

PART ONE

# CHICAGO'S ENROLLMENT CRISIS

## EXPLORING ROOT CAUSES

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the third largest school district in the nation, has lost more than 100,000 students in the last twenty years. Today, just over 330,000 students attend CPS — and there is a consistent decline of as many as 10,000 public school students each year. This report, part one of a two part series, explores the root causes of enrollment decline in Chicago.



**01** INTRODUCTION

**07** ARE THERE FEWER SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN OR ARE THEY LEAVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

---

**03** WHY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT MATTERS

**13** CHICAGO'S UNIQUE CHALLENGE

19

KEY DRIVER ONE,  
DECLINING BIRTHS

33

KEY DRIVER THREE,  
INCREASING OUT-MIGRATION OF  
BLACK FAMILIES FROM CHICAGO

23

KEY DRIVER TWO,  
SLOWING GROWTH OF LATINX/A/O  
FAMILIES IN CHICAGO

43

WHAT DO WE DO?  
A CHALLENGE AND AN OPPORTUNITY

---

## ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

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 solutions that will improve equity and lead to stronger outcomes for our students, our communities, and our city.



## INTRODUCTION

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the third-largest school district in the nation, has lost more than 100,000 students in the last 20 years. Of that, more than 60,000 left in the last decade, more than 40,000 of those in the past five years alone. In 2000, CPS enrollment stood at more than 430,000 students. Today, just slightly more than 330,000 students attend CPS — and there is a consistent decline of as many as 10,000 public school students each year.

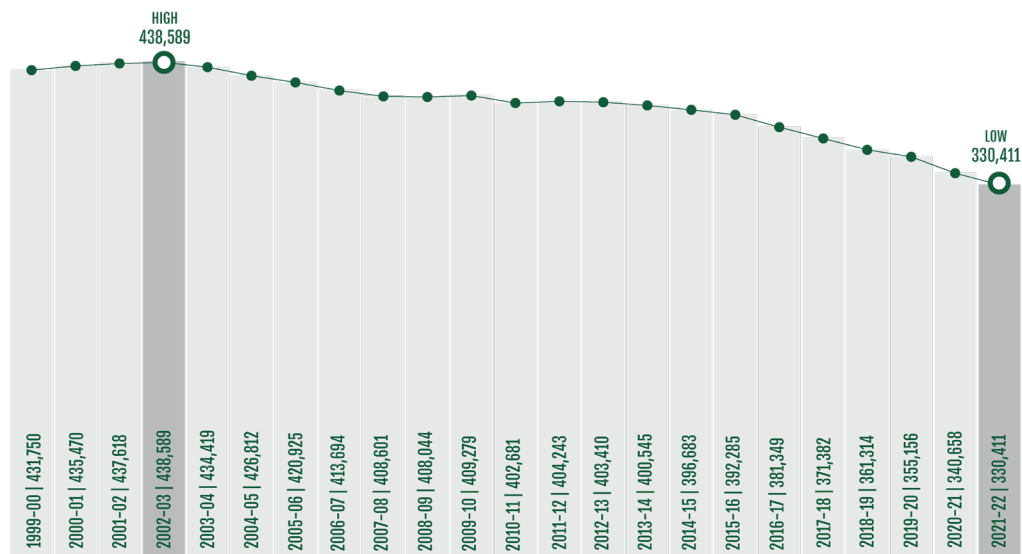
This report, **Part One** of a two-part series, dives deep into these key questions:

- What are the drivers for the enrollment decline in CPS?
- Where have students enrolled outside of CPS schools?
- What does fewer students mean for CPS and Chicago?
- What might be done to stave off further enrollment drops that could cost the district billions in education funding?

**FIGURE 1. CPS ENROLLMENT** (School Years 1999-00 to 2021-22)

Unfortunately, the answers are complicated. A confluence of decreasing births, slowing growth of Latinx/a/o families in Chicago, and increasing out-migration of Black families away from Chicago contributes to CPS's accelerating enrollment decline.

In **Part Two** of our report, we will share parent-led solutions to CPS's enrollment challenges, including ways to address the short-term implications for schools, as well as longer-term solutions for communities and our city as a whole that require citywide partnership and collaboration.



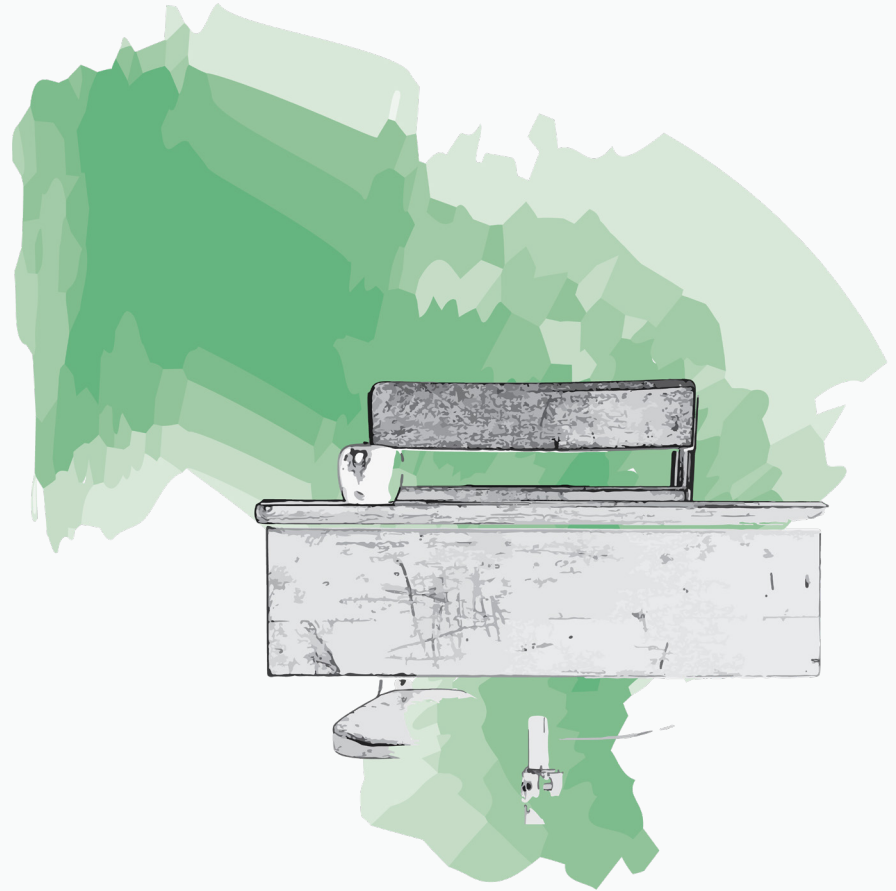
# 01

## WHY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT MATTERS

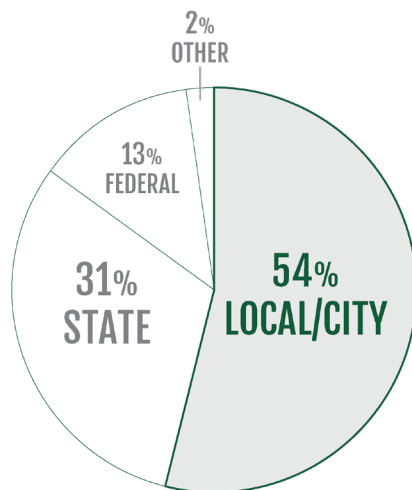
### HOW CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS IS FUNDED

Nearly one-third of CPS's funding comes from the state of Illinois, which uses an evidence-based funding (EBF) formula. EBF relies heavily on prior-year student enrollment to fund the state's school districts, including CPS.<sup>1</sup>

Because each year's budget is based on how many students a school district serves, lower enrollment means less funding for district schools while some costs, like maintaining buildings, remain fixed.



**FIGURE 2. CPS FUNDING SOURCES**  
(School Years 1999-00 to 2021-22)



## HOW LOW ENROLLMENT AFFECTS SCHOOLS ADVERSELY

At CPS, funding for the school year is based on the number of students enrolled in school on the 20th day of the previous school year (often called the “20th day enrollment count date”).

