

**To:** Mayor-Elect Lightfoot

**From:** [Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education](#)

**Objective:** Ensure all students have access to the quality schools, teachers and supports they need to graduate from high school on the path to success.

**Initiative:** Restructure CPS from a portfolio/choice district to a sustainable community schools district -- a system of neighborhood schools with resources equitably distributed to provide every child with the education they need to become active participants in our public life.



### **How values are infused in this initiative:**

**Equity:** Competition is fundamentally incompatible with equity. A school system where schools and students must compete for scarce resources is inherently inequitable. Instead:

- **Allocate operating funds via a need- and evidence-based formula.** Simplistic per-pupil budgeting (CPS's "student-based budgeting") exacerbates inequity. Allocate funding in a way that (1) does not further damage communities suffering from depopulation and displacement; (2) does not incentivize schools to hire less experienced teachers; (3) accounts for the specific needs of the population a school serves.
- **Make capital funding decisions via a transparent, inclusive process.** All students deserve clean, safe, modern school facilities. Demographic predictions should be based on publicly available data and models. Repairs and maintenance of existing buildings should be prioritized over new construction.

### **Transparency:**

- **Engage parents and students at every level of the policy making process.** The reasoning and evidence to support new CPS policies should be easily available to the public well in advance of when a decision will be made so there is a genuine opportunity for deliberate input from parents, students, school community and the public.
- **The BoE should comply with both the spirit and the letter of the Open Meetings Act.** Meetings should be held on evenings and weekends, live streamed, in large venues outside downtown. Observers should not be required to pre register. Closed sessions should be minimal. Participation bans should be re-evaluated.
- **Respect the Freedom of Information Act.** Fund CPS FOIA office adequately; don't ignore and deny requests.

### **Accountability:**

- **Replace appointed BoE with an elected BoE.** The Board needs to be held accountable at the ballot box.
- **Create a public process to nominate and vet board appointments until there is an elected board.**
- **End privatization of janitorial, nursing, facilities/capital improvement management.** Private contractors in these areas have been costly fiascos and unaccountable to the public for their failures.
- **Stop charter expansion.** Privately-run schools funded by public dollars are not accountable in the same way public schools are. Diversion of dollars to charters in a district with declining enrollment is a dereliction of fiduciary duty.

### **Diversity & Inclusion:**

- **Provide wraparound services and supports to meet the needs of each and every student.** Clinician ratios for counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses should be brought to nationally recommended staffing levels to ensure consistent, competent care and legally mandated provision of services.
- **Mandate support of ethical and appropriate Individualized Education Programs (IEP) Team decisions** for the benefit of each and every student with disabilities in Chicago Public Schools.
- **Remove test scores as a barrier to access to a well-resourced education for any student.** Currently, students are ranked and sorted based on test scores with the most resources going to the least in need, and some students (e.g. students with disabilities) are shut out of opportunities altogether.
- **Provide Local School Councils with resources for training and support needed to function effectively.**

## **Transformation:**

- **Create an equity-driven system where all schools are ready to serve every child who walks through the door.** Every child has guaranteed access to a well-rounded education close to home. The arts, a library and librarian, extracurriculars, small classes, unstructured play are not “options” - they are basics. Services and supports required by IEPs and 504 plans are not discretionary, they are mandatory.
- **Revolutionize how and why we assess students, teachers and schools.** The school quality rating policy and the promotion policy need to be overhauled. Sparing use should be made of racially, linguistically, economically biased standardized testing, with no high-stakes decisions based on test scores. Students should be assessed for their own learning, not as part of accountability measures for teachers, administrators, and schools. Assessment should be used for non-punitive purposes and include multiple measures and qualitative factors, like human observation.

## **For this initiative:**

### **What is happening now that should keep happening?**

- Pilot of sustainable community schools; restorative justice programs; Local School Councils.
- Maintain current programs and initiatives that are working in individual schools.

### **What needs to be implemented in the next 100 days?**

- Renounce the schools-as-a-business model and return to having a Superintendent of Schools.
- Develop plan to reform operating budgets, including study of how funds cut since 2013 can be restored to individual schools—or communities, if schools have been closed—and comparison of admin costs of CPS vs. other districts.
- Announce intent to overhaul school rating system and promotion policy.
- Restart the Chicago Education Facilities Task Force (CEFTF) and comply with its recommendations
- Audit all existing contracts to be sure they are student-focused, cost effective, and avoid conflicts.
- Remove Chicago Police Department officers from schools and reallocate funding to other supports.
- Replace staff who enforced the illegal policies and procedures put in place under previous CEOs.
- Develop meaningful competency and accountability measures for CPS-employed and contract nursing staff.
- Implement tracking system to identify all nurses in our schools (including agency nurses) including certifications etc.
- Create new Health Care Aide position for every CPS school to fulfill routine daily medical needs of students.
- Create & implement policy to protect student data privacy & security ensure data is not exploited commercially.

### **What needs to be planned for in terms of longer-term implementation?**

- Prioritize resources for a sustainable community schools district.
- Collaborate with community organizations, disability rights groups, and CTU on all initiatives.
- Implement recommendations of IEP teams and 504 plans created via a process that fully includes parent input to ensure IEPs and 504 plans are written to meet student needs not budgetary constraints.
- Reform school utilization formula; reimagine community uses of facilities in conjunction with CEFTF.

### **What challenges might be encountered in executing this initiative?**

- Structural deficit exists because of inadequate state and city funding. The TIF system siphons off dollars and exacerbates inequities. Finding new revenue resources and reforming TIF are difficult but imperative.
- Test scores have been the dominant measure of education quality for more than 25 years. We need a new vision where quality of education is more than a score.
- CPS has historically been unable to police itself when it comes to special education issues. Even post- ISBE inquiry, the CPS administration has shown little sense of urgency about making things right for the students who continue to be harmed by past and current denial of services.
- Schools do not exist in a vacuum. Enduring neighborhood effects and 100 years of segregation led to the systematic disenfranchisement and denial of resources to communities in the most need.
- Resorting to top-down, message-over-substance strategies is simpler than implementing systemic solutions developed via a truly inclusive, democratic process.