

# GENERATION ALL REACHES OUT TO COMMUNITY THROUGH FOCUS GROUPS

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In August and September, hundreds of Chicagoans will provide feedback to Generation All on its ideas for making a top quality education available at every one of the city's neighborhood public high schools and expanding opportunities for learning both in and out of the classroom.

The plan under discussion, still in outline form, was crafted between September 2014 and June 2015 by Generation All's 40-member steering committee and will be released early next year. It includes ideas for creating a more equitable system to fund neighborhood high schools, expanding extra-curricular activities and internships for youth across the city and improving instruction by providing more time for high school faculty to collaborate, plan, and learn together within and across schools.

In the focus groups conducted thus far, one idea that particularly resonated with participants is that neighborhood development needs to go hand-in-hand with school improvement, says Misuzu Schexnider, Generation All's policy and outreach coordinator. "They were excited that the plan would emphasize that schools can't do everything and that we need strong neighborhoods to support them."

Another theme emerging from the focus groups is frustration with Chicago's system of offering families a dizzying array of high school choices, more than 170 public high schools in all, including charter schools. The quality of education at those schools is believed to vary widely, however, and despite the many options, students are guaranteed admission only to their own neighborhood public high school.

In a North Side focus group, parents and teens talked about the pressure to attend a selective high school and the feeling "that if students don't get in, their future is totally derailed," Schexnider reports. "There seemed to be a high-stakes culture, 'This or bust.'"

On the Southwest Side, residents talked about the social pressure to attend a high school outside their neighborhood and the long commutes students endure to attend one, even if it's not any better than one down the street, she says. "There's this feeling that if you're leaving the neighborhood, it must be better."

Generation All's vision for guaranteeing a top-quality education for every student in their own neighborhood was strongly appealing to participants, Schexnider says, and many noted recent rallies in the city against opening more charter or magnet schools. More Chicago families are calling for certainty of access to a good high school for their students, not simply more options with limited access.

"It's a new day," she observes. "The tide is shifting. People feel a growing momentum to support neighborhood public high schools."



