



# A CASE STUDY IN RADICALLY INCLUSIVE POLICY DESIGN

February/March 2023



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# ABOUT US

Kids First Chicago (K1C) believes that those closest to students — families — are best equipped to co-design new policies and systems that will improve equity and lead to stronger outcomes for students, communities, and the city.

# HOW WE WORK

We believe that the best way to serve people with marginalized identities is through proximity and deference. Proximity through representative staff, direct engagement, and deep ongoing reflection and empathy-building work. Deference through putting the priorities and perspectives of marginalized parents at the center of everything we do.

We are committed to the regular self-reflection and empathy-building work required to unpack our own racial bias and acknowledge the role that it and discriminatory systems have played in oppressing educational outcomes for children in Chicago, especially children who identify as Black and/or Latinx/a/o. We believe our history matters and our legacy is embedded within education and subsequent life outcomes.

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Defining what constitutes a high-quality school experience and measuring performance is essential to keeping parents, students, teachers, administrators, and district leaders informed about how our schools serve students.

Kids First Chicago believes that every school should be held to high standards when it comes to delivering a quality education and that schools that serve students with the greatest needs deserve greater support to achieve student success. Accountability is critical to inform improvement and direct resources to where they are needed most. When implemented well, it has the potential to dismantle education inequities.

# > 01

## A TRANSFORMATIVE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

### PROVIDING STAKEHOLDERS THE PEN TO CO-DESIGN POLICY

In fall 2020, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) asked Kids First Chicago (K1C) to serve as the district's lead stakeholder engagement partner for **Accountability Redesign** – a multi-year initiative to create a new system for measuring school quality and performance that would be fully informed by the ideas, insights, and perspectives of our city's diverse education stakeholders.

This new system will replace the district's previous measurement system, School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP). A strength of SQRP was that it included student growth measures, as well as school climate and culture information, compared to previous policies that focused solely on student attainment.

We heard loud and clear, however, that SQRP did not always align to stakeholders' vision of what a "high-quality" school should provide for students – and, despite the inclusion of multiple measures, the policy reduced schools to a single rating.

K1C was responsible for creating the project's stakeholder engagement plan and supporting the district on the outreach, collection, and synthesis of all stakeholder feedback data through town hall meetings, focus groups, surveys, local engagement efforts, and more.

K1C was attracted to the project by the prospect of not only ensuring that parents would be at the table to co-design the district's new accountability policy, but also engaging with other stakeholder groups – students, teachers, principals, school-based staff, and community members – to create a new, vitally-important policy that promised to better meet all stakeholder needs and drive systemic improvements.

### > BEFORE: WHAT ENGAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY LOOKED LIKE IN THE PAST

- 1 Top-down, district-driven
- 2 Limited opportunities for stakeholders to share their priorities and insights
- 3 Ideation occurs behind closed doors
- 4 Reliance on limited number of "experts," not those most impacted
- 5 Little iteration or substantive change

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750+  
TOWN HALL  
PARTICIPANTS

## ACKNOWLEDGING HARM, HEALING TOGETHER, AND ESTABLISHING TRUST

### INSIGHTS FROM CITY-WIDE TOWN HALLS

Accountability Redesign was **launched** in January 2021 with the announcement of an Advisory Group – consisting of parents, students, teachers, principals, community members, CPS staff, and CPS Board members – that would be tasked with developing recommendations for the district’s new policy.

K1C began by designing the initial series of town halls that would introduce Accountability Redesign to CPS stakeholders. We memorialized key trends and themes from the town halls in a **report**.

**We heard from more than 750 attendees that there was a significant trust deficit between stakeholders and the district.**

To be successful and inspire trust, we would need to help the district create an inclusive policy-making process wherein decision-making was transparent and stakeholders were continuously sought out for their insights and kept informed about the project’s progress. Moreover, K1C and CPS could not create and implement a stakeholder engagement plan in a vacuum; rather, we would need to co-create and co-implement a plan **with** stakeholders.



“One of the things that would go a long way in keeping [stakeholders] engaged is showing us that we’re being heard. The trust issue is extremely significant. And it has a lot to do with why parents give up even trying to talk to the district.”

—CPS Parent, Spring 2021 Town Hall

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# > 02

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DESIGN TEAM

28 DESIGN  
TEAM MEMBERS

### Radical Inclusion

Intentionally including a diverse group of stakeholders in co-designing and co-producing at every stage of the process

### OPENING THE SYSTEM

Recognizing that stakeholders with different identities, perspectives, and backgrounds bring invaluable knowledge, talents, and insights to the design of the district's new accountability policy, K1C and CPS launched a new Stakeholder Engagement Design Team (SEDT) in spring 2021.

