



**KIDS FIRST
CHICAGO**

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Kids First Chicago Response to CPS's December 2023 Board Resolution Regarding Values and Parameters for New Five-Year Transformational Strategic Plan, SY25-SY29 ("Resolution")

Much of what is laid out in the Chicago Board of Education's December 2023 Board Resolution is compelling and laudable, in particular the focus on addressing long-standing racial inequities.

However, the district's desire to 'transition away' from a system of choice, as articulated in the resolution, appears to be intentionally vague and ideologically motivated.

After being appointed just five months ago, Board members claim that they have "heard many pleas from the community to overhaul the choice system." But there have been no community meetings or public engagement opportunities to discuss the dramatic changes reflected in the Board's resolution, suggesting that they have only spoken to a narrow and mostly privileged set of stakeholders rather than engaging in robust and authentic discussions with all Chicago families – in particular those who do not live in wealthy communities or are assigned to a high-performing neighborhood school.

We believe wholeheartedly in investing in neighborhood schools. But to decide unilaterally to anchor all students to their attendance-area school *without any authentic input from families* runs contrary to the anti-racist and community-centered aims of the resolution.

While we can debate the merits of charter, magnet, and selective enrollment schools, and attribute their origin to policies that may not have fully centered communities in the past, the lack of public discussion casts doubt on the Board's commitment to equity and inclusivity. How can policies be shaped to address stratification and inequity effectively if they are formulated in isolation from the communities they intend to affect?

This approach not only contradicts the principles of representative governance but also risks exacerbating the very issues the recently-appointed school board purports to address with its resolution.

We strongly urge the Chicago Board of Education to walk back this resolution until a comprehensive, inclusive, and transparent public engagement process is conducted. Stated simply, the CPS Board needs to put aside its ideology, openly discuss the consequences of such a massive decision, and take time to ask the people what they want. The future of our public schools and the well-being of our children depend on a process that respects and incorporates the voices of all stakeholders in our diverse city.

Kids First Chicago stands ready to support CPS in authentically engaging with those who have the most at risk, Chicago families and children, before the district makes top-down decisions that miss the mark on anti-racism and co-design, and ultimately exacerbate historic harms.

Background

Nearly 50,000 (or roughly 1 in 6) CPS students are enrolled in charter and contract schools, of which nearly all are students of color and over 80% qualify for federal aid. Roughly 23,000 students are currently enrolled in magnet schools and another roughly 17,000 in selective enrollment elementary and high schools. Families also routinely choose to attend neighborhood schools that are not their assigned attendance-area school. In the 2022-2023 school year, less than half (46%) of all CPS students attended their neighborhood school, including just 1 in 4 high school students.

Example of the Equitable Co-design of District Policy:

In partnership with Kids First Chicago, CPS engaged in a robust stakeholder engagement process that incorporated input from over 20,000 people to determine the direction of the new Accountability Policy. Moreover, the district only issued a resolution on the intended direction of this policy once they had initially engaged with more than 8,000 stakeholders through focus groups and surveys. This effort to redesign the district's approach to accountability has been touted as an exemplar of anti-racist and equitable policy co-design.

The district should look to this very recent effort for inspiration anew about how to lead an inclusive process around this equally complex issue.

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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.