

A woman with glasses is looking at a laptop screen. The screen displays a data dashboard with various charts and tables. The background is a blurred desk with papers and a keyboard. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

PARENT-LED SOLUTIONS

EDUCATION RECOVERY

AT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO, PARENT VOICE IS AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING WE DO. WE ARE COMMITTED TO ASKING THOSE CLOSEST TO CHICAGO'S EDUCATION CHALLENGES WHAT THEY NEED, AND THEN ENSURING THOSE SAME PEOPLE HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE WHEN IT COMES TO DECISION-MAKING ABOUT SCHOOLS.

OUR PARENT-LED SOLUTIONS SERIES DIVES DEEP INTO THE ISSUES THAT MATTER MOST TO PARENTS AND FAMILIES.

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AUGUST 2020

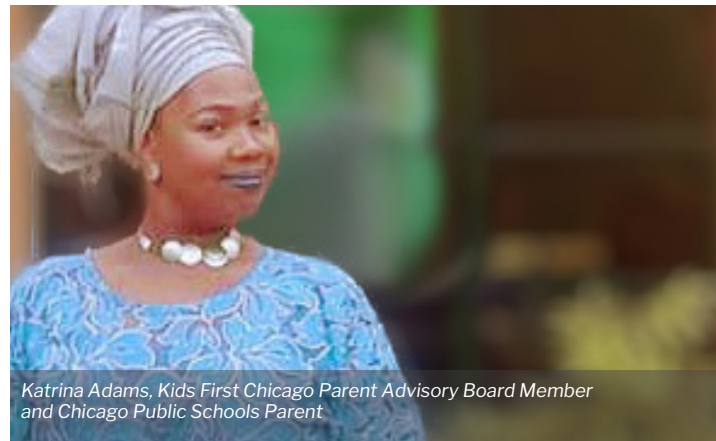
DEAR FRIENDS & PARTNERS,

The COVID-19 health crisis, along with long-overdue national outrage over racism — especially police violence — faced by Black Americans every day, painfully reminds us all of the deep inequities that have existed for centuries in our country and our city.

District, city, and state leaders are in the process of making important policy decisions about Chicago's and Illinois's return-to-school plans and education recovery more broadly. Our response to these crises and the creation of plans provides an opportunity for real change – **but it must be guided by what Chicago families tell us they need.**

Kids First Chicago's Parent Advisory Board hosted a series of focus groups this summer to capture the perspectives of Chicago parents. During these sessions, parents and caregivers shared their difficulties and successes with remote learning, their hopes and concerns about sending their children back to school in the fall, and their priorities to recover lost education time.

Most of all, though, parents shared strategies and solutions to ensure that remote learning is effective, return-to-school is safe, and education recovery is equitable for all students.



Katrina Adams, Kids First Chicago Parent Advisory Board Member and Chicago Public Schools Parent

Now, more than ever, parents and caregivers must be **partners in designing education policy** so that all of our students have access to a high-quality education.

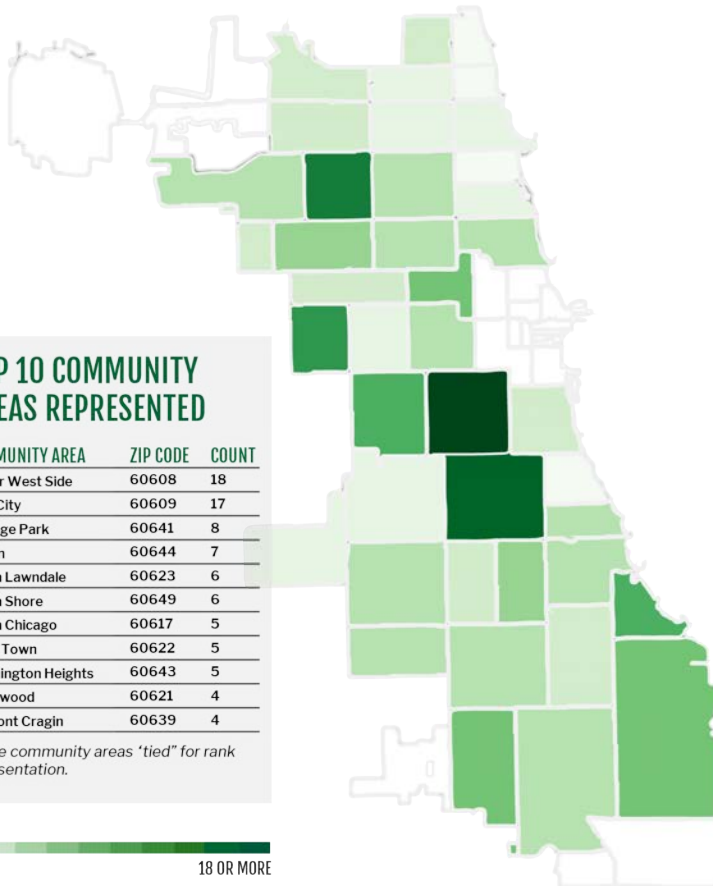
We look forward to partnering with the district, our school leaders, and our school communities in developing a more equitable vision for Chicago education that not only helps our students recover but enables them to **thrive**.