The insights gathered by the SEDT would add to the technical expertise of the Advisory Group – allowing for the co-creation of an equitable, human-centered policy.

Radical inclusion asks us to acknowledge the system's complexity and to open the system by making it accessible to all stakeholders. This means taking the time to educate and engage individuals or groups that may lack social capital or awareness of a particular policy, but whose perspectives and expertise are essential to promoting equity and inclusion.





## THEORY OF ACTION

If CPS engages stakeholders in co-creating policy through a radically inclusive process, then district policies will be more reflective of the needs of those most impacted, resulting in improved policy outcomes and students being better prepared to succeed in life.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DESIGN TEAM

Brings “unlikely” collaborators and their respective expertise to the table.



STUDENTS



PARENTS



CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION & EDUCATORS



CHICAGO PRINCIPALS & ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION AND DISTRICT LEADERS



COMMUNITY & NONPROFITS



RESEARCH & ACADEMICS

“We have heard these anonymous accounts of Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a/o people experiencing racism at some selective schools. When we think about outcomes — and making a school better — we need to listen to these voices to ensure that an excellent school is one that creates an equitable space for everyone.” —Community Partner

HAVING ACCOUNTABILITY REDESIGN ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS SERVE ON THE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DESIGN TEAM HELPED ESTABLISH THE PROMINENT ROLE STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK WOULD PLAY IN GUIDING THE ADVISORY GROUP'S FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS.





## INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENTS TIMELINE

The role of the Stakeholder Engagement Design Team was to generate stakeholder feedback for CPS and the Advisory Group to use in redesigning the district's school accountability policy. Each subsequent engagement provided new insights to build upon the previous one and add to the reservoir of insights for CPS and the Advisory Group to consider.

### > APRIL-MAY 2021

*Stakeholder Engagement Design Team Formed*

### > MAY-JUNE 2021

*Initial Focus Groups*

K1C and the SEDT engaged a third-party facilitator to conduct two phases of focus groups to better understand perceptions of the existing School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP).

- 20 focus groups with 160+ stakeholders including principals, students, parents, teachers, school-based staff, and community members
- Findings shared with Advisory Group, Local School Councils (LSCs), Community Action Councils (CACs), Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), Bilingual Advisory Councils (BACs), the Chicago Multilingual Parent Council (CMPC), the Office of Diverse Learners and Support Services Family Advisory Board (ODLSS FAB), Community Schools partners, and through school newsletters.

37  
FOCUS  
GROUPS

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## > AUGUST 2021-JANUARY 2022

### *Citywide Survey*

The SEDT worked with the University of Illinois at Chicago's Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) to co-create the survey objectives and questions, engaged in user experience pre-tests, and developed the final prototype before survey release.

The SEDT co-led survey recruitment, with an explicit focus on prioritizing those furthest from opportunity and ensuring representation – racial/ethnic, gender, geographic, and stakeholder-type – in survey respondents.

Following the survey's release, IPCE and the SEDT met regularly to review survey responses and led localized, supplemental outreach to boost responses from specific stakeholder groups in targeted communities.

- SEDT partnered with IPCE to disseminate a citywide survey to all CPS stakeholders.
- Survey was accessible in 19 languages and completed in 13 languages.
- Survey resulted in 8,100+ responses, including 4,000+ parents, 1,600+ teachers, and 1,300+ students.
- SEDT engaged in participatory analysis of data with IPCE to finalize the key survey findings and share them with the Advisory Group, CPS, and the broader public.
- Findings published in a data dashboard, video presentation, and PowerPoint presentation.

## > APRIL 2022

### *Resolution Approved by Chicago Board of Education*

CPS Board of Education approved a resolution in April 2022 that sought to outline the objectives of the new school accountability system, acknowledge how prior accountability systems did not sufficiently meet stakeholder needs, and establish the core uses of the new accountability system—including using the information to diagnose where and how to equitably direct resources and supports to schools.

The main ideas of the resolution were based on feedback from stakeholders, especially the idea that the new accountability system should be used to better match resources to the needs of schools and students. Additionally, stakeholders urged the district to:

- Use the policy to shift focus from an accountability system focused solely on outcomes and outputs to one that gave greater consideration to, and accountability for, inputs
- Establish greater accountability for the district
- Require that the new accountability system not be used for punitive purposes, including not ranking schools through a single summative rating

## > MAY-JUNE 2022

### *Final Round of Focus Groups*

The last round of focus groups were designed to contextualize the data gathered in the citywide survey and provide additional insights to help resolve areas of misalignment in priorities and preferences across stakeholder groups. They also allowed us to delve more deeply into understanding stakeholders' definitions of two key priorities – what constitutes social-emotional learning and college and career success.

