



# Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

## Public Comments To The Senate Special Committee On the Chicago Elected Representative School Board Regarding the First Draft Of the New Chicago Elected Representative School Board Districts May 12, 2023

*These written comments were made pursuant to oral testimony provided by Valerie F. Leonard to the Senate Special Committee on the Chicago Elected Representative School Board, held at via Zoom on May 9, 2023; remarks made to the House Executive Committee, held at Curie High School on May 6, 2023 and subsequent conversations with community leaders from the Asian, Latino and Black communities, including the IAAFER Strategy Committee; review of the literature regarding elected school board districts; review of the redistricting plan for the Oakland, California City Council and Oakland Unified School District.*

### **Introduction**

We thank the members of the Illinois Senate Special Committee On the Chicago Elected Represented School Board for your role in bringing the idea of an elected school board in Chicago to reality. My name is Valerie Leonard, the co-founder of members of Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting (IAAFER). IAAFER is an ad hoc group of Black leaders across various sectors that came together in 2020 to ensure that our most recent redistricting process was implemented taking into account issues of concern to Black people around the State.

### **What We Have Found**

*In The Congruence of American School Districts with Other Local Government Boundaries: A Google-Earth Exploration*, William A. Fischel, Professor of Economics Dartmouth College noted that there are advantages to having school district and city boundaries match up, even though the two are governed by different elected officials. If a city's borders match up with the local school district borders (coterminous), it has an incentive to consider the consequences of its zoning decisions, since the same set of voters—city and school district—will be affected by them. Coordination of city services that affect the school district is also more easily done if city and district match up. (Fischel, 2007) Chicago's School District 299 is unified and shares the same borders as the City, creating opportunities for collaboration and streamlining government.

Some municipalities, like the City of Oakland, use the same geographic boundaries for its city council and board of education. Each district has one representative on city council and one representative for the local school board. There have been suggestions that Chicago consider a

similar arrangement. However, given that the city has 50 wards, that option, while providing optimal representation, could prove to be impractical. Another alternative, nesting up to 5 wards in a single board of education district could be effective in keeping communities of interest together, fostering collaboration between government entities and streamlining city services.

### **Our Views On The Legislature's Mapping Proposal**

**We have reviewed your proposed map of 20 districts and reject it as a non-starter.**

1. Your proposal includes 20 districts when the law provides for the creation of 10 districts with 2 representatives each for the 2024 election. The spokesperson for the virtual hearing on May 5, 2023 indicated that the Legislature would be creating 10 districts. For purposes of elections conducted pursuant to subsection (b-5) of Section 34-3, the City of Chicago shall be subdivided into 10 electoral districts for the 2024 elections and into 20 electoral districts for the 2026 elections. Each district must be compact, contiguous, and substantially equal in population and consistent with the Illinois Voting Rights Act.
2. This mapping proposal does not indicate whether the 20 districts will be coupled for the 2024 election. The law provides that the Mayor will appoint 11 persons, including the President, and 1 person from each of the 10 districts. It is not clear how this is possible, given the configuration of the map. We are left with the following questions:
  - a. Will the Mayor appoint 10 people to fill the vacancies of 10 districts while 10 of the districts will hold elections in 2024?
  - b. Will the 20 districts be coupled, so that we effectively have 10 districts?
  - c. If the districts will be coupled, what will that pairing look like?
3. The mapping proposal provides no data to support the boundaries other than the total population. We have no way of verifying the racial composition of the various districts you have proposed.
4. Only 11 of 50 (22%) Chicago wards have their boundaries fully contained within the school district boundaries that you proposed. Given there are 50 wards and 20 districts, one would expect an approximate ratio of 2.5 wards to each district. In other words, ideally, 40 of 50 wards (80%) should have their boundaries fully contained in a school district, given 20 districts.
5. Your proposal completely disregards existing wards as communities of interest. You have effectively dismantled 39 of 50 established communities in favor of 10 electoral school districts that have been untested. Your map calls for some wards to be spread over 3 districts, some to be spread over 4 districts, and some over 6 or 7 districts. One of the results is the map presents several instances in which little pockets of voters are pulled away from the center of gravity of their wards, into a school district where they couldn't begin to make an impact on the outcome of the election because their area is too small. The chances of being heard by their elected officials on educational issues is significantly reduced.

6. Most wards are divided such that their land mass is spread across several school board districts. It could be as few as three or as many as five. It's not clear what will happen when we as voters go to the polls. Will we have to vote for candidates in multiple school board electoral districts, or will we only see candidates on the ballots whose districts have some land mass in our ward? What happens to those of us who live in areas where we happen to be separated from the rest of our wards, and are only a very small section of a larger school district that is culturally and politically different from our wards? Your proposal clearly does not provide every voter in Chicago equal opportunity to elect candidates of their own choosing.
7. Your proposal does not make it easy for Aldermen and Board of Education members to collaborate effectively or for the public to hold our elected officials accountable. With so many seemingly unrelated boundaries, service requests are bound to slip between the cracks.