KATRINA ADAMS-ADEWUSI
Kids First Chicago Parent Advisory Board Member and Education Recovery Task Force Chair

Burnside Scholastic Academy Parent

OF PARTICIPANTS BY ZIP CODE



M

METHODOLOGY. The Kids First Chicago Parent Advisory Board, a diverse group of 21 parents from the South and West Sides of Chicago, hosted a series of focus groups in July 2020 to hear directly from student caregivers about how this crisis has affected them and how the district and their children's schools can support them.

We convened 16 focus groups with 163 participants to better understand how remote learning and back-to-school plans can best serve families equitably. We held four focus groups in dual language for Spanish-speaking families.

These participants were parents and caregivers from across the city, especially the South and West Sides, with students in every grade level, including diverse learners and English language learners, and at a diverse set of schools.

21
PARENT LEADERS

16
FOCUS GROUPS

163
PARTICIPANTS



TIMELINE

Key dates as Chicago Public Schools works to shift from in-person to virtual learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

01

JANUARY 24

First confirmed case of COVID-19 reported in Chicago

03

MARCH 17

All schools in Illinois close

MARCH 21

Illinois's stay-at-home order begins

04

APRIL 13

Remote learning in Chicago Public Schools officially begins

APRIL 17

Illinois schools closed for the remainder of the school year

06

JUNE 19

Last day of 2019-2020 school year

JUNE 25

Mayor Lightfoot announces Chicago Connected, a new program to provide internet to 100,000 CPS students

07

JULY 1

Kids First Chicago convenes first focus group of parents

JULY 17

Chicago Public Schools announces preliminary reopening framework and seeks community and parent feedback

JULY 21

Kids First Chicago convenes final focus group

08

SEPTEMBER 8

First day of 2020-2021 school year



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT WE HEARD

Parents and caregivers, reflecting on their remote learning experience and back-to-school considerations, shared concerns about school safety and cleanliness, effective learning experiences for their students, and emotional and mental health - along with solutions and ideas to address these issues.

OVERALL, PARENTS WANT

- School-wide and district-wide **consistency** across platforms, expectations, and schedules
- **Additional communication and training** for parents to allow them to best support their students during at-home learning
- Additional safety and school cleanliness measures, including **rigorous district-wide standards** for cleaning and social distancing
- **Equity** in back-to-school planning, including distributing resources, prioritizing in-person instruction, and targeting supports for students who need them most



01

CAMPUS SCHOOL SAFETY & CLEANLINESS

Parents shared concerns and solutions around school cleaning, masking/social distancing, and transportation needs. Many shared that in-person learning was ideal, but may be risky without a long-term solution to COVID-19.



02

PARENT ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

Parents named communication with their students' teachers as critical to success. They stressed that common expectations within schools and across the district before the school year begins is vital.



03

TEACHING & LEARNING

Parents shared that individual student assessments to gauge knowledge gaps paired with teacher-led lessons, and consistent, proactive communication strategies would be the key to student learning.



04

STUDENT EMOTIONAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Parents believed that social connection among peers and with teachers was critical to student emotional wellness. They suggested dedicated time for informal reconnection, celebration, check-ins, and socialization as a necessity for the return to school.

01

CAMPUS SAFETY & CLEANLINESS

Top of mind for parents and caregivers was health and safety. Although participants overwhelmingly felt their students' educational needs were best met by being at school in person, most preferred a hybrid or virtual option for return in the fall, believing that a complete return to school is too risky right now.

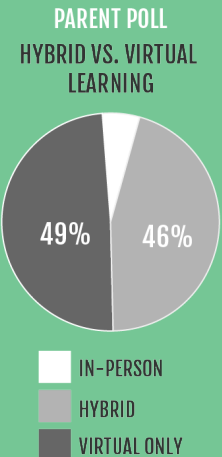
They also highlighted the need for **equitable** solutions across the district - targeting support to schools with fewer resources, rather than equally across the board.

