

Chicago Educators' Demands for a Successful CPS Reopening

Background

Amidst an ongoing global pandemic and fight against systemic racism, schools have a responsibility to reopen in a thoughtful and equitable manner. The decisions made by school districts will impact whether students feel welcomed and embraced, or dismissed and ignored. Educators are on the frontlines of school reopening and have become experts in leading a (virtual or in-person) classroom in a pandemic – it is essential we listen to them.

To advocate for educators' voices in the Chicago Public Schools' reopening plans, E4E-Chicago gathered data from 60 survey responses and over 15 focus group and meeting participants. We asked open-ended questions about what went well in the past year (SY21) and what their top priorities are for school reopening this year (SY22).

Continued Investments

Technology

Educators want to continue using educational technology beyond the pandemic. 52% of educators mentioned technology when asked what worked in SY21 that they would "like to continue in the future." This included 1:1 devices for students and staff and online platforms for learning and assessments. In particular, a significant number of educators specifically pointed to Google Classroom or other Google Workplace platforms as tools they would like to use going forward.

CPS must continue to invest in updated technological hardware and software, subscriptions to educational technology tools, high-speed internet at schools and at students' homes through Chicago Connected, and technology-related professional development opportunities.¹

Safety and Health Procedures

Given the ongoing risk to students who cannot yet receive a vaccine, educators want the safety and health procedures put in place during SY21 to continue for school reopening in SY22. 32% of educators named safety and health procedures as their top priority moving into SY22. When asked what specific safety and health measures they wanted to see in schools this fall:

- 63% mentioned masks, with 26% of those educators specifying masks for unvaccinated students & staff
- 40% mentioned district-provided sanitation materials, such as hand sanitizing stations, disinfectant wipes, and disinfectant spray
- 40% mentioned custodial deep cleaning and sanitation

Top Priorities

Beyond the continued investments listed, three themes emerged as top priorities for the district to act on:

- **Social Emotional Learning and Trauma**
- **Educator-Directed Time**
- **Educator Input**

Educators identified both immediate and long-term solutions as we look to reopen in August, laid out on the following page.

Learn more about our work,



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1. Karp, S. (2021, May 26). The pandemic propelled CPS from the tech 'dark ages' into the modern computing age. WBEZ Chicago. Retrieved from <https://www.wbez.org/stories/the-pandemic-propelled-cps-from-the-tech-dark-ages-into-the-modern-computing-age/2f5d55ea-964a-43ff-9833-9a5a4e07ea2f>

What Educators Need

Top Priorities

During the summer of 2021, a team of E4E-Chicago members compiled immediate and long-term recommendations on fall reopening for Chicago Public Schools. To build these recommendations, the team used data from numerous surveys and focus groups, representing educators' voices from across Chicago.

NEED

SEL & Trauma

Throughout the pandemic and reckoning on systemic racism, Chicago students and educators have experienced significant trauma and grief. We need focused mental health support for ourselves, and improved SEL and trauma-responsive education for our students.

IMMEDIATE

- ★ Create a research-based SEL Skills Inventory for pre-K-12 educators to administer at the beginning of the year. This can be achieved by leveraging:
 - The CASEL 5 core competencies
 - The Center for Childhood Resilience's Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH) initiative¹
- ★ Mandate ongoing training for all school personnel to build competencies in anti-racism, implicit bias, healing-centered practices, and culturally sustaining pedagogy that includes coaching, feedback, and educator-led collaboration²

LONG-TERM

- ★ Include Mental Health and Wellness lessons in Physical Education classes for all grades
- ★ Approve mental health days as sick days for all educators to take as needed, without a note from a medical professional
- ★ Expand Behavioral Health Teams to every school and provide excellent trainings to team members that focus on supporting our most vulnerable students

NEED

Educator-directed Time

Educators need additional time each week to plan independently, collaborate with peers, and address self-care needs. Additional time will help us best support our students and school communities in order to sustain commitments to trauma-responsive and culturally-responsive education.

IMMEDIATE

- ★ Increase time for planning, collaboration, or development by:
 1. Utilizing the additional minutes for play time in SB0654 with recess aides at the beginning or end of day to create space for staff meeting time³
 2. Partnering with community organizations to lead programming at the end of the school day once per week while staff meet⁴
 3. Rethinking the structure of Flex Days and Grade Level Team Meetings to allow for more planning & collaboration time

LONG-TERM

- ★ Reach an agreement in the next CPS-CTU contract that provides teachers additional planning and collaboration time, without reducing student attendance days

NEED

Educator Input

Educators demand opportunities to give our input and make decisions regarding reopening both at the school-level and district-level. We are the only experts in teaching during a pandemic and deserve to have our voices represented at the decision-making table.

IMMEDIATE

- ★ Incorporate input from schools' Safety Committees, before students return in August
- ★ Address the needs outlined in this guide, leveraging this as a source of educator feedback

LONG-TERM

- ★ Create and sustain additional opportunities for educator feedback and input (i.e. surveys, focus groups, townhalls, network roundtables).
- ★ Review input and follow up with next steps based on that feedback in a timely manner
- ★ Increase visits by district leadership to schools, prioritizing the south and west sides to better represent student and educator experiences

1. Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago (2020, December 3). ISBE partners with Lurie Children's and Peoria ROE on mental health supports for Illinois students and staff. Retrieved from <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/news-stories/isbe-partners-with-lurie-childrens-and-peoria-roe-on-mental-health-supports-for-illinois-students-and-staff/>

2. Educators for Excellence-Chicago (2020, November). From Hashtags to Healing. p. 4. Retrieved from <https://e4e.org/what-we-do/policy-solutions/hashtags-healing>

3. Illinois General Assembly (2021, June 28). Bill Status of SB0654. Retrieved from <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/billstatus.asp?DocNum=654&GAID=16&GA=102&DocTypeID=SB&LegID=133254&SessionID=110>

4. Chicago Public Schools (2021). Office of Community Partnerships. Retrieved from <https://www.cps.edu/about/departments/community-partnership/>