### **Our Ask**

Given that the enabling legislation for the Chicago Elected Representative Elected School Board addresses governance issues, in addition to election operations, we respectfully request the following:

1. **Create a standing African American Affairs Committee of the Board of Education to prioritize problems that are unique to African American children and their families.** The committee would interface with other Board committees, CPS and local stakeholders to improve academic outcomes for Black children and create an environment for CPS and its schools that is welcoming to parents and community stakeholders. The Board Committee would be chaired and co-chaired by members of the Board of Education, with advisory members who may be selected from the community, Local School Councils, Parent Advisory Councils, the faith community, the business sector, the civic sector, local universities, etc. This structure would not impact the size of the Board of Education or provide an undue expense to implement.

**Rationale:** The Chicago Public Schools population is nearly a third Black, and our children are suffering from entrenched problems that have only been exacerbated by closing 50 schools in 2013 and shutting down from the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020-2021. Black children, as a group have suffered significant learning loss, trauma, isolation and reduction in social and emotional supports, economic loss and health and safety concerns. Here are some very stark examples:

- a. In 2021, 80% of Black children graduated from high school in 5 years, as compared to 85% of Hispanic children; 91% of White children and 92% of Asian children. (Block Club Chicago, 2021)
- b. African Americans comprised 36% of Chicago Public Schools but accounted for up to 61% of the 19,799 school suspensions in 2021. (Julian Johnson, Esq., 2021)  
Today, Black children only comprise 29% of the CPS population.(CPS 2023)

- c. African American children accounted for 63% of the 2,244 school referrals to police. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the detainees in the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center are Black. It costs \$4,397 per year to educate a child in CPS (Julian Johnson, Esq., 2021) and \$28,196 per year to detain them in the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center (National Juvenile Justice Network 2011).
- d. Between March 8<sup>th</sup> and March 12, 2021, a daily average of 89% of White students showed up to in-person classes, compared with daily averages of 77% for Latino students and 60% for Black students during that same period. Asian students had a daily in-person attendance average of 83%. (Matt Masterson, WTTW, 2021)
- e. Approximately 88% of school actions (ie, school closings, turnarounds, removing principals, etc.) have occurred at predominantly African American Schools. (CTU, 2013) These actions alone have disrupted student learning and further destabilized Black communities that have endured decades of disinvestment.
- f. A WBEZ investigative report has found that since the pandemic, the need for mental health services has increased, particularly for students from very low income families, many of whom are Black. The state is failing to ensure thousands of children get any follow-up help after mental assessments, let alone the type of intensive behavioral health support many need. Senator Lightford has called for public hearings and the creation of a 15-member task force to better understand the problems explore the issue, (including operational, programmatic and financial issues surrounding the program). (Sarah Karp, WBEZ, 2023)

These problems persist despite the fact that there are board committees to address the needs of all CPS students and their families. We need a standing committee that is laser focused on moving the needle on the issues that keep Black students from meeting their potential. We have attached a proposed governance structure, including the new African American Affairs Committee.

**1. Adopt our mapping proposal, which was developed taking into account the following criteria:**

- a. Each district must be compact, contiguous and substantially equal in population and consistent with the Illinois Voting Rights Act, pursuant to Public Act 102-0177.
- b. Communities of interest will be kept intact to the fullest extent possible
- c. School Board electoral districts will be aligned with other political and educational districts to the fullest extent possible. This will allow community residents and local leaders to coordinate policy advocacy efforts that may require interaction with multiple layers of government.

To this end, we have shared 3 alternative mapping proposals that include 10 districts, each comprised of 5 contiguous wards. To the extent possible, wards are clustered together by their majority/plurality racial composition. Our preferred alternative is Alternative 1, which includes 3 majority/plurality Black districts, 3 majority/plurality Latino districts and 4 majority/plurality White districts. We reviewed the other alternatives and found that they only provided 2 majority Latino districts. These alternatives represent the evolution of our analyses over time, and take into account

discussions we have had with leaders from the Asian, Latino and Black communities. We have shared Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 in previous remarks to this body. Alternative 1, which has never been shared publicly, is the most recent. Because ward boundaries were vetted for compliance with the VRA during the most recent redistricting process, we expect the proposed map to pass legal muster.

