Advocating For Network Councils In Chicago Public Schools (CPS): A Policy Advocacy Document

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

Part 3:

ADVOCATING FOR NETWORK COUNCILS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CPS): A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Policy Advocacy Document

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


6.20.16
Abstract

To reinforce best practices at the building level in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), this study advocates that CPS enact a policy to create Local Network Councils (LNCs). Using an analysis of need, the impact of Local Network Councils is examined through educational, social, political, economic, and moral frames. It is determined that a Local Network Council system can reinforce best practices at the building level. This is defined as including: promoting teacher and staff excellence through continuous improvement to develop and achieve high expectations for all students, establishing professional learning communities guaranteeing learning for all students, developing a culture focused on college and career skills, empowering and motivating families and the community to become engaged and attentive, as well as persistently practicing self-disciplined thinking and action. This type of multifaceted changeover requires significant human resources and economic considerations, as well as vigilance in planning, furtherance of professional development for all staff, and meticulous methods of both student and facility assessments. A proposed budget and an assessment plan is included in the study.
Preface

I was a building level administrator for Chicago Public School for five years. My job responsibilities included more work than I could ever have imagined. I came to CPS from the suburbs, and had been trained in best practices, and implementing systems through a continuous cycle of improvement. The work we performed prior to my position at CPS was rooted in teaming and collaboration. While at CPS, I worked in one of the lowest performing schools in the state. Through these practices we were able to turn the school around. It was extremely more difficult to implement these systems within CPS. During my tenure at CPS, I learned a great deal about the characteristics of successful implementation of best practices, as well as characteristics of unsuccessful efforts. The aspect of the work that stands out the most is the amount of time supporting the Local School Council (LSC). My prior experiences had sparked my curiosity and motivation to research and write about the best ways to support successful leadership in CPS.

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 created Local School Councils for all Chicago Public Schools. The then-newly formed councils consisted of the principal, two teachers, six parents, two community members, as well as a student representative for those LSCs at the high school level. The board itself, properly concerned with sharpening policy, tended instead to get caught up in administrative operational tasks. It was not unusual for the LSC meetings to have 50-60 agenda items.

The meetings needed to focus on improving the schools; however, meetings were consumed with bureaucracy, politics, and power struggles. I am still trying to comprehend why the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 would introduce a system in
every school enabling what appeared to me as more dysfunction. On the other hand, there is evidence of high-performing LSCs within CPS; however, my experience and my examination through this study confirms that LSCs are overall not effective. Schools in CPS are expected to generate rapid improvement in a short amount of time. My personal experiences and research on CPS point to two interesting facts about school leadership: (1) building level administration is unable to support the LSC, and (2) building level administration does not receive adequate support from CPS to run a governing board.
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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Introductions

Currently, there is a great deal of turmoil surrounding the Chicago Public Schools, including an ongoing budgetary crisis. With this type of distraction occurring outside the buildings, it is challenging for principals to focus on the students inside the buildings. I became aware of the main issue of this paper through an evaluation of why it had become so strenuous and complicated to implement best practices as a building level administrator in the Chicago Public Schools. I had been partially successful, some of the time; however, the Local School Councils had become a roadblock in execution of best practices, practices outlined in the five principal competencies, as displayed in Figure 1.

![Five Principal Competencies](image)

*Figure 1. Five Principal Competencies. [Repurposed and sourced via (CPS.edu, 2015)].*

As noted in Figure 1, the five principal competencies include: A) championing teacher and staff excellence through continuous improvement to develop and achieve a vision of high expectations for all students.
high expectations for all students; B) instituting professional learning systems that guarantee learning for all students; C) developing a culture focused on college and career readiness; D) empowering and motivating families and the community to become engaged; and E) relentlessly pursuing self-disciplined thinking and action (CPS.edu, 2015).

