RAISE YOUR HAND FOR ILLINOIS PUBLIC EDUCATION

PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON CPS REMOTE LEARNING AND BACK TO SCHOOL

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Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education engages, informs, and empowers parents to protect and strengthen public education for all children in Chicago and Illinois, eliminate inequities in public schools, and work at the grassroots for the public good that is public education.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

What do parents want to see moving forward?

Recommendations for Future Remote Learning:
- More social emotional wellness support
- Consistent, frequent, and clear expectations for communication to parents at the classroom, school, district, and city levels
- More opportunities for student to staff contact
- More professional development

Recommendations for Diverse Learners and ELs:
- Create a plan to provide compensatory education for all students who were denied services, regressed, or failed to meet their expected goals
- Increase the time and quality of services mandated by the IEP
- More opportunities for 1 on 1 and small groups
- Create a special education and EL task force that includes youth, parents, and community
- Provide parents more guidance on accommodations and modifications

Recommendations for the CPS Back to School Plan:
- Regardless of the plan, parents should have the agency to keep their kids at home without suffering negative consequences
- The plan must be grounded in science metrics and backed by health professionals
- The plan must be comprehensive, detailed, and show precisely how CPS will keep our children safe

Minimum Conditions for Hybrid Models:
- Robust hygiene/sanitization practices
- Reduced class size
- Hire more staff

Recommendations for Repairing Harm from COVID:
- Additional mental health services
- Compensatory education for all students that need it
- Time for socialization
- Work beyond the school walls

Recommendations for Long Term Recovery:
- Hire more support staff
- Moratorium on standardized testing, SQRP, and punitive attendance practices
METHODOLOGY

How was the data collected? Who was included?

Progress Report Survey

Between April 28th - May 17th, Raise Your Hand (RYH) surveyed over 1300 CPS parents about their remote learning experience. These surveys were in 6 languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Polish, and Urdu). Parents submitted responses for each student. The survey can be found here: https://bit.ly/CPSprogressreport

We distributed the survey through our email and social media platforms. Over 50 community based organizations, elected officials, and parent groups also committed to share the survey with their membership.

Every quote in this report is from a CPS parent who filled out the survey.

Who Was Surveyed:

- At least 100+ responses from parents with students at every grade level
- Majority of parents (60%) surveyed identified as a parent of color
- Reached 51% of CPS schools, every ward represented.
- Over 40% identified as a parent with a student with special needs (IEP or 504)
- Over 20% identified as a parent with a student who was an EL

Parent Calls

In addition to the survey, RYH held 13 Special Education Community Circles which gathered over 470 special education parents, teachers, and advocates to discuss remote learning. RYH also held 13 Local School Council Solidarity calls with over 450 LSC members and candidates to discuss remote learning and ways to address remote learning equity gaps.

Limitations

We want to recognize that this survey was our best attempt at getting a snapshot of CPS parents over a 3 week period. Limitations such as our digital outreach fails to reach parents without technology. While we leveraged community partnerships, targeted specific zip codes, and reassessed outreach strategies daily, we recognize this does not capture some of our most directly impacted families, specifically the need to capture more Black/Brown voices. We also want to note the date of the surveying as many things have occurred that may change perspectives such as the Uprising or the increase in COVID19 cases in Illinois.
Parents graded their remote learning experience on a curve. They understood that there wasn’t a playbook for the pandemic and that everyone was doing the best given the conditions.

Parents’ experiences varied widely between and within schools and parents expressed the entire spectrum of satisfaction with remote learning. Two months into the pandemic, over 130 parents still indicated concerns around the digital divide. While this issue is being addressed through more funding, many parents are worried about how the schools that loaned out the most technology are more likely to be negatively impacted when we fully return back to school in person.

While there is no consensus on workload - there were many parents who either commented that the academic workload was too light or too heavy - remote learning will be some part of the return to school strategy and there are many ways it needs to be improved moving forward.

"Just uploading assignments isn’t helpful to me and my kinder. I am a single working mom of two special needs kids and she needs way more 1:1 support. I shouldn’t feel like I have to choose between working and earning money for our family and her education.”

