

## Education Priorities for Chicago's Next Mayor

Chicago students have posted impressive academic achievement gains in recent years. Stanford researcher Sean Reardon found that Chicago students are making faster gains on elementary school achievement exams than 96% of districts nationwide. And more Chicago Public Schools students are graduating high school, going on to college and obtaining postsecondary credentials. The gains are noteworthy, especially given the district's financial challenges. However, progress has been uneven, with low-income and students of color continuing to lag far behind their white and wealthier counterparts in both academic achievement and life outcomes. Moreover, steep declines in student population mean the district has an excess of more than 130,000 classroom seats, creating thorny academic and budgetary challenges for the next mayor.

The Joyce Foundation supports policies that ensure the next generation has equitable access to high-quality education and jobs, especially young people of color and those from low-income communities. We focus on policies that ensure K–12 students attend schools with high-quality educators, graduate high school with the momentum they need to be successful in college, and attain college credentials that lead to good jobs. To that end, here are our top suggestions for Chicago's next mayor:

1. **Increase the number of low-income students and students of color who have highly effective teachers.** Research consistently shows teacher quality is the main in-school driver of student success. This is especially true for students of color and low-income students, who often have the most inexperienced and least effective teachers. To ensure strong educators for every classroom, the city should hire a high-caliber and diverse workforce and ensure teachers are properly prepared, receive meaningful evaluations, and get the support and career opportunities they need to be successful.
  - Chicago should bolster CPS' Teach Chicago program, which aims to grow a highly effective and diverse teaching force, especially for Opportunity Schools (50 hard-to-staff schools in low-income communities.) Teach Chicago already has boosted teacher retention rates. The city should:
    - Double the number of Opportunity Schools to 100 to show commitment to strong staffing in the highest-needs communities.
    - Double teacher residency program capacity to support 200 teaching candidates for hard-to-staff positions.
    - Provide flexibility in school staffing, schedules and funding to allow for experimentation with teacher leadership models that let teachers take on added responsibility for added pay.
  - Chicago should support the REACH teacher evaluation system and accompanying statewide evaluation policies as tools for equity and teacher improvement. A study by the UChicago Consortium on School Research found that 26 percent of teachers with the lowest evaluation scores are in high-poverty schools, while 13 percent are in low-poverty schools. The study also found that most teachers think REACH will improve instruction and student outcomes. It's important to retain policies that link

evaluations to student achievement, set out four performance categories, and maintain high bars for each category.

- The mayor's office should push local teacher preparation programs to lengthen clinical practice, work with the district to align teacher supply to demand, and commit to preparing teachers to understand students' social and emotional learning needs.

2. **Increase support for school leaders.** Principals are second only to teachers as the main driver of student success. Chicago already has a national reputation for its strong commitment to school leadership – a commitment that has helped drive the nation-leading academic gains. The city should double down on policies that grow the principal pipeline and support these talented leaders so they can accelerate student learning. This would include:

- Preserving principal autonomy. CPS principals, rightly, have authority over staffing and some school-based budgeting decisions. This is rare in school districts in America. The system's best principals say autonomy is one of the top reasons they continue to work in CPS. The next mayor should ensure principals retain this power, as it has been a key to the district's success.
- Ensuring the school day/school calendar allows more time for principal-teacher collaboration. Research by the Consortium shows that principals can most influence student achievement when they foster strong learning environments for teachers and students. Principals need the flexibility in the school day to ensure that teachers can work together to find solutions to problems.
- Supporting a focus on retention. Today, Chicago's retention rate for principals hovers at about 85 percent, significantly above the national and large urban averages. The mayor can play a role in keeping top talent by visiting schools where top leaders are up for contract renewal, calling top leaders and asking them to stay during our annual campaign, and communicating an interest in and support for principals in the city.
- Continuing the success of the Chicago Leadership Collaborative in building a strong pipeline of highly qualified school leaders. The CLC is a unique partnership between CPS and leading principal development programs that allows the district to attract and retain the best candidates. CLC is responsible for about 30% of principal hires every year. The next mayor should expand on this idea to better support the remaining 70 percent, most of whom come from the district's very diverse assistant principal pool.

3. **Create a comprehensive college and career pathways system by strengthening the partnership between Chicago Public Schools and postsecondary institutions – especially City Colleges of Chicago.** Chicago's high school graduation rate continues to climb – jumping from 57 percent in 2006 to 74 percent in 2016. And more CPS students are enrolling in college and earning degrees. Despite the gains, Chicago still has persistent performance and attainment gaps between students based on gender, race/ethnicity, and family income. Black and Latino students are less likely than their white and Asian peers to be on track in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, graduate from high school on time, earn a 21 or higher on the ACT exam, enroll in two- or four-year college, and earn a college degree or

credential. To address these challenges, the city should build upon the partnership between CPS and City Colleges to prioritize college- and career-readiness strategies that lead to postsecondary success for students – especially students of color and low-income youth. This includes:

- Increasing the number of students who participate in dual enrollment, early college, and Advanced Placement programs that allow students to earn free college credits while in high school. About 44 percent of CPS students earn college credit and more than 300 students earned at least 15 college credits before graduation, thereby saving significant time and money towards completing a college credential or degree. Students of color and low-income youth in CPS remain underrepresented in these programs. Therefore, expansion should focus on closing participation gaps across racial and income groups.
- Expanding the apprenticeship work underway in the city to build a comprehensive work-based learning system for young people. Regional employers are working with CPS and City Colleges to improve students' career readiness. But there's considerable energy from education institutions and workforce leaders to build a more robust continuum of career-development opportunities that includes career expos, job shadowing, paid internships, and youth apprenticeships.

4. **Continue the City Colleges of Chicago's momentum on student outcomes.** Over the past eight years, City Colleges has increased its graduation rate from 7% to 23%. While there are reasons to look at broader indicators of success – the federal graduation rate metric captures only a small subset of students – there has been important progress in getting students through the system. Chicago must build on that past work and maintain momentum towards improving outcomes. This would include:

- Maintaining, and perhaps even expanding, the STAR scholarship. The STAR Scholarship has supported more than 6,000 students attending City Colleges and has a completion rate of 50% for full-time students – dramatically higher than national average completion rates. It stands apart from other nation-wide programs in supporting undocumented students. Future efforts could grow on the success of the program by building better, clearer four-year college transfer options (including more dual admission programs) and by expanding to a wider pool of Chicago students (e.g., by reducing GPA requirements.)
- Supporting state reforms that let City Colleges grant baccalaureate degrees in areas of occupational need. Employers in fields such as nursing increasingly require baccalaureate degrees. Half of the states in the country (but not Illinois) allow community colleges to grant bachelor's degrees in occupational fields, satisfying employer demand, and reducing student debt.
- Supporting and expanding apprenticeship programs. In recent years, City Colleges has created opportunities for graduates to go to top Chicago employers, including Aon and Accenture. The city should support CCC in expanding those opportunities to encompass more students and more employers.

- Increasing institutional investment in evidence-informed programs that boost post-secondary graduation rates by providing small-caseload advising and financial support to students, such as One Million Degrees or the CUNY ASAP model. These programs require an investment of about \$2,000 per student per year for intensive advising and financial support, which translates to a doubling of graduation rates for participating students.
5. **Seek greater, and more equitable, state higher education funding.** The next mayor should push for more equitable funding formulas for higher education. K-12 funding reform has passed in Illinois, but severe inequities in higher education spending remain. Chicago is an important voice in statewide education conversations and can lay the groundwork for future reform.