The number of students enrolled at each school is used to determine the base amount of funds that a school receives for core instruction, a process called Student-Based Budgeting (SBB).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, low-enrolled schools receive fewer dollars and thus often lack the resources needed for their students and educators.

Faced with hundreds of schools experiencing low or declining enrollment, CPS began providing those schools with additional resources to offset the impact of decreased revenue from SBB.

For School Year (SY) 2021-22, CPS provided an additional \$32 million to 262 schools toward this effort.

<sup>1</sup> [CPS Resident’s Guide to the Budget \(FY2020\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> SBB is a per-pupil funding allocation, weighted based on grade level and diverse learner category.



## COMMON EFFECTS OF LOW ENROLLMENT ON STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOL LEADERS

---

### STUDENTS

- Limited choices for electives, necessitating some schools to offer the same electives to all students
- Grade and language-level programs for English Learners may not be appropriate for their skill levels
- Fewer advanced/Honors courses available; limited Math, English/Language, and Arts course offerings
- Fewer opportunities for participation in sports teams, student extracurriculars, and school clubs (Drama, etc.)

### TEACHERS

- Fewer opportunities to collaborate and review student work and/or plan units and lessons with grade-level or subject-specific colleagues
- Teachers required to teach multiple grades and/or subjects

### SCHOOL LEADERS

- Less discretionary funding to promote the school and attract students
- Less staff available for schoolwide coverage (drop-off/pick-up, lunch duty, recess, etc.)
- Fewer opportunities to fund full-time staff such as nurses, social workers, technology coordinators, or librarians

---

**NOTE.** Modified from CPS Public Meetings on "Co-Creating Solutions: Achieving Well Resourced Schools for Every Student" in summer 2021

While the infusion of \$1.8 billion of federal COVID-19 relief funding to CPS will certainly help to soften and subsidize school enrollment-driven budget declines in the short term, these one-time funds are only a temporary stopgap.

Another complicating factor is that CPS, according to the state's calculations, receives only 66% of the local and state resources needed to meet its students' needs.<sup>3</sup>





**If CPS's enrollment trend is not reversed, declining revenue from the state coupled with substantial fixed costs will inevitably force CPS and individual schools to make difficult budgetary decisions in the years ahead... it is difficult to fathom a scenario where student outcomes improve and opportunity gaps close while CPS faces annual revenue declines due to lower student enrollment.**

Even if the per-student amount of funding were to stay the same, it would not be enough to provide a high-quality, equitable education for students. Additionally, when there are fewer students, a school's per-pupil resources cannot extend as far.

**Put another way: School leaders are not able to reach an efficient economy of scale within the school, reducing access to necessary student supports.**

If CPS's enrollment trend is not reversed, declining revenue from the state coupled with substantial fixed costs—primarily in personnel and building maintenance—will inevitably force CPS and individual schools to make difficult budgetary decisions in the years ahead. While the district undoubtedly would strive to avoid cuts that impact student learning, it is difficult to fathom a scenario where student outcomes improve and opportunity gaps close while CPS faces annual revenue declines due to lower student enrollment.

<sup>3</sup>

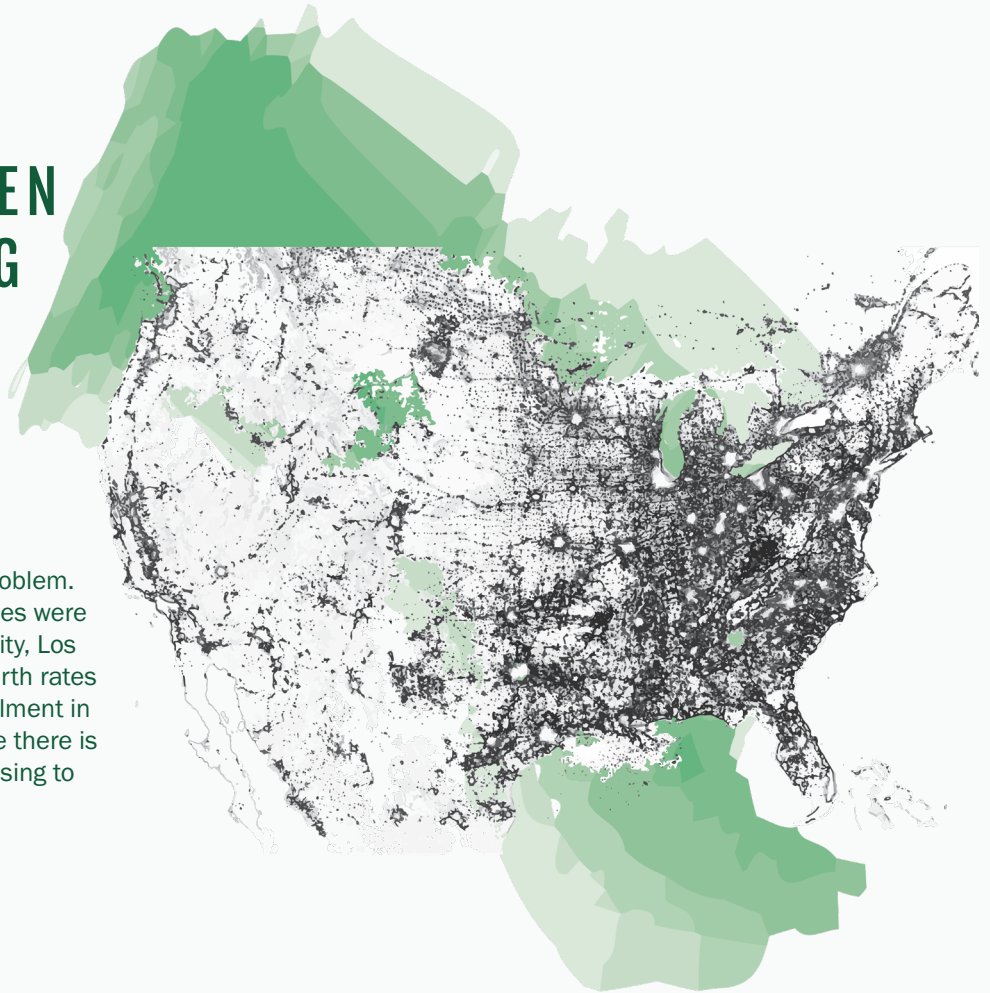
[Chicago Public Schools' Funding Working Group April 2020 Report](#)

# 02

## ARE THERE FEWER SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN OR ARE THEY LEAVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

### UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL TRENDS

CPS's enrollment crisis is not a uniquely Chicago problem. In 2021, significant public school enrollment declines were reported in major urban cities including New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Boston, with declining birth rates oft-cited as a key driver reason for the decline. Enrollment in urban districts across the country is declining, while there is an upward trend in the *proportion* of students choosing to attend public schools.<sup>4</sup>



From 2009 to 2019, the U.S. saw a 3% increase in public school enrollment, from 49.4 million to 50.7 million students.<sup>5</sup> This increase was partially driven by a decline in private school enrollment, which fell by 300,000 students from 1999 to 2017.

