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Insights from K1C's Citywide Poll on Chicago's Transition to an Elected School Board

Full results released at K1C & Mikva Challenge-hosted Town Hall on Thursday Evening

CHICAGO, IL - Results of a poll commissioned by Kids First Chicago (K1C) of 723 registered and eligible voters on Chicago's forthcoming elected school board will be shared Thursday evening at a virtual Town Hall hosted by K1C and Mikva Challenge.

Background

In 2021, K1C connected with over 300 parents to understand their priorities regarding the then-pending state legislation to authorize an elected school board. After its passage, K1C's parent leaders established the Elected School Board Task Force (ESBTF). The task force identified several key priorities for the school board, including campaign spending limits, parent representation on the board, non-citizen participation, and fair racial representation in school board districts.

In fall 2023, K1C engaged Qualtrics, a commercial survey sampling and administration company, to execute a citywide poll of registered and/or eligible voters in Chicago. The goal was to find out if the views and priorities of K1C parents are similar to those of the general Chicago voter population.

Key findings from the poll indicate that Chicago voters want:

The racial and ethnic composition of elected school board districts to reflect the composition of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) student body. Chicago's demographics are significantly different from those of the CPS student body. As of 2022, Chicago's population was approximately 57% Black and Latine while the CPS student body was almost 82% Black and Latine. A majority of respondents (75%) thought it was "extremely" (44%) or "very" (31%) essential that districts have racial representation that reflects the racially diverse CPS student population.

Any Chicago adult to be able to vote in school board elections, regardless of their immigration status. A majority of respondents (68%) support any Chicago adult voting, regardless of immigration status.

Any Chicago adult to be able to serve on the school board regardless of immigration status. More than half of the respondents (58%) support any Chicago adult serving on the board, regardless of their immigration status.

Strict limits on donations to elected school board candidate campaigns. A majority of respondents (74%) support strict limits on donations.

Stipends or salaries for elected school board members serving on the board. A majority of respondents (71%) support school board members receiving a stipend or salary.

Parent seats on the board. A majority of respondents (69%) thought it was “extremely important” (27%) or “very important” (42%) that there be board seats reserved only for CPS parents.

Additionally, there is a general lack of awareness that there is an upcoming transition to an elected school board. Only 52% of Chicago voters are aware, with roughly 2 out of 5 current CPS families unaware of the transition.

Kids First Chicago, in conjunction with its Elected School Board Task Force, is now calling on Springfield to amend Chicago’s elected school board legislation to align with the public’s priorities for an elected board and improve its long-term chances of success.

“CPS parents, and now, Chicago voters generally have made it clear what they want to see in an elected school board,” said Blaire Flowers, CPS Parent at Milton Brunson Math & Science Specialty School and North Lawndale College Prep, and Chair of K1C’s Elected School Board Task Force. “It’s now up to the state legislature to make the changes necessary to create a board that is well positioned to meet the needs of Chicago kids and families.”

In response to these insights, K1C’s task force **recommend the following actions:**

Draw Chicago elected school board districts with racial/ethnic compositions that mirror CPS student demographics

In spring 2023, the Illinois House and Senate held hearings to solicit public feedback on elected school board map proposals. At these hearings, multiple prototype maps were shared with the state legislature, but the decision was made to push the map drawing deadline back to spring 2024. However, the Illinois Senate has reconvened hearings this month with one this evening.

Springfield should go back to the drawing board and create a map with districts that more closely reflect the racial and ethnic composition of CPS students.

Pass legislation allowing any Chicagoan to vote or run in Chicago School Board elections, regardless of immigration status

Chicago voters want any resident to have the ability to run for or vote in school board elections, regardless of immigration status – which will require a change to the legislation authorizing Chicago’s elected school board.

Extending voting and candidacy rights in school board elections to all residents, regardless of immigration status, is a way to promote inclusivity, foster greater community and civic engagement, and enhance educational equity in Chicago’s schools.

Establish campaign spending and donation limits for candidates in Chicago School Board elections

Chicago voters overwhelmingly agree that Springfield should establish statutory donation and spending limits for candidates in Chicago school board elections. The law should outline the maximum amount a candidate or campaign can receive from donors as well as set a maximum spending cap on activities such as advertising, outreach, and fundraising. Violations of these limits could result in penalties, fines, or disqualification from the race.

