OVERVIEW

Parents and families are the first educators of their children. Effective schools guide families to support children’s learning at home and draw on the talents of parents as volunteers. A district that intends for every child to succeed in life must also support parents as leaders. Parents who can advocate not only for their own children but for all the community’s children are a powerful force for change.

The community is also a vital source of nourishment for a child’s growth. The work of schools can be strengthened by organizations that support students’ academic, physical, social and emotional development. School and district leaders must draw on all the resources of our city and neighborhoods: nonprofits and businesses, universities and community groups, faith-based leaders and government officials, philanthropists and activists.

OBJECTIVES

- Engage neighborhoods in shaping a vision for education. As we create a 10-year education facilities master plan for every neighborhood, we are discussing with families, Local School Councils, Community Action Councils and additional community partners the types of specialty schools and programs they want in their neighborhoods. These may include International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, STEM schools, world language programs, programs for the arts and many other options.

- Empower families to support children’s learning at home and school. Parents need a clear understanding of how to support their children’s school success from an early age. We will launch Parent Universities across the city to help parents understand expectations at each grade level, how to build children’s academic and social-emotional skills and how to support their college and career plans. The Parent Portal enables parents to view their children’s grades and attendance online and provides email access to teachers along with email and text alerts when children’s performance slips. Trainings will teach parents how to advocate effectively for their children with school staff and how to further their own educational goals through GED, ESL and college classes. Citywide parent information sessions will provide additional information on these topics while also engaging parents in dialogue regarding key district initiatives and exposing them to the range of schools and specialty programs available. Annual school progress reports provide a clear picture of school performance and further assist parents with selecting the schools and programs that best meet their children’s needs.
• **Improve services that help parents to navigate CPS.** We have already established call lines for parents in each region staffed by skilled and experienced professionals who help answer school-related questions and resolve issues. All issues and their resolutions are tracked to ensure that families receive timely and satisfactory responses to their concerns. Soon we will open Parent Engagement Centers at a number of locations across the city. There, parents will be able to find information about CPS schools, programs and services, file complaints, use computers and attend parent workshops. Meeting space will also be available for parent-related interest groups.

• **Prepare Local School Councils (LSCs) to become effective leaders, advocates and innovators.** LSCs play a pivotal role in school improvement, with the power to select principals and approve the school’s improvement plan and budget. We must raise the quality of training, both from in-house trainers and outside providers, so that all councils are prepared to assume those responsibilities. For the first time, the district’s Talent Office will play a lead role in providing training to LSCs on principal selection. Beyond their primary duties, councils must also learn how to take the lead on crafting initiatives that address school challenges, such as safety or truancy.

• **Increase equity of access to high-quality school options by establishing a streamlined, single application system for CPS high schools.** An unnecessarily burdensome process for applying for admission to CPS high schools currently involves multiple applications and varying deadlines. The current system is time-consuming to navigate and places many families at a disadvantage. We will create a unified application for all high schools in the CPS portfolio – magnet, charter, selective enrollment, etc. – to provide all students with more equitable access to the full range of school options.

• **Support principals to strengthen family and community engagement.** Many of our principals do a phenomenal job of drawing community partners into the school who can enrich students’ development such as arts groups, faith-based organizations, universities, health providers and parent volunteers. We need all of our principals to create a welcoming environment for parents and community partners and to draw on community resources to support school improvement goals. Encouraging parent attendance at report card pick-up day will be a priority for every principal, and the district’s Office of Family and Community Engagement will help to identify potential community partners in each neighborhood and guide principals on cultivating relationships with those that can help to meet school needs.

• **Strengthen community partnerships at the district level.** Just as schools must extend themselves to draw on community partners, so must the district forge partnerships that can benefit many schools and students. Already a vast array of partners are ready to assist but want to invest their time, advocacy and resources in the most effective way. We hope this plan will prove useful to our current and prospective partners in matching their resources to priorities for district-wide improvement. It will take the contributions of all – nonprofits and community-based organizations, businesses, higher education institutions, faith-based leaders, elected officials, sister city agencies and the philanthropic community – to make this vision for Chicago’s children a reality.

> I would like the schools to become havens for education, positivity, healthy living and recreation for all community members (days, evenings and weekends).

* Lindblom High School Community Member