- 17 focus groups, with 145+ stakeholders including principals, students, parents, teachers, school-based staff, and community members
- SEDT co-designed, co-recruited, and co-conducted focus groups as well as engaged in participatory analysis with focus group researcher
- Findings shared with Advisory Group, Local School Councils (LSCs), Community Action Councils (CACs), Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), Bilingual Advisory Councils (BACs), the Chicago Multilingual Parent Council (CMPC), the Office of Diverse Learners and Support Services Family Advisory Board (ODLSS FAB), Community Schools partners, and school newsletters

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# > 03

## LOOKING AHEAD

CPS's new Accountability Framework will be released for public consideration in February 2023 and will be voted on by the Chicago Board of Education at its April 2023 meeting.

50+  
INFO  
SESSIONS

## TAKEAWAYS ON THE FUTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

### **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Across all stakeholder groups, a school's ability to develop students' social-emotional skills emerged as a top priority metric for any future school accountability system.

### **DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY**

Schools cannot do this work alone. Specifically, any future school accountability system should establish greater accountability for the district, grounded in the shared responsibility of providing the necessary support to generate positive outcomes for students. This could be accomplished through more transparent reporting on what every school receives in terms of funding, staffing, and support.

### **A FOCUS ON INPUTS AND OUTCOMES**

The system should not solely focus on school-level outputs and outcomes and instead, give greater consideration to, and accountability for, inputs such as the set of resources (e.g., funding to schools) and conditions (e.g., safe and inclusive professional and student learning environments) that effectuate a high-quality educational experience.

### **LESS PUNITIVE AND MORE SUPPORTIVE**

Stakeholders felt SQRP was punitive and did very little to support school improvement. Instead, stakeholders want the district to use the new school accountability system to diagnose where and how to equitably direct funding and support to schools with greater needs.

“As a lower-performing school, you are shamed. It feels like you aren't good students, teachers, or a good principal when you have this score. You are embarrassed to tell people where you work. I even feel like I have let the people who own houses in the neighborhood down because their property value drops. I am costing them money. You feel it when you pull in to the parking lot every morning.”

—CPS Principal

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13,000+  
STAKEHOLDERS  
ENGAGED

## TAKEAWAYS ON INCLUSIVE POLICY DESIGN

### EQUITY REQUIRES AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

Real equity in policy design requires us to include the voices of those most impacted and meet them where they are – both in educating them on the issue and centering on their ideas. Involving people in the design of the process itself is just as important as the resulting policy.

### INVERTING POWER CREATES DURABLE SOLUTIONS

By co-designing solutions alongside those most directly impacted (bottom-up) rather than being driven by the district (top-down), those solutions will inevitably work better for those affected – and therefore will last much longer.

### INCLUSIVITY TAKES TIME

And that is okay. We have to detach ourselves from traditional notions of urgency that prioritize output rather than outcomes. Inclusivity requires us to accept a pace of change that ensures inclusion.

### INCLUSION REQUIRES TRUST

Intrinsic biases often prevent us from fully including those directly impacted. We have to challenge ourselves to trust people to lead themselves – if we give them the information and opportunity to do so.

“Sometimes you want changes right away, but when you are part of a team, sometimes, to make change happen, it takes time. Considering other minds and perspectives, [I felt] relieved when my ideas were heard.”

—CPS Parent, Advisory Group & SEDT Member



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# > 04

## A MODEL FOR INCLUSIVE POLICY DESIGN

### AN APPROACH TO ADOPT AT SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEVELS

K1C's experience with the Accountability Redesign initiative has only further solidified our belief that inclusive policy design can – and should – be an approach that every government body adopts to build more sustainable policies that best meet the needs of those most impacted.

With faith in public institutions at an **all-time low**, inclusive policy design serves the public interest by promoting greater trust between residents and their government. As a result, more durable policy solutions emerge, which is better for communities, our city, and our nation.

Some conditions are necessary for a government agency to authentically engage stakeholders in an inclusive policy design process:

- There needs to be a mandate from an oversight body, as was the case with the Board of Education and the district's school accountability policy; and/or
- The leader (CEO or equivalent) requires their staff to implement.

Both conditions do not need to exist, but at least one must. This model can be used at both the school and district levels, as well as in non-government institutions – in fact, any place where a policy is being put in place.

“An inclusive policy redesign process aids in opening the system and promoting authentic collaboration that ensures stakeholders have the space to bring critical and necessary perspectives into policy proactively.”

—Dr. Natalie C. Neris,  
Chief of Community Engagement,  
Kids First Chicago

# > DESIGN YOUR OWN INCLUSIVE PROCESS

Once a mandate or requirement is established, a government agency and their staff must have an implementation plan. Consider these initial questions when beginning to create an inclusive policy design process.

## > WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING THE FINAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

Will the government agency create a committee/advisory group with decision-making authority? Will that decision-making authority be absolute or will the committee/advisory group issue recommendations to be considered by a final decision-maker(s)?

Who will select committee/advisory group members? How can the selection process be designed to foster greater trust and collaboration from inception?

## > WHO WILL RECRUIT, OPERATIONALIZE, AND MANAGE A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DESIGN TEAM?

Will staff from the government agency assume the responsibility of managing the Stakeholder Engagement Design Team? If so, how will this impact their current workstreams? Are staff trained on how to lead an inclusive stakeholder engagement process?

Will the government agency contract out the Stakeholder Engagement Design Team responsibilities to a neutral, third-party entity? Are there resources in place? What will the procurement/selection process entail?

## > WHO WILL DESIGN, COLLECT, ANALYZE, AND SHARE STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK?

Will this work be performed by staff from the government agency? What are the advantages and disadvantages to doing this work “in-house”? Are staff trained on large-scale data collection efforts, such as conducting focus groups and designing surveys?

Will neutral third-party contractors be solicited to perform these tasks? What are the advantages and disadvantages to outsourcing this work? Are the requisite resources in place to compensate contractors? What will the procurement/selection process entail?

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# > 05

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was envisioned and co-led by Kids First Chicago's Chief of Community Engagement Dr. Natalie C. Neris and Chief of Policy Hal Woods. Senior Manager for Operations Ana Mosqueda expertly provided project management support. Research partners Dr. Kristin Moody and Matt Sweeney collaborated deeply with Kids First Chicago and the Stakeholder Engagement Design Team to undertake data collection and outreach in the most accessible, equitable, and inclusive manner possible.

### FUNDING PARTNERS

Dedicated project support for K1C was provided by the Education Equity COVID Response Fund (a collaborative fund of 20 local foundations), the Finnegan Family Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation.

### CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Making the vision of the project a reality had a lot to do with the interest of Chicago Public Schools in living its 'equity in engagement' framework.

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**Maurice Swinney**  
*Former Chief Equity Officer*

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“As a CPS student no one talked to me about college—I was an undocumented student. No one thought there was any point in me thinking about it. There has to be a cultural understanding of the different students we have. We are the resource for them—we have students who don’t know what the ACT is—different schools have students who have different kinds of college readiness they need—they are all starting from different places and need different things. So we can’t rank two schools on sending kids to college the same way when they get kids thinking about college in really different ways. They are doing different jobs to get them there.”

—CPS High School Teacher and Former Student

## ADVISORY BOARD GROUP

We thank the members of the Advisory Group and Stakeholder Engagement Design Team for their invaluable thought leadership and dedication to CPS students.

### BOARD OF EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES

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### **Hassan Chaudhry**

*Equity Data Strategist, CPS*

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DESIGN TEAM

The Stakeholder Engagement Design Team (SEDT) brought diverse expertise and perspectives into shared consideration for the co-creation of an equitable, human-centered stakeholder engagement plan.

## KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

### **Natalie C. Neris, EdD**

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# > 06

## [RE]SOURCES

**Press Announcement (February 2021)**  
CPS Launches Extensive Stakeholder  
Engagement Process to Develop New System  
for Measuring School

**Chicago Public Schools' Strategic  
Initiatives**  
Accountability Redesign

**Summary Report (May 2021)**  
Town Hall Meeting Analysis

**Summary Report (June 2021)**  
Focus Group Analysis

**Summary Report (February 2022)**  
Survey Dashboard, video presentation, and  
PowerPoint presentation

**Summary Report (September 2022)**  
Focus Group Analysis

**Natalie C. Neris, EdD**  
Radical Inclusion: An Engagement Model  
for Accountability Redesign (2021).  
Dissertations. 650.

### >CONTACT

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Kids First Chicago's approach to Inclusive  
Policy Design, please contact:

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**Or Call**  
**(312) 853-1212**



> TO ACCESS OUR RESOURCES  
ONLINE SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT  
[KIDSFIRSTCHICAGO.ORG/ACCOUNTABILITY-REDESIGN](https://kidsfirstchicago.org/accountability-redesign)



“K1C is working to build more inclusive policies and systems by co-designing them with those who have the most to gain, and the most at stake, in their implementation. GoCPS, the Annual Regional Analysis, Chicago Connected – and now this project – were all made with and for Chicago parents.”

—Hal Woods, Chief of Policy,  
Kids First Chicago

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“Kids First Chicago is helping the district rewrite the playbook on policy making, and we are grateful.”

—  
Jeff Broom

Director of School Quality Measurement & Research,  
Chicago Public Schools



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