HYBRID vs. VIRTUAL RETURN. Families who preferred a hybrid model emphasized the importance of small class sizes. Parents and caregivers who described typical class sizes of more than 30 students were skeptical that CPS could reliably reduce class sizes to 15 or fewer students, as they proposed in their guidelines.

In particular, parents worried about adequate staffing, including the possibility of a shortage of substitutes, which would impact CPS's "pod" model.¹ Some doubted that one adult could effectively supervise 15 students with the demands of new safety requirements, pointing to their own challenges in helping students wear masks regularly and maintain social distance.

Although most parents reported that in-person schooling better suited their children, the majority felt safety was too great a concern for a full return to campus to be possible, and nearly half preferred a completely virtual return in fall 2020.

¹To learn more about CPS's "pod" model and return-to-school guidelines, please visit cps.edu/reopening2020.



TOTAL RESPONSES | 112

CONCERN ABOUT STUDENTS' SAFETY IN THE CLASSROOM OUTWEIGHED THE BENEFITS OF AN IN-PERSON RETURN

Those who preferred virtual learning didn't necessarily have a better experience in the spring than those who preferred a hybrid model; in fact, many participants described challenges with remote learning regardless of their back-to-school preference.

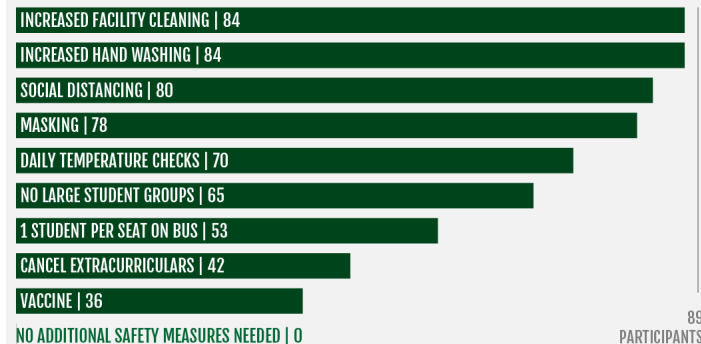
However, their concern about students' safety in the classroom outweighed the benefits of an in-person return. In particular, parents were worried about whether safety measures would work, especially mask-wearing and social distancing.

They pointed out challenges for very young children, students with sensory processing challenges, and students with special needs, suggesting that masking and keeping students in designated spaces for extended periods of time would be difficult or impossible for some.

CPS's remote learning framework currently doesn't address this concern; caregivers need additional details to understand how these students' needs will be met.

PARENT POLL | WHAT DO YOU NEED TO FEEL SAFE?

Parents were able to select more than one response.



PARENT POLL | HYBRID LEARNING PREFERENCES

When considering a mixture of virtual and in-person learning, parents were asked to consider alternative schedules to accommodate a hybrid model. Parents could choose one 'favorite' of the options below.



EQUITABLE CAPACITY AND RESOURCES. Parents were concerned about equitable access to the resources needed for safety measures like increased facility cleaning. Participants from some schools described spending more than \$50 per student out of their own pockets to provide wipes, sanitizer, and school supplies in prior, non-COVID years; other participants described schools lacking in these resources altogether.

Although the CPS draft plan for the return to school includes additional resources for cleaning supplies and additional janitorial staff, participants wondered how these would be distributed equitably to schools that need them most.

Many participants discussed challenges in trusting CPS's existing janitorial vendors, Aramark and Sodexo, to implement vitally important cleaning measures within school buildings.

Some described unsanitary conditions that existed before the pandemic, causing serious distrust in vendors' ability to keep schools clean - and whether CPS would truly hold them accountable in the fall, when it will matter most.

“OUR SCHOOL IS FILTHY, AND IT’S NOT JUST KIDS SPILLING FOOD WHEN THEY EAT. THERE IS URINE ON THE FLOOR THE NEXT MORNING. THERE IS FOOD EVERYWHERE WHEN THEY LEAVE THE LUNCHROOM AND STILL THERE THE NEXT DAY. EVEN AFTER THEY CLEAN, YOU CAN SEE DIRT. THEY [JANITORIAL SERVICES] DO A VERY POOR JOB AND IT ACCUMULATES OVER TIME. I CAN’T SEE HOW THE SAME PEOPLE WHO DON’T EVEN WIPE OUR CLASSROOMS DOWN CAN BE THE PEOPLE WE ARE COUNTING ON TO KEEP OUR BUILDINGS CLEAN NOW.”

FOR MANY PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS, THE TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGE WAS THE GREATEST BARRIER TO RETURNING TO SCHOOL.