Nonetheless, and as remarked, all Chicago public schools have a Local School Council (LSC) responsible for three main obligations: A) approving how school funds and resources are allocated; B) developing and monitoring the annual School Improvement Plan; and C) evaluating and selecting the school’s principal (CPS.edu, 2017B). And while the LSCs serve such much-needed purposes, during my five years as a Chicago Public Schools (CPS) building administrator, I was diverted many times from vital work detailed in the *Five Principal Competencies* (Figure 1.) These diversions included following Local School Councils’ requests, helping LSCs to grow in their capacity of moving away from day-to-day operations, to focusing on policy and funding approvals. These diversions have taken building administrators away from the classrooms; there is an imperative for those administrators to be encouraged toward a shift in focus back to the classroom, back to creating a professional learning community, as well as establishing a culturally proficient school.

There is a Local School Council associated with each CPS school, for a total of 514 LSCs. Each LSC hires and works directly with its school principal, like the way most district school boards interact with superintendents (CPE, 2011). Each LSC is made up of a small group of teachers, school staff, parents, the principal, and various community members; all members (except the principal) of the council are elected to
their positions, and conduct monthly meetings, meetings which are open to the public. In addition, the LSCs handle evaluating the principal in conjunction with the Network Chief’s principal evaluation on an annual basis. This unique component of CPS principals having to manage teachers who evaluate them may be problematic.

Although the amount of community and parent involvement varies from school to school, CPS leaders spend much time navigating, supporting, and working with individual Local School Councils. I have personally worked with many different leaders in CPS and have discovered certain characteristics of individuals who have never worked outside CPS. For example, no one appears to publically question the LSCs’ mission or their effectiveness within CPS. I have been taken aback as I see the levels of attention - in time, consideration, and energy - provided to building level LSCs by the district and Network Support. Moreover, there are specific staff members directly employed by the district to maintain LSCs needs and requirements; however, these staff positions are not capitalized on to build council members’ competencies, but to self-promote their personal conflict resolution skills. The LSC support staff members are part of a vast political structure, a structure which distracts principals and other staff from fostering and encouraging the work in the classrooms, work which should include focus on the competencies noted in the Framework for Principals (Figure 1. Five Principal Competencies, along with visionary leadership, instructional programs, and continual planning for improved student success.

In addition to the encumbrances of coping with LSCs, the vast scope of work assigned to building level administrators within CPS is impractical and unrealistic. Many of the directives come from individuals unfamiliar with, or unaware of, the work that
takes place in the building, and although some of the ideas, programs, and initiatives are rooted in best practice, their implementation is not possible given the array of demands placed on the building level leaders. As there are limited resources at the building level, and little or no funds to pay individuals to plan and carry out the work requested by the LSCs, much of the work is done on a voluntary basis. Leaders are trying to assemble teams to maneuver the needs of LSCs, but are overwhelmed with the sheer amount of work that must be completed.

In response to these critical obstructions preventing a building level administrator from administering to the needs of their students, I am advocating for a policy that would create Local Network Councils (LNCs). The Local Network Councils would hire district superintendents and work with the principals, similar to the way the majority of effective district school boards function. Ideally, while the superintendent is the CEO of the district, the BOE (Board of Education) provides oversight for the superintendent. Using best practices those districts where BOEs and superintendents work well together are very successful (CPE, 2011).

These newly-formed LNCs would furthermore be responsible for evaluating the Network Superintendent in conjunction with the district evaluation system which would preferably not be composed of CPS employees, but rather be made up of community members. Likewise, instead of acting in an authoritative or evaluative role, as the LSCs currently do, the Local Network Councils would work in tangent as they collaborate with the principals. Most notably, teachers would no longer serve on a council that evaluates the principal, a huge shift within CPS.
Building level administrators would no longer spend hours navigating, facilitating, and working with individual Local School Councils, but would instead have time allocated to encouraging community engagement and parent involvement. Building level administration would also be able to spend more time collaborating with the Department of Family and Community Engagement (FACE), currently used significantly to support the Local School Council. As imaginable, it is complicated and quite complex for FACE to support 514 local school councils.
SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