"Remote learning does not work for every family. I am already seeing regression in my two autistic children. It's sad they worked so hard while in school and were showing gains. It's all slowly slipping away.”
• **More social emotional wellness support.** While ISBE and CPS remote learning guidance both stressed the importance of social emotional learning, parents continued to be highly concerned about their child’s well being - only 11% of parents indicated they were not at all concerned, with the basic majority being “somewhat concerned” to “extremely concerned.” Of parents surveyed, 42% indicated they want more social and emotional support when school starts. Parents are looking for more tangible, transparent, and scaffolded ways for students to process this unprecedented moment.

• **Consistent, frequent, and clear expectations for communication to parents at the classroom, school, district and city levels.** Data - both historical and present - shows a likelihood that our realities will keep changing. More than a third of the parents in our survey (~41%, >600 parents) stated that they were not entirely satisfied with how clear the communication from their school was regarding remote learning. About one in five parents in our sample (~18%) said that they were unable to reliably contact staff at their child’s school. Over 180 parents commented about the importance of CPS officials and teachers being more consistent and frequent in their communication. Parents found the process of remote learning disorienting and should not need to sleuth through numerous learning platforms, school websites, emails, parent groups, and social media to piece together what their child needs - this was especially true for parents with students at different schools. While much of this was unavoidable in the spring, CPS has had sufficient time to create more structures for the fall and beyond.

• **More opportunities for student to staff contact.** While we recognize the logistical challenges of having more virtual face-to-face or live interaction between educators and students, over 230 parents independently indicated in the qualitative responses that having recorded lessons or updates through digital platforms (Dojo or Google Classroom) is just one tool in a toolkit of ways to engage students. Parents are looking for more 1:1 time and small group experiences - we can be more creative tha. In addition to whatever we consider traditional lessons, over 500 parents indicated they want more tutoring support for their child in the fall.

• **More professional development.** Remote learning requires different pedagogy and may not be intuitive to parents or students. Teachers need more professional development on how to be more effective at remote learning. More than a third of the parents in our survey (~39%) expressed a desire to be provided more guidance on implementing remote learning (navigating technology, sorting through curriculum, communication systems). 15% of parents specifically indicated they want more technology assistance when the semester starts.
Remote Learning for Special Education Students and English Learners

We have to do better by our special education and EL students. Almost three-fourths of the parents in our survey who had children with IEPs or 504s (~69%) stated that they did not receive as much support as they would have liked to help their child reach their goals and access their learning. Almost 100 parents (14% of families with IEPs surveyed) indicated that they had no contact or communication about their child’s IEP or accommodations. According to the May Board of Education presentation on student engagement, students with special needs recorded the second to lowest engagement digitally outside of Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS). More than half of the parents in our survey with children who were English Learners (ELs) (~55%) stated that they did not receive as much support as they would have liked to help their child reach their goals and access their learning. In addition, about one in five parents in our survey (~18%) stated that they did not reliably receive updates and communications on their child’s learning in a language they could understand.

Recommendations for Diverse Learners and ELs:

- **Create a plan to provide compensatory education for all students who were denied services, regressed, or failed to meet their expected goals.** As a direct result of COVID-19, the students who have struggled the most must get the most. 68% (>900) of parents surveyed believe that every student with an IEP/504 plan and/or English Learner should be eligible for compensatory education/services.
- **Increase the time and quality of services mandated by the IEP.** Throughout the 13 Sp.Ed calls with over 470 attendees, parents consistently named the difficulty of attaining services such as speech, OT and PT from clinicians.
- **More opportunities for 1 on 1 and small groups.** Whether virtual or in person, CPS can be more creative in using SECA and other support staff to create more appropriate learning environments. Co-teaching models only represent one tool in the pedagogical toolkit.
- **Create a special education and EL task force that includes youth, parents, and community to actively monitor our district’s efforts in the learning and well being of our students.** Dozens of parents commented on how they wanted to be included in the decision making process during the pandemic - we have seen many task forces and working groups include parents across the country. Surveys are good but should only be one piece of authentic parent involvement.
- **Provide parents more guidance on accommodations and modifications.** We recognize that most parents are not trained educators and must be given more instruction on how to serve their children at home.
Parents completed the survey in early to early May and were not explicitly asked about their preference for the different return to school models that are being implemented across the country. Parents, however, provided over 200 pages of comments when asked what they think CPS should do to prepare students to return back to school next year.