**The increase in public school students from 2010 to 2019 was driven by public schools taking a larger *proportion* of available school-age children – not by an uptick in the number of children in the population.**

The overall number of U.S. children under the age of 18 declined over the course of a decade, from 74 million in 2010 to 73 million by 2019.<sup>6</sup>

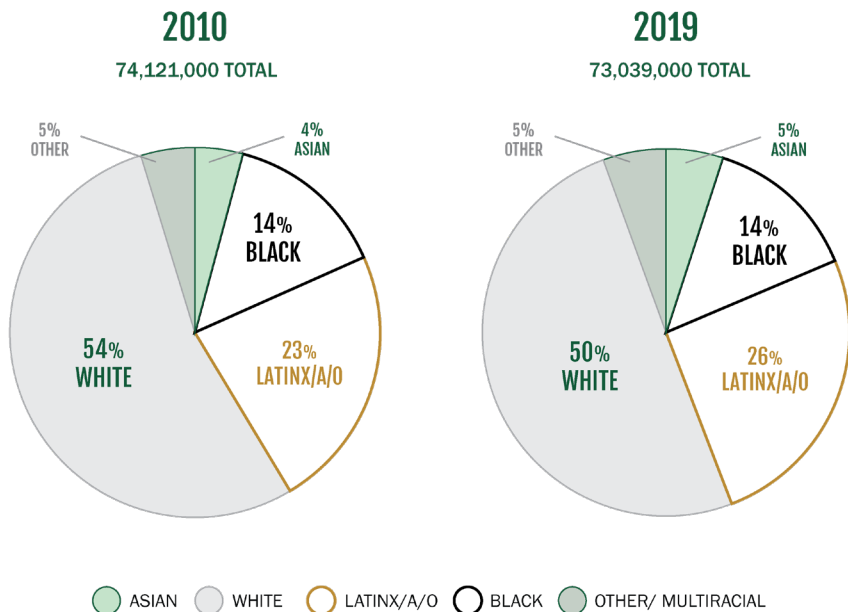
Disaggregating by race reveals that populations of children increasing include Latinx/a/o (+1.5 million), Asian (+440,000), and Other/Multiracial (+500,000). Over the same period, the number of White and Black children declined by 3 million and 400,000, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> [Early evidence](#) from several states suggests that the pandemic has likely slowed this trend, with one primary assumed reason being families choosing non-public options that offered in-person instruction. Nationally, the latest federal data indicates U.S. public school enrollment fell 3% for the 2020-21 school year. In Illinois, enrollment in public schools also saw its largest drop since 2007, with nearly 70,000 fewer students enrolled this year compared to last year. The extent to which this shift will impact public school enrollment in the future, given that nearly all schools are fully in-person, remains to be seen.

<sup>5</sup> [NCES Public School Enrollment Data](#)

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Data

**FIGURE 3. POPULATION TRENDS IN THE U.S. (2010-2019)**

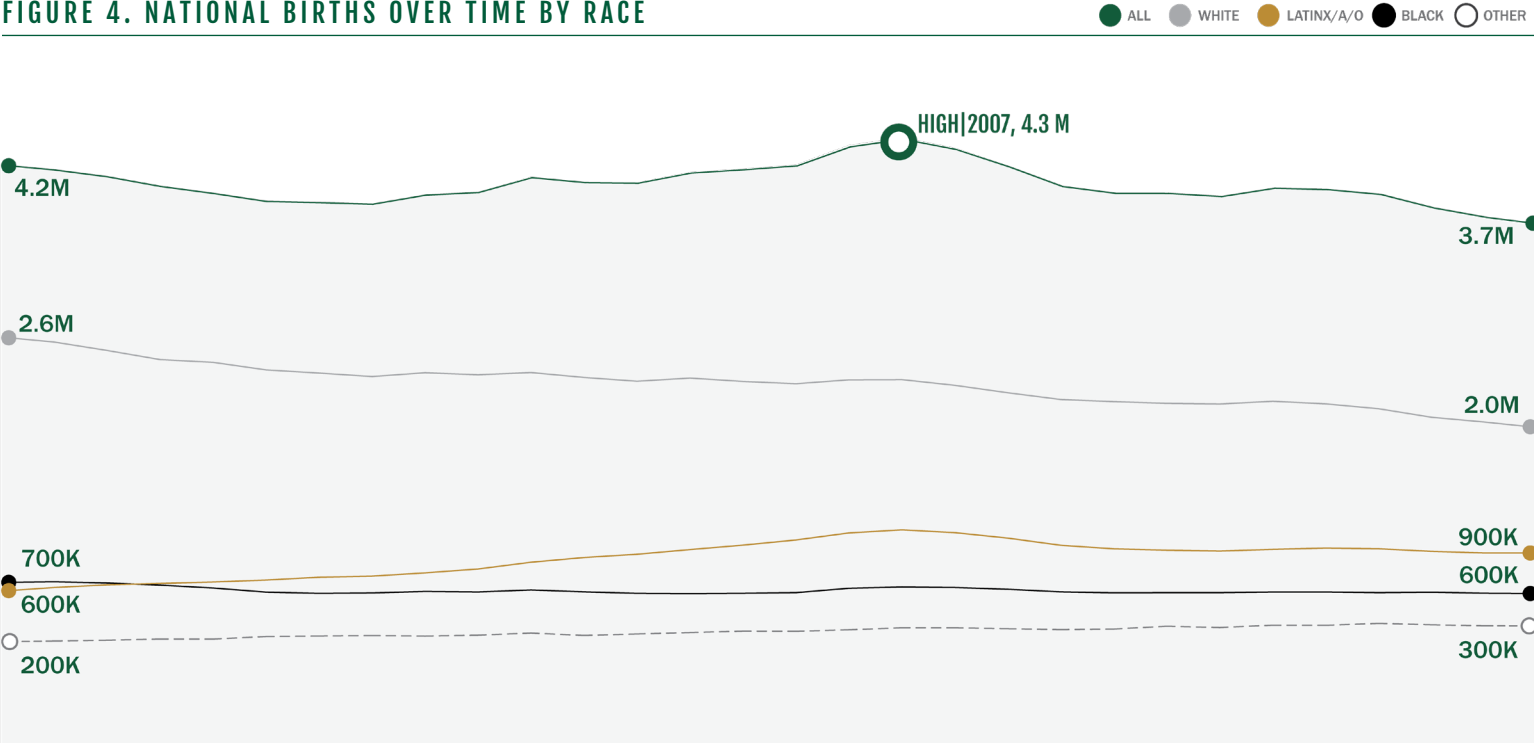


The main reason for the decline in the number of school-age children is lower births.

In 2020, just slightly more than 3.6 million babies were born in the U.S. – the lowest number of births since 1979 – compared to more than 4 million in 2009.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. is now below the “replacement level” – that is, the number of births needed for a generation to exactly replace itself. All but Latinx/a/o families have had fewer babies over the past 20 years, and every demographic group has seen a drop since 2007.

<sup>7</sup> [CDC National Vital Statistics System Birth Data](#)

FIGURE 4. NATIONAL BIRTHS OVER TIME BY RACE



SOURCE. Data provided from the U.S. Census, organized by kidscount.org

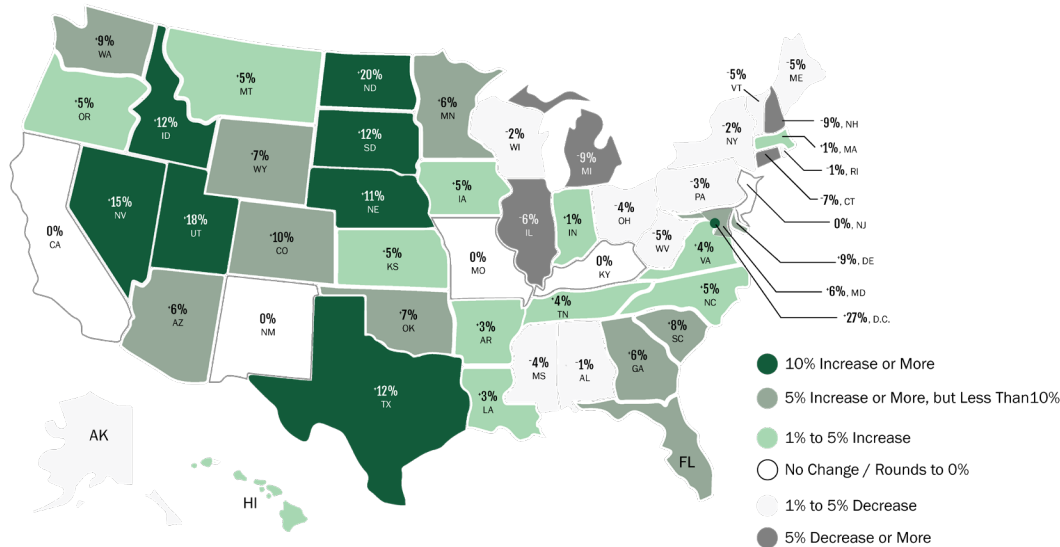
“

*“U.S. fertility rates are likely to be considerably below replacement levels for the foreseeable future. This is driven by more than a decade of falling birth rates and declining births at all ages for multiple cohorts of women, not simply the aftermath of the pandemic-induced reduction in births.”*

-  
**BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

May 2021

**FIGURE 5. STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, BY STATE (2000-2018)**



**STATES WITH 10 PERCENT+ INCREASE**

District of Columbia	27%
North Dakota	20%
Utah	18%
Nevada	15%
Idaho	12%
South Dakota	12%
Texas	12%
Nebraska	11%
Colorado	10%

**STATES WITH 5 PERCENT+ DECREASE**

New Hampshire	-9%
Connecticut	-7%
Michigan	-9%
Illinois	-6%

**SOURCE.** Data derived from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2020.

**NOTES.** NCES Public School Enrollment Data. U.S. average is for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data include both traditional public and public charter schools. Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages. 2000-2018 data range cited as data for 2019 or later are not yet available.

