

**October 18, 2023, Agenda Review Committee Meeting Written Comments
Received between Monday, October 16th and Thursday, October 19th Submitted
via Written Comments Form**

1 I'm writing to you as a parent of a CPS student, a native Chicagoan, and a Black mother concerned about my child's opportunity to fairly and equitably access a neighborhood high school option on the Near South side.

My daughter is currently a 5th grader at South Loop Elementary. We relocated back home to Chicago in 2021 (after 4 years away) from a neighboring state after experiencing a lack of diversity that negatively impacted my daughter's educational experience and socio-emotional development.

As a native Chicagoan, Black, from a lower middle class upbringing, it was critically important to me that my daughter's educational experience be diverse in all ways, welcoming, and supportive. My family very intentionally poured over school demographic reports, far more than academic ones, to find a school with a majority BIPOC population while still very diverse, with small class sizes, and a range of intellectually and socially stimulating activities.

We chose the South Loop community for that reason, despite having the resources to locate to comparable environments in Evanston or Oak Park and other neighborhoods with greater capital resources but less diversity, because we value diversity in all its forms and the experience that comes with growing up and navigating a city like Chicago and how it prepared me for the world at large.

It's for that reason that it has been extraordinarily disheartening to have my daughter's fair and equitable access to a neighborhood high school option, which is a standard in Chicago, be treated as negligible and negotiable.

Failure to ensure that students like my daughter have easy access to a neighborhood school to matriculate into creates an unnecessarily disruptive educational and social experience that is supposed to be at the heart of / guaranteed by a public education.

Failure to create a neighborhood school for the Near South requires parents and students to make the hard decision to either relocate out of the city, into other neighborhoods, or to apply for selective enrollment - magnet schools all of which in itself are forms of educational and social manipulation that only further stratifies and segregates students along academic, racial, and economic lines rather than serving the very real needs of the vibrant and diverse community of families that would feed into the Near South high school.

The fact that my child and many others will have to travel further than others (that do have the neighborhood option) to access education is a failure and unnecessary obstacle for kids and families that will impact attendance, participation in school activities, family involvement in schools, and the amount of time spent on studies and recharging each day.

I implore the school board to take a greater and more sustained look at how its inaction to move forward on a school will negatively impact this and future generations of students.

Further in a neighborhood that has undergone revitalization efforts by committed and diverse families over the last 30 years this lack of a neighborhood school will only drive flight which will lead to a recurrence of economic downturn and instability in the neighborhood which drives cyclical segregation and stratification and that's exactly the situation we moved back to Chicago to combat.

Rhetoric that discounts the needs of a significant population of racially and economically diverse Chicago students and intentionally puts them and their families at disadvantage to ease of access is appalling. I was born into the area bounded by the Ickes and Stateway Gardens, lived in multiple foster placements, a shelter, and eventually graduated from HS from a girls home so know exactly what's at stake. Easy access to education changes lives.

I would love an opportunity to discuss further how children in South Loop are impacted by a lack of neighborhood school within reach and look forward to hearing what solutions CPS will put in place to ensure equitable access.

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My name is Paul Wargaski and I'm a father at InterAmerican and Kenwood Academy Academic Center. With so much happening in the world today my problems seem small. My family is safe, my home secure, but I'm here because 8000 students lost their bussing weeks before school started. I'm here for those who can't be here.

Episode 562 of This American Life features Nikole Hanna-Jones discussing how desegregation thru bussing closed the achievement gap between African American Students and white students by 50%. Please listen to the episode if you have a chance. Bussing connects students who have a desire to learn with quality teachers, quality instruction and quality administration.

The below excerpt is from the Illinois Compiled Statutes 105.ILCS 5/34-18 (7)

The board shall take into consideration the prevention of segregation and the elimination of separation of children.... The board of education's open enrollment plan must include provisions that allow low-income students to have access to transportation needed to exercise school choice.

A bus driver shortage does not give us a pass not to provide that, and there is not a shortage of seats on those buses. For the start of school we had a little less than 700 bus drivers and 7000 students routed on those buses. About 10 students to every driver. We can do better. A large bus holds 45 and a smaller one 20. Those seats can be optimized and our students need us to do better. Offering stipends to families in groups B & C will also help ease the pressure on the district and families until we can get their kids routed. You can tap any of the yellow shirts in this room to help with this, they are excellent problem solvers and some of the smartest people I have ever met.

