

Monday, April 17, 2023
Virtual Hearing – 6 p.m.

To: Chicago Elected School Board Senate Committee Members
From: Jodie Cantrell, Chief Public Affairs Officer, Illinois Network of Charter Schools
Subject: Chicago Elected School Board District Mapping

Good evening, Chair Lightford, Vice-Chair Martwick, Vice-Chair Acquino, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jodie Cantrell and I am the Chief Public Affairs Officer at the Illinois Network of Charter Schools. INCS is a statewide membership organization representing 114 public charter schools in the City of Chicago, educating nearly 55,000 students. As background, 1 in every 4 high school students in CPS attends a charter school and 1 in every 8 elementary students in CPS attends a charter school. 98% of students in charter schools identify as students of color and 86% qualify for free or reduced lunch, compared to the district-run school enrollment in CPS of 86% students of color and 77% of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Charter public schools have been a part of the CPS family of schools for over 25 years and have successfully been a part of providing families with a high-quality public school option in their neighborhoods that have led to increased high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and college completion rates for students across the city. Charter schools have served as community hubs throughout the pandemic and supported families and community members with resources, technology, health supplies, food, and mental health and wellness supports as students and children continue to recover academically and emotionally. The charter community has and always will stand ready and willing to engage and collaborate to ensure CPS is a world-class educational system for our city's students and families. They deserve nothing less.

That is why we believe strongly that representation matters and we look forward to engaging parents, school communities, charter alumni, voters, CPS staff, legislators, and broader Chicago residents in these critical upcoming conversations as CPS transitions to a newly elected school board. Our hope is for a process, starting with these district maps, that ensures all voices and stakeholders are brought to the table and there is strong, fair representation across the city.

Now and always, lawmakers should make sure equity is front and center for the CPS board structure. And all decision-makers must center the needs of students first. Because of this, INCS has joined a coalition of other education advocates to call for lawmakers to use this opportunity to bring greater equity to the new elected school board in Chicago by making two changes before the maps are drawn.

First, lawmakers should consider reducing the Chicago Board of Education to 9 seats. It would recognize that CPS is the largest district in the state and bring it into the range of sizes of many other public boards. At 21 members, Chicago's school board would be triple the size of other Illinois school boards and at least twice the size of most public boards serving Chicagoans and statewide. For example, CTA has seven members, the State Board of Education has eight, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District has nine. This large CPS board size may make it difficult for board members to make timely, actionable, and student-centered decisions and cost CPS significantly more taxpayer dollars to ensure board members have the resources necessary to make student-centered decisions. These dollars could

otherwise be allocated toward the classroom at a time when student needs are increasing and federal dollars are drying up.

Second, state law prohibits school board members from being paid. Having to serve without pay gives the wealthy and well-connected an advantage. By allowing for compensation, the reality of serving on the board will be more realistic for parents, CPS alumni, and others who are called to public service but may not have the means to volunteer.

We appreciate your time today and we look forward to working with you and engaging in this process as CPS transitions to the newly elected school board.

Thank you.

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