# 03 CHICAGO'S UNIQUE CHALLENGE

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHICAGO CONTEXT

Chicago's population of school-age children has also declined. While fewer births across all demographic groups are a key driver, other reasons for the decline are more nuanced and complex.





Since 1960, the number of children ages 3-18 in the city of Chicago declined by nearly half from 760,000 to 398,000.

**Put another way: There is approximately only one child today for every two children in 1960—although Chicago’s overall population is more diverse now than it was then.**

The White population loss has been particularly pronounced: The number of White children declined by nearly 450,000 from 1960 to 2018.

After a surge of Black families moving to Chicago beginning in 1960 and continuing through 1980, the number of Black PK-12 children has also declined precipitously since its peak.

From 1980 to 2018, Chicago lost nearly a quarter of a million Black children — from 358,000 in 1980 to 130,000 in 2018, a 64% decrease. Politico recently reported, “In 1980, about 40% of the city’s total population was Black. Since then, that number has dropped to just under 29%.”<sup>8</sup>

And while the number of Latinx/a/o PK-12 children increased significantly from 1990 to 2000, those increases have not been sustained or sufficient enough to counter the decline of Black and White children. Moreover, [CPS’s enrollment data](#) shows nearly 12,000 fewer Latinx/a/o children enrolled in School Year 2020-21 compared to School Year 2019-20 — even while Chicago’s total Latinx/a/o population grew from approximately 779,000 in 2010 to nearly 820,000 in 2020.

<sup>8</sup> [“Black People Are Leaving Chicago en Masse. It’s Changing the City’s Power Politics.” Politico, December 7, 2021.](#)

# 4 of 5

## CHICAGO SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN ENROLL IN CPS

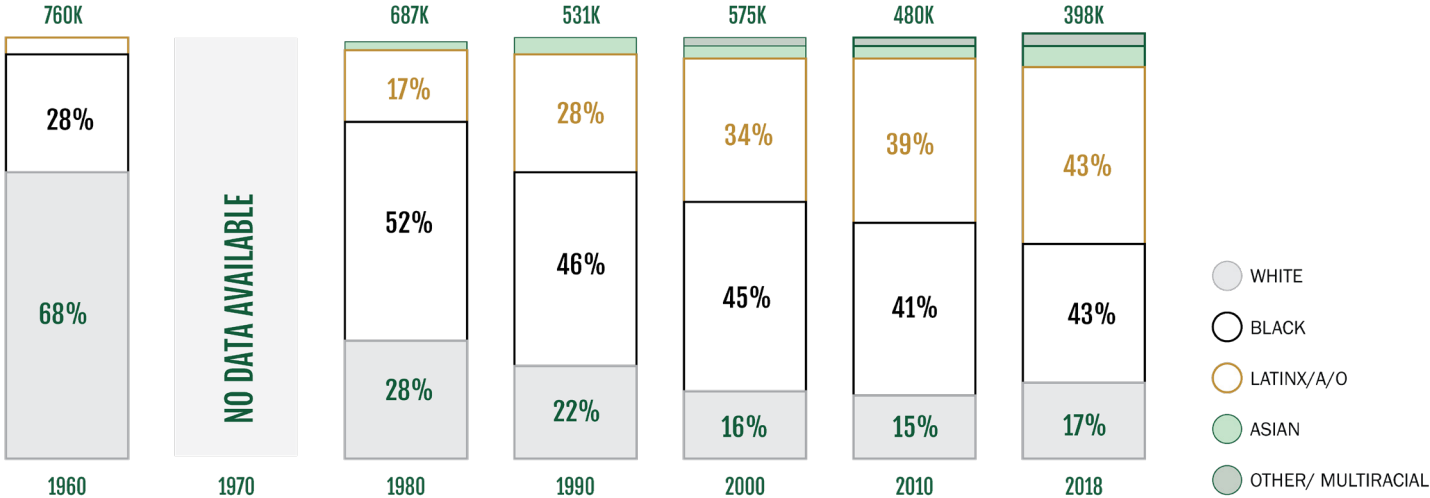
Despite the decline in school-age children, CPS remains the top education *choice* for Chicago families. CPS’s market share — that is, the percentage of school-age children in Chicago who attend CPS schools versus other options such as private, Catholic, and home schools — grew by 20% from 1960 to 2018, from 61% to 81%.<sup>9</sup>

Since 2000, approximately four out of five school-age children in Chicago have enrolled in CPS — despite leadership transitions, labor strife, multiple budget crises, and a global pandemic.

---

<sup>9</sup> All public schools are under CPS jurisdiction. This includes all district-managed, charter, contract, and Alternative Learning Opportunity Programs (ALOPs).

FIGURE 6. TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO BY RACE (1960-2018)



Even with recent news reports of an uptick in enrollment at Chicago’s Archdiocese schools, likely due to those schools offering in-person instruction during the start of the 2020-21 school year while CPS remained remote, there is little evidence showing that the precipitous drop in CPS’s enrollment is due to Chicago families choosing non-public options in the city.<sup>10</sup>

CPS’s data indicates it did not lose a majority of students to non-public schools in Chicago or to homeschooling: Since 2019-20, CPS indicates that nearly 18,000 students transferred out of the city altogether; however, over that same period, only 727 students left the district for non-public schools and only 658 transitioned to homeschooling.<sup>11</sup>

**Rather, Chicago’s school-age population decline — and the resulting decline in CPS enrollment — can be attributed to three key drivers:**

- 1.** Declining births;
- 2.** Slowing growth of Latinx/a/o families; and
- 3.** Increasing out-migration of Black families.

---

<sup>10</sup> [“At Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic schools, enrollment grows”](#), [Crain’s Chicago Business, October 11, 2021](#)

<sup>11</sup> “20th Day Enrollment,” Report by Dr. Sara Kempner, Executive Director, Enterprise Data Strategy, Chicago Public Schools. Report delivered to Chicago Board of Education at its October 2021 meeting.

“

*“We found a CPS school we liked on the North Side but lived on the South Side. Getting our son to school every morning was so stress-inducing. The amount of time kids spend traveling to and from school in Chicago ends up robbing the child of vital parts of their childhood.”*

-

**CAROLYN & BAYO O.**

Former Chicago residents and parents who left CPS for the nearby suburbs

# 04

## KEY DRIVER ONE

# DECLINING BIRTHS

### EXAMINING THE FIRST KEY DRIVER

According to the U.S. census, from 2010 to 2020, Chicago's population grew 2% to 2.7 million residents, offsetting a 7% decline that occurred over the previous decade.<sup>12</sup>

While 2.7 million residents is 50,000 more Chicagoans than there were in 2010, the number is 150,000 shy of the population in 2000. Chicago remains the third-largest city in the U.S. and CPS remains the third-largest public school district in the country.



**D**espite modest population growth over the past decade, Chicago has seen a significant decline in births over that same period, mirroring national trends. From 2009 to 2019, births in Chicago fell from approximately 44,000 children born per year to 33,000 children born per year.<sup>13</sup>

In 2009, approximately 30,000 Kindergarteners enrolled in CPS. By 2021, this number had fallen to less than 22,000. This trend holds across all racial/ethnic groups.

