



**RAISE YOUR HAND FOR
ILLINOIS PUBLIC
EDUCATION**

LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCIL REPORT

***ANALYZING ACCESS
AND TRANSPARENCY***

21-22 SCHOOL YEAR

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INTRODUCTION

Local School Councils (LSCs) are the most hyperlocal democratic levers in Chicago. LSCs give parents and community members power to influence and strengthen equitable education for children in Chicago Public Schools. LSCs were established in 1988 to enshrine local control; a belief that people who are impacted by the policy should be the ones to make them. Now, this belief is more important than ever.

LSCs were created to put power into the hands of the community, making LSCs fully autonomous at each school. In 1995, when mayoral control of CPS began, the Office of LSC Relations was created to support LSCs. This office claims to "provide training, and technical support to councils." However, this office is failing to carry out this mission.

Engagement and participation in LSC elections has decreased since the first elections. Parents and the community are struggling to be involved with LSCs, and it's not their fault.

"Parents don't know about LSC[s]. Parents don't know how to navigate the CPS website to apply. Parents are not motivated, assisted, [or] facilitated to engage." -Far Southeast Side Parent

LSC engagement is diminishing because CPS is not doing enough to prioritize these key aspects of democracy within our schools. There are far too many barriers to access: parents can't access information, attend meetings, or talk to their LSC representatives. This equity gap has a direct impact on families being engaged with their children's learning.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Raise Your Hand collected data from Chicago Public Schools (CPS) school websites during the 2021-2022 school year. We looked to see if the websites had any information at all about the LSC, up-to-date information for the 21-22 school year, meeting times, agendas, minutes, a list of current members, and members' contact information. This included 414 elementary schools (K-8), 7 middle schools, and 94 high schools.

Parent Survey


The parent quotes throughout the report were pulled from an LSC Access and Training Survey that was distributed to CPS parents during the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023. 150 parents submitted responses to the survey. The used quotes were answers submitted to the question: "What other LSC election access issues have you encountered either as a candidate or as a voter?".

A RESOUNDING PROBLEM

Citywide, Local School Councils are inaccessible and lack real transparency for parents.

Imagine you are a new parent who wants to be involved in your child's education and make sure their school is providing the best possible experience. However, when it comes to Local School Councils, it seems that many Chicago Public Schools are falling short.

Shockingly, only 41% of CPS schools have updated information about LSCs from the previous school year, leaving parents in the dark about important decisions being made about their child's education. And if you tried to attend an LSC meeting to learn more, you would find that only 34% of CPS schools provided information about when and where meetings are held. Even if you managed to track down information about past meetings, you would find that 64% of CPS schools do not post agendas, and 71% do not post minutes on their websites. So, where does that leave you as a concerned parent? Trying to reach out to LSC members, who are elected officials, but unfortunately, 54% of CPS schools do not post their LSC members, and 86% do not provide a direct contact method outside of the principal.



"Far too many parents & community members are ill informed about the LSC. This is CPS responsibility." -Far Southeast Side Parent

This lack of transparency and accessibility is unacceptable and leaves parents feeling frustrated and powerless. It's time for CPS to prioritize the importance of LSCs and provide the necessary information and resources for parents to be involved in their child's education.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

	Has LSC on Website	Has Up-To-Date Info	Has Meeting Time	Has Agenda on Website	Has Minutes on Website	Has List of Current Members	Has Members Contact Information
Far North Side	93.2%	71.2%	69.5%	69.5%	69.5%	69.5%	33.9%
North Side	97.4%	89.7%	76.9%	79.5%	76.9%	89.7%	61.5%
Northwest Side	90.0%	65.0%	55.0%	57.5%	47.5%	62.5%	20.0%
Central	80.0%	50.0%	50.0%	60.0%	50.0%	50.0%	30.0%
West Side	72.9%	33.9%	28.0%	27.1%	21.2%	41.5%	6.8%
Southwest Side	71.8%	28.2%	18.8%	29.4%	20.0%	25.9%	5.9%
Far Southwest Side	82.5%	35.0%	30.0%	22.5%	15.0%	30.0%	5.0%
South Side	70.0%	35.0%	21.7%	26.7%	15.0%	31.7%	15.0%
Far Southeast Side	68.7%	18.7%	18.7%	12.5%	9.4%	28.1%	7.8%

Number of schools per region

Far North Side: 59 schools
 North Side: 39 schools
 Northwest Side: 40 schools
 Central: 10 schools
 West Side: 118 schools
 Southwest Side: 85 schools
 Far Southwest Side: 40 schools
 South Side: 60 schools
 Far Southeast Side: 64 school

Chicago's deep seeded segregation affects all aspects of Chicago Public Schools, including Local School Councils. LSC access and transparency differs hugely throughout Chicago. While some areas have clear information published on their websites, in many areas of the city it is impossible to find necessary information regarding LSCs. Ability to access LSCs should not be dependent on where a family lives.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The greater North Side (Far North and North) consistently demonstrates the highest percentages across most categories. This region boasts the highest presence of LSC information, up-to-date information, meeting times, agendas, and minutes. These regions also have some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. 89.7% of schools on the North side have up-to-date information about LSCs on their websites, compared to 18.7% on the Far Southeast side. While only 61.5% of schools on the North side have member contact information listed on their websites, this is significantly more than the mere 5% on the Far Southwest side.

“Community members often lack knowledge of LSC and the needed role of community members.” - West Side Parent

The Far Southeast, Southwest, and Far Southwest sides all exhibit the lowest percentages in one or more categories, including up-to-date information, meeting times, agendas, and minutes. Parents and community members are failing to receive transparency and opportunities to engage with the school community in these regions of the city. The bare minimum of any up-to-date information published on the website is only fulfilled on a third or less of school websites in these regions. If parents have no access to timely and accurate information, the next steps to actually get involved in an LSC are near impossible.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The data also reveals that regions like the West side and South side have low transparency and accessibility, especially when compared to more Northern and Central regions. On the South side, only 1 in 5 schools publish their meeting times on the school website. On the West side, only 1 in 4 schools publish the LSC agenda on the website.

Analyzing this data provides valuable insights into the discrepancies in information accessibility across different regions in Chicago. These disparities must be addressed to foster greater transparency, community engagement, and effective communication within the school system, ultimately benefiting students, parents, and other stakeholders. When it comes to restoring LSCs, all schools cannot be given the same treatment.

"I couldn't find the information on the website. I had to really research. I know that not everyone has that skill. This is a barrier. They need to include this with the information packets they send on the first day." -Southwest and West Side Parent

RACIAL ANALYSIS

	Has LSC on Website	Has Up-To-Date Info	Has Meeting Time	Has Agenda on Website	Has Minutes on Website	Has List of Current Members	Has Members Contact Information
Total	78.3%	42.5%	35.7%	37.1%	30.7%	43.9%	16.3%
90% or more Black student population	65.5%	17.6%	13.9%	11.5%	5.5%	18.2%	3.6%

Context

Regional breakdown of schools

Far North Side: 59 schools
 North Side: 39 schools
 Northwest Side: 40 schools
 Central Side: 1 school
 West Side: 37 schools
 Southwest Side: 14 schools
 Far Southwest Side: 24 schools
 South Side: 45 schools
 Far Southeast Side: 44 schools

165 schools within Chicago Public Schools have a 90% or more Black student population. A closer look at averages for these schools and the overall numbers reveals significant discrepancies.

RACIAL ANALYSIS

The data on the previous page lists the availability of crucial LSC information in schools with a 90% or more Black student population compared to the overall average. The percentages reveal notable disparities between these two groups.

Overall, 42.5% of schools have up to date LSC information on their websites. However, this percentage drops to 17.5% for schools with a higher concentration of Black students, suggesting potential inequities in access to LSC information for these schools.

Similarly, there are concerning gaps in the availability of meeting times, agendas, minutes, member lists, and contact information on websites for schools with a 90% or more Black student population. While 1 in 3 schools overall have minutes published on their website, only 1 in 20 schools with a 90% or more Black student population have the minutes published.

"As a voter there is very little to no information shared with families about how the LSC functions and why one should run. This is at times intentional so that there is little to no participation from parents and students." -West Side Parent

Black families are thus receiving significantly less community control over their schools and not given the same opportunities to engage with their children's education. These inequities continue the legacy of segregation and intentional disenfranchisement of Black students and families.

PARENT VACANCIES

The lack of access and transparency provided to parents about LSCs results in parent vacancies throughout Chicago Public Schools. Each Local School Council is supposed to have 6 parent representatives. The overwhelming majority of schools citywide, 312/515, have at least 1 parent vacancy on their LSC. This means that only 39% of schools have a full LSC. 165 schools have 3 or more parent vacancies. Throughout CPS, there are 892 vacant LSC parent representative positions.

32%

of all schools have 3 or more parent vacancies (165/515 schools)

42%

of schools with a 90% or more Black student population have 3 or more parent vacancies (69/165 schools)

23%

of Far North, North, Northwest, and Central Side schools have 3 or more parent vacancies (34/148 schools)

36%

36% of West, Southwest, South, Far Southwest, and Far Southeast schools have 3 or more parent vacancies (131/367 schools)

These vacancies are direct manifestations of parents inability to access clear information about their LSCs. Vacancies make it impossible for the schools that need LSCs the most to have effective LSCs. This means student needs are ignored, budgets are cut, and more. Thus, the North side is able to have more successful LSCs because of the lack of vacancies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to begin to eradicate the lack of access and transparency, and disparities throughout the city, as shown in this report, every CPS school needs to provide adequate digital access about LSCs to their school community. The Office of LSC Relations should support each school in providing digital access (on their website) to:

- Up to date information, including past LSC agendas, minutes, and meeting times and locations
- A list of current LSC members and at least 1 method of directly contacting the LSC (that is not just the principal)

Community members also have community control to improve transparency and access. LSC members can step up to jumpstart increased accessibility. Check if your school website has up-to-date information about the LSC available. If you're on a LSC with a vacancy, ensure that the vacancy is being advertised, whether that be at school or on a parent newsletter.

While LSCs should be an accessible way for parents and community members to have a voice in their schools, the lack of information and transparency makes this problematic. Vacancies are seen all over the city, and CPS's lack of care towards LSCs does not affect all schools or regions of the city equally. If LSCs are to be genuinely democratic, their current state is unacceptable and perpetuates existing inequalities within Chicago Public Schools and the city of Chicago.

CONTACT US

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Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education engages, informs, and empowers parents to protect and strengthen public education for all children in Chicago and Illinois, eliminate inequities in public schools, and work at the grassroots level for the public good that is public education.