Parents provided ideas that almost covered the entire spectrum of return to school models. These ideas include hybrid models that center most impacted students, alternating days, varying experiences by grade level, etc. Only a handful of parents (less than 12 out of over 1300 parents) indicated that we should return to school like normal. While parents are natural problem solvers and have provided potential solutions, these ideas were given under the condition that there would be scientific evidence backed by health professionals that shows schools are safe to return. We simply are not there yet. The vast majority of parents want CPS to exercise extreme caution before reopening schools.

"Do not rush or hastily reopen schools; I’d much rather deal with prolonged remote learning than for my only baby to be subjected to unsafe and unclean school buildings."
This is not an easy decision. Many parents commented on the economic pressure they face of balancing their job with remote learning. Parents mentioned they have lost income or struggle with childcare since they are essential workers. While returning back to school may alleviate that stress, it does not solve the underlying root issue of the failures by our federal government. It is also not a surprise that many parents were not satisfied with their remote learning experience. They are worried about social isolation, loss of learning, and how this exacerbates existing inequities for their children, particularly children with special needs. Remote learning needs to be improved.

"I think CPS has to [do what's] best for the kids. If it's not safe to go back to school, keep on doing e-learning. We can't send our kids to a place where they are not 100 percent sure they won't be exposed to the virus."

“I am not sure that we should return to school in the fall. We need to pace ourselves based on science and data. When we do return I imagine a 3 days a week school schedule or some such the transition should not be abrupt.”

Despite all of these factors, parents repeatedly state that keeping students safe is first and foremost the most important factor. Some parents have already stated they will not have their child return until there is a vaccine. Hundreds of parents expressed that CPS should take the reopening process slowly and exercise caution and restraint. One of the more popular ideas was a gradual transition that starts with remote learning until there is both proof that schools are safe and that safety protocols are implemented with fidelity.
Regardless of the plan, parents should have the agency to keep their kids at home without suffering negative consequences. While COVID-19 has the ability to infect anyone, it is clear parents across the city are facing very different realities. Many live in multigenerational homes, have immunocompromised or at risk family members, or have living situations that make one model unsuitable for one reason or the other.

The plan must be grounded in science metrics and backed by health professionals. Decisions to open up schools should be based on metrics such as testing, positivity rates, and contact tracing - much like how Illinois and Chicago based their phased reopening plan.

The plan must be comprehensive, detailed, and show precisely how CPS plans on keeping our children safe. Parents have read enough plans and guidance documents that paint with broad brush strokes; the devil is in the details. A complete plan must also include what happens when there is another outbreak.

“Set very clear specific expectations well in advance of any in person school starting. Consider those with immunocompromised individuals in school children’s homes and how returning to school for kids puts these individuals at risk. The kids are stressed about bringing germs into their homes.”
Many cities across the US are exploring whether hybrid models make sense for their district. As mentioned previously, any return to school plan needs to be grounded in science and be comprehensive - we need to know how our children are going to be kept safe. Parents are open to creative solutions but have very specific conditions for any type of in person learning.

**Minimum Conditions for Hybrid Models:**

- **Robust hygiene/sanitization practices.** The majority of parents who provided qualitative feedback mentioned the need for plenty of PPE, hand sanitizer/disinfectant and other tools such as thermometers. Given years long concerns about cleanliness before COVID-19, parents expressed concern over feasibility that CPS can maintain rigorous cleaning practices. Parents also indicated that they want to know how students are going to be taught these routines and how fundamental practices like hand washing are going to be implemented into a school day.

