

Curriculum Equity Strategy Recommendations

Educators' recommendations for removing barriers
to Chicago Public Schools' Skyline curriculum

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Introduction

Historically, Chicago Public Schools' principals and teachers were responsible for identifying and securing curriculum on a school or individual basis. For some communities, this decentralized approach has allowed for selection or creation of materials that are tailored to unique community identity or specialized school focus.

However, across an entire system, it has created a patchwork on inequitable access to quality, grade-level content. National research demonstrates that students of color—those historically furthest from academic opportunity—are least likely to have access to grade level and culturally relevant materials when teachers are not provided with high quality materials at a district-level.

In a historic move toward advancing equity, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launched the Curriculum Equity Initiative in 2020 to ensure that every student in every school has access to a high-quality curriculum that engages their interests and reflects their identities. This initiative led to the Skyline curriculum—a digitally-based, comprehensive curriculum for all students and core content subjects, PreK-12.

The Importance of Equity in Curriculum Access

Bolstered by national research, E4E believes that a universal curriculum can be a powerful lever for driving equitable student experiences and outcomes.

In 2021, Chicago Public Schools unveiled Skyline, the district's first-ever universal curriculum resource that is culturally-responsive and tailored to the needs of Chicago students. Founder & co-CEO, Evan Stone said, "It has the potential to be one of the most significant district-wide policy changes in decades."

However, from listening to our membership, organizers learned that the roll out of Skyline has areas it needs to improve. E4E organizers surveyed and interviewed CPS teachers at school visits and networking events about their experience implementing the district curriculum from September through December 2022.

Teachers at Skyline-implementing schools had concerns regarding implementation support, student accessibility, and material quality.

"It has the potential to be one of the most significant district-wide policy changes in decades."

-Evan Stone, E4E Founder & co-CEO

Understanding Teacher’s Experiences

With input from nearly 400 teachers, our survey revealed that 80 percent of respondents at Skyline-implementing schools reported not having adequate input on adoption decisions. “In the next phase of CPS’ universal curriculum implementation strategy, consider including scholars from student voice and perspective committees,” said Charese Munoz, educator at Stagg Elementary School.

Seventy seven percent of respondents at Skyline-implementing schools reported that implementation training was insufficient to prepare them to teach using Skyline materials. “Teachers need more protected time for lesson planning, especially when supplemental resources are needed in the classroom,” said an educator at Goode STEM Academy High School.

Other teachers struggled to manage the realities of student needs with the rigor outlined in Skyline, “When the pacing is unrealistic, students get frustrated and discouraged. If the pacing is more reasonable, students are motivated to succeed,” Corinne Lydon, educator at Nash Elementary School shared.

Skyline was launched as part of CPS’ Curriculum Equity Initiative to ensure that every student in every school had access to a high-quality curriculum that engages their interests and celebrates their diversity. However, 65 percent of respondents felt the curriculum was not accessible or adaptable for diverse learners.

“The curriculum needs to better reflect a connection to the students we represent.”

-Dr. Winnie Williams-Hall, diverse learner teacher at Nicholson STEM Academy

Dr. Winnie Williams-Hall, diverse learner teacher at Nicholson STEM Academy said, “The curriculum needs to better reflect a connection to the students we represent and build on that connection as the lessons progress. Diverse learners especially are more engaged and attentive when a lesson or unit is culturally relevant and reflective of their culture and community.”

Moving to Action

It’s critical that CPS gets this right—a historic equity investment and major opportunity to align teaching and learning districtwide and a powerful lever to close equity gaps.

In order to move from identifying issues to creating solutions, E4E convened a Skyline Teacher Action Team in January 2023 to develop recommendations that, if implemented, can remove barriers to access for teachers and students and ensure Skyline has the best chance of success.

Our Skyline Teacher Action Team reviewed national research and local recommendations for district curriculum implementation strategies and developed the following eight critical recommendations with a call for CPS leadership to implement.

Curriculum Equity Strategy Recommendations for CPS

Improve Skyline's Accessibility for Teachers

- **Recommendation 1:** Simplify teacher materials and provide protected time for teacher development on Skyline instructional resources and instructional strategies.

Improve Skyline's Accessibility for All Learners

- **Recommendation 2:** Offer more comprehensive training for teachers on strategies for differentiating materials for students who are performing above or below grade level; multilingual learners, and students with IEPs.
- **Recommendation 3:** Provide most commonly needed resources for accessibility and accommodations; including text choice, audio versions, and printable materials.
- **Recommendation 4:** Ensure school and Network administrators support teachers to adjust lesson pacing to meet learner needs.
- **Recommendation 5:** Conduct an audit of images used in instructional materials to ensure proportional representation of CPS students' identities.

Build district-wide buy-in through clearer messaging

- **Recommendation 6:** Develop and implement a districtwide messaging campaign, led by teachers and principals, to build awareness of the value of a universal curriculum as an equity strategy.
- **Recommendation 7:** Convene teachers and middle and high school students from implementing schools to provide additional feedback on specific grade/content strands.
- **Recommendation 8:** Clarify the CPS definition of "culturally responsive curriculum" and disseminate widely.



The Skyline Teacher Action Team

Educators for Excellence's Curriculum Equity Strategy Recommendations were co-developed by E4E-Chicago's Skyline Teacher Action Team made up of CPS teachers at Skyline-implementing schools. These recommendations aim to ensure that CPS' curriculum equity strategy has the best chance of success and provides all students with differentiated, relevant learning every day.

With gratitude for and acknowledgement of The Skyline Teacher Action Team:

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Educators for Excellence—Chicago (E4E) is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing education equity by ensuring that teachers have a leading voice in the policies that impact their students and profession. E4E members learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession. Learn more at e4e.org