



OUR ORGANIZATION

KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

2015-2020 IMPACT SUMMARY

WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS.
WORLD-CLASS CITY.

**“Putting parent voices
at the center of our
work has become a
manifesto for how
our organization
approaches education
policy change.”**

DANIEL ANELLO
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

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OUR ORGANIZATION

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Imagine a Chicago in which every child in every community has access to a world-class education—the kind that opens the doors to new opportunities in college, career, and life.

Dear Friends,

In 2019, Kids First Chicago commemorated 15 years of educational transformation in Chicago, honoring the many partners who have dedicated countless hours and invested deeply to improve outcomes for our students and our city.

With Kids First Chicago's contributions since 2004, Chicago has seen record gains in student outcomes and has become a national exemplar for urban school improvement.

Graduation rates are at an all-time high, and Chicago students outpace peers in almost every other district nationally in academic growth.

Despite remarkable progress, in 2015 nearly 75,000 students remained in low-performing schools that were not preparing them for success in college, career, or life. Low-income communities with predominantly African American and Latino/a/x families remained disproportionately impacted—an inequity that must be addressed.

To achieve our ultimate vision—world-class education for every student in every neighborhood—we knew we had to change the dynamic around education reform in Chicago and fully engage those closest to the challenges.

We relaunched in 2015 with a new strategy to place communities and families at the heart of the conversation, which has become the manifesto for how our organization approaches education policy change.

Today, we partner with communities and families to help them identify, navigate to, and advocate for high-quality public schools for their kids.

CORE STRATEGIES

- 01 Support communities and families** to identify, navigate to, and advocate for high-quality public schools for their children and communities.
- 02 With parent input, shape education policy and systems** to better support communities and families.
- 03 Steward the facts** by providing unbiased data expertise to communities and policymakers alike.



(Above) Kids First Chicago CEO Daniel Anello conducts a community training event.

Then we work with parents and the district to shape education policy to better support all families.

Our model is powerful in driving the kind of change needed to ensure that every child in every neighborhood has access to quality education.

We are committed to continuing this work and invite you to join us in ensuring we put kids first, every day.

Sincerely,

Daniel Anello
CEO, Kids First Chicago

January 2020

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

2020

6 of 10

2025

8 of 10

2030

9 of 10

STUDENTS IN HIGH-QUALITY SEATS

**A WORLD-CLASS CHICAGO
WHERE ALL CHILDREN RECEIVE
THE HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION
THEY DESERVE**

WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS, WORLD-CLASS CITY.

SPOTLIGHT

UNIVERSAL ENROLLMENT



(Above) Chicago parents on the West Side gather for a focus group on the current enrollment process in January 2017.

In 2015, we began extensive engagement with families to understand their primary pain-points.

We heard overwhelmingly that Chicago's school enrollment process was "broken" for families. With hundreds of applications for programs and schools, the system favored parents with the time, resources, and experience to overcome enrollment barriers.

In ongoing conversations with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), we heard that the process was also "broken" from their perspective. It did not provide timely, efficient, or actionable data for the district and school leadership.

CPS's Office of Access and Enrollment would make 51,000 offers to 20,000 students, resulting in 31,000 "unused" offers, all while 6,000 students received no offers. Some students got multiple offers, while others got none. Without a fix, the central office struggled to make informed decisions around school and program offerings, while principals couldn't set a budget in time for school to start.



Our response to tackle the “broken” process illustrates our core organizational strengths. We:

- Sought out national expertise;
- Researched and produced recommendations for district leadership;
- Provided transparent, digestible information to parents;
- Activated parent voice in advocating for change;
- Offered trainings for schools and community-based partners; and
- Provided direct project management support for CPS

Our activities underscore the value of having an objective, “kids-first” partner—like us—solving a major pain point for families.

“I never knew about an enrollment process. In high school, I just went to the neighborhood high school...I just didn’t know there were a lot of options for different types of schools—charter, public etc. Some parents are lost. They don’t know where to start..”