While we believe any of these maps can pass legal muster, there are limitations. For example, Chicago is 29% Black, 29% Latino, 33% White and 8% Asian and others. The CPS population is approximately 36% Black; 47% Latino, 11.0% White and 6% Asian and others. Our methodology resulted in a map with 40% of the districts that are majority/plurality Black; 30% that are majority/plurality Latino and 30% that are majority/plurality White. At the root of this challenge is the fact that the law requires that elected representative school board boundaries be apportioned based on the Census and that districts must be of approximately equal size. This is a situation that is worth further exploration with the Legislature and expert demographers and legal counsel.

**2. Keep the 10 Elected Representative School Board Districts In Tact in 2026.**

Rather than expand the number of school districts to 20, keep the number at 10, with 2 elected representatives. This will be less expensive than operating 10 districts, and the boundaries may be drawn in a manner that maintains better accountability. It's much easier to account for 5 wards per district with 10 electoral districts than to account for 20 districts comprised of 2.5 or more districts.

In closing, we thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions regarding this statement, please feel free to contact Valerie F. Leonard, Co-Founder, Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting, at 773-571-3886 or [valeriefleonard@msn.com](mailto:valeriefleonard@msn.com). Our proposed board structure and mapping proposal are attached.

*Valerie F. Leonard*

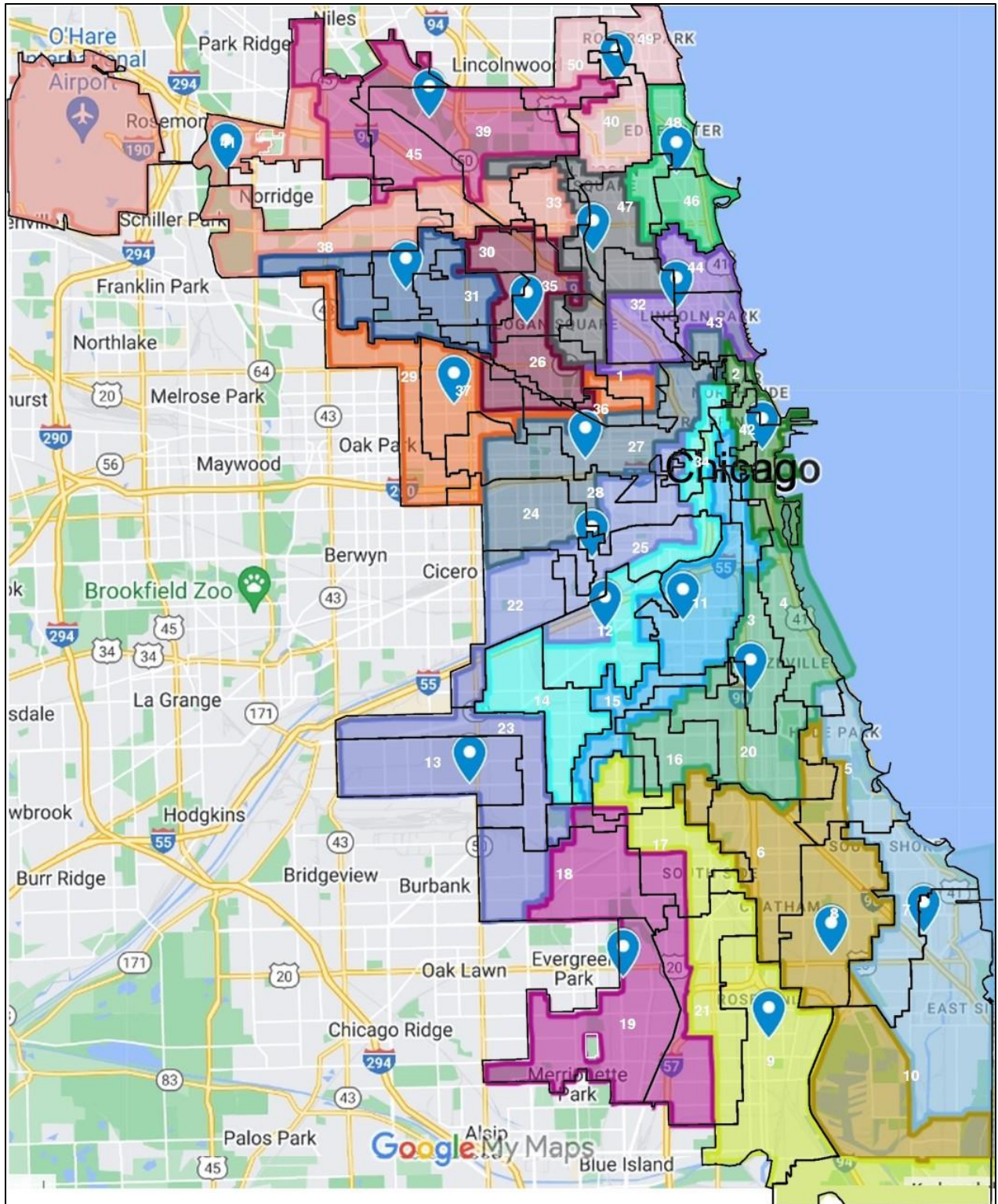
Co-Founder  
Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting

**Members of the IAAFER Strategy Committee Include:**

Tina Augustus, Founder, Westside Chamber of Commerce  
Natasha Dunn, Founder, Black Community Collaborative Illinois  
Dr. Carmen Palmer, PhD, Founder, Educational Village Keepers (EDVK)  
Dwayne Truss, Founder, PACE  
Craig Wimberly, President, COAL



**Exhibit 1. State Legislature's Proposed Map of  
20 ERSB Districts With Chicago Ward Boundaries Overlaid**



Data Sources: City of Chicago Ward Shape Files;  
State Legislature's proposed map of Chicago ERSB districts May 5, 2023.

**Exhibit 2. Analysis of the  
State Legislature’s Proposed  
Map of 20 ERSB Districts  
Wards Mapped to Proposed Districts**

<b>District</b>	<b>Wards</b>	<b>Number of Wards</b>	<b>Notes</b>
A	45,39,50	3	No wards have 100% land mas in District B.
B	41,38,45,33	4	No wards have 100% land mas in District B.
C	50, 40, 49	3	100% of 49th Ward is in District C. A sliver of District A cuts through the 50th Ward. An area of approximately 20 blocks of District A cuts through the 40th Ward.
D	46,47,48	3	The 46th and 48th Wards have 100% land mass in District D. About 40% of the 47th Ward's land mass is in District D.
E	26, 35, 30, 31	4	None of the wards is fully contained in District E.
F	30, 31,36, 38, 26, 35	6	None of the wards is fully contained in District F.
G	1, 24,27,28, 36, 37, 29	7	Only the 29th and 37th wards are fully contained in District G.
H	24, 28, 27, 1, 36	5	None of the wards is completely contained in District H.
I	32, 43, 44, 2, 1	3	District 44 is the only district that is fully contained in District I.
J	47,32,1, 26	4	None of these wards is fully contained in District J.
K	14,12, 25,34	3	None of these wards is fully contained in District K.
L	22, 24, 25, 28,12,27	6	None of these wards is fully contained in District L.
M	3,11,12,15,28,34,42	7	None of these wards is fully contained in District M.
N	2, 42	3	The 2nd Ward is fully contained in District N.
O	23, 13, 22,18	4	The 13th and 23rd wards are fully contained in District O.
P	17, 18, 19, 21	4	The 19th Ward is fully contained in District P.
Q	3,4, 20, 18, 15	5	None of these wards is fully contained in District Q.
R	16, 17, 21, 9	4	The 9th Ward is the only ward with all of its land mass in District R.
S	4,5,7,10	4	None of these wards is fully contained in District S. However, apparently all of the 7th Ward, with the exception of about 20 blocks is in District S.
T	5, 6, 8, 10	4	Only the 8th Ward is fully contained in District T.

Analysis by Valerie F. Leonard

Data Sources: City of Chicago Ward Shape Files;

State Legislature’s proposed map of Chicago ERSB districts May 5, 2023.

