



**KIDS FIRST  
CHICAGO**

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**CPS Parents Hold Roundtable Discussion About How CPS, CTU and the Mayor's Office Must  
Realign Around Kids**

*Kids First Chicago's Parent Advisory Board Calls for Renewed Focus on Students Amid  
CPS Turmoil*

**Chicago, IL** – Parents who serve on Kids First Chicago Parent Advisory Board (PAB) met with members of the media on Tuesday to share their perspectives on the most pressing concerns in Chicago's education system.

Parents underscored their frustration with being sidelined in conversations about the future of CPS, while kids remain far behind academically and socially-emotionally.

"It was at a recent K1C PAB meeting when we all realized we are being distracted by contracts and things of that nature – not the fact that [only] 30% of our students are reading at grade level," said Katrina Adams, a parent of three from the South Side.

They demanded an immediate commitment to putting kids first amid tense contract negotiations between CPS and CTU. They also stressed the need to bring parents in as real thought partners in devising solutions.

"We are the people who are going to be impacted by these decisions, and we should be the people making them...we can't have real compensation discussions about contracts without including parents' voices," said Maria Owens, a grandparent from the South Side who also serves as the Vice Chair on the Hirsch High School Local School Council (LSC).

"I think we do a good job of normalizing loss of learning. It's always a situation where we're focusing on the problem versus actually fixing it," said Clent Lewis, a Humboldt Park parent and member of the Moos Elementary LSC.

The parents called on CPS to ensure that meaningful accountability measures exist and that CPS communicates honestly about where students are.

"I think that parents need to understand what kids need to learn and know at different grade levels. How do we get parents on board? How do we teach them that? It starts at the primary level. You can't get kids at 5th and 6th grade and call a parent in and decide that you want to do an intervention then. In most cases, that's too late," said Cata Truss, a West Side grandparent of six CPS students.

Parents asked that CPS and its schools provide full transparency by sharing comprehensive student performance data with families—not just celebrating the wins but also demonstrating where more support is needed for students who are furthest behind.

Generally, parents expressed a desire for more communication and cooperation between their kids' schools and parents.

“At our school, we have been having problems with unsafe traffic posing a danger to kids during drop off and pick up. After 97 emails and three years, we finally received a response but only approval that our school 'agrees to collaborate' on parent suggestions to consider security staff who could direct traffic,” said Lilia Guevara, an Acero-Garcia High School and Chicago Military Academy parent. “We're telling you what we need, how to fix it and it's still not happening. So if that's just with traffic safety, then what about things like academics and everything else?”

The parents also had demands for the newly-elected and soon-to-be-appointed CPS board members to put aside distractions and focus on implementing strategies that address the academic issues students are facing head-on.

“If the Elected School Board had the makeup of Local School Councils, we would have had guaranteed seats on the board for parents. They would be able to address the needs of our parents as well as our students,” said DePriest Elementary parent Claiborne Wade. “Without having guaranteed seats for parents, we can't be sure our perspective will be included. Parents can run, but without campaign spending limits they will be outspent.”

“What can the board do within its purview to make sure that parents are supported so that our kids can get what they need?” said Mykela Collins, a parent at Payton High School and Manierre Elementary School. “A lot of what we're seeing with social-emotional learning or the lack thereof in classrooms has to do with what did or didn't happen at home during COVID.”

Resources for schools and teachers has been a huge hurdle in the current CPS/CTU contract negotiations. While all students will be impacted in the battle for resources, parents of IEP students comprising 16% of the district are very concerned that their vulnerable kids will be left behind.

“If a student has an IEP and they're already behind, they're not going to catch up. They're saying we don't have the resources to pay for the teacher that the kids need or the help or the support that they need to be able to catch up,” said Guadalupe Ojeda, a Northwest Side parent with kids at Inter-American Elementary Magnet School and Senn High School. “So every six months or every year they meet and it's the same thing.”

Katrina Adams also felt that enrichment programs were not equitably distributed across CPS. She believes these types of programs help students catch up academically. Adams said, “Some CPS schools do have [enrichment programs]. People up North have enrichment programs at kindergarten and 1st grade. But on the South side, after-school programs and enrichment programs do not start [until] 5th and 6th grade. That is too late. Early exposure is the key.”

The parents made the point that any agreement must be fiscally responsible so as not to jeopardize the district's future. They also stressed that accountability *must* be at the heart of any new CTU contract. This accountability ranges from transparency around how schools and kids are performing to tying increased compensation to performance and student outcomes.

