



**KIDS FIRST
CHICAGO**

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New Report: Parents Offer Solutions to Chicago's School Enrollment Crisis

A comprehensive parent-led process offers actionable recommendations to attract and retain Chicago families

Chicago, IL – Today Kids First Chicago (K1C) released an in-depth report series with families' recommendations to help stem Chicago's persistent and precipitous decline in student enrollment. The report series follows K1C's January 2022 report examining the root causes of the decline over the last 20 years.

In this new report, K1C delves deeply into the multifaceted issues identified by parents and caregivers as the top barriers related to Chicago keeping and attracting families. The parents ranked seven primary roadblocks for retaining population; crime and safety, taxes and cost of living, education, housing, job quality, access to quality healthcare, and the presence (or lack thereof) of government programs.

"We must take a comprehensive approach involving both the public and private sectors to make Chicago an attractive and supportive environment for families," said Daniel Anello, CEO at Kids First Chicago. "By embracing and adopting these recommendations, our city's leaders will be making a bold statement to both its residents and the world that Chicago values families. And a city that values families will attract and retain them."

The report is the culmination of over 1,500 people-hours participating in 30 in-depth workshops with more than 160 CPS parents from 45 community areas across the City of Chicago. The racial/ethnic composition of the parents engaged was 66% Latine, 28% Black, and 5% White.

"We dedicated more than a year to engaging with parents throughout the city, ensuring we understood the challenges families face and listening to their ideas for improvement," said Andrea Zayas, a member of K1C's Enrollment Solutions Design Team. "As a teacher and a mother of five, I know that parents have an invaluable perspective on what needs to change to keep families in Chicago."

This expansive report offers deep analyses of each topic identified by parents as barriers with new data insights.

Not surprisingly, improving Chicago's crime and safety issues ranked as parents' top of seven priority concerns. The top three areas included:

Crime & Safety. While the report cites nearly 6 in 10 voters preferring measures to prevent crime over 4 in 10 favoring a tough-on-crime approach, prevention is a long-term proposition. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's recently released *People's Plan for Community Safety* acknowledges this fact and promises a focus on many of the same issue areas prioritized by Chicago parents. The

Mayor's plan, while laudable in its intent, is thus far short on specifics and could start by implementing some of the recommendations offered by families including:

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

Taxes & Cost of Living. 1 in 5 Chicago families live below the poverty line. Chicago's cost of living is 20% higher than the national average and 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.

To ease the burden and keep families in the City, parents recommend that policymakers:

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

Education (PreK-12). Parents point to their child's educational experience as a key factor in the decision about where to raise their family. And in Chicago, CPS has a huge impact on life in the City with about 320,000 students enrolled in the system and approximately 45,000 employees working in its more than 630 schools. To help CPS retain and attract families, parents interviewed for the report call for:

- Fund Chicago's schools adequately and equitably.
- Offer programming beyond the traditional school day.
- Expand investment in 21st Century community schools' "Neighborhood Hub" models.
- Extend Chicago's Parent Mentor Program to every CPS elementary school.
- Dramatically increase focus on – and investment in – school climate reform.
- Support, train, and pay teachers like professionals.
- Better prepare all Chicago students for jobs of the future.

The recent influx of migrants coming to Chicago has played a significant role in temporarily stabilizing CPS enrollment. However, while CPS may have newly enrolled families at this moment, Chicago needs to attract and retain families over the long term. Public schools are the first line of government support that migrant families encounter. Chicago must be intentional about integrating newcomers into our communities and schools, providing them with ready access to housing and government support.

"Chicago has always been a welcoming city, committed to keeping our communities safe and making the changes necessary to attract and retain families through collaborative work," said Maria Sanchez, a member of K1C's Enrollment Solutions Design Team. "We remain committed to helping create a

more healthy environment where *all* families thrive. And we hope that everyone who receives this report will find the will and desire to work together to adopt these recommendations and solve Chicago's most pressing challenges."

K1C will be convening conversations on each of the identified issue areas with organizations working in those arenas to share strategies, identify synergies, and determine future workstreams.

Available for questions or comment: CPS parents are available for comment, in English and Spanish, on the recommendations within the report (interpretation is also available). If interested in discussing the details of this report with K1C staff or connecting with a parent involved in defining the recommendations, please contact Kristin Pollock at (847) 830-0866 or kpolllock@kidsfirstchicago.org.

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The overview report is available for download in both [ENGLISH](#) and [SPANISH](#). Three topical chapters on **(1) Crime & Safety**, **(2) Taxes & Cost of Living**, and **(3) Education (PreK-12)** are also available for download. Additional chapters will be available within the weeks ahead.

Background

In January 2022, K1C released *Chicago's Enrollment Crisis: Examining Root Causes*, which analyzed CPS enrollment decline through a comprehensive analysis of available data including school enrollment, population, and census reports. Enrollment drops in Chicago are driven by three factors: (1) fewer births; (2) slowed in-migration of Latine families, even despite the recent influx of migrants from Latin America; and (3) a significant exodus of Black families leaving the city.

CPS remains the top education choice for families with 4 of 5 school-aged children enrolling despite leadership transitions, labor strife, multiple budget crises, and a pandemic that disproportionately hurt Black and Latine communities.

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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. 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 public schools. For more information, visit kidsfirstchicago.org.