Ward	Districts	Number of Districts	Notes
1	G, H, I, J	4	A small pocket of the 1st Ward is in District H. A sliver of the Ward is in District I. Approximately 20% of the Ward is in District G, with the remaining 40% being in District J.
2	N, I	1	The 2nd Ward is fully contained in District N.
3	Q, M, N	3	Most of the Ward is in District Q, with a sliver located in District M and a pocket in District N.
4	S, Q, N	3	The majority of the 4th Ward's land mass is in District Q, with a pocket in District S, and about a third of the land mass in District N.
5	S, T	2	About 60% of the 5th Ward's land mass is in District S, with about 40% in District T.
6	R, Q, T	3	Approximately 8 blocks in the 6th Ward are in District Q. A pocket of about 30 blocks within the 6th Ward are in District R. The majority of the land mass is in District T.
7	S, T	2	All but about 20 blocks total from the 7th Ward are in District S. There are 2 pockets on the western border that are in District T.
8	T	1	The 8th Ward is fully contained in District T.
9	R	1	The 9th Ward is fully contained in District R.
10	S, T	2	About half of the 10th Ward land mass is in District S, with the other half being in District T.
11	M, K	2	Essentially all of the 11th Ward is in District M, with the exception of about 4 blocks. Those blocks are in District K.
12	K, L, M	3	About 75% of the 12th Ward is in District K, with about 20% in District L and 5% in District M.
13	L	1	All of the 13th Ward is within the District L boundaries.
14	K	1	All of the 14th Ward is within the District K boundaries.
15	M, Q, R	3	Approximately 75% of the 15th Ward's land mass is within the District M boundaries. About 22% of the land mass is within the District Q boundaries, with the remaining few blocks left in District R.
16	M, Q, R, T	4	Most of the Ward is in Districts Q and R, with a pocket in District T and very few blocks in District M.
17	L, P, R, T	4	The majority of the 17th Ward's land mass is in District R, with a few blocks in 2 pockets in District T, and a pocket in District L.
18	P, L	2	About 60% of the 18th Ward's land mass is in District P, with 40% in District L.
19	P	1	The entire 19th Ward is in District P.
20	M, Q, T	3	The 20th Ward has the majority of its land mass in District Q, with pockets in Districts M and T.
21	P, R	2	The 21st Ward's land mass is about evenly split between Districts P and R.
22	H, L	2	About 95% of the 22nd Ward's land mass is in District L, with about 5% in District H.
23	L	1	All of the 23rd Ward is within the District L boundaries.
24	G, H, L	3	About 70% of the 24th Ward's land mass is in District 8 with the remaining 30% split between G and L.
25	L, K	2	The 25th Ward's land mass is split about a 70%-30% between Districts L and K, respectively.



Ward	Districts	Number of Districts	Notes
26	E, J, I, G	4	The predominant District is District E, with very small land areas contained in Districts J, I and G.
27	K, H, G	3	The 27th Ward has land mass in Districts K, H, G and E, with the largest portion being in District H.
28	H,L, K,M	4	Most of the 28th Ward's land mass is in Districts H and M, with pockets in K and L
29	G	1	The 29th Ward is fully contained in District G.
30	A,B,E	3	About 20% of the land mass of te 30th Ward is in District E, 30% in District B and 50% in District A
31	E, F	2	Approximately 80% of the 31st Ward land mass is in District F; 20% in District E.
32	I, J	2	About 1/3 of the 32nd Ward's land mass is in District J, with 2/3 in District I.
33	B, E, J	3	The predominant District is District B, with very small land areas contained in Districts E and J.
34	K,L	2	The majority of the 34th Ward's land mass is in District K, with a pocket in L.
35	B, E, J	3	The predominant District is District E, with very small land areas contained in Districts J and B.
36	E, F, G, H	4	No ward has 100% land mass in the 36th Ward
37	G	1	The 37th Ward is fully contained in District G.
38	A, B	2	About 95% of the 38th Ward land mass is in District B, with about 5% in District A
39	A,J, B	3	Approximately 8 Blocks in 39th Ward are in B. Approximately 24 Blocks in 39th Ward are in J. Number of blocks is an estimate, not verified.
40	A, C	2	About 95% of the 40th Ward's land mass is in District C, with the remaining 5% in District A.
41	A, B	2	About 10% of the 41st Ward land mass is in District
42	M, N	2	About half of the 42nd Ward land mass is in District M, with the other half being in District N.
43	I, H, N	3	Most of the 43rd Ward is in District I, with pockets of the Ward in Districts H and N.
44	I	1	The 44th Ward is totally contained in District I.
45	A, B	2	Approximately 33% of the 45th Ward is in District B, with 66% in District A , and 90% in District B.
46	D	1	100% of the 46th Ward land mass is in District D.
47	D,J	2	About 40% of the 47th Ward land mass is in District D, with 60% in District J.
48	D	1	100% of the 48th Ward land mass is in District D.
49	C	1	100% of the 49th Ward land mass is in District C.
50	A, C	2	A strip of District A goes through the 50th Ward. There are 2 somewhat isolated pockets of District C on the east and south borders of a few blocks each.

Analysis by Valerie F. Leonard

Data Sources: City of Chicago Ward Shape Files;

State Legislature's proposed map of Chicago ERSB districts, May 5, 2023.

