

PART TWO

CHICAGO'S ENROLLMENT CRISIS

ADOPTING PARENT-LED SOLUTIONS

This is Kids First Chicago's second installment on Chicago's enrollment crisis. This report focuses on parent-led solutions to address the root causes of the challenges.



ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

Kids First Chicago's mission is to dramatically improve education for Chicago's children by ensuring their families are the respected authorities on what their kids need and decision-makers in their kids' education. We do this by partnering with families to support them in gaining the resources, access, and voice they need to achieve their vision for their children.

We imagine a Chicago where Black and Brown parents have a prominent voice in shaping their communities so that every child has access to a world-class education—the kind that opens the doors to new opportunities in college, career, and life. An education where **100% of our students graduate with the confidence, knowledge, and skills to shape our city for the better.**



“

“Cada niño que mejora, mejora la comunidad, mejora el mundo.”

LUZ MARÍA FLORES

Translation

Every child that improves, improves the community, improves the world.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHICAGO'S ENROLLMENT CRISIS

In January 2022, Kids First Chicago (K1C) released *Chicago's Enrollment Crisis: Examining Root Causes*, which analyzed Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) enrollment decline and the implications for all who live, work, and do business in the region. The report sought to set the record straight on the primary drivers for the falling number of students enrolled in CPS. In the report, we dispelled common myths about the decline through a comprehensive analysis of available data including school enrollment, population, and census reports.



The report illustrated that CPS's enrollment decline is attributable to an unprecedented reduction of school-age children in the city overall — roughly 360,000 fewer children today compared to 60 years ago, and about 175,000 fewer children since 2000. Further, Chicago families are not fleeing CPS for non-public education options; rather, data revealed that the district serves roughly 80% of all school-age children in the city – a market share that has remained consistent over the past 20 years.¹ Specifically, enrollment drops in Chicago are driven by three factors:

1. Declining births;
2. Slowing in-migration of Latine families; and
3. Increasing out-migration of Black families.

If CPS's enrollment trend is not reversed, CPS and individual schools will be forced to make difficult decisions in the years ahead — at a time when schools and families are still recovering from the effects of a multi-year pandemic.

We stand at a critical juncture in the vibrant history of Chicago, a city known for its resilience, diversity, and potential. We can no longer ignore the undeniable challenges that have prompted an exodus of families from our city and the obstacles deterring new families from considering Chicago as their future home.

The recent influx of migrants coming to Chicago has played a significant role in temporarily stabilizing CPS enrollment. While we may have newly arriving families in this moment, Chicago still needs to attract and retain families over the long-term. We must be intentional about integrating newcomers into our communities and schools, providing them with ready access to housing and government support. Chicago can and should lead as a sanctuary city. The majority of the parents involved in this project continually noted the tremendous potential of the immigration population and highlighted that attracting and retaining them is important to Chicago's long-term vitality.

In this January 2024 report, we strive to address interrelated issues that are converging to shape the destiny of Chicago's families.

We delve deeply into the multifaceted relationships between crime, housing, education, cost of living, access to quality healthcare, and the presence (or lack thereof) of government programs. It is through this exploration that we hope to shed light on how Chicago can attract and retain families.

These interconnected issues are important for all who care deeply about the future social and economic vitality of the Chicagoland region. Our first report noted that Chicago's enrollment crisis cannot be solved by CPS alone. It demands a multi-faceted approach involving both the public and private sectors. The ultimate goal is to make Chicago an attractive and supportive environment for families, ensuring that they view the city as a desirable place to live, work, and educate their children.

¹ K1C analysis of U.S. Census data and American Community Survey data accessed via ipums.org

02 METHODOLOGY

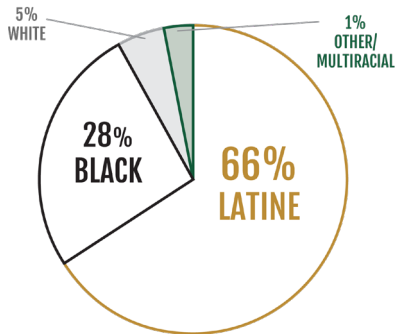
A PARENT-LED DESIGN PROCESS

This work is the culmination of over 1,500 people-hours consisting of about 30 in-depth workshops and deliberations bringing together over 150 CPS parents to identify the key drivers of the enrollment crisis and develop solutions and policy recommendations.