Educational Analysis

Historical Background of Local School Councils in Chicago Public Schools

To have a deeper understanding of the role of Local School Councils within the Chicago Public Schools, it is necessary to appreciate some of their history and development over the years. In 1988 the Chicago School Reform Act (CSRA) passed (ISGA, 1988), creating Local School Councils, Sub-district Councils, a School Board Nominating Commission, and a Mayor-appointed interim board. There were also mandates for school improvement plans at each individual school. In October of 1989, CPS held elections for personnel of the first LSCs; there were 17,256 individuals who ran for seats, 312,000 people cast ballots, and 6,000 members were elected to serve on LSCs (CPS.edu, 2017B). The LSCs were granted key powers, including the choice of principals, the approval of school budgets, and the endorsement of annual school improvement plans (Belsha, 2015).

Since that first election there have been significant changes to the CSRA of 1988. A decision of the Illinois Supreme Court, in November 1990, declared the initial method of electing LSC members unconstitutional because it violated the principle of one person, one vote. As a result, the legislature developed a modified election procedure for the second set of elections, held in November 1991 (Katz, 1995). In 1994 there was a minor change - the election dates changed to Spring report card pick-up day.

Due to continued corruption allegations, investigations, and findings, the Illinois State Legislation (ISL) restructured the CPS system; one of those changes was to the LSC, requiring incoming members to undertake specific training over the course of three
days, comprised of 18 hours of training on topics such as a continuous improvement work plan, budgeting, and fundraising. ISL also added Senate Bill 652 (which eventually became PA-61-622), mandating criminal background checks for all LSC members, and withdrawing the requirement for LSC members to have to file a Statement of Economic Interest with Cook County (CPS.edu, 2017B). (This statement requires individuals dealing with public funds to disclose any business or potential business connections to those funds.) Finally, in 1996, the Illinois School Code was established, the Chicago Board of Education set up a Local School Council Advisory Board (LSCAB) made up of both elected and appointed currently-serving LSC members. The role of the LSCAB is to advise the Board on issues related to Local School Council elections, operations, powers and duties, and school improvement plans (CPS.edu, 2017B). The LSCAB also serves as liaison between Local School Council members and senior staff, and advises the Board of Education on other issues regarding the school district, as requested (CPS.edu, 2017B).

**LSC Purpose**

Chicago Public Schools have Local School Councils (LSC) responsible for three main duties: A) LSCs approve how school funds and resources are allocated; B) they develop and monitor the annual school improvement plan; and, C) LSCs select, and furthermore evaluate, the school’s principal. Initially, LSCs were created to function in a similar way as a typical district school boards. Today’s school boards have been called to provide leadership, governance, and increased student achievement results in the school systems they serve (Gemberling, Smith, & Villani, 2000). Continuous improvement is an approach that effective school boards have practiced in their boardsmanships (Fuhrman, 1999; Gemberling et al., 2000; IASB, 2017), and has been defined as the practice of
improving results on a constant basis, and the process of establishing goals; collecting and analyzing data; making a determination of accomplishment of goals; and setting new goals (Bonstingl, 1992; Edds, 2000). Nonetheless, within CPS, rather than functioning to support the work of the schools in the ways described above, LCSs have evolved into social and political arenas. With the advocated revamping of the structuring, by reducing dramatically the number of councils, and offering practical and realistic backing, the district could reinvent itself with newly developed and high-performing Local Network Councils.

**Economic Analysis**

CPS is made up of 415 elementary school and 85 high school Local School Councils. Within CPS, there is a department solely dedicated to support LSCs. CPS publishes the financial backing of The Office of Local School Council Supports in the budget lines of the Office of Leadership and Learning (OLL). The Office of Leadership and Learning Department received $8.3 million during SY16. The funds in the budget line for OLL also maintained the Family and Community Engagement Office (FACE), which engages heavily in underwriting the LSCs. Therefore, the district uses Title 1 funds to sustain the LSCs’ massive amount of paperwork, promotional items, election staff, parent training, and parent involvement, while Title 1 funding is designed to help students (IES/NCES, 2017).