Exhibit 3. Proposed Chicago Board of Education Structure

# Proposed Chicago Board of Education Structure

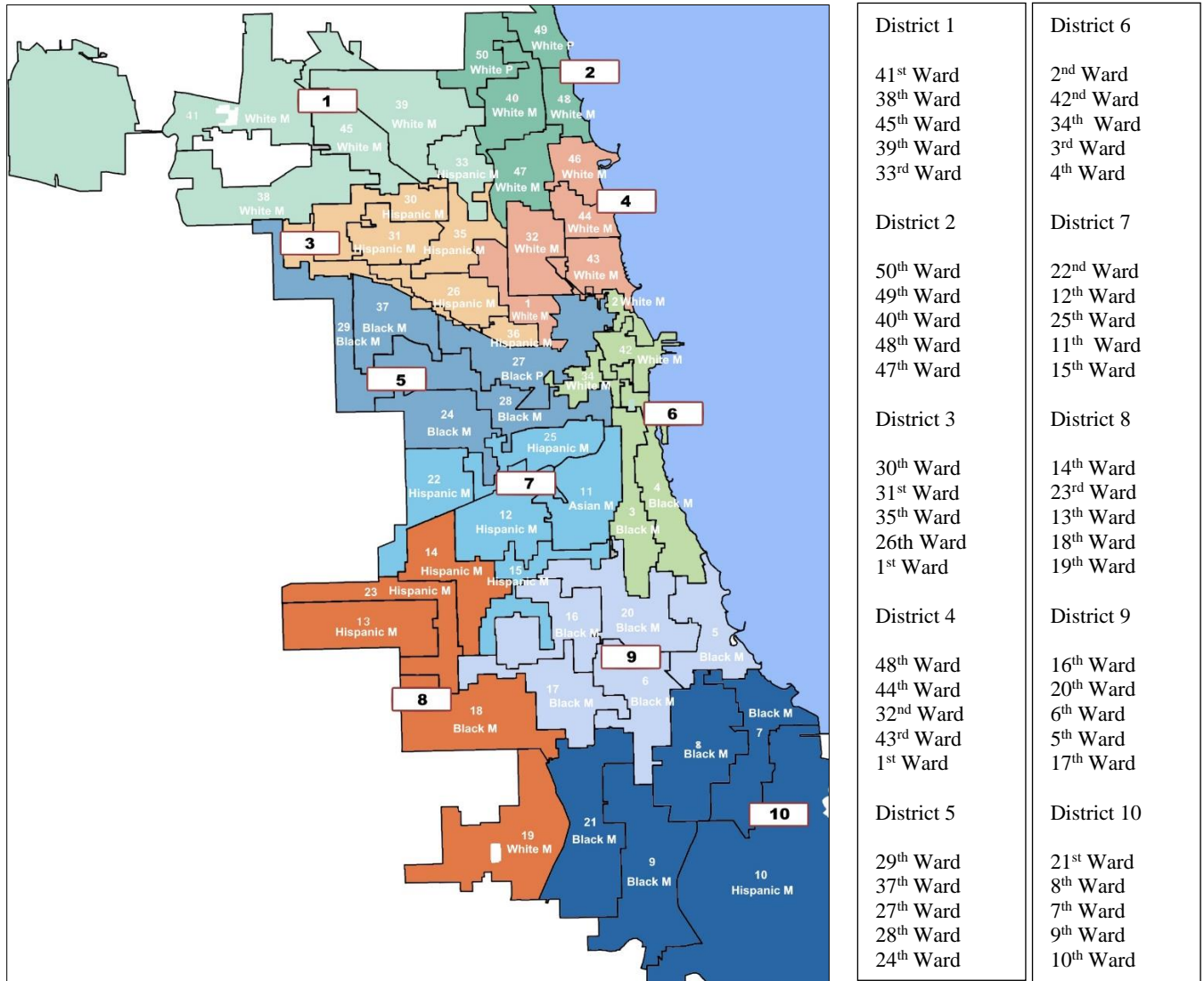


**Exhibit 4. Mapping Alternatives  
(On the following pages)**



# Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

## Proposed Elected School Board Boundaries for Chicago Public Schools Alternative 1



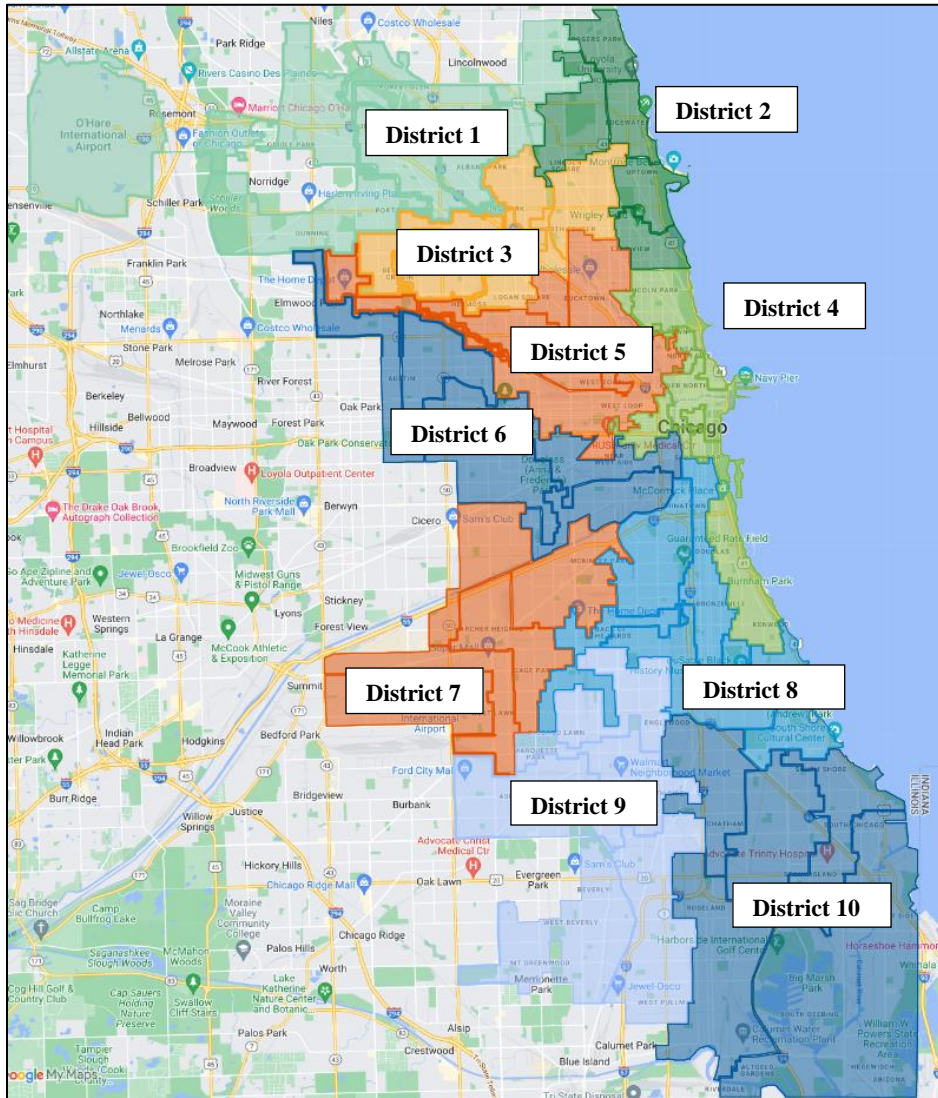
Author: Craig Wimberly, President COAL Chicago.  
Data Sources: City of Chicago, U.S. Census Bureau

This map was drawn to align CPS Elected School Board districts with specific wards for greater accountability and coordination with members of the City Council while maintaining racial equity and balance. Ward boundaries were vetted for compliance with the VRA during the most recent redistricting process.



# Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

## Proposed Elected School Board Boundaries for Chicago Public Schools Alternative 2



District 1	District 6
41 <sup>st</sup> Ward	29 <sup>th</sup> Ward
38 <sup>th</sup> Ward	37 <sup>th</sup> Ward
45 <sup>th</sup> Ward	28 <sup>th</sup> Ward
39 <sup>th</sup> Ward	24 <sup>th</sup> Ward
50 <sup>th</sup> Ward	25 <sup>th</sup> Ward
District 2	District 7
40 <sup>th</sup> Ward	22 <sup>nd</sup> Ward
49 <sup>th</sup> Ward	12 <sup>th</sup> Ward
48 <sup>th</sup> Ward	14 <sup>th</sup> Ward
