OVERVIEW  Every student is unique. High expectations for all students must be coupled with a holistic approach that supports the individual needs of each. All students need special attention to grow both personally and academically. Many also face serious challenges to learning, including poor nutrition or hunger, inadequate health care, emotional trauma and community violence. Schools – with support from the district and invaluable partners such as the Department of Family and Support Services, the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Department of Public Health and community-based organizations – play a vital role in helping students build resiliency and overcome challenges. Every school will establish systems that keep students safe, healthy, focused and on-track for college and career success.

OBJECTIVES

• **Ensure that every school is a safe, secure, orderly, drug-free environment for learning.** Keeping children safe requires that we become more proactive in preventing violence. Toward that end, we have begun transforming the role of school security officers by training them to identify potentially volatile situations and mediate conflicts before fights break out. We are guiding them to go beyond rule enforcement and to build trusting relationships so that students are comfortable seeking their help.

  We will provide similar training to Safe Passage workers and Parent Patrol volunteers who support students’ safety as they travel to and from school. In addition, we will continue to guide principals to partner with local police for support and timely information about neighborhood violence that can lead to conflicts within the school building. Each school will be required to optimize its safety plan in partnership with the CPS Office of Safety and Security. Continuing to expand the use of security cameras that can be monitored both at schools and at central office is also a priority. Lastly, parents and community-based organizations will be further engaged to support student interventions and to resolve conflicts before they become serious incidents.
• Establish a universal standard for a positive learning climate in every school that makes students feel valued, challenged and supported. Schools with positive relationships, clear expectations, collective responsibility and learning-focused interactions have better student attendance, behavior and grades. We will expand proven school climate and social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies to help students develop the self-management, decision-making and relationship skills required to meet the academic expectations of the Common Core. As part of that effort, we will guide schools to resolve conflicts with restorative justice approaches, which require misbehaving students to listen to their victims, to acknowledge the harm they have caused and then to take action to remediate it. Restorative approaches have shown to be far more effective than punitive measures in improving behavior. We have also trained social workers, counselors and community partners to use proven anger management and trauma strategies to support students who have endured violence in their communities, and we have already seen fewer misconducts and suspensions system-wide.

Finally, when serious misconducts do occur, we must push to minimize instructional time lost due to out-of-school suspensions by providing alternatives such as in-school suspension, detention and Saturday school programming focused on improving conflict resolution skills. Such efforts will help students stay on-track academically while building the social and emotional skills needed for life-long success.

• Promote good attendance. Regular school attendance is critical for academic success. Each school will be required to organize an attendance team comprised of appropriate staff and community partners to identify chronically absent students and provide interventions, such as counseling or academic support. Schools with attendance rates below 95% will receive training to create attendance plans that include concrete roles for community partners, such as mental health organizations, who can provide additional services to students as needed. Schools and regions with the highest absentee rates will be targeted for further student services and family outreach.

• Address health-related barriers to learning. Research shows that healthy, active children are better prepared to succeed academically. Recently, we launched the Healthy CPS Action Plan as part of the Mayor’s public health agenda, in partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health. The plan contains 60 strategies for schools to improve student health. Among other initiatives, we will provide access to free oral health exams and treatment for all high school students, building off a successful program already in place in elementary schools. We will ensure all students receive a free vision screening and that those who fail their screenings can visit a local optometrist for free eyeglasses. We have also established the district’s new Wellness and Healthy Snacks and Beverages policies, through which we are training schools to make productive use of recess time and create healthier cafeteria options.

“"You can’t educate a child who isn’t healthy, and you can’t keep a child healthy who isn’t educated.""  
Dr. Joycelyn Elders, former US Surgeon General

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• **Provide students with the academic and behavior supports needed to achieve their full potential.**

Each school will be required to establish a Multi-Tiered System of Supports. MTSS is a system for schools to analyze student data, such as attendance and grades, and add layers of support for those who need extra help to progress academically or to improve their behavior. Nationwide, schools implementing MTSS are showing significant gains in student achievement. Extra support begins in the classroom as teachers analyze why certain students fall short of mastering a particular lesson. Interventions may include re-teaching small groups or individuals, assigning additional practice or redirecting problem behavior.

Students who continue to struggle will be supported by a school intervention team that considers a range of learning, health, behavioral and other reasons for poor performance. The team can then recommend additional interventions in the regular classroom or through individualized school services such as counseling or tutoring and through partnerships with outside agencies that offer additional services. Regional offices will provide professional development, monitoring and follow-up support for every school to establish an MTSS system. Training will also include strategies for teaching students with a range of diverse learning needs.

• **Ensure that every student graduates high school with a concrete postsecondary plan.** Many Chicago students leave high school without a plan for securing employment or enrolling in college or vocational training. Principals and school counseling staff will now be held accountable for ensuring that every student graduates with a clear plan for the future and the guidance needed to execute it. We will provide counselors with guidelines, strategies and professional development to keep students on track for graduation and the postsecondary option of their choice. Strategies include helping students select coursework or internships that match their aspirations, enrolling students in credit recovery programs and guiding them to select colleges that meet their needs and interests. Principals will also be supported to effectively implement afterschool and summer school credit recovery programs.

In addition, the district will increase student access to early college and career and technical coursework, enabling students to graduate with a leg up on their path to postsecondary success. CPS will pursue new partnerships with businesses in order to create more internship, job shadow and mentorship opportunities. Strengthening university and community partnerships will expand student access to college fairs, college tours,
scholarships and dual enrollment coursework. Collectively, these opportunities and partnerships will help students walk across the graduation stage with a postsecondary plan that is best-suited to their future aspirations and that meets the demands of the 21st century workforce.

- **Re-engage our off-track students.** To serve youth aged 14 to 21 who have dropped out or are significantly behind in credits needed for on-time graduation, we will create new high-quality Options schools and programs specifically designed to get these students back on-track and prepared for post-secondary life. We will also add seats at our existing sites and raise expectations for instruction and student outcomes. Historically, the district has referred to these sites as alternative schools, but we believe that these programs are quality “Options” for students who need a different setting to achieve their potential.

To recover dropouts aged 16 to 21, we recently opened three Re-engagement Centers in Garfield Park, Roseland and Little Village. Outreach workers actively search for dropouts and encourage them to enroll in credit recovery programs at the centers, offer counseling to help resolve issues that led to dropping out and assist them to re-enroll in high school. Workers also visit their high schools to provide follow-up support. We will look for opportunities to open additional Re-engagement Centers going forward.

- **Target struggling schools for intensive district support.** Our lowest-achieving schools need additional support, and we will offer them targeted resources and guidance to improve all aspects of school governance and classroom instruction. The new Office of Strategic School Support Services will provide a Common Core-aligned curriculum and professional development for teachers, principals, school leadership teams and local school council members. Regular school diagnostic reviews will help school staff identify strengths and weaknesses and plan further improvements. Parents will be invited to workshops that help them support their children’s education and offer free GED and ESL classes to continue their own. Our goal is that after three years of receiving these additional resources and district-led supports, our lowest-performing schools will have demonstrated significant gains in achievement and will be capable of continuing this positive growth going forward.

My top priorities are to have a school with highly qualified teachers who are concerned about the students’ performance. This school should value parent involvement and community investment. It should also have an excellent and resourceful instructional leader. Additionally, we need programs in our schools to address the social-emotional learning challenges that our students possess.

*Austin Community Action Council Member*