Transportation safety measures were another area of critical concern. Families who relied on yellow school buses felt additional staffing was needed to monitor students and reported a lack of trust in current vendors to implement the sanitization and safety measures called for in the current draft plans.

Families who relied on often-crowded public transportation feared the lack of social distancing and adult supervision. In every discussion about transportation, families worried that students congregating at drop-off or prior to boarding would undo any social distancing at school and that current providers lacked the capacity to implement safety measures, including increased supervision.

For many parents and caregivers, the transportation challenge was the greatest barrier to returning to school.

+ PARENT STRATEGIES

MASKS. Teachers mark each mask with a brightly colored dot so it's obvious from a distance which belongs to whom (to avoid students' swapping or losing masks)

STUDENTS CONGREGATING. Staggered arrival and dismissal times; students arrive and dismiss at different doors

PERSONAL SANITATION KITS. Each student has their own fanny pack that lives at school with sanitizer, an extra mask, and bleach wipes to wipe down desk

SMALLER CLASS SIZES. Fewer in-person meetings (one meeting per week instead of two and/or alternating weeks); support staff and extracurricular teachers to "team teach"; schedules created based on family surveys to account for those who opt for virtual instruction in planning

EQUITABLE RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION. District hotline for parents and teachers to call to get supplies; extra resources directed to lower-income schools

VENDORS. Specialized vendors provide sterilization services to supplement existing contracts in facilities and on buses; dedicated cleaning staff with higher accountability; specialized training and new equipment to hold custodians accountable to new requirements, with a priority on placing these highly trained specialists in schools with the most challenging facilities first

BUSING. CPS bus service with additional bus monitors for each ride to ensure compliance; increased availability of CPS-funded buses for families that previously used public transit; schools leverage community organizations to supplement efforts with equipment or additional staff

02

PARENT/CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

Parents named communication with their students' teachers as a critical area of focus for both spring remote learning and back-to-school. Many said communication with teachers in the spring was inconsistent or nonexistent.

They stressed that clear communication of common expectations within schools and across the district **before** the school year begins is vital and must include: length and times of school day, duration of live teacher-led learning, amount of independent work, and frequency/type of school-home communications (such as progress reports, assignments, and conferences), regardless of a virtual, hybrid, or in-person return.

Robocalls across the district to provide urgent information was helpful to parents, and many advocated for robocalls to share information about critical scheduling changes or health and safety alerts, including possible student exposure to COVID-19.

Many cited frustration with communication being primarily directed to their student through student email accounts, as it was in the spring, which prevented caregivers from tracking assignments, updates, and other important information.

Some parents described best practices that their schools used in the spring and recommended them for wider use, including innovative technology solutions, like apps to track engagement, and one place, like the school website, to access common resources and information.

CONSISTENCY. Caregivers noted that consistency across grade levels or whole schools in communication frequency, platforms, and methods promoted clear expectations, simplified the process for families with multiple children, and allowed community members to support one another by sharing information in parent and community groups.

“We had a teacher who was really organized, and she emailed us every week with assignments for the class. She also used an app we had from before school closed that she kept using to let us know how our individual children were doing. It really made us feel seen and connected. She used the app to send me a text if my child’s camera was off in Zoom or if he was missing something, but also to tell me when he had a good day so I knew she was checking on him.”

CHICAGO CONNECTED

Chicago's new program, Chicago Connected, aims to provide free high-speed internet access to 100,000 eligible CPS students, an important step towards bridging this internet gap in the fall and beyond. Through Chicago Connected, families will also receive digital literacy training and resources to help them navigate remote learning and much more.

CPS.EDU/CHICAGOCONNECTED

TECHNOLOGY. Participants advocated for a single platform where all information, assignments, links, and communication could be housed, and many liked the use of Google as this platform. Many parents needed additional support with digital literacy, reporting that the training provided wasn't enough or wasn't accessible. Some parents shared that the device they received from their school didn't work, especially if their school didn't use technology in the classroom before the closure, and some struggled with access to high-speed internet, particularly for multiple students trying to access video calls or applications at one time.

Participants recommended an **equitable** approach in back-to-school plans, allocating technology resources, including parent trainings, to those schools that didn't previously use technology in the classroom or didn't have full implementation in the spring.

“IT’S IMPORTANT THAT CPS OR OTHER COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS GIVE US CLASSES SO WE CAN NAVIGATE ON THE COMPUTER, SEND EMAILS, OR GET ON PLATFORMS FOR OUR STUDENTS. WHETHER CPS STARTS REMOTE OR NOT THIS FALL, WE WILL BE ABLE TO BE THE BEST COMMUNICATORS FOR OUR KIDS.”