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have allocated resources to annual budgets in each of the past 15 years by a collective $6.6 billion, amassing debt to continually increase spending on operations, while district student enrollment has steadily declined. This is according to an analysis of CPS financial reporting to the State of Illinois by
Local Government Information Services (Chicago City Wire, 2017). The amount of funds used to support Local School Councils needs to be drastically reduced, and would certainly be the case if the advocated number of councils, as proposed, is reduced from 514 to 18 in this proposed redesign. There are several school boards in urban districts that use a systematic approach to improve the district, an approach which would become practical and realistic for CPS, as the district would be able to utilize a continuous cycle of improvement to help increase the quality of support (Shakman, Bailey, & Breslow, 2017). This is a cycle that does not require district employees, but necessitates developing existing council members’ capacities of understanding how to improve the school(s).

**Social Analysis**

The LSC, with intense support and interventions, might be able to champion for a high-quality neighborhood school. However, the complexity of CPS, and the size of the district, makes it all but impossible to sustain the vast number of 514 LCSs. Furthermore, the system, as it stands today, does not support best practices. Being the third largest urban area in the country, there is a wide range of social demographics throughout the city and the quality of life of CPS students ranges vastly from school to school. Some LSCs serve students, who, while they might live six blocks from each other, are on different ends of the spectrum when examining their quality of life. Some LSCs are fighting for social services and social justice for their communities.

The district is affected by local, state, and federal governments on an almost global scale; Chicago is part of the global news today. Chicago has been identified as one of the most segregated and financially disparate economies in the nation. There are
different groups utilizing the distress of the district to leverage their agendas at the cost of the students and the communities the LSCs serve. Ethnic cultures, migration of people, and identity gentrification also play roles in the district not being able to effectively support the LSCs.

It is problematic for certain individuals to actively take part in the LSC process, for example, parents and stakeholders who do not speak English. The U.S. Census study released in 2013 informs that 2.5 million Chicago area residents speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). That equates to 30% of the city potentially unable to support the LSC process without added assistance. Besides, at the present, there are no provisions offered by the city to support individuals whose native language is other than English. There were also approximately 14% of people in the Chicago metropolitan area, or more than 1.3 million people, living below the poverty line in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The majority of jobs filled by individuals below the poverty line are minimum wage and do not come with sick, personal, or vacation time (Johansson, 2017). This adds another potentially problematic layer to the LSC dilemma in that certain individuals are in a position of choosing work or serving on the LSC as serving on the council is also a voluntary position, and individuals are often required to take time off from work to be at meetings and assist sub-committees created by the council.

**Political Analysis**

The structure of the LSCs create a political structure that does not support research for effective management. On each LSC there are two teachers and one principal representatives. The principal evaluates the teachers per PERA requirements
and union contracts; likewise, the LSC evaluates the principal, and those very same teachers are part of that evaluation. CPS and public officials have created a circular system wherein management (the principal) is being formally evaluated by the individuals that are contracted and legally to be evaluated by their supervisor (the principal). If a principal is required to discipline, or provide a low-rating evaluation to a certain teacher representative on the LSC, that teacher representative will consequently, or subsequently, be officially evaluating the principal. This is obviously problematic.

There is furthermore a small percentage of voters that support the LSCs. With limited amount of voting turnout, special interest groups can navigate the election process with little or no resistance. These special interest groups are thus able to assemble members of their choice to be easily elected to drive their specific agenda.

Likewise, the principal must spend a great deal of energy satisfying the members of the current interest group who has subsequently gained control of the LSC. In many communities, there are no LSCs, especially within those populations where there is little political capital or even a lack of understanding of the power in the political structure of the LSC. You can find that many Level 3 schools, the lowest performing schools in CPS, do not have an LSC. The schools are extremely segregated and the majority of Level 3 schools have a high percentage of student qualifying for free or reduced lunch, thus denoting low socio-economic status.