**As a result, there are approximately 11,000 fewer students available in Chicago for each successive school year than there were a decade prior.**

Parochial schools in Chicago saw a similar enrollment decline over the same period, a result of the smaller population of prospective students.

Given that there are fewer children locally and nationally, the opportunity to grow student enrollment in places like Chicago relies heavily on retaining the population we have and attracting non-residents to move to our city.

<sup>12</sup> [Chicago population up 2% over the past decade as city keeps title of third-largest city in U.S., Chicago Sun-Times, August 12, 2021](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Illinois Department of Public Health](#)

“... the opportunity to grow student enrollment in places like Chicago relies heavily on retaining the population we have and attracting non-residents to move to our city”

But doing so will require Chicago’s political, civic, and private sector leaders to recognize the uniquely challenging demographic trends that Chicago faces that are contributing to the continuing decline of school-age children and CPS’s enrollment crisis. And perhaps as importantly, city and civic leaders must also understand the root causes that are driving these trends so that they can enact strategies and make meaningful investments to counter them.

Trends in birth rates are also driven by positive trends, worth celebrating, in women’s education levels and participation in the economy.

## WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR SLOWER GROWTH?

Chicago’s slowed population growth this past decade was driven primarily by the city’s Latinx/a/o and Asian populations, which added 40,000 (+5%) and 45,000 (+31%) residents, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

**As a result, Latinx/a/o Chicagoans now account for 30% of the city’s overall population — second only to White residents (31%).**

But the increase in Chicago’s Latinx/a/o population is far short of the explosive growth witnessed during the 1990s, when, between 1990 and 2000, the Latinx/a/o population in Chicago surged by roughly 220,000, increasing by 38%.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



“

*“Chicago school leaders have had to add the job of marketing and promotions to their already long list of duties. The time, money, and resources spent in recruitment season can be challenging, especially if they don’t have the skillset on staff to create comprehensive marketing materials. Recruitment has become a big focus of our work as school leaders—when culture and foundation building should be.”*

**LEEANDRA JAMISON**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EPIC ACADEMY

A South Shore School Leader reflecting on the demands of attracting new students instead of focusing on school culture and learning

# 05

KEY DRIVER TWO

## SLOWING GROWTH OF LATINX/A/O FAMILIES TO CHICAGO

### UNDERSTANDING THE NATIONAL & LOCAL LATINX/A/O POPULATION

America's Latinx/a/o population played a significant role in driving U.S. population growth over the past decade, though the group is not growing as quickly as it once did.<sup>15</sup>

From 2010 to 2019, the U.S. population increased by 18.9 million, and Latinx/a/o residents accounted for more than half (52%) of that growth.<sup>16</sup>



In 2019, the Latinx/a/o population reached a record 60.6 million, making up 18% of the U.S. population – an increase of 10 million people and two percentage points from the decade prior. However, the country’s Latinx/a/o population is growing more slowly than it did previously, due to a decline in the annual number of births and a drop in in-migration.

From 2015 to 2019, the Latinx/a/o population grew by an average of 1.9% per year, down significantly from a peak of 4.8% from 1995 to 2000.<sup>17</sup>

This trend is reflected in cities and counties across the country, including Chicago. Specifically, three factors contribute to slower growth from Chicago’s Latinx/a/o population:

1. Declining birth rates;
2. Declining in-migration from Latin America, particularly from Mexico; and
3. Increasing gentrification.

<sup>15</sup> [How Latinos are growing and reshaping the United States.” NBC News, September 15, 2021](#)

<sup>16</sup> [“Hispanics have accounted for more than half of total U.S. population growth since 2010.” Pew Research Center, July 10, 2020](#)

<sup>17</sup> In Illinois, Latinx/a/o population increased from 2010 to 2019, even though the overall state population declined during this time due to a decline in the state’s Black and White populations.

**-66%** AMERICA’S LATINX/A/O POPULATION GROWTH DECLINED BY APPROXIMATELY 66% FROM 2015 TO 2019 IN COMPARISON TO 1995 TO 2000

## DECLINING BIRTH RATES

Throughout much of the early 2000s, the birth rates of Latina women ages 15 to 44 were averaged 95 births per 1,000 women.<sup>18</sup> However, since the onset of the Great Recession, the birth rates have declined steadily, falling to 63 births per 1,000 Latinas ages 15 to 44 in 2020.

**This means there are only two babies born to Latinas today for every three children born to Latinas 20 years ago.**

The decrease has been driven largely by the steep decline in the fertility rate of women of Mexican heritage. From 2006 to 2015, the birth rate for women of Mexican heritage declined by 37%.<sup>19</sup>

A variety of factors have been proposed to explain declines in birth rates. In a [survey](#) in 2018, the top reasons young women gave for their decisions to have children later were economic — children were simply too expensive. Other factors included increasing average levels of education and changing attitudes surrounding childbearing.<sup>20</sup> However, the especially large declines among Latinas may also be due to compositional changes in the U.S. Latinx/a/o population. Over the past decade, the U.S. Latinx/a/o population has become more likely to be born in the country. In 2006, 55% of the adult Latinx/a/o population was foreign-born, compared to 48% in 2015. Foreign-born Latinas generally have higher birth rates than U.S.-born Latinas.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> [CDC National Vital Statistics System, Births: Provisional Data for 2020](#)

<sup>19</sup> [“Hispanic Women Are Helping Drive The Recent Decline in the U.S. Fertility Rate,” The National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, March 6, 2019](#)

<sup>20</sup> [“Why Birthrates Among Hispanic Americans Have Plummeted,” The New York Times, March 7, 2019](#)

<sup>21</sup> [“Hispanic Women Are Helping Drive The Recent Decline in the U.S. Fertility Rate,” Hispanic Research Center, March 6, 2019](#)

“

*“We left Chicago because of the high cost of quality child care. Leaving Chicago, we were able to afford both a house and child care. We couldn’t have done both living in the city.”*

—  
**EMANI JOHNSON**

Former Chicago West Side resident and mom  
on moving with her family to the Chicago suburbs

## DECLINING IN-MIGRATION FROM MEXICO

The Mexican immigrant population in the Chicago metropolitan area has decreased by 15% over the last decade.<sup>22</sup> The decline was widespread from 2010 to 2019. In the city proper, the Mexican immigrant population decreased by 45,000, despite the Latinx/a/o population as a whole growing by 41,000 (or 5%) – from approximately 779,000 in 2010 to nearly 820,000 in 2020.<sup>23/24</sup>

**This is particularly significant given that approximately three out of four Latinx/a/o residents in Chicago are Mexican or Mexican American.**

There are several potential reasons for the changing patterns of migration. During the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009, job losses in the U.S. were substantial in industries in which migrants tend to be represented heavily. In addition, stricter enforcement of immigration laws both at the southwest border and within the interior of the country may have contributed to the reduction in Mexican in-migration to the U.S. Mexico's economy has also improved, providing more opportunities for its citizens. All of these factors may have made the U.S. – and Chicago by extension – less attractive to new migrants.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> ["Illinois population loss: why immigration is catching our attention." Metropolitan Planning Council, March 22, 2021](#)

<sup>23</sup> In Cook County, the Mexican immigrant population decreased by 66,000, and in Illinois, it decreased by approximately 100,000.

<sup>24</sup> ["Latinos Are Now Chicago's Second-Largest Racial Group." WBEZ, August 13, 2021](#)

<sup>25</sup> ["Before COVID-19, more Mexicans came to the U.S. than left for Mexico for the first time in years." Pew Research Center, July 9, 2021](#)

“

*“Some changing patterns in Mexico could also explain the reduction in the number of immigrants coming to the U.S. since the Great Recession. First, growth in the working-age population of Mexicans has slowed due to a decades-long decline in the average number of births among women in Mexico. Lower fertility rates also mean smaller family sizes, which reduces the need for migration as a means of family financial support. Coupled with this, the Mexican economy over the past two decades has been more stable than in the 1980s and 1990s, when the country was hit with a number of profound economic crises.”*

## PEW RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

July 2021

## GENTRIFICATION

Residential displacement remains a significant threat to the stability of several Latinx/a/o neighborhoods in Chicago, shifting families from one community to another or compelling some families to leave the city altogether.