Another approach could be creating a public financing system for school board elections in Chicago that could allocate public funds to candidates who demonstrate a minimum level of community support through small-dollar donations or signatures.

Predetermined donation limits would diminish the potential influence of special interests. Deemphasizing the need to focus on fundraising could put school board candidacy within the reach of moderate-income parents – thereby ensuring a diversity of candidate perspectives and experiences.

Allow Chicago School Board members to be compensated for their service

The current Chicago Elected School Board law prohibits board members from receiving compensation for their service. Chicago voters disagree. Springfield should remove the prohibition, thereby allowing the board to decide if, and at what amount, school board members should be compensated. Springfield could establish a maximum compensation cap that the board would be required to adhere to if it decides to compensate board members.

Create opportunities for Chicago parents to serve on the elected school board

While Chicago voters overwhelmingly agree that parents should have seats on Chicago’s elected school board, current election law prohibits “reserving” school board seats for specific stakeholder groups, including CPS parents.

However, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson will have 11 appointments to the Chicago Board of Education after the inaugural November 2024 elections. Strong voter preference for parents to serve on the board make it clear that Mayor Johnson should fill those seats with CPS parents.

Enacting legislation that allows board members to be compensated for their service and/or creates conditions that reduce the need to fundraise should encourage moderate-income parents to run for office.

The final recommendation is directed at CPS, education stakeholders, and City of Chicago officials.

Launch a citywide campaign to broaden awareness of Chicago’s ongoing transition to an elected school board

With less than half of those polled having heard that Chicago will be transitioning to an elected board, CPS, education stakeholders, and City officials should mount a public information campaign to inform

residents of the upcoming change. This can include engaging local media, launching digital campaigns, conducting outreach through community groups, holding school-based informational events, and sending information home with students.

TOWN HALL

The jointly-sponsored Kids First Chicago and Mikva Challenge Virtual Town Hall, “Our Schools, Our (Elected) School Board,” will be held this evening at 6:00 p.m. Over 200 are registered to attend and hear from parents, students, and legislators on their aspirations for the elected school board. Free registration is open [here](#).

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POLL METHODOLOGY

K1C’s citywide poll on Chicago’s Transition to an Elected School Board (ESB) was conducted from September 26 to October 9, 2023. The survey was completed by a total of 723 voting-age (18+) Chicago residents from across all of Chicago. Survey respondents were recruited by Qualtrics, a commercial survey sampling and administration company. Qualtrics uses random online sampling using multiple sample providers. The sample was collected from the Chicago designated market area by targeting 18+ year olds who fit the criteria of living within the city limits of Chicago. The margin of error is estimated to be +/- 5 percentage points. The demographics of the survey respondents closely resembles that of Chicago’s eligible-to-vote population.

More information about the poll, methodology, and results can be found at kidsfirstchicago.org/schoolboard.

Available for questions or comment: For inquiries or detailed data analysis, please contact Kristin Pollock at kpollock@kidsfirstchicago.org or 312-853-3697.

ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

Kids First Chicago (K1C) is an education nonprofit that works to ensure that every family and child in Chicago has access to a high-quality education. Their work focuses on empowering parents to identify, navigate to, and advocate for quality public schools for their kids. Then, they work directly with city and district leadership, using parent input to shape education policy to better support families. K1C provides transparent and rigorous education analysis to families, educators, and policymakers alike to inform data-driven and inclusive decision-making about the future of Chicago’s PK-12 public schools. For more information, visit kidsfirstchicago.org.

ABOUT MIKVA CHALLENGE

Mikva Challenge develops youth to be empowered, informed, and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society. We know that democracy is people taking action — speaking, engaging, learning, listening. Mikva clears a path for young people to be involved now, and to develop confidence and habits that will serve them — and the world we share — all their lives. Outcomes: Alumni of the Mikva Challenge programs are more likely: to vote (3x), graduate college, volunteer and participate in civic life, than their peers. Learn more at mikvachallenge.org.