Fifteen K1C parents formed the Enrollment Solutions Design Team (ESDT) to guide the work through various phases of engagement. The work of the ESDT began in the spring of 2022 and culminated in the spring of 2023, meeting for over 50 hours across nearly 20 different virtual and in-person meetings.



FIGURE 1. RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS
Workshop Participants



CITYWIDE PARENT & CAREGIVER WORKSHOPS²

From October 2022 through January 2023, K1C’s ESDT held nine workshops over 20 hours that included 163 parents from 45 community areas across the City of Chicago.

The racial/ethnic composition of the parents we engaged were 66% Latine, 28% Black, and 5% White. Parents had the option to attend three workshops conducted in English, Spanish, or bilingual (English and Spanish).

² In the interest of brevity, our report will use the term “parents” inclusively, encompassing both parents and caregivers.

ENROLLMENT SOLUTIONS DESIGN TEAM (ESDT) TIMELINE

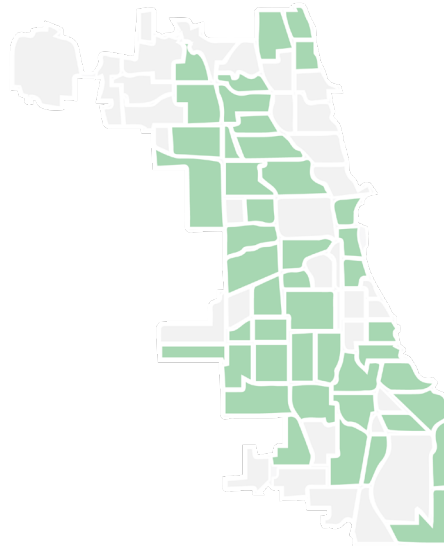
WORKSHOP DESIGN MARCH - SEPT. 2022	WORKSHOP RECRUITMENT OCT. 2022	WORKSHOP EXECUTION NOV. 2022 - JAN. 2023	DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS JAN. - APRIL 2023	FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS MAY - JUNE 2023
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163

**PARENTS & CAREGIVERS
ENGAGED EACH COMMITTED
20 HOURS ACROSS 9
WORKSHOPS**

FIGURE 2. 45 COMMUNITY AREAS

Represented by Workshop Participants



WORKSHOP 1. Parents were asked to identify and prioritize barriers related to keeping families in, and attracting families to, Chicago.

WORKSHOP 2. Parents described their experiences with the priority barriers, shared thoughts on root causes underlying these barriers, and identified entities responsible for addressing them.

WORKSHOP 3. Kids First Chicago staff presented parents with a series of draft recommendations developed using parent input and designed to address the priority barriers. Parents reviewed the proposals and provided feedback on the recommendations.

FIGURE 3. KEY ISSUE AREAS RANKED BY PARENTS

Note. While parents identified and ranked 15 key issue areas, this report focuses on their top seven recommendation areas. These recommendations are reported in the order of importance that parents ranked them in.

INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT

1. Crime / Safety
2. Taxes / Cost of Living
3. Education (K-12)
4. Housing
5. Job Quality
6. Access to Quality Healthcare
7. Lack of Government Programs & Benefits

ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED IN THIS REPORT

8. Childcare (Availability/Cost)
9. Discrimination / Non-welcoming Environment
10. Gentrification
11. Public Transportation (Reliability / Access)
12. Commute Time to Work
13. Air and /or Water Quality
14. Access to Grocery Stores
15. Ease of Moving to Chicago from Another Country

“

“As a Black woman from the West Side of Chicago, it was very important [for me] to be a part of this process and have my voice reflected in the recommendations.”

KARONDĀ LOCUST

FINALIZING PARENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Beginning in February 2023, ESDT members reviewed more than 50 prototype recommendations across the seven priority issue areas. Meeting weekly for three months, they reviewed each recommendation, including the underlying research or case studies that supported the recommendation, and assessed how participants responded both qualitatively and quantitatively to the recommendation in Workshop #3.

ESDT members proposed changes to the initial recommendations based on parent feedback, as well as their own lived experience.