Often referred to as gentrification, this phenomenon is associated with mostly White middle- or upper-class residents moving into neighborhoods and affecting the cost of living, leading to displacement of lower-income and working-class residents.

Many Latinx/a/o neighborhoods have either experienced or are threatened by the impacts of these market pressures, including:<sup>26</sup>

**LOGAN SQUARE.** Since 2000, Logan Square has experienced a significant amount of gentrification, losing more Latinx/a/o residents than any other community in the city. From 2000 to 2014, 19,000 Latinx/a/o residents left Logan Square, while the non-Latinx/a/o White population increased by more than 10,000 residents, an increase of 48%. The Latinx/a/o population fell below 50% of the total population of Logan Square as of 2015.

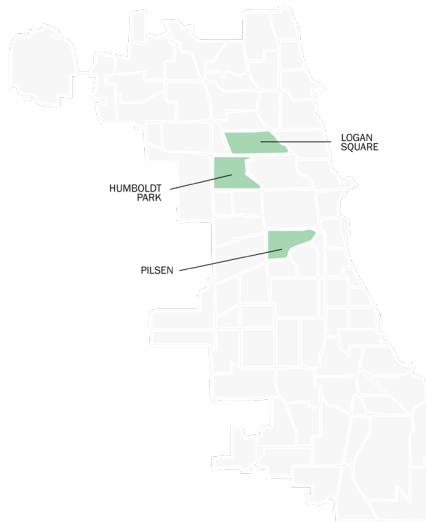
**PILSEN (LOWER WEST SIDE).** Pilsen continues to experience gentrification. The non-Latinx/a/o White population increased from 8% in 2000 to 12% in 2010, while the Latinx/a/o population decreased from 89% in 2000 to 82% in 2010. New condo developments continue to be built which, coupled with low rates of homeownership, make the area very susceptible to continued gentrification.

**HUMBOLDT PARK.** Rapid gentrification came to Humboldt Park from the east (West Town) and from the north (Logan Square). The community has begun to see skyrocketing housing costs, particularly on its eastern end, pricing many long-time families and businesses out of the community.

---

<sup>26</sup> [The Latino Neighborhoods Report: Issues and Prospects for Chicago. Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy & Great Cities Institute. October 11, 2017](#)





The combination of these factors — declining birth rates, declining in-migration, and increasing gentrification — has contributed to approximately 21,000 fewer Latinx/a/o school-age children in Chicago from 2010 to 2018 and a corresponding decline in the number of Latinx/a/o CPS students, with CPS losing more than 12,000 Latinx/a/o students in the past two years alone.

**Without coordinated and comprehensive investments, policies, and protections that make child rearing less costly; that address in-migration through the enactment of policies that encourage diversity and protect human rights; and that adopt equitable development policies that do not displace vulnerable residents, Chicago will continue to see declining growth in its Latinx/a/o population, leading to a further decline of Latinx/a/o students within CPS.**

**-22%** STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN PILSEN/LITTLE VILLAGE DECLINED BY 22% OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS, DEMONSTRATED BY CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' ANNUAL REGIONAL ANALYSIS

# 06

KEY DRIVER THREE

## INCREASING OUT-MIGRATION OF BLACK FAMILIES

### UNDERSTANDING THE BLACK EXODUS

In addition to slower growth within Chicago's Latinx/a/o population, the third reason for the decline in the city's population has been the continued out-migration of Black families—a **large scale Black exodus**.



There were 85,000 fewer Black residents in Chicago in 2020 compared to 10 years prior, when the Black population was the largest racial group in the city.

Since 2000, Chicago has lost more than 260,000 Black residents. The Black population is the lowest it has been since the 1960 census and is now the third-largest population group in the city.<sup>27</sup> Whereas other population groups have seen declines based primarily on total births, the decline in Black residents is being driven by a mass departure of these families from the city.

**Englewood, one of Chicago's 77 community areas, boasted nearly 100,000 people in 1960 but is now home to about 22,000.<sup>28</sup>**

These local population shifts are critical as we consider the future of public schools in Chicago. As noted, CPS currently enrolls more than 80% of all school-age children in the city. However, different demographic populations enroll in public schools to varying degrees.

As of 2018, more than 85% of Black and Latinx/a/o children are enrolled in public schools in Chicago, on par with the 80% of Asian families who choose CPS. However, only 55% of Chicago's White school-age children are CPS students.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> ["Latinos Are Now Chicago's Second-Largest Racial Group," WBEZ, August 13, 2021](#)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Census Data

“... for every 10 school-age Black children who leave the city, 8 of them are likely to have been CPS students.”

This means that for every ten school-age Black children who leave the city, eight of them are likely to have been CPS students. Compare that to the White population, where only five of ten children are likely to be CPS students.

**Because Black students are the second-largest racial demographic in CPS and are highly likely to be enrolled in public schools, the recent Black exodus has had — and will continue to have — serious implications for CPS’s enrollment.**

## WHAT’S THE REASON FOR CHICAGO’S BLACK EXODUS?

According to a 2020 report from the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), *“Black population trends in Chicago are associated with trends in levels of racial inequality, as indicated by racial disparities in unemployment and wages. When inequality in Chicago was lower than many Southern cities during the mid-20th century, Black migration to Chicago was very high. After 1980, however, racial inequality in Chicago became worse, both compared to historical levels within Chicago and in relation to other cities.”*<sup>30</sup>

This was the beginning of the exodus, as Black families started to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Chicago’s Black exodus has had a dramatic impact on CPS enrollment.

Kids First Chicago interviewed several parents to better understand their reasons for leaving Chicago.

---

<sup>30</sup> [“Between the Great Migration and Growing Exodus: The Future of Black Chicago?” The Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, February 4, 2020](#)

“

*“I moved to Chicago from LA with my parents when I was eight. I did not want to raise my kids on the South Side of Chicago. There’s too much violence and poverty in the areas where I could afford to live the way I wanted to live.”*

-

**GARRETTE HORNE**

Former Chicago resident and father of six on why he moved his family to Indiana in 2013

“Black families are moving to where they can find meaningful work to support their families—where their dollar and hour stretch further.”

Onyea Davenport, who grew up in Chicago, was raising her son on the South Side, where he attended a public school from kindergarten through second grade.

“We saw so much violence, especially as we traveled on the bus to and from school. My son couldn’t go outside to play,” she said.

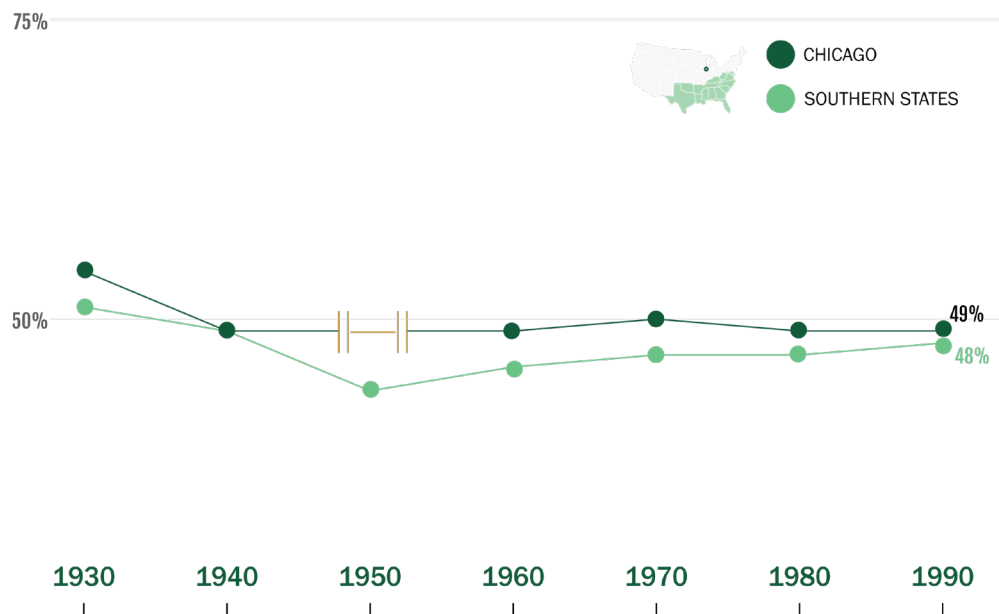
She added, “I wanted better opportunities and more resources for my son.” She and her son moved to Austin, Texas, four years ago. “I don’t see myself coming back.”