46 <sup>th</sup> Ward	23 <sup>rd</sup> Ward
44 <sup>th</sup> Ward	13 <sup>th</sup> Ward
District 3	District 8
30 <sup>th</sup> Ward	11 <sup>th</sup> Ward
31 <sup>st</sup> Ward	3 <sup>rd</sup> Ward
35 <sup>th</sup> Ward	20 <sup>th</sup> Ward
33 <sup>rd</sup> Ward	5 <sup>th</sup> Ward
47 <sup>th</sup> Ward	15 <sup>th</sup> Ward
District 4	District 9
43 <sup>rd</sup> Ward	16 <sup>th</sup> Ward
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ward	17 <sup>th</sup> Ward
42 <sup>nd</sup> Ward	18 <sup>th</sup> Ward
34 <sup>th</sup> Ward	19 <sup>th</sup> Ward
4 <sup>th</sup> Ward	21 <sup>st</sup> Ward
District 5	District 10
36 <sup>th</sup> Ward	6 <sup>th</sup> Ward
26 <sup>th</sup> Ward	8 <sup>th</sup> Ward
1 <sup>st</sup> Ward	7 <sup>th</sup> Ward
32 <sup>nd</sup> Ward	9 <sup>th</sup> Ward
27 <sup>th</sup> Ward	10 <sup>th</sup> Ward

Author: Valerie F. Leonard, Co-Founder, Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting.  
Data Sources: City of Chicago Data Portal, Google My Maps

This map was drawn to align CPS Elected School Board districts with specific wards for greater accountability and coordination with members of the City Council while maintaining racial equity and balance. Ward boundaries were vetted for compliance with the VRA during the most recent redistricting process. A link to the map on Google My Maps is found below.