In May and early June 2023, ESDT members met in-person over the course of three meetings to deliberate, build consensus, and agree on the final set of recommendations.

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RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS CHICAGO'S ENROLLMENT CRISIS

THE PARENT PLAN

Families want safe neighborhoods, world-class education, quality jobs, affordable housing, and robust healthcare options. These are not just amenities but necessities that people prioritize when deciding where to raise their children. By aligning our efforts with their recommendations, we can create environments where families can flourish. And by embracing their recommendations, we signal our commitment to their needs and aspirations.

The policy proposals made by parents serve as a vital compass to guide us toward a Chicago that families want to call home and enthusiastically invite others to join them.



NEARLY
6 IN 10CHICAGO VOTERS FAVOR MEASURES TO PREVENT CRIME
BEFORE IT HAPPENS OVER A TOUGH ON CRIME STRATEGY

ISSUE AREA 1

CRIME & SAFETY

Chicago parents identified crime and safety as top barriers in attracting and keeping families in the city. They cited multiple ways crime and safety issues negatively impact kids' educational experience, from creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear and anxiety among students, teachers, and parents alike to contributing to higher teacher turnover and student dropout rates. Further, these issues limit students' and parents' willingness to participate in extracurricular activities, after-school programs, and school events.

Parents recommend a comprehensive approach to minimize and interrupt violent crime, expand alternatives to policing, and address the root causes of violence (e.g. high unemployment).

Families also favored investing in projects that not only focus on safety but also beautify communities and create a sense of belonging among neighbors.

Chicago voters agree. In advance of the April 2023 Mayoral Runoff, nearly 6 in 10 voters chose prevention compared to about 4 in 10 who backed a tough on crime strategy.³

³ GQR poll on Chicago's Mayoral Race, April 2023. The data are based on 811 respondents interviewed from March 31- April 4, 2023, and represent the regional, age and gender composition of the estimated likely voters in Chicago. [Detailed results of the poll can be found here.](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Increase city-wide security measures and expand alternative crisis responses**
- 2. Sustainably fund community violence intervention programs**
- 3. Establish a state-level capital program for neighborhood improvement projects that explicitly focus on improving safety**
- 4. Provide workforce development and housing support for formerly incarcerated individuals to mitigate reoffending**

“

“Creo que esta [área prioritaria] es una de las causas de que las Familias se muden porque todos queremos vivir en un lugar seguro para que nuestros hijos se forjen un mejor futuro.”

LUZ MARÍA FLORES

Translation

“I think this [issue area] is one of the causes of families moving because we all want to live in a safe place for our children to build a better future for themselves.”

“Chicago regularly ranks among the most expensive places in the world to live.”

ISSUE AREA 2

TAXES & COST OF LIVING

Chicago's taxes and high cost of living adversely affect low-income families, who are faced with tough decisions on how to make ends meet. Some families relocate to more affordable areas outside of Chicago. Others will work long hours or multiple jobs, leaving them with less time and energy to participate in their children's schooling.

Chicago regularly ranks among the most expensive places in the world to live.

According to one estimate, Chicago's cost of living is 31% higher than the state average and 20% higher than the national average. Another suggests Chicago residents need to earn an annual income of \$172,600 for their purchasing power to equate to that of the average American bringing in \$100,000.⁴

⁴ SmartAsset analysis of local cost of living in 76 of the largest cities in the U.S. using data from the Council for Community and Economic Research. [Available here.](#)

Parents call for measures that city- and state-level leaders could take, including abolishing and/or reducing taxes for basic need purchases; cutting the city’s sales tax; making the State of Illinois’ income tax fairer; and offering property tax relief for qualifying homeowners and renters alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Lower the city sales tax on basic necessities, and offset the revenue loss by broadening the tax to a wider range of luxury items**
- 2. Provide Chicago’s low-and-medium income homeowners and renters with property tax relief**
- 3. Abolish sales tax double taxation on gasoline purchases and all sales taxes on medicine and groceries**
- 4. Enact a graduated income tax in the State of Illinois and create automatic triggers to reduce income tax rate for low-income earners**

“

“El alto costo de la vivienda y la comida ocasionan que las familias se vean forzadas a adquirir doble empleo, es así como se desatiende a los hijos en los hogares y no se les brinda la atención suficiente.”

ERIKA AYALA

Translation

The high cost of housing and food causes families to be forced to take on double employment; this is how children are neglected in the homes and are not given enough attention.

ISSUE AREA 3

EDUCATION PRE-K THROUGH 12TH GRADE

Parents believe that a child’s educational experience from preschool through 12th grade has a major effect on a family’s decision to remain in Chicago. Moreover, the overall reputation of the public school system and its individual schools can be an incentive – or a deterrent – to families in their decision to relocate to Chicago.

Parents want a number of enhanced services and support for Chicago’s public schools, which starts with ensuring that schools are funded adequately and equitably.

They want schools to offer programs beyond the traditional school day that meet the needs of families and expose students to jobs of the future, a well-trained and well-paid teaching force, and a focus on school climate and culture that engages families and makes students feel safe and supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Fund Chicago’s schools adequately and equitably**
2. **Dramatically increase focus on – and investment in – school climate reform**
3. **Expand investment in 21st Century community schools “Neighborhood Hub” models**
4. **Expand Chicago’s Parent Mentor Program to every CPS elementary school**
5. **Expand programming beyond the traditional school day**
6. **Support, train, and pay teachers like professionals**
7. **Better prepare all Chicago students for jobs of the future**

It takes about 45,000 employees to operate a district this size. That amounts to approximately 30% of all government positions in the State of Illinois.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CPS IN CHICAGO LIFE

CPS plays a huge role in Chicagoans lives; from educating our children, employing our residents, and investing taxpayer dollars in our city's future, at least 1 in 5 Chicago households are connected to CPS.

Chicago Public Schools is the fourth largest school district in the U.S. It educates over 300 thousand students and a disproportionately large share of high-needs students in Illinois.

CPS serves about 18% of the K-12 students in Illinois, but nearly 1-in-3 of all low-income and English Learner students, and 40% of all housing-insecure students.

It takes about 45,000 employees to operate a district of this size and need. That amounts to approximately 30% of all government positions in the State of Illinois. That is more government positions than it takes to run some of the largest cities in the U.S., including Philadelphia and Houston.⁵

⁵ K1C analysis of Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances, 2021, Individual Unit Data File; 2022 State & Local Government Employment & Payroll, Individual Unit Data File

“

“I have and know families who have left the city due to frustration with the quality of education in CPS. There has been divestment from neighborhood schools.”

—
MEGAN ASP

“A lack of affordable housing and the persistent barriers to homeownership have led many families to explore places with more inclusive housing policies.”

ISSUE AREA 4

HOUSING

Chicago is one of the most expensive cities in the world to own or rent a home. About 1 in 2 renter households in Chicago are burdened by housing costs – meaning that 30% or more of their monthly income is spent on rent and utilities. About 1 in 4 renter households are severely burdened by housing costs – with 50% or more of their monthly paychecks going to their landlords and utility companies.⁸

Chicago housing discrimination practices like redlining are infamous.⁹

The city has yet to right the wrongs of its past by creating more affordable housing options for families. A lack of affordable housing and the persistent barriers to homeownership have led many families to explore places with more inclusive housing policies.

High housing cost burdens are greater for Black and Latine residents and, as a result, Black and Latine families are less likely to own their homes. For example, only about 1 in 3 Black households own their home compared to over half of White households.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [“Where Banks Don’t Lend.” WBEZ, June 3, 2020](#)

¹⁰ Ibid.

People of color and immigrants in Chicago are more likely than White residents to live in overcrowded housing conditions, experience housing cost burden, and have lower rates of homeownership.

- **1 in 2 renters are housing cost burdened**
- **1 in 4 renters are severely burdened**
- **1 in 3 Black households own homes compared to 1 in 2 White households**

Parents described how frequent moves and switching schools lead to learning gaps and the failure to form stable relationships with teachers who can follow their child's progress and support their growth. Families stated that housing challenges prevent them from living in areas with better-performing schools and may force them to accept longer commutes which limit time for extracurricular activities or homework, impacting academic performance.

A lack of affordable housing also contributes to an increase in housing insecurity among students.