In conclusion, I think Mr. Martinez said it best the other day:

At CPS, we value and recognize the importance of dual-language immersion programs. These programs expose students to diverse perspectives and approaches to learning, ultimately preparing them for a globalized world.

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| | <p>In my own words: I know that in your hearts you want to give students a 'Seat at the table', but they can't get there unless you give them a seat on the bus.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Can the board please look into Tier assignments for the neighborhoods? Many neighborhood demographics have changed. Many kids in Tier 4 have to achieve perfect grades and perfect scores because of where their parents rent not own their houses. Thank you!</p> |
| 4 | <p>What happened to all of the drivers and busses from last year? Were they all fired? Shame on CPS for not getting ahead of this problem and summarily ending bussing right before the school year started, and putting the burden on families,.and adding to the traffic problems in the city from parents having to drive. You don't get to encourage "school choice" without providing bussing.</p> |
| 5 | <p>I'd like to request CPS to reinstate transportation for general education students at Selective Enrollment and Magnet schools or offer stipends, not just Ventra cards.</p> <p>I am an immigrant. My family is a biracial, multilingual immigrant family living in the West Side. Our neighborhood school does not have the capacity to serve Gifted children. In fact, it was my child's teachers at our neighborhood Pre-K who strongly encouraged us to apply for Gifted programs. Since all the Selective Enrollment schools are at least 3 miles away from our home, the promise of bussing was a key factor when we decided to send our son to McPherson IB Regional Gifted Center. For two years, my son took the bus with Diverse Learners.</p> <p>I would like to be clear that I support prioritizing transportation for DLs and Students in Temporary Living situations (STL). But, prioritizing and excluding are two different things. I've been told by a Transportation personnel that my son cannot get on the bus even if we had a nextdoor neighbor who is a DL and is being routed to the same school. How is that a good policy? Why not optimize existing routes to provide bussing to as many students as you can?</p> <p>It is no secret that Chicago is segregated. Selective Enrollment and Magnet programs are essential components for equity in education in Chicago. Transportation is absolutely essential to maintain equity in these programs. We need to be making it EASIER, not Harder, to access these specialized programs.</p> <p>President Shi and the members of the Board, please take action now. Show us that you care about the success of our children. Thank you.</p> |
| 6 | <p>Our children love Their school but we need transportation or stipends to get them to and from school. Today I drove 4.5 hours to take 5 children from three families. I survived two cancers and chemotherapy and radiation but I don't I can continue with this route. The parents are working and trying to keep a roof over their heads. Can at least fill those empty buses?!</p> |

ATTACHMENT

Chicago Board of Education Agenda Meeting

October 18th, 2023

My name is Natasha Haque. My pronouns are she/her. I'm advocating for my 11-year-old, who like thousands of her peers has been abandoned by CPS' transportation mismanagement. I speak on behalf of my partner who spends hours on the road daily, driving our 6th grader and a first grader to and from their school.

Guess what happens on the days when my partner falls sick. Our daughter and her school mate are absent from school. That's right, students are missing school days not only when they're sick but also when the adult in charge of their safe transportation falls ill.

The current situation in all our households is not sustainable. We, the CPS Parents for Buses (or CPfB for short) will NOT be ignored.

I implore CPS to take responsibility for their mismanagement of what's been known for years as a "bus driver shortage". It's time to stop using it as an excuse to avoid your duty towards Chicago's children. Show us that you are open to our ideas in developing an immediate, short-term and long-term plan for protecting equity of access to public education.

We ask CPS to fairly compensate, with cash stipends, ALL families who have been and continue to be impacted by the lack of school buses. If CPS has funds to raise bus driver hourly rates, and pay for buses, some currently operating with 90% of their seats empty, then CPS has the funds to provide monetary compensation to struggling families immediately AND retroactively.

Also, since CPS has been working to hire more bus drivers, I ask for transparency of the process. Please add "Transportation Update" to the October 25th Board of Education meeting agenda, so CPS Transportation can report on how many more bus drivers have been hired and how many routes have been added since the September 28th Board meeting.

Thank you for your time.