- FOCUS GROUP PARENT



Elevating Parent Voices & Changing Policy

In January 2017, we partnered with Chicago Public Schools in organizing 10 parent focus groups. Neil Dorosin of *The Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice* (IIPSC) facilitated the conversations at all focus groups. We then publicly released key findings in a report, and shared parent feedback directly with the District.

KEY FINDINGS

- Families are not getting information about schools and programs, and cannot participate in the process of selecting those schools and programs.
- The act of applying to schools and programs in Chicago is cumbersome and complicated.
- Parents are uncomfortable with the way choice results are determined and communicated. They want better and more reliable communication, explanations for results, and more information on and a clear set of rules to follow regarding waitlists.
- There is support among parents for a Universal Application and a single-best-offer process for allocating seats.

In April 2017, the Chicago Public Schools Board of Education voted unanimously in favor of moving to a single application for all public high schools in the city.

(Above) Neil Dorosin conducts a focus group with Chicago parents.

Three Kids First Chicago speakers, two students from Plato Elementary, and a mom whose child is now enrolled at a Noble Network campus spoke at the meeting. The parent concluded her remarks by delivering a stack of more than 470 petitions from supporters in favor of a single application, gathered by Kids First Chicago.



26K

STUDENTS WITH FAIRER ACCESS

99%

PARTICIPATION RATE IN YEAR 2

83%

MATCH RATE IN YEAR 2

Years One & Two Process & Results

In the 2017-18 school year, the shift to a single-application platform at the high-school level resulted in a 93% application rate and provided more than 26,000 students with more transparent and fair access to high-quality schools across the district. This participation rate is record-breaking compared to other urban districts nationally.

According to a study from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research and Federal Reserve Bank, more than 80% of students who used GoCPS in Year One received an offer at one of their top three highest-ranked schools. And parents overwhelmingly described GoCPS in our focus groups as “easy” or “easier.”

We continue to gather and respond to parent feedback about the new enrollment system. K1C conducted nine focus groups with 65 parents of CPS 8th graders across the city to better understand what parents liked and disliked and how we can best support families through this process. We compiled their feedback into a new report—**Parents Talk GoCPS**.

We actively listened to parent feedback throughout Year One and advocated for changes to CPS’s communications, the supports available, and the system itself going into the second year.

Year Two saw increased participation rates, with 99% of eligible students using GoCPS, and of those students who applied 83% were matched to one of their top three schools of choice.

CHICAGO'S FIRST EVER

ANNUAL REGIONAL ANALYSIS



Chicago students and families struggle not only to find basic information about our schools, but also to understand the implications on their student's education.

We partnered with CPS to create a first of its kind, comprehensive, fact base called the **Annual Regional Analysis (ARA)**. It is a consistent set of information on enrollment, student demographics, school quality, school choice, and program offerings for all public schools organized by region.

In developing the Annual Regional Analysis, CPS needed an independent intermediary that could undertake comprehensive analysis to uncover

barriers to quality and access, build knowledge and capacity of grassroots stakeholders, and create a model for community-driven school planning that can be replicated across all neighborhoods/regions in CPS.

Kids First Chicago is uniquely positioned to serve in this intermediary role because of our track record of effectively engaging family and community stakeholders to support high-impact district policy change.

(Above) CPS Parents discuss information included in the Annual Regional Analysis.

“I became involved with Kids First Chicago simply trying to research and figure out the whole CPS system and how it works, and where I was going to find a place for my daughter. I’m very much a person that likes data, and it was extremely eye-opening for me. As a parent, I plan to continue to be involved in order to make those positive changes. There just needs to be this equal amount of opportunity and access regardless of where you live. It’s great to be able to connect with like-minded people, and that we’re all here for education and we’re all here for kids.”

-HEATHER ARELLANO
CPS PARENT & ATTENDEE OF
KIDS FIRST CHICAGO ARA BRIEFING

Making Data Available & Understood

In early 2018, we briefed more than 120 organizations and partners on the ARA.

Guided in part by the briefings that our team facilitated, CPS hosted ARA town halls in each of the 16 regions of the city in the fall of 2018.

