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**KIDS FIRST
CHICAGO**

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Chicago's Enrollment Crisis

New analysis from Kids First Chicago shows changing demographics in the country's fourth largest school district

Chicago, IL – Today, Kids First Chicago (K1C) released the [third installment](#) in their multi-year *Enrollment Crisis* series, looking at the forces shaping Chicago Public Schools (CPS) enrollment and what they mean for students, families, and schools.

According to the official student count released by CPS, there are 316,224 students enrolled in CPS for 2025-26. This is a notable decline in enrollment of 9,000 fewer students than the year before. After two years of modest gains, CPS enrollment is once again on the decline.

“It’s essential to monitor Chicago’s student population as it continues to change in size, composition, and need,” said Daniel Anello, chief executive officer of Kids First Chicago. “Monitoring these trends over time helps us understand and plan for their impact on the student experience. Classroom resources, school programming, and the supports available to families are all on the line.”

Key findings of the report include:

- **Fewer Births, Fewer Students:** With fewer children being born in Chicago, and recent new-arrival growth leveling off, CPS is increasingly shaped by demographic forces outside the district’s control.
- **CPS’s Market Share Is Shrinking:** After holding steady for years, CPS is serving a shrinking share of Chicago’s school-age children, signaling that demographic change is now intersecting with shifting family preferences.
- **Early Grade Enrollment Trends and Their Implications:** The early grades provide the clearest signal of CPS’s long-term enrollment trajectory. Fewer children are entering kindergarten each year, producing smaller cohorts that move through the system and reshape the district from the youngest grades up.
- **West and South Side Neighborhoods See the Steepest Enrollment Declines:** Enrollment declines are unfolding unevenly across Chicago, with West and South Side neighborhoods experiencing the steepest losses due primarily to long-term population loss, while other areas remain relatively stable.
- **Black and Latine Enrollment Declines:** As CPS enrollment continues to fall, declines are concentrated among Black and Latine students. Latine enrollment dropped 4.7% this year—nearly 7,000 students—while Black enrollment fell 2.6%, or about 2,900 students. Meanwhile, White, Asian, and multiracial enrollment saw modest increases.
- **English Learners Dip as Special Education Grows:** After nearly a decade of growth, English Learner (EL) enrollment declined 2.9% this year, from a ten-year high of 88,807 to 86,172

students. Even so, ELs now make up over 27% of CPS enrollment, up from about 19% five years ago, and continue to drive increased state funding under Illinois' evidence-based funding formula. In contrast, special education enrollment has steadily risen, growing about 8% over three years to 54,846 students. Today, 17% of CPS students receive special education services, up from 14% five years ago.

For high-poverty districts like CPS, enrollment declines can be especially damaging. As budgets tighten, students often bear the consequences: schools may be forced to cut programs, electives, and extracurriculars, or reduce counseling, library, and mental health staff.

Looking Ahead

As enrollment continues to decline, Chicago's education system is being reshaped by demographic forces largely beyond the district's control—from fewer births to slower family in-migration—forcing difficult but necessary decisions about how best to serve students citywide. Closely tracking these shifts over time is essential to helping city and district leaders make informed choices that protect access to a high-quality, well-rounded education in every neighborhood.

Ultimately, these trends demand greater understanding and shared responsibility from all who care about Chicago's students—educators, policymakers, families, and funders alike—to confront what smaller schools mean for the young people learning inside them and to respond with clarity, equity, and purpose.

Read the full report, available in English and Spanish, at kidsfirstchicago.org/enrollment-crisis.

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BACKGROUND

In January 2022, Kids First Chicago (K1C) released [Chicago's Enrollment Crisis Part 1: Examining Root Causes](#), which analyzed CPS enrollment decline through a comprehensive analysis of available data including school enrollment, population, and census reports. Released in January 2024, the second part of the series, [Chicago's Enrollment Crisis: Adopting Parent-Led Solutions](#), examined the multifaceted issues identified by parents and caregivers as the top barriers related to Chicago keeping and attracting families.

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. Visit kidsfirstchicago.org.