

**January 17, 2024, Agenda Review Committee Meeting Written Comments
Received between Friday, January 12th and Thursday, January 18th Submitted via
Written Comments Form**

1	<p>My name is Melissa, and I am the Dean of Student and Family Engagement and a school social worker at Great Lakes Academy. I relocated from Minnesota to South Chicago three years ago, specifically to work at GLA. I was looking for a neighborhood school that prioritizes the holistic development of students and takes a proactive approach toward their welfare. We are doing that at GLA.</p> <p>All students at GLA receive Tier 1 MTSS Support in academics, behavior, social and emotional (SEL) skills, and attendance. They participate in daily SEL advisory lessons in their homerooms. GLA follows the evidence-based model of Leader in Me®, which empowers students with leadership and life skills, enabling them to become self-reliant, take initiative, manage their emotions, and resolve conflicts. Teachers and support staff analyze behavior and attendance data and select students to implement Tier 2 interventions, with the data being tracked on 8-week cycles.</p> <p>Structurally, we saw the need to increase counseling (Tier 2 and 3) support through social work. Last year, we hired an additional full-time social worker, and this year, we added a part-time Master’s in School Social Intern. Currently, the SW department supports 20% of the student body, 110 students. All interventions and supports are tracked with fidelity to determine if they lead to improved student and school outcomes.</p> <p>GLA provides additional therapeutic support to students beyond what school social workers can provide. The school has contracted with a national and a community organization to provide mental health support. Weekly, a caseload of students meets with their mental health clinician from Touch of Wholeness at GLA. Middle school students can meet one-on-one online with licensed mental health wellness coaches through OpenSeat.</p> <p>We are continuing to explore other resources for our students. We are currently working on initiating young men’s mentoring programming for our middle school students. Teachers and parents have witnessed the positive results that come with these supports. Thank you.</p>
2	<p>I am the Principal of Great Lakes Academy Charter School. Our Executive Director has attempted to get time during the Board’s office hours to discuss our renewal application in more detail but has been unable to do so, understandably, due to board members’ busy schedules.</p> <p>In our public messages, we have emphasized the strengths of our academic performance. However, our school has made substantial progress in other areas as well, particularly in the areas of school culture and student supports, and members of our leadership team want to tell that story to the Board in more detail as it considers final renewal decisions.</p> <p>As a part of our renewal application, we had to submit a supplemental disciplinary application because we were in the 79th percentile for out-of-school suspension rates. Last year, despite our attempts at proactivity and intervention with MTSS, our school was not immune to some of the issues with violence that national surveys show have been challenging schools the last couple of years. Although we only opted to use out-of-school suspensions when violent behaviors were severe enough that it caused concern</p>

for the safety of others, we were not pleased with being an outlier and saw it as a cause to reevaluate staffing and programming related to student culture.

We have made changes we have been implementing since last year and are now seeing their positive impacts on our school's culture and student well-being. As a result of our changes, we are on track to see a 50% decrease in the number of out-of-school suspensions this school year compared to last year, which should put us well within the 75th percentile baseline that was set for this renewal cohort. More importantly, this is directly tied to a decrease in the number of incidents that have led to such disciplinary responses.

We have heard lots of feedback from families of transfer students who note the difference in how safe their child feels at our school and how that is positively impacting their school experience. Our teaching approach to conflict resolution is a major part of it. Parents appreciate how we teach students to interact with each other and handle challenging situations. They also appreciate how we listen to students when they report they are having an issue and immediately take action to help them resolve the situation with other parties. We communicate with parents liberally and involve them in the process.

Ultimately, those feelings of safety from family and students are what matter the most.

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- 3 Good morning Board Members,
I am Jleese Williams, Dean of Culture and Climate at Great Lakes Academy. As the leader of our culture team, I am here to tell you about the steps we have taken to build and maintain a school culture where students can learn and thrive. I have worked in multiple schools in my career and GLA has, without a doubt, the most positive and safe school culture I have seen.
- Structure is essential to maintaining a safe and inclusive learning environment. We also believe that must be paired with an orientation toward creating joy in and out of classrooms, a robust system of student support, and strategic responses to behavior that breaks our school community's norms.
- We use a variety of practices to build school culture and respond to behavior, and many of these are rooted in the core tenets of restorative practices. We use restorative practices to teach students to take accountability for their actions and repair harm. Over time, this teaches students to foster empathy and it builds a sense of community within the school. When an incident occurs, we engage affected parties in open and honest conversations facilitated by a trained culture team member. Instead of merely imposing consequences, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and actively participate in creating solutions. This allows everyone involved to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns, fostering a deeper understanding of the situation. Moreover, restorative practices highlight the importance of accountability, one of our Be GREAT Virtues. This not only addresses immediate issues but also helps in preventing future occurrences by promoting personal growth and development. We also encourage our parents to play an active role in supporting our school culture by inviting them in for parent conferences, scholar shadows, and volunteering. We teach scholars how to resolve conflicts without using violence and learning to co-exist and be accepting of differences. Students benefit from understanding the principles of empathy, accountability, and conflict resolution.
- Restorative practices do not replace the need for boundaries and rules. Instead, they provide a more holistic approach to discipline—one that recognizes the complexities of human interactions and the potential for growth and learning even in challenging

situations. There are times when we use consequences, including out-of-school suspensions, as a part of addressing the most serious student behavior and carefully plan responses that will support victims and the safe and successful reintegration of the offending student into the school community. In Quarter 1, we issued 10 out-of-school suspensions, a number we felt was too high. Since then, the changes we have implemented have substantially reduced out-of-school suspensions and placed us on track to reduce those by over 50% when compared to last year. The reductions are not just a result of changing decisions about our responses, but they are tied to a significant decrease in unsafe behaviors which is our ultimate goal. This decrease is due to the proactivity the culture team takes in resolving conflicts, big or small, and consistently keeping our parents involved by providing positive spaces for families to engage. I know we are having success because I hear lots of positive feedback from parents of transfer students who notice the difference in how safe their child's experience is at GLA compared to their previous school.

4 Dear President Shi,
You repeatedly say that you and the Board would like to be accessible and to be transparent. Sadly, I don't see that in your action.
Many parents have made public comments on the busing crisis and the importance of financial relief at Agenda Meetings and Board Monthly Meetings since August. Why have you and CPS not done anything to make meaningful progress? Looking for more drivers isn't enough. Why is CPS so determined to not help the 5,500 students who lost promised transportation? Who is blocking it? Is it the Board, CEO Martinez, or you? As you know, 85% of the students that you're exploiting are from low-income households.

All it takes is \$12 Million to provide financial relief for the affected families for the rest of the school year. I know you can find the money if you are willing to help.

5 CPS is unique in the country in failing to bus. No district in the country cut busing as much as CPS, which eliminated busing from 5,500 students this school year. We're bussing 30% FEWER students this year. Why have other cities worked toward solutions and CPS has not despite its excessive spending. CPS is spending an average of \$15,000 for each student in transportation and still leaving 5500 students without a way to get to school or a financial relief. THIS IS FISCAL MISMANAGEMENT, and failure to deliver on promises.