



Chicago Public Schools CEO Search Recommendations from Educators

Educators for Excellence-Chicago hosted a series of focus groups with educators regarding Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) search for a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Chicago educators are eager to work in partnership with CPS leadership during the CEO search, so E4E-Chicago aimed to expand the opportunity for feedback by conducting educator roundtables and surveys over the summer.

Across all four roundtables and sixty survey participants, educators spoke of similar qualities and priorities they want to see in their new CEO, including four major trends:

1. Educators need their CEO to have a **deep understanding of the landscape** that Chicago Public Schools is situated in.

- Chicago's legacy of racial and economic segregation persists,¹ and the new CEO must understand "the differences and disparities between schools across the city."* Educators also want the new CEO to immerse themselves into the landscape by visiting schools across the city year round, both announced and unannounced to "see what's really going on."* Many educators also believe it's critical that their CEO is a Person of Color who has lived and worked in Chicago.
- Having "classroom and network experience"* and "a background in education who has moved up through the ranks with a strong track record"* were crucial to roundtable and survey participants when discussing the ideal CEO background. Educators appreciate that former CEO Jackson had a deep experience in and knowledge of the system and are looking for the new CEO to share a similar background. Experience in education will ensure that the CEO understands the importance of engaging educators in decision-making and prioritizing what has been successful recently, like the district's increased attention on social-emotional learning and technology access throughout the pandemic.

2. Educators need their CEO to **prioritize equity** across the district and actively work to **dismantle systemic racism** in education.

- Educators said that, while CPS has included equity in its plans for several years, it needs to revisit what "equity" means and how it plans to actively fight for equity.² The new CEO must "have a willingness to fight systemic racism to make the district better for Black and Brown students."*
- The new CEO "needs to be progressive and willing to make changes that are tough, or that disrupt the status quo."* Identified changes include, but are not limited to: equitable funding and spending, updated resources and critical pedagogy, accessible technology and internet, and diverse leadership positions.

¹ Pierce, J. et al. (2021, February 19). Racial/ethnic minority and neighborhood disadvantage leads to disproportionate mortality burden and years of potential life lost due to COVID019 in Chicago, Illinois. Health & Place. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102540>.

² Chicago Public Schools (2020, August). CPS Equity Framework: Creating and Sustaining Equity at the Individual, School, and District Level. Office of Equity. Retrieved from https://assets.website-files.com/5e724f7b19f97014d5cb21c4/5f6cefddde4bd525d0c0a5fb_cps-equity-framework.pdf.

* All quotes were taken from roundtable participants who are CPS educators from across the district.

3. Educators need their CEO to focus on **stakeholder engagement and collaboration**, specifically with parents and teachers.

- Educators want the CEO to work on genuine outreach with parents to identify their needs, engage them in district decisions, and listen to their feedback. Educators also need the CEO to build trustworthy relationships between CPS leadership and educators, where educators feel included in decision-making and see accountability in the leadership.
- Teachers shared the need for the new CEO to follow Dr. Jackson's student-first decision making by "listening to teachers about what's really needed in schools... Teachers need support, resources, and time to make progress with our students."* Because "teachers are the best sources of information regarding students, [the new CEO should] have a laser-like focus on developing more programs and organizations where [teachers] can have a direct influence in CPS."*

4. Educators urge their CEO to **address safety concerns** in schools, due to both COVID-19 and violence.

- Coming out of the pandemic, safety concerns remain a top priority for educators and for the priorities they seek in the new CEO.³ Educators demand transparency regarding COVID-19 safety precautions and clarity of the decisions being made even when plans do not go as expected, so that everyone feels informed and valued.
- Educators also mentioned the need to address safety concerns within school buildings and neighborhoods. With an increase in violence surrounding school communities, educators want their students to be protected from harm.⁴

We at Educators for Excellence-Chicago hope that Chicago Public Schools' leadership takes the educator needs outlined above into consideration during the search for the next CEO. Our members and staff look forward to future opportunities for input regarding the CEO search and future major leadership decisions.

For additional information or follow up, please contact Lindsay Semph, Managing Director of External Affairs at lsemph@e4e.org.

³ Davis Gates, S. (2021, July 30). July 29 update on bargaining with Chicago Public Schools for fall return. Chicago Teachers Union. Retrieved from <https://www.ctulocal1.org/posts/july-29-update-on-bargaining-with-chicago-public-schools-for-fall-return/>

⁴ Casanova, S. & Sweeney, A. (2021, July 28). Violence spike of 2020 widened familiar safety gap between city neighborhoods, University of Chicago Crime Lab analysis shows. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/criminal-justice/ct-2020-homicide-rate-spike-safety-gap-20210729-3lau7u2mijgaxjvkfqnvooee-story.html>

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