Unhoused students face tremendous challenges including difficulties with attendance, a lack of access to resources, and increased emotional stress – all of which can hinder their educational progress and sense of belonging.

Housing affordability also impacts teachers. High living costs may deter teachers from working in certain areas, leading to teacher shortages in schools serving disadvantaged communities. High teacher turnover can disrupt students' learning and limit the cohesion and trust built between families and educators within a given school community.

“

“La vivienda es muy cara. La gente quiere quedarse en el área, pero no pueden pagar. En todas partes de Chicago, la vivienda es cara. Hay casas en venta, pero nunca se venden porque la gente de la comunidad no reúne los requisitos.”

-

OFELIA CARMONA

Translation

“Housing is so expensive. People want to stay in the area, but they cannot afford it. Everywhere in Chicago, housing is expensive. There are houses for sale, but they never sell because the people in the community do not qualify.”

**OUR PARENTS' FINAL SET OF HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS ENCOMPASSED
12 SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN TWO KEY AREAS.**

INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK

1. Expand incentives and tax breaks to developers to create affordable housing
2. Relax zoning and development rules
3. Engage in strategic property purchases to preserve housing affordability
4. Incentivize new construction of affordable homes via better lending terms

REDUCE BARRIERS TO RENTING AND OWNING A HOME & ENSURE HOUSING SECURITY

5. Maintain emergency rental assistance programs
6. Pilot below-market & interest-free mortgages to first-time home buying families
7. Expand the number of zero down payment, zero closing cost mortgages for first-time homebuyer families in Chicago's predominantly Black and Latine communities
8. Expand Chicago's financial literacy education offerings to boost homeownership rates for Black and Latine families
9. Dramatically change what information Chicago-based banks use to issue mortgages
10. Launch a pilot program to encourage landlords to rent to families
11. Prohibit the practice of forcing noncitizens to pay higher interest rates and down payments for mortgages
12. Expand federal housing subsidies for rental assistance

ISSUE AREA 5

JOB QUALITY

Quality jobs strengthen Chicago's economy and enable workers to meet family obligations, save for the future, and prevent poverty. However, many workers, particularly women and people of color, lack access to living wages, paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, stable work schedules, and other protections. Many also lack access to health insurance, career advancement training, and affordable, high-quality childcare that make it possible to consistently attend work.

Without a quality job and the stability that comes with it, parents have less flexibility to actively engage in their children's education; students experience stress due to financial instability at home, making it more difficult to focus at school; and families are forced to make housing decisions based on job availability, exacerbating school enrollment challenges and instability.

A thriving job market with more quality employment opportunities can have a positive ripple effect on Chicago's education system through increased resources for schools, enhanced parental involvement, and a more supportive civic community that fosters student success and well-being.

1 IN 3 WORKERS IN CHICAGO HAVE A LOW-WAGE JOB. ABOUT **1 IN 3** OF THESE LOW-WAGE WORKERS SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO CPS COMPARED TO ONLY **1 IN 5** HIGH-WAGE WORKERS.

“

“Job opportunities are not what they used to be. Families are struggling. The middle class is disappearing because of how expensive it is to live in the city. In Chicago, families are having a hard time earning a living.”

ADAM VÁSQUEZ

ONLY HALF OF CHICAGO'S LOW-WAGE WORKERS HAVE EMPLOYER-PROVIDED HEALTH INSURANCE

That's compared to about 4 in 5 high-wage workers who are provided health insurance by their employers.

Additionally, 20% of low-wage workers have family income below the poverty line. This is a higher poverty rate compared to the general population of the City of Chicago (17.2%).⁷

⁷ K1C analysis of U.S. Census data and American Community Survey data accessed via ipums.org and data.census.gov

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TAKE ACTION TO IMPROVE JOB QUALITY

- Raise wages and address systemic wage gaps
- Establish career paths for low-wage earners and support with workforce training
- Establish strong job safety standards and stable, predictable hours
- Launch a citywide campaign to ensure employers provide family-friendly benefits

2. BETTER PREPARE CHICAGOANS FOR EXISTING JOB OPPORTUNITIES

- Boost support for community colleges to provide in-demand job training
- Pilot innovative workforce development programs to help families access infrastructure jobs

3. CREATE MORE QUALITY JOBS BY ACCELERATING SUPPORT TO CHICAGO'S SMALL BUSINESSES

“

“I was kicked off Medicaid because they told me I made too much money. I make too much money to get benefits, but not enough to survive the high cost of living? That is frustrating.”

OVETTA BROWN

ISSUE AREA 6

ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE

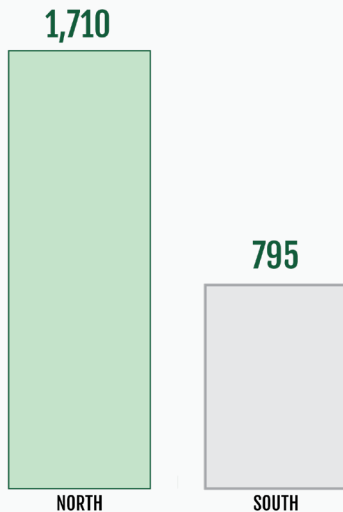
Without access to quality healthcare, families are vulnerable to chronic health conditions, untreated illnesses, and preventable diseases. This increases student absenteeism, making it difficult for students to consistently attend school and fully engage in their studies, leading to decreased academic performance and lower graduation rates.

Disparities in access to healthcare are egregious; the South Side of Chicago has fewer than half the number of Primary Care Provider locations when compared to the North Side.⁶

⁶ [The Challenging Future of the Chicago Safety Net™, February 2021. Prepared by the Health Care Council of Chicago.](#)

FIGURE 4. PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER ACCESS

North vs. South Side



The lack of access to healthcare – including mental health and preventative care services – can exacerbate anxiety in students from already high-stress environments and cause some health conditions to go undiagnosed and untreated.

Teachers in classrooms with a high proportion of students lacking healthcare face greater strain on their resources and time, affecting the overall quality of education that they can provide.

Parents recommend more accessible healthcare services and supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expand healthcare services beyond traditional brick-and mortar locations through telehealth and mobile clinics
2. Increase awareness of citywide mental health services & local healthcare sites
3. Improve healthcare providers' cultural competence
4. Address health coverage gap for Illinois' immigrants
5. Abolish State of Illinois sales tax on prescription drugs

ISSUE AREA 7

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS & BENEFITS

Parents shared a variety of ways that the lack of strong government programs — such as unemployment benefits, food assistance, and housing support — have increased financial hardship for Chicago families. This may lead to families moving to places with more supportive government policies and better social safety nets.

Food insecurity and the resulting hunger and malnutrition can severely affect kids' cognitive development, attention span, and academic performance. The pressures of financial insecurity leave many parents without the time or resources to adequately support their child's education. Teachers in schools serving disadvantaged communities that experience these stressors are subject to increasing burnout from the burdens placed on them to educate kids living in poverty.

1 in 5 Chicago families — 55,000 — live below the poverty line (earning \$27,250 for a family of 4)¹¹ and are eligible for government assistance. Another 130,000 more are currently not eligible for any government assistance based on their immigration status.¹²

¹¹ K1C analysis of U.S. Census data.

¹² Data from estimates on the unauthorized population in Chicago produced by the Center for Migration Studies. Based on the augmented 2019 American Community Survey accessed via ipums.org

1 IN 5 CHICAGO FAMILIES — 55,000 — LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE AND ARE LIKELY ELIGIBLE FOR GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE.

“

Los programas sociales reducen la desigualdad y la pobreza cuando se centran en los hogares de menores ingresos. Si no están bien enfocados, los programas pueden aumentar la desigualdad y no tener ningún efecto positivo sobre la pobreza.”

-

EDUARDO MORENO

Translation

“Social programs reduce inequality and poverty when they are focused on the lowest-income households. If they are not good at targeting, the programs can increase inequality and have no positive effect on poverty.”