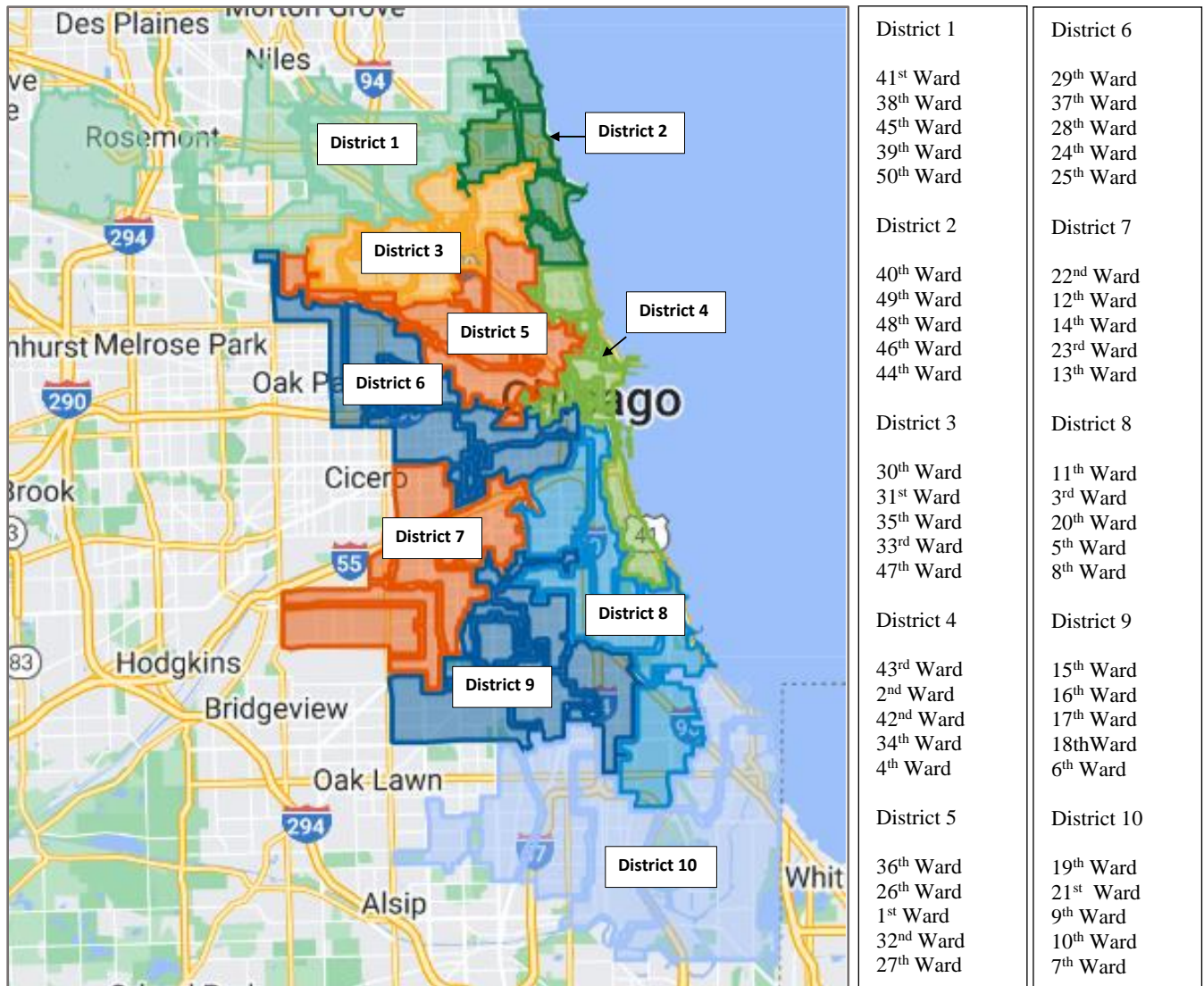
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1p6oaDMbREAJXzekNERRgdtLgJrHMySk&usp=sharing>





# Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

## Proposed Elected School Board Boundaries for Chicago Public Schools Alternative 3



Author: Valerie F. Leonard, Co-Founder, Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting.  
Data Sources: City of Chicago Data Portal, Google My Maps

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<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1p6oaDMbREAJXzekNERRgdtLgJrHMySk&usp=sharing>