"I think that if we as a community demand that you just use what you've got in a way that works, that's what is important," said Maria Owens. "Of course, the more funding available, the better. But even without that, just take what you have and try to make it work."

"Figure out what's the best practices for students, because a lot of students are behind. Parents are not supported, schools are not supported," said Mykela Collins. "So we must get it through our head, that we're all a partnership. Our children won't prosper if we don't work together."

The following parents attended and were interviewed at the Roundtable:

- Katrina Adams, Burnside Scholastic Academy, South Side; STARR Community Service
- Maria Owens, Hirsch HS, South Side
- Clent Lewis, Moos Elementary, Northwest Side
- Claiborne Wade, DePriest Elementary, West Side
- Guadalupe Ojeda, Inter-American Elementary Magnet School, Senn HS, Northwest Side
- Lilia Guevara, Acero-Garcia HS, Chicago Military Academy, Southeast Side
- Cata Truss, Westinghouse College Prep, Michelle Clark, MTA, West Side
- Mykela Collins, Payton High School, Manierre Elementary School, South Side

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### **ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO**

Kids First Chicago's (K1C) 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. K1C supports Black and Latine parents in gaining the resources, access, and voice they need to achieve their vision for their children's education. K1C also 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. Visit [kidsfirstchicago.org](https://kidsfirstchicago.org).

## NOT INCLUDED IN RELEASE BUT FOR REFERENCE

### PARENT QUOTE BANK FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON VARIOUS TOPICS

#### Accountability

1. *"What accountability measures are we going to have to make sure? Because everything that they're dealing with is not really just necessarily related to the teacher's ability or inability to teach."*
2. *"The ball has been dropped. And I think that the parents right now should be the people picking the ball up, running with it, saying to the Chicago Board of Education, 'This is what our children need. This is what we'd like to see money being spent on.'"*

#### Communication with Parents

1. *"Once as parents we get that through our head that we are all a partnership as a school gets it through their head that we're all a partnership, our children won't prosper if we don't work together."*
2. *"There needs to be some communication and accountability for communication. If you don't communicate with capable parents, you can't get your rent."*
3. *"A lot of times the decisions are being made about our schools without ever asking us. And if you would take the time to ask the parents what they needed in their schools, I bet you they could tell you."*

#### Budget

1. *"I can't say strongly enough how important it is to properly and fiscally responsibly use what you have. There is waste and there's also favoritism bias." Maria Owens*
2. *"If each school is evaluated individually, you may realize that this school doesn't need \$50,000—they may need \$10,000. This school may need something different entirely." Katrina Adams*
3. *"When they closed 50 schools... you did not see an increase in services, educational development, or school outcomes. Even though there should have been millions of dollars diverted to areas where those schools were left open."*

#### Contract Negotiations

1. *"When you're talking about negotiating contracts and distributing your resources... how do we distribute our resources in a way that is fair and effective—not just to say we did something?"*
2. *"I think that some of the staff members that the board is asking for are necessary, but in terms of the things they're asking for, you have teacher assistants who can be trained to perform those duties without hiring someone at a higher salary."*

## COVID-related learning loss

1. *"Imagine when you are just about to go to kindergarten or pre-K for the pandemic hits. So that critical socialization from being at home or in daycare to being in a structured environment is ripped away. Fast forward—the first time your placement environment is not at five years old or six years old—the first time you're asked to sit in your seat, listen to the teacher, don't talk when you want, you're eight. It's not happening." Maria Owens*
2. *"I've seen 12-year-olds who cannot even read or sound out words... You have to take time to just get those basic things so they can even get to realizing the words and the rules in the English language."*
3. *"The sad part is that when the students came back to school to receive in-person classes, the teachers knew that all this loss in teaching was not going to be able to be covered. They knew right away."*
4. *"Early exposure is the key. If enrichment programs started at a young age, like kindergarten or first grade, they could catch students up. But waiting until fifth or sixth grade makes it too late to address all the catching up that needs to be done."*
5. *"During the pandemic, students with IEPs didn't get the resources or support they needed. They're already behind, and schools lack the resources to pay for the teachers or therapists to help them catch up." Guadalupe Ojeda*
6. *"What can the board do within its purview to make sure that parents are supported so that our kids can get what they need? A lot of what we're seeing with social-emotional learning or the lack thereof in classrooms has to do with what did or didn't happen at home during COVID."*
7. *"How do we find a way to engage those parents who are not logging on? Because a lot of the social-emotional learning issues happening in classrooms really stem from gaps created during the pandemic."*