**Moral and Ethical Analysis**

When dealing with school boards, administrators must sometimes choose between supporting students or meeting the needs of a few adults. They must ask themselves, “Do I support what is best for the students, or do I give up my job and potentially my career.”
It sounds drastic, but it is the reality of some CPS principals. It is very strategic for the teachers to take the focus of their members. It also puts their colleagues in a moral and ethical position of choosing sides. No matter how hard an administrator works on building culture and climate, the teachers’ union is going to push their agenda of “us against them.” Us being the teachers with the LSC and them being CPS management, the administration. It causes a great deal of tension and turmoil at the local level. There are many cases in CPS where special interest groups, in addition to the teachers’ union, who worked in collaboration with CPS to have principals removed to drive their agenda. A principal at times must come to the decision if they are a principal or a puppet.

Some LSC members require a great deal of time and energy. This time and energy is taken away from the efforts of running the school. As stated, some schools do not have a LSC. The school administrator is then forced, based on their formal evaluation, to create and support a LSC. They must decide to allocate time to being compliant or committing to the strategic priorities of bringing added resources or supports to their school. There have multiple cases of election and budget fraud, and illegal campaigning. There are also multiple employees in CPS who leverage the structures of CPS to support rapid professional and political growth in the system.
SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Vision

The question that needs to be answered is this: is the work which building level administration is engaging in with Local School Councils supporting student learning? The answer would be a definite “no.” The mission of my policy advocacy is to support school based administration with a board that will best support the school and student learning. The vision of the policy advocacy is to remove the local school councils and create network school councils. The commitments of the policy advocacy are to support network school councils in training, adoption, policy, and best practices as recommended by the Illinois School Board Association. With this partnership, networks can better support the administrators at the local school level. The goals of the policy advocacy are to support the shift to network school councils with research and evidence.

Needs

The first need is to focus on student learning. One way for building level administration to focus on student learning is time allocation. Many hours of Chicago Public School administrators are spent supporting Local School Councils. As a Superintendent today, there is even more personal qualitative evidence to support administrators with this change. The amount of time I spend working with my district school board is dramatically less than I did as building level administrator in CPS supporting the local school council. All that time could be allocated to supporting student learning. Principals can best support students by supporting teachers. Teacher leadership is an important component to supporting student learning.
Teacher leadership is very complex in Chicago Public Schools. The teachers are part of one of the strongest and largest unions in the nation. They have very strong leadership and train their members very well. Members of the Chicago Teachers Union also sit on the Local School Council. The union has systems to support their members who sit on the LSC. The teachers evaluate the building level administration. The time that is spent working with those teachers on the LSC could be allocated to support them on, or the supporting the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT, typically has members that form the Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP). This is a three-year plan that is driven by the *School Effectiveness Framework*. This is a very rich document outlining best practices to support schools develop the CIWP. It helps schools identify priorities, goals, and align budget to support those goals. The ILT is then tasked to implement the plan. This process is a research based process. If implemented with validity, it could help drive positive change in CPS schools. Unfortunately, much time and energy of building level administrators is taken away from this work to support the LSC and the political undercurrent formed by having teacher representatives on the Local School Council.

Parents also sit on the LSC. Many parents are recruited, by administration and teachers, to sit on the LSC. Instead of utilizing parents to drive the work of the Parent advisory committee, Bilingual advisory committee, and parents-teachers’ association, they are utilized to develop and support the LSC. Having a fully functional LSC is part of the principal's evaluation completed by the networks. If a principal does not spend quality time developing their LSC, they will receive a lower rating on their evaluation. This requires one-on-one meetings, and trainings, to support LSC members on board best
practices. Again, that is a great deal of time that is taken away from building and supporting parent organizations, workshops, and activities.

**Values**

The number one value of this policy advocacy is student achievement. According to the Center for Public Education, effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction, