



Submitted via Electronic Delivery

Chicago Public Schools District #299
Board of Education
1 North Dearborn, Suite 950
Chicago, Illinois 60602

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To the Chicago Board of Education:

As an organization committed to building a more just, equitable, and inclusive city, Chicago United for Equity applauds the Board of Education's commitment to evaluating the impacts of the proposal for the greater near south community through the lens of racial equity.

In taking this step, Chicago joins over 125 jurisdictions across the nation that have implemented the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's methodology for a Racial Equity Impact Assessment, which includes the following core steps:

1. What is the policy and its intention?
2. What does data tell us about the most impacted groups and program quality?
3. What have we learned in the community engagement process about who this plan benefits and burdens?
4. What alternative opportunities exist to promote racial equity within this plan?
5. How can we best support implementation and accountability?¹

This protocol ensures that equity is not just an outcome we seek – it is a process that we create to promote greater equity of voice in traditional policymaking. As the Annie E. Casey Foundation has found, this process has gained popularity because it has the power to:

1. Keep the focus of the decision on data and fact, instead of assumptions or ingrained beliefs,
2. Provide a systematic way to engage the opinions and voices of those who will be affected by the decision in question,
3. Shed light on the unintended consequences of policy decisions before those decisions are made, and
4. Provide a wider range of options for policy choices.²

To uplift the value of inclusion inherent in this tool, Chicago United for Equity (CUE) engaged several hundred community stakeholders in developing the two reports enclosed. The two simultaneous, yet independent, processes resulted in the following:

¹ Government Alliance on Race and Equity, "Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity." Published 2016: www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Tools for Thought: Using Racial Equity Impact Assessments for Effective Policymaking." Published 2016: <http://www.aecf.org/resources/tools-for-thought-a-race-for-results-case-study/>.



- **Equity Committee Report** – This process began with an open vote to select experts in education, public policy, and school integration.³ Additionally, this committee was augmented by representatives from Chicago Public Schools and each of the key impacted communities.⁴ The committee received facilitation support from Dr. Tiffany McDowell, head of the Chicagoland Equity Network, general advising on the REA process from Juan Sebastian Arias, formerly with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, and note-taking support from a Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE) Policy and Advocacy Fellow.
- **Community Report** – The second report synthesizes the comments and feedback of 300 community members who engaged with the CUE town hall series that took place from November 29, 2017 to January 11, 2018. This included members from the communities of north Bronzeville, South Loop, and Chinatown. This process was facilitated by a group of 55 CUE Racial Equity Fellows⁵ and the report was prepared by fellow Louis Makarewicz.

Though the two processes outlined above were conducted simultaneously, deliberations and reports occurred independently. Their findings were unanimous in the following key points:

1. **The existing proposal would exacerbate conditions of racial inequity.** The CPS proposal for the near south community begins with a laudable intent for a racially diverse, high-quality educational system from Pre-K to 12th grade. However, the specific plan that is proposed would have an undue burden on three specific communities, all of which are predominantly low-income and African-American. These communities include the existing student population at National Teachers Academy, future generations of low-income, African-American students in the Chicago Public Schools system, and the existing high school communities that are facing steady enrollment declines in buildings less than 1.5 miles south of the existing NTA campus.
2. **Community stakeholders were not meaningfully engaged in the development of this proposal.** The public engagement process for this proposal fell far short of all three communities' hopes. Each report's section on community engagement highlights a troubling trend of

³ First, CUE worked with the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community and the Greater South Loop Association to co-host two community meetings that led directly into this larger REA process. After these engagements, we organized a CUE meeting to open a nomination and voting process to select the members of the Equity Committee. Of those who voted, 14% of those had an affiliation with NTA, an additional 14% were South Loop residents, 9.5% of voters were Bronzeville residents, 5% were associated with the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, and the remaining 57% of voters had no identified affiliation with the communities impacted.

⁴ CPS Chief Education Officer Dr. Janice Jackson appointed Ms. Judith Camacho, Director of Strategic Initiatives for Family and Community Engagement, to participate on behalf of Chicago Public Schools and the Board of Education. The chairwomen at each of the Local School Councils at National Teachers Academy and South Loop Elementary and the Executive Director of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community were all invited to send representatives from their community. Because the LSC Chairwoman at NTA is also a founding board member of CUE, she was asked to recuse herself from the process. She instead asked the NTA Student Action Committee to send a designee, which they did.

⁵ These are mid-career professionals who serve in full-time roles in organizations across Chicago's policy landscape. They were trained in the Racial Equity Impact Assessment tool by individuals at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Chicago Lawyers Committee in Civil Rights, and Chicago United for Equity. They are participating in a year-long fellowship to learn how to implement racial equity frameworks into their professional roles influencing policy.



stakeholders feeling as if the proposal was a “done deal,” thereby cultivating a lack of trust in public institutions and undermining the credibility of an authentic community engagement process. Additionally, stakeholders from all communities cited feeling as if they had been “pitted against each other” to publicly state support for a position that would secure high-quality educational opportunities for their children.

3. **There is universal agreement that better solutions are possible.** In both processes, all stakeholders agreed that alternative strategies were possible to promote racial equity while meeting the initial intention of this plan. The Equity Committee designed one solution focused on investing in the existing, underutilized building at Dunbar High School. The community stakeholders devised 5 different proposals on how to address the need for a high-quality neighborhood high school without furthering racial inequity. These include:
 - a. Moving NTA to a new building
 - b. Investing in existing neighborhood high schools
 - c. Selling the old South Loop facility to fundraise for a new high school
 - d. Redistributing selective enrollment
 - e. Developing an academic center plus high school option

Chicago United for Equity believes that the Board of Education has a historic opportunity in this proposal to construct a new template for community engagement. We call on the Chicago Board of Education and Chicago Public Schools to engage in an open election process that allows residents from the most impacted communities outlined in these reports to vote on a solution that serves the area in a just and equitable manner. On our best days, Chicago is a city that serves us all well. To ensure that all communities are served well today, we can start today by acknowledging the history of inequity in our city, recognizing those who have been historically marginalized, and looking for solutions that do no further harm to these communities.

In partnership for a stronger Chicago,

Niketa Brar
Executive Director,
Chicago United for Equity