These briefings demonstrate a commitment to open dialogue between district leadership, schools, and community residents and are a proof point that the ARA is working exactly as intended — to bridge the gap between grass-tops and grassroots stakeholders in creating solutions to our city’s most pressing education needs.

This new resource has already guided strategic decision-making and investments by the district and dozens of other external education partners.

For example, in March 2019, the district announced a \$32 million programmatic investment into those regions and schools that need it most.

We also produced a **User Guide** to help stakeholders digest and apply the ARA to communities and schools. With information on how to read the ARA and room for note-taking, the User Guide is an ideal companion to the full report.

“Kids First Chicago has given so much support to Clark and our community, and they’ve provided technical guidance so we could take advantage of opportunities to improve our school and our neighborhood. They are dedicated to making sure community voices are heard and listened to. We are so glad to count them as a partner.”

-CHARLES ANDERSON
PRINCIPAL, MICHELE CLARK HIGH SCHOOL
ON CHICAGO’S WEST SIDE

Using the ARA to Guide Strategy

According to the analysis, there are nearly 50,000 available elementary school seats in CPS’s highest-quality rated schools. After additional research, we discovered that these high-quality seats are not in areas with a low population or surrounded by another obvious barrier.

Moreover, nearly 15,000 of these available seats are in 52 high-performing elementary schools in under-served neighborhoods on Chicago’s West and South sides. A new strategic priority for Kids First Chicago is to support families of elementary school children in navigating to available high-quality options, while diving deeper to understand and address the obstacles that have contributed to these “empty” quality seats in the first place.

In the analysis of ARA data, the West Side has emerged as a microcosm of the broader issues facing the district. The West Side is a historically disinvested, low-income, high-minority region of the city serving as many students as some entire U.S. school districts, like Cleveland. Less than half of students in both elementary and high school attend a Level 1+/1 school.

However, there are almost 10,000 unfilled Level 1+/1 elementary seats and 72 unfilled Level 1+/1 high school seats in the West Side Region alone.

With these data in mind, and in partnership with families and community organizations in the West Side neighborhoods of Austin, North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, and Humboldt Park, we are guiding new investments based on data from the ARA, conducting additional fact-finding through polling and focus groups to understand families’ school choices, and continuing to empower families and community stakeholders through direct service and information sharing. In the long term, we hope this revitalization will go beyond the education space, achieving multi-sector solutions to empower West Side champions and promote sustainable change in the region.

KEY FINDINGS IN THE ARA

67%

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTEND A LEVEL 1/1+ SCHOOL

72%

OF HISPANIC/LATINO STUDENTS ATTEND LEVEL 1/1+ SCHOOLS

150K

MORE SEATS THAN THE CURRENT STUDENT POPULATION

62%

OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTEND A LEVEL 1+/1 SCHOOL

45%

OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS ATTEND LEVEL 1/1+ SCHOOLS

60K

UNFILLED LEVEL 1/1+ SEATS ACROSS THE DISTRICT

18%

OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ATTEND SCHOOL OUTSIDE OF THEIR REGION

91%

OF WHITE STUDENTS ATTEND LEVEL 1/1+ SCHOOLS

12%

DECLINE IN ENROLLMENT OVERALL SINCE SCHOOL YEAR 06-07

45%

OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTEND SCHOOL OUTSIDE OF THEIR REGION

100s

OF PROGRAM TYPES WITH REGIONAL SKEW THROUGHOUT THE CITY

5%

ADDITIONAL ENROLLMENT DECLINE PROJECTED IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Measuring progress in Chicago Public Schools

Comparing 2-Year Average SQRP Ratings Over Time

At Kids First Chicago, we believe that measuring progress in our schools is essential to knowing where we are and what we need to do so that all students get the education they deserve. Families cannot make informed choices about schools without a consistent “measuring stick” for whether students in a school are learning.

Using CPS’s School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) we take a longitudinal view of school performance by looking at a 2-year SQRP average alongside a school’s performance in a single year. Measuring the consistency of a school’s activity over time provides a more accurate depiction of that school’s performance.

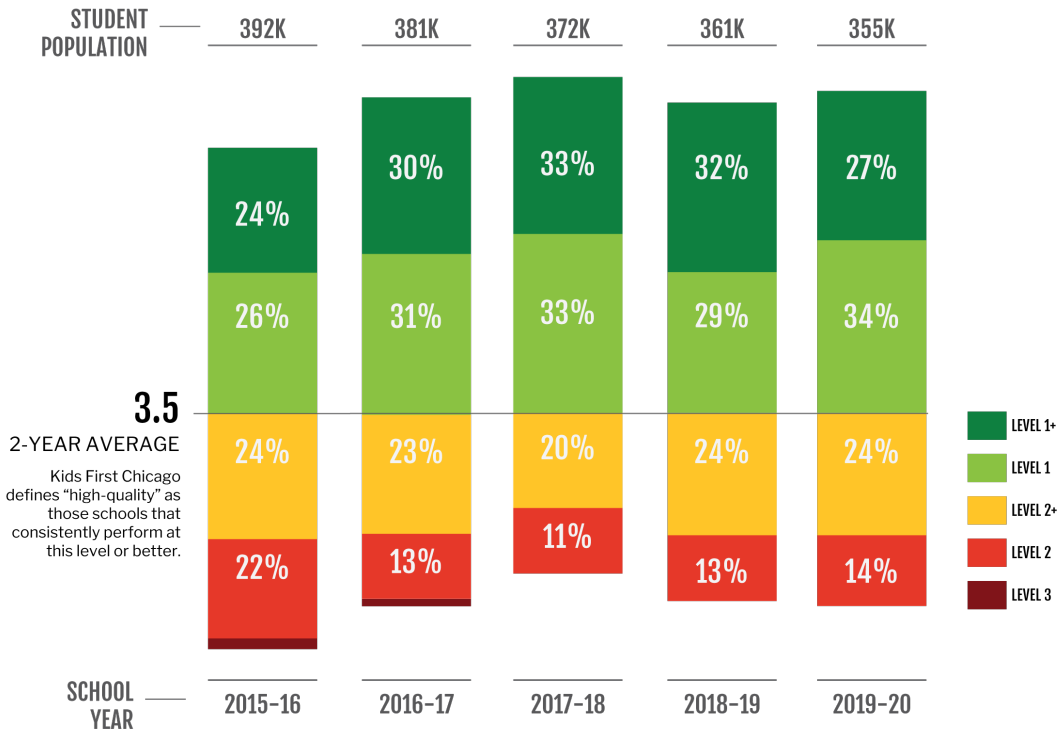
We believe that measurements of school quality should be applied consistently across all types of schools, and that school quality levels should be communicated and made easily accessible to families. Yet, we recognize that SQRP is only one of many factors that families use when making decisions about school options.

In aggregate, we look at the breadth of all schools’ performance from year to year to better understand whether the district is providing a quality education for all students.

Just five years ago, there were 75,000 students enrolled in Chicago’s lowest performing schools. In our 2016 impact report, we shared that that number had been reduced to approximately 50,000, and now we see it further **decreased to approximately 42,000.**

Chicago Public Schools uses its School Quality Ratings Policy, or SQRP for short, to standardize the way they measure performance, and whether or not schools should receive additional supports. SQRP weighs factors including student growth and attainment on standardized tests, attendance, and school culture. For high schools, it also measures graduation rates, college enrollment, and college persistence.

Then, a school receives a score between 1+ (highest performance) and 3 (lowest performance). Depending on their numeric score, a school is then assigned a Level Rating and Accountability Status.



LEVEL RATING	SCORE RANGE	DESCRIPTION
LEVEL 1+	4.0 or Higher	Above average performance that far exceeds expectations.
LEVEL 1	3.5 to 3.9	Above average performance that exceeds expectations.
LEVEL 2+	3.0 to 3.49	Average performance that meets expectations.
LEVEL 2	2.0 to 2.9	Below average performance that does not meet expectations.
LEVEL 3	Less than 2.0	Far below average performance that does not meet expectations.

N/A	No Score	Not enough data. This often occurs when a school is new or serves only K-3rd grades.
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**PUTTING
KIDS FIRST
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