52nd Anniversary honoring the fight for educational opportunity and equality in public educational institutions in Chicago during June 2014; and

WHEREAS, This august body has been informed of this important milestone by the Honorable Michelle A. Harris, Alderman of the 8th Ward; and

WHEREAS, May 17, 2014 marked the 60th Anniversary of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* and July 2, 2014 marks the 50th Anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, The movement to desegregate schools in Chicago began on a cold winter day - January 2, 1962, with a sit-in at Burnside Elementary School. It was organized by a group of dissatisfied PTA mothers and in many ways was the spark that ignited the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago; and

WHEREAS, The sit-in was in response to a highly unpopular and widely considered demeaning plan to relieve overcrowded conditions at Burnside Elementary School. The Chicago Board of Education ordered 7th and 8th grade students living east of the former South Park Blvd. (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive) and south of the railroad tracks to transfer to Gillespie Upper Grade Center located at 9301 S. State Street. This order came in late December 1961, right before the Christmas Holiday vacation. This action would force some students to now walk 17 blocks to school. The Chicago Board of Education, which was then under the leadership of school superintendent Benjamin C. Willis, preferred transferring Black students rather than integrating the then predominantly white Perry Elementary School (now Harold Washington School), located at 9130 South University, which was a few convenient blocks from Burnside Elementary School; and

WHEREAS, Since its launch in 1962, the Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In 52nd movement has established a well-deserved reputation and quiet historical recognition for pushing toward the desegregation of Chicago schools during a time when the U.S., as well as Chicago were grappling with a range of civil and human rights issues affecting African-Americans. Over 200,000 students, parents and concerned Chicagoans boycotted, sat-in and walked-out of overcrowded and deteriorating schools on the south and west side of the city, in protest of 'Willis Wagons' and other inequities, making an important statement among young people, community and religious activists, as well as everyday citizens and those in the affected communities; and

WHEREAS, During the past fifty-two years, the little-discussed, yet pivotal story of the strength, fortitude and bravery of a committed group of PTA mothers and concerned parents fighting for educational equality for black children in Chicago Public Schools during the 1960's has existed on the periphery of local history; and

WHEREAS, Today, a renewed interest in and awareness of the accomplishments of Burnside

Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In 52nd Anniversary has encouraged Chicago genealogist Tony Burroughs and others to take another well-deserved look at this fight for educational justice and parity, which was designed to give a strong voice to those in economically and socially challenged communities throughout Chicago and led to the arrival of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago during 1965-66 in support of this and other relevant civil rights and social justice causes; and

WHEREAS, In addition, the Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In 52nd Anniversary helped leverage public-private opinion to effect social change and improved the lives of thousands of Chicago students, by providing them citywide access to schools that enabled them to positively focus on the future; and


WHEREAS, The Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In 52nd Anniversary is overdue to be recognized for launching this movement, and triggering similar sit-ins and walkouts across the city. The 'Burnside Mothers' goal was to reach the least and left out through direct action outreach, while successfully grooming the next generations to hold high the torch of excellence and equality in public education; and

WHEREAS, During these challenging times, the continuing dedication of the Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In survivors who inspired the creation of a photo mosaic mural dedicated to telling the story to future generations of leaders during this 52nd Anniversary year deserves citywide recognition, as they seek to dramatically display the strategic social action of youth, adults, working families, and others throughout Chicago and beyond; and

WHEREAS, The Chicago City Council is pleased to salute the Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In, in honor of its 52nd Anniversary for their longstanding dedication to creating a better City for all its residents; and

Be It Resolved, That we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, gathered here this twenty-fifth day of June 2014 A.D., do hereby express our recognition and respect for this important historical legacy with respect to the educational equality for all Chicago Public School students, and do hereby extend to this group our sincere congratulations for their resistance and perseverance.

Be It Further Resolved, That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the surviving members of the coalition in recognition and honor of Burnside Elementary School Desegregation Sit-In 52nd Anniversary.



MICHELLE A. HARRIS

Alderman – 8th Ward