“OUR DAUGHTER’S TEACHER WAS SOLID ABOUT COMMUNICATION FROM THE START. SHE SENT WEEKLY UPDATES, CREATED A SCHEDULE WITH ALL THE LINKS, AND SHE SENT US ALL THE EMAILS THAT WENT TO OUR DAUGHTER. I HOPE THEY WILL LEARN FROM TEACHERS LIKE HER — SHE REALLY MADE THE EXPERIENCE EASY TO NAVIGATE BECAUSE WE KNEW WHAT WE WOULD BE GETTING FROM HER AND WHEN THE WHOLE TIME.”

+ PARENT STRATEGIES

COMMUNICATION. Weekly/semi-monthly progress reports with student grades and work due; regular communication from the school about schedules and deadlines; copying caregivers on all emails to students; technology solutions like texting apps to immediately alert parents of student disconnection, including not being logged in or turning their cameras off; student resources, schedules, and additional enrichment opportunities readily available in one place on the school website

TECHNOLOGICAL TRAINING. Baseline training with every device at the time of issue to ensure families have what they need to get started; live and recorded virtual trainings; small group sessions by school; increased capacity at district tech support hotlines

TECHNOLOGICAL QUALITY. Hotspot and broadband internet access; each device tested for all required capabilities before issued; all applications and websites recommended by teachers tested for accessibility on school devices prior to implementation

SCHOOL-LEVEL RESPONSIVENESS AND FLEXIBILITY. District baseline expectations augmented by clear, school culture-specific expectations and ongoing family engagement through the school year

EQUITABLE RESOURCE ALLOCATION. Schools that used technology least prior to closures should receive the most support from the district in device testing, parent and staff training, checking on students’ participation, and proactive technology support

03

TEACHING & LEARNING

Although opinions about how to return to school safely and experiences with remote learning varied widely, participants largely agreed on the strategies that would make learning effective for their students.

At all grade levels, families worried that students missed critical skills in core areas, and that without individualized assessment to determine students' knowledge gaps, those gaps may persist long-term.

PARENTS PREFERRED TEACHER-LED INSTRUCTION RATHER THAN APPLICATIONS TO DELIVER CONTENT.

LIVE INTERACTION WITH TEACHERS. Across all focus groups, parents preferred teacher-led instruction rather than applications to deliver content.

In the spring, some teachers assigned different games, applications, and activities, asking families to track multiple log-ins, web addresses, and passwords.

This was especially challenging for families with multiple students and students with multiple teachers. Some of these sites were blocked by district devices or required internet speeds families couldn't access. This prevented some students from completing work and ultimately discouraged some families from engagement in remote learning.

Participants warned of over-reliance on these applications during CPS's recommended two days of independent at-home learning; those that were most satisfied with remote learning had regular schedules where their students interacted live with teachers and classmates and submitted teacher-created assignments on a single platform, using applications for supplemental practice in class or at-home. Parents advocated for this approach across focus groups.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES. Some caregivers also described challenges to completing and submitting assignments. Various ways of submitting assignments, including photographing or scanning completed work or submitting it over a platform that didn't provide confirmation created confusion about how students were performing. At least one caregiver in each focus group reported having to buy a printer, scanner, or other supplemental technology or supplies to submit or complete assignments.

Many participants had to buy specialty items, like art supplies or materials for science fair projects. For these families, the resources necessary to complete the work were not given to them by the school, meaning that not everyone could participate effectively or equitably.

On the other hand, families who had positive remote learning experiences often had supplies and resources provided to them by the school, including printed copies of online math work, art materials, math manipulatives, science fair materials, novels, Pre-K classroom toys, workbooks, and other resources to supplement virtual instruction.

Having these resources provided by the school ensured there was equitable access to learning and assignments whether or not parents could provide them.

“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO WORK AN ALGEBRA PROBLEM ON THE COMPUTER AND [MY DAUGHTER’S TEACHER] KNEW THAT, SO EVERY WEEK WE COULD PICK UP THE PROBLEMS ON THE COMPUTER FROM THE SCHOOL — THEY WERE PRINTED OUT SO SHE COULD WORK THE PROBLEMS ON PAPER. THEN SHE COULD JUST SUBMIT THE ANSWERS ON THE COMPUTER. IT MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE TO NOT HAVE TO PRINT OUT ALL THOSE PAGES EVERY WEEK.”

“I DIDN’T TEACH MY DAUGHTER TO DO MATH THE WAY THEY DO NOW.”