- **Reduced class size.** Over 100 parents commented that CPS should reduce class size to lessen the risk of exposing children to COVID-19. Parents provided examples of their current student’s class sizes and how that was impossible to socially distance. The majority of parents who commented about class size wanted less than 15 students in a room.

- **Hire more staff.** Hundreds of parents mentioned the need to increase the current number of nurses, social workers, custodial staff, counselors, and other additional staff at their respective schools if there was a return to in person learning.

> “Have a dedicated plan for online learning, an ability to perform it as a hybrid. Make it easier for parents to know where their children stand in regards to assignments. Figure out social distancing and ways to keep kids and families engaged.”

> “I truly wouldn’t feel safe sending my kid to school until there is a vaccine, but until then, the benefit of in-person learning has to far outweigh the health risks of reopening schools.”
Returning back to school is not just about getting safely back into the physical classroom. A complete return to school plan must include how we are going to repair the harm caused by COVID-19. It is clear that across the country, students are suffering from significant learning losses. What is more important is that we have developmentally appropriate practices that create the conditions so students can learn - we must address the bottom tiers of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs first.

**Recommendations for Repairing Harm from COVID-19:**

- **Additional mental health services.** Over 170 parents provided feedback about tending to the social and emotional needs of students by providing additional mental health resources. Parents mentioned the need for more social workers, therapists, counselors and SEL focused staff. Of parents surveyed, 42% (>500) indicated they want more social and emotional support when school starts.

- **Compensatory education for all students who were denied services, regressed, or failed to meet their expected goals.** There were close to 100 references about students who did not have access to learn during the Spring and how specific interventions need to be given to historically underfunded schools, students who lacked technology access and our most vulnerable students. 68% (>900) of parents surveyed believe that every student with an IEP/504 plan and/or English Learner should be eligible for compensatory education/service.

- **Time for socialization.** 70 parents provided feedback about how COVID-19 has negatively impacted their child’s ability to socialize and the importance of socialization for their child’s development and mental health.

- **Work beyond the school walls.** Strengthen CPS offices that support families with housing instability, food insecurity, unemployment, and lack of health insurance. Advocate for laws, policies, and practices that build sustainable social supports for Chicago families.
“Everyone is experiencing a level of trauma, including adults, and the part of the brain that registers stress and trauma is the same part that is responsible for memory and learning. Social emotional development is the foundation for all learning and if we don’t deliberately attend to those needs, we will not achieve positive academic outcomes.”

“Students must be given time with their friends when they return, just to be together, independent of learning. Students have missed critical behavioral milestones and times of maturing, and that cannot be ignored, and bridging that gap must be prioritized.”

“Not all parents are able to stay at home to teach. Not all parents will understand the schoolwork. Please be gentle with our kids and slowly reintroduce school. More than anything, they need to know they are safe and loved before they can learn.”

“The children that are ok, are still going to be ok for the most part, while the children that are not ok are falling further and further behind every day. We cannot let the gap between those two groups grow and hide behind issues of equity. Equity does not mean equality, and resources need to be targeted to our most vulnerable populations.”
"We have a unique moment to reimagine education with children and young people at the center."

Too often funding education is seen as a “good to have” and not viewed as essential to rebuilding a stronger, more equitable Chicago. While we are in a current recession, we must continue to center the needs of our children. In addition to investing in our children, we have the opportunity to correct inequities that exist in CPS long before COVID-19. This is the opportunity for us to reimagine education in Chicago - we need to work together.

Recommendations for Long Term Recovery:

- **More support staff.** 82% (>1000 parents) of parents surveyed indicated they want every school to have a dedicated nurse and a social worker within 2 years
- **Moratorium on standardized testing, SQRP, and punitive attendance practices.** Majority of parents surveyed - 58% (>750 parents) - said they are against using attendance, test scores, and other income correlated measures to justify school closings or ratings for the next 3 years.

"CPS needs to release the limits and manufactured pressures of grading, testing, attendance measures and allow schools to care for kids and support their families. Now, in the fall, and forever."

"This is not a small band aid fix of what's happening right now. This should be a complete overhaul for students and their families from this."