Chicago was once seen as a mecca for Black opportunity. But, as UIC’s report notes, a variety of factors have led to the exodus, including the demolition of public housing, the closing of public schools, the continuing effects of foreclosures and the housing crisis, the lack of access to health care, the prevalence of food deserts, the substantial wage gaps, and the high unemployment rates. High rates of crime and violence are symptoms of inequities and have also influenced many Black families’ decisions to leave the city. The latest factor is the disproportionate impact of the pandemic felt by Chicago’s Black residents. **Today, we are watching a Great Migration in reverse.**

By investigating where Black families have moved and comparing those choices with employment rates, we see a consistent trend: Black families are moving to where they can find meaningful work to support their families—where their dollar and hour stretch further. Employment data from 1930 to 1990, during The Great Migration, suggest that Black residents’ migratory patterns are primarily economic.

## FIGURE 7. COMPARING BLACK EMPLOYMENT RATES DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION

Chicago Region vs. Southern States, 1930 to 1990



**Notes.** Employment rates averaged over the previous 5 years for all individuals identifying as Black/African American, not enrolled in school and not living in institutional quarters, compared over the period 1930 to 1990.

Chicago Region refers to the metropolitan area definition of 2013. Southern States according to the U.S. Census include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

||—|| Datapoint for Chicagoland in 1950 missing due to a change in how counties were referenced in the Census as available in public-use Census data.

Cook County employment rates over the past three decades for Black residents are significantly lower than in any of the surrounding counties, whereas employment rates for other large racial/ethnic populations follow similar patterns for Cook and neighboring counties.

Black families cannot thrive without gainful employment, and the data show they are not finding it in Chicago or greater Cook County. We must more seriously confront the economic factors that specifically exclude Black families if we aim to keep them in the city and, by association, continue to have their children enrolled in CPS.

“

*“Here I have a dishwasher, laundry, balcony, all these amenities. And I pay way less than I did in Hyde Park. I would come back to Chicago for family. I don’t think my son wants to leave Chicago, and I’m interested in setting up or buying some property in Chicago to build some generational wealth.”*

-

**NINA BUTLER**

Former resident of Hyde Park on why she moved to Texas and what would bring her back to Chicago

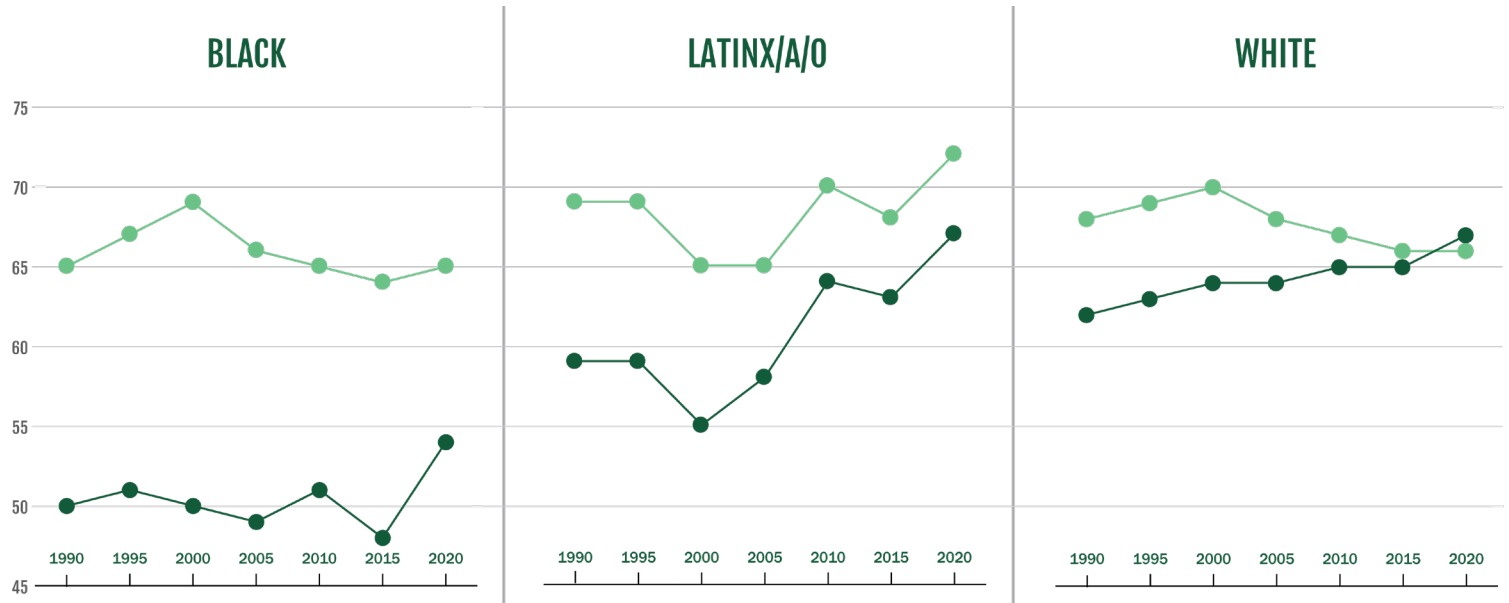


### FIGURE 8. COMPARING EMPLOYMENT RATES BY RACE FROM 1990 TO 2020

Cook County vs. Surrounding Counties, by Race

● CHICAGO ● SURROUNDING COUNTIES

Blacks are significantly more likely to face employment challenges in Chicago vs. the surrounding region as compared to other groups



**Notes.** Trends are plotted from calculating five-year averages from information available from public-use Census data. Surrounding counties include Du-Page, Kane, Lake (IL), McHenry, and Will.

There is a glimmer of hope, though. According to UIC’s report, more than 50% of Black families leaving Chicago and the surrounding suburbs that make up Cook County are staying in Illinois or within the bordering states of Indiana and Wisconsin.

**“The most common destinations for Blacks were in the outlying suburbs of Will, Grundy, Kane, and McHenry counties.”<sup>31</sup>**

The next most popular destination for Black relocation has been the cities of Hammond and Gary, Indiana, just across the border from Chicago.<sup>32</sup>

A recent Chicago Tribune article reported that *“On average, nearly 8,000 Black residents moved to Indiana each year between 2015 and 2019.”*<sup>33</sup>

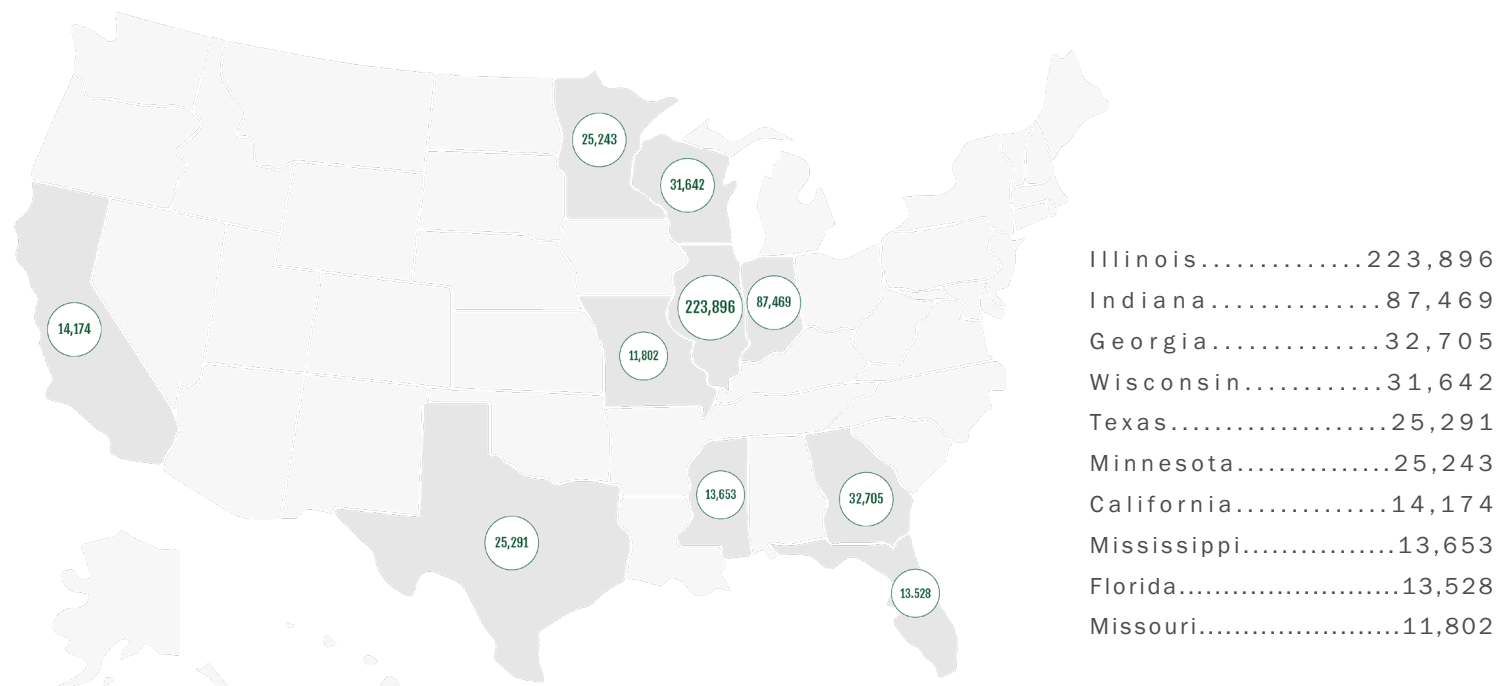
This suggests that Black families have roots in Chicago that they are reluctant to leave behind. Instead of going south, as some have speculated, Black families who have left Chicago are often, but not always, staying within the Chicagoland region.

These families could return to Chicago if the conditions that compelled them to leave — particularly the lack of employment opportunities — are addressed.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> [“As the Black population continues to drop in Chicago and Illinois, few regret their move: ‘I have peace.’ The Chicago Tribune, November 22, 2021](#)

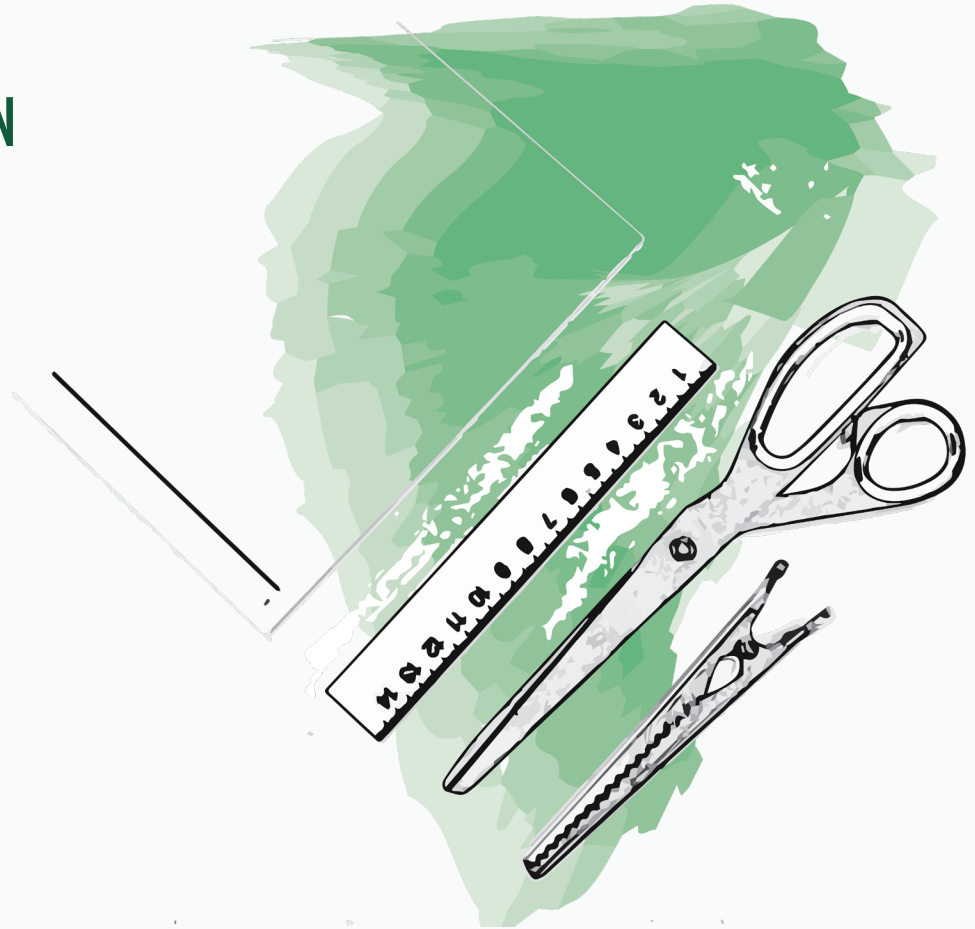
**FIGURE 9. TOP 10 DESTINATIONS FOR BLACK MOVERS FROM CHICAGO** (2005-2016)


# 07

## WHAT DO WE DO? A CHALLENGE AND AN OPPORTUNITY

### FACING THE CHALLENGE TOGETHER

CPS's enrollment crisis is not a challenge the district can solve alone; rather, it is a symptom of a much larger crisis — one that requires the city, civic and corporate leaders, policymakers, community members, residents, and philanthropists to address it together.



**W**e have a citywide problem, rooted in declining births, inequitable policies, and long-term, systemic community disinvestment that continues to drive families out of Chicago. The damage has been slow and steady — and for many, imperceptible — but now that we see the severity of the consequences, including CPS’s continued enrollment decline, we know it’s real.

Solving this crisis will require all of us to commit to rectifying past harms while working to keep more families in Chicago and attract new ones — of all races, ethnicities, and demographic groups. Without a comprehensive, multisector effort, we will continue to watch student enrollment fall.

**This will ultimately lead to significant declines in federal, state, and local funding for CPS — erasing the district’s academic progress and condemning currently enrolled students to a lifetime of the effects of budget cuts and insufficient resources.**

In *Part Two* of our report, we will share parent-led solutions to this multilayered challenge.

These will include ways that CPS can address the short-term implications of a rapidly declining student population, as well as longer-term solutions that will require the collective will of all of us to co-design and co-implement in partnership with our communities.

As we collectively confront CPS’s current and ongoing enrollment crisis, we recognize that there are some crucial lessons we have learned over the last decade that, if heeded, will enable us to avoid the same mistakes of the past, including massive school closures. Instead, parents will offer bold, transformative ideas to combat the structural challenges contributing to Chicago’s continued student enrollment decline.

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Kids First Chicago is committed to including the perspectives of parents, families, and communities in all that we do.

We invite you to join our work and share your thoughts on Chicago's enrollment crisis. Please drop our team a message at: [info@kidsfirstchicago.org](mailto:info@kidsfirstchicago.org)



DESIGNED BY  
**HALT** CREATIVE

“

*“We even looked at all the school options—public, lottery, private, selective enrollment—but none of it made sense. Cost-wise, living in the city just wasn’t worth it. And we just have the one kid.”*

**CAROLYN O.**

Former Chicago resident on why her family left the city and CPS for the nearby suburbs



**KIDS FIRST  
CHICAGO**

**WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS. WORLD-CLASS CITY**

**KIDSFIRSTCHICAGO.ORG**