CONSISTENCY. Across focus groups, participants advocated for consistency. Those that had the best remote learning experiences were using the same communication platforms, devices, or approaches as before school closures.

The predictability and consistency of having a tool they knew how to use already was a critical win. As families return to school in the fall, consistency in communication methods, learning platforms, and schedules are all important to enabling students and their caregivers to learn a new way to “go to school.”

ACADEMIC RECOVERY. While remote learning experiences differed, the focus on academic recovery in the fall was consistent across participants.

Families wanted to start in the fall with teachers leading instruction of new content and with clear expectations for when and how students will access that instruction.

Remote learning in the spring was a combination of applications, recordings, and meetings with teachers, with some provided only on request. This left many parents responsible for teaching material, something most noted they felt ill-equipped to do.

Parents and caregivers want students to spend more time in classrooms, even if they are virtual, having the concepts they will practice for homework explained and demonstrated by teachers. In the fall, caregivers asked for more frequent student progress updates and for teachers to refer students to office hours proactively.

Participants noted that teachers’ office hours may not have been offered at times students could attend or relied on students to self-advocate, which was a challenge for students who did not know how they were performing or who may not have the skills to ask for help.

While some families were concerned their students were falling behind, others felt they weren’t being challenged. Some parents created their own curriculum when work was too easy or when students had lost interest.

Many participants were especially concerned about the impact of critical transition years being interrupted. High school parents, in particular, were worried about how to share resources across schools to make sure their juniors and seniors were effectively preparing for college applications and enrollment. For students in mandatory testing years and for seventh graders considering where they would attend high school, lack of preparation for these tests and the elimination of these benchmarks was concerning.

“If they plan small groups or one-on-one meetings to go over what [my child] is missing, he will go, but he isn’t going to email the teacher and ask for help if he isn’t required to.”

“It felt like the work was just review and [my daughter] was bored. So I made a schedule and found applications her sister used in her school and created a whole plan for her. It was a lot of work for me, but I knew she was giving up [without extra support].”

+ PARENT STRATEGIES

“IF YOU ARE A CHILD OF PRIVILEGE IN THE SUBURBS, YOU MIGHT HAVE BETTER OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR TO APPLY FOR COLLEGES OR PREPARE FOR SATS. NOW WE CAN MAKE THAT SAME INFORMATION AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE VIRTUALLY TO ALL FAMILIES IN CPS WITH EQUALITY IN MIND—NOW WITH VIRTUAL WE SHOULD ALL HAVE THAT OPPORTUNITY.”

TEACHER-LED LEARNING. Live, virtual sessions with the class or small groups in which concepts are taught using the same strategies students are used to from a traditional classroom

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT. Limiting the number of different log-ins and passwords or reducing to a single platform, organizing links to all sites in a central location accessible by both caregivers and students, and testing sites for accessibility on a range of devices and internet speeds

RESOURCE ACCESS. Structuring assignments around materials most families already have at home, distribute supplemental learning resources on-site at schools

TECHNOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY. A single platform to submit assignments and consistency around communication, devices, and approaches; when changes must be made, structuring them around natural breaks in the school year to prepare parents ahead of time

BACK-TO-SCHOOL ASSESSMENT. All students assessed at the beginning of the school year, identifying concepts that need to be retaught so that instruction can be tailored to the needs of individual children one-on-one or in small groups

ACCESS TO INSTRUCTION. Regular live class meetings recorded for students who can't attend; CPS-led chat windows or phone banks with on-demand tutoring for students and caregivers who need support outside of teachers' availability; and Saturday school sessions for students to “drop in” with teachers, counselors, and/or administrators on a rotating basis from each school

ENRICHMENT. CPS-created enrichment work, provided through a website or recorded webinar, to allow students access to more challenging projects on an as-needed basis

SHARING RESOURCES. Best practices and quality resources shared virtually across the district so all families can access them, on topics like college counseling, high school application support, enrichment activities, tutoring, parent education workshops, and tech support

04

STUDENT EMOTIONAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

While parents and caregivers discussed the urgency of their students' academic recovery, they called out socio-emotional health and wellness as an equal concern.

Participants described the range of emotional upheavals students have experienced, from disruption in the development of social skills to trauma and loss. Further, unless there were lessons specifically designed to practice socialization skills, younger students and diverse learners working toward socio-emotional development goals lost access to practicing these skills.

SOCIAL CONNECTION AND WELLNESS.

Parents and caregivers believed that social connection among peers and with teachers was critical to their students' emotional wellness.

Most participants named dedicated time for informal reconnection, celebration, check-ins, and socialization as a necessity for the return to school.

In addition, parents prioritized more formal supports for emotional wellness and mental health.

They described a range of experiences they suspected could be hurting their students, from the isolation of social distancing and school closures, to losses experienced through the pandemic, to the fear and trauma of social unrest and violence in communities.

Without dedicated time to engage students around these experiences, caregivers were concerned their students would feel alone and have difficulty processing. And without proactive support, families worried that their students wouldn't seek resources, even if they were available upon request.

“Students miss their classrooms, their teachers—every student needs dedicated time to just talk to their friends and check in with their teachers about something other than math. We have to make time for this in remote learning, too, because it is part of what school does that keeps our kids healthy.”

“At our school they used peace circles to start their homeroom check-ins, and it was really powerful. I think everyone can do this. It’s just a way for the kids to say how they are feeling and show they aren’t alone. Just this—making time to say how they are feeling every time they log on—this can help all of our kids want to go to class and feel less isolated. It’s these simple, little things I want to see more of in the fall.”

ACTIVITIES AND CLUBS. Parents also noted that students missed out on clubs, extracurricular activities, and celebrations in the spring. In particular, high school students count on these opportunities as career preparation, a competitive edge for college and scholarship applications, and even part of their identity and school pride. Ensuring clubs and electives are still available, rigorous, and meaningful for those students who seek them is critical for building emotional wellness and connection.

“ONCE A WEEK, THE TEACHER INVITED ALL THE STUDENTS TO GO ON ZOOM TO MEET UP FOR LUNCH. FOR HER [MY DAUGHTER], THAT MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE — IT WAS THAT SAME CLASSROOM FEEL AND THAT SAME COMMUNITY. EVEN THOUGH IT WAS ONCE A WEEK, IT MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR HER BECAUSE THEY WOULDN’T SEE EACH OTHER IN THAT WAY OTHER THAN THAT. IT GAVE HER ROUTINE BACK.”

“I KNOW THIS IS A HARD TIME AND IT WOULD BE AMAZING TO HAVE MORE ACCESS TO COUNSELORS FOR BOTH STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND STAFF — PEOPLE NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO. THERE IS DEFINITELY A NEED FOR EMOTIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT, AND THIS IS THE TIME TO BE CREATIVE. REMOTE MEANS COUNSELORS CAN CHECK ON EVERY TEACHER SO THEY CAN PRACTICE NEW SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS. WE ALL NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO RIGHT NOW. SIGN THE TEACHERS UP FIRST — THEY ARE HURTING, TOO.”

+ PARENT STRATEGIES

DEDICATED TIME FOR FORMAL SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELLNESS. Time for formal check-ins virtually; regularly scheduled one-on-ones with teachers to celebrate accomplishments; family conferences with school staff; dedicated time in each class to build virtual classroom culture and school connectedness

FORMAL SOCIO-EMOTIONAL LEARNING. Units on cyberbullying and respectful virtual interactions; small group discussions facilitated by counseling staff to discuss experiences during school closures

INFORMAL SOCIALIZATION. Dedicated, regular class time for informal “hanging out” and check ins; virtual classroom parties to celebrate milestones

INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORTS. Active observation of students by counselors and social workers to initiate therapeutic supports as needed; integration of mental health partners to provide small group and family supports; check-ins for teachers and staff to promote their emotional health and well-being

EXTRACURRICULAR EMOTIONAL WELLNESS. Recruit community partners to run clubs that prioritize socio-emotional development and emotional wellness; ensure extracurricular offerings are available virtually and share quality options districtwide

SPECIAL TOPIC

DIVERSE LEARNERS

Families of diverse learners participated across all meetings, in addition to two focus groups held specifically to discuss their unique challenges and successes. Experiences varied based on school and even classroom: some schools moved swiftly to ensure accommodations were available and services were provided virtually.

“HIS SPEECH THERAPIST WAS SCHEDULED DURING HIS REGULAR CLASS MEETING. SO HIS SPEECH THERAPIST WAS TAKING UP THE MAJORITY OF [MY SON’S] TIME IN HIS REGULAR CLASS—HE WAS ONLY SEEING HIS SPEECH THERAPY TEACHER. SO HE NEVER GOT TO BE IN HIS REGULAR CLASS.”

Most families, however, reported significant disruption in services, which ranged from challenges with implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and inconvenient meeting times with providers to a complete absence of services altogether.

Across the range of experiences, families of diverse learners called for the same priorities in the fall: ensure IEPs can be implemented and services can be provided without disruption, assess students to see what they have missed and provide additional education to address those gaps, and ensure therapeutic support is flexible around caregivers’ work schedules. One parent noted that therapeutic services required her physical supervision and could only be scheduled during her work hours: without flexibility to accommodate her work schedule, she ultimately canceled services altogether.

“[MY STUDENT] HAS AN IEP. SHE HAS [PULL-OUT] MINUTES FOR MATH...SO SHE WOULD LEAVE HER MATH CLASSROOM AND LOG-IN TO THE SPECIAL ED TEACHER’S CLASS TO GET HER HELP IN MATH AFTER THE INSTRUCTION, BUT THE SPECIAL ED TEACHER WAS NORMALLY DOING SOMETHING ELSE WITH HER KIDS, LIKE JOURNAL WRITING. SO SHE WOULD HAVE TO DO WHAT THEY WERE DOING OR JUST SIT THERE. SHE NEVER GOT HER HELP FOR MATH. THEY NEVER WORKED IT OUT. I SENT EMAILS TO THE PRINCIPAL, THE TEACHER, THEY NEVER WORKED IT OUT. THEY TOLD ME IF SHE WANTED SPECIAL EDUCATION MINUTES FOR READING, SHE WOULD JUST HAVE TO STAY IN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM ALL DAY, NOT JUST THE TIME SHE’S SUPPOSED TO BE IN THERE. SO WE SAID FORGET IT. SO SHE DIDN’T GET ANY SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES.”

+ PARENT STRATEGIES

IEP MODIFICATIONS TO MATCH

NEW SCHOOL SCHEDULES/TYPES. Revisit each student’s IEP with caregivers at the start of the year to reassess needs and address gaps; identify new strategies to be implemented for forms of instruction that may be challenging for existing IEPs; provide tutoring, additional hours or curriculum, and other support to compensate for academic and socio-emotional gaps experienced in the spring; create plans for compliance with safety measures that may be challenging based on students’ disabilities and goals

SHARED SERVICES ACROSS SCHOOLS. Pool resources across school sites to allow for greater flexibility in scheduling with tutors and therapeutic service providers; recruit community partners to provide opportunities for access to interaction and engagement to practice independent living and social goals; additional resources for families to obtain technology that will create modifications to curricular materials from home or provision of modified curricular material distribution made available at school sites

C

PARENTS KNOW THEIR CHILDREN BEST, AND THEY'RE BEST EQUIPPED TO DESIGN SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR THEIR FAMILY.

CLOSING WORDS. Parents know their children best, and they're best equipped to design solutions that work for their family. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work for every family or every school. It is imperative that policy-makers at all levels not only listen to what they have to say, but carefully consider and respond to parent concerns about policies and decisions that directly affect their children and communities. The process of engaging parents must not stop now, which is why our organization is committed to continued focus groups throughout the school year.

This report provides a jumping-off point for district, city, and state leadership to engage further with parents as co-creators in these plans to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are met not only during this back-to-school period, but throughout the coming school year - one that will be unlike any other.



Parent Advisory Board Members at the 2020 Kids First Chicago Champions Dinner.

PARENT ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

KATRINA ADAMS-ADEWUSI
Burnside Scholastic Academy

CHERELLE BILAL
Little Angels Learning Center

GUADALUPE CARREON
Orozco Elementary

LILIA GUEVARA
Evergreen Academy
Middle School

TAWANA HARRIS
Von Steuben HS and
Legal Prep HS

LATESHIA HOLLINGSWORTH
U of C Woodlawn HS
U of C Donoghue Elementary

LORENA LOPEZ
Seward Elementary

CONSUELO MARTINEZ
Back of the Yards HS

FAREEDA MUHAMMAD
Nash Elementary

MARY OTTINOT
Skinner West and
Beard Elementary

MARIA OWENS
Hirsch HS

BRENDA RIVERA
Inter-American Elementary Magnet
School

RENA ROBINSON
Westinghouse HS

MARIA SANCHEZ
Orozco Elementary

ALMA SIGALA
Seward Elementary School
Back of the Yards and
Phoenix Military HS

CATA TRUSS
Austin community

CLAIBORNE WADE
DePriest Elementary

YOLANDA WILLIAMS
Penn Elementary

MELINDA YOUNG
Skinner West Elementary

MARIA ZAVALA
Seward Elementary

ANDREA ZAYAS
Erie and McAuliffe Elementary

A

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Kids First Chicago's (K1C) mission is to dramatically improve education for Chicago's children by ensuring high-quality public schools are accessible to every kid in every neighborhood. We believe that those closest to our students - families, community members, and educators - are best equipped to design policies and systems that will improve equity and lead to stronger outcomes for our students, our communities, and our city.



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