Full participation in government programs would decrease poverty considerably. An Urban Institute study shows that full participation in Illinois would decrease poverty by over 30% and the results for Chicago would likely be similar or even higher because the incidence of poverty in Chicago is higher than in the State of Illinois.¹³

An estimated 130,000 living in Chicago are currently not eligible for any government assistance based on their immigration status. Many of these would likely qualify for assistance based on their income. Opening eligibility to include all low-income families, regardless of immigration status, would allow thousands of more families to benefit from the social safety net.¹⁴

¹³ [Giannarelli, L. et al., 2023. A Safety Net with 100 Percent Participation: How Much Would Benefits Increase and Poverty Decline?. Urban Institute. United States of America](#)

¹⁴ The unauthorized population in Chicago is estimated to be about half of the non-citizen population. As of 2022, the non-citizen population is estimated to be about 280,000 (2022 ACS 1-year estimates from data.census.gov). Using data from the Center for Migration Studies, the unauthorized population between 2019 and 2021 is estimated to be around 130,000. A detailed description of the project and the methodology is available at: Robert Warren, 2021 "In 2019, the US Undocumented Population Continued a Decade-Long Decline and the Foreign-Born Population Neared Zero Growth." Journal on Migration and Human Security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase social safety net for all low-income, vulnerable populations**
 - Better serve immigrants and their families
 - Raise the State of Illinois' benefit level for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
 - Make expanded Federal Child Tax Credit permanent
 - Provide more adequate Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits
2. **Make Cook County's Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot Program permanent**

04 CONCLUSION

FAMILIES NEED ACTION NOW

Chicago has always been a dynamic tapestry of culture, innovation, and diversity, but we face an urgent challenge. Families, the cornerstone of any thriving society, are leaving our great city. By listening to parents, we can create an environment that attracts and retains families, boosting our city's vibrancy, prosperity, and long-term stability.



Our sincere hope is that the insights presented in this report will serve as a foundation for meaningful conversations, innovative solutions, and collaborative efforts.

Chicago is a city of boundless potential. Together, we have the power to address these challenges head on, create an environment where families thrive, and welcome newcomers with open arms.

It is time to unite our public and private sectors, civic organizations, and community leaders in a common purpose – making Chicago a magnet for families.

This work is the culmination of nearly two years of research and discussion with Chicago families, who offered their time and insights to help make the city a better place for families like theirs.

Thank you for joining us on this crucial exploration of the issues affecting Chicago's families. Together, we can create a brighter future for our great city.

We invite you to dive deeper into these recommendations in our issue briefs, available for download on our website.

LEARN MORE

kidsfirstchicago.org/enrollment-solutions

QUESTIONS?

Please contact José Pacas, Hal Woods, or any member of our team at Kids First Chicago to explore our analysis further. Contact us at kidsfirstchicago.org/our-team.

05

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THANK YOU

Kids First Chicago would first like to thank the members of the Enrollment Solutions Design Team (ESDT) for their skillful and dedicated leadership through the project's demanding multi-year process.



The issues surrounding the topic of how to make Chicago a city where more families want to live are complex and require expertise from parents from disparate communities and backgrounds. It speaks to the stature, insight, and energy of the parent leaders on the design team that the project was able to recruit such a diverse group of participants for the workshops; understand the barriers that families face; learn the perspectives and insights from caregivers as to the root causes behind those barriers; and develop a series of parent-endorsed recommendations that address those experiences through a thorough, well-founded report.

Kids First Chicago would like to especially thank these parents for their time and willingness to exchange views candidly during the group's deliberations on the final recommendations.

Kids First Chicago extends its deepest appreciation to the 163 parents who participated in our nine parent-led workshops. Each participant provided a distinct experience and view on the issues considered.

Vanessa Espinoza, a parent on the ESDT and dual-language specialist on the project, provided invaluable support throughout the engagement process, and played a key role in preparing materials for the project team and the entire design team with a commitment to accuracy and inclusion.

This project was led by several Kids First Chicago staff members including Hal Woods, Micaelan Gasperich, Jasmin Pizano Luna, Kendall Moore-Fields, Dr. José Pacas, Dr. Chris Poulos, and Kristin Pollock.

JANUARY 2024

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“If the city of Chicago adopts these changes they will be making a bold statement to the world that Chicago values families. As it stands, we have a tarnished reputation as a city of violence, poverty, and injustice; this is an opportunity to change that narrative. As a teacher, a mother of 5, and a born-and-raised Chicagoan, I want the city to hear my voice because I am fighting for my children’s futures, my students’ futures, and the future of education in Chicago. Without children, there is no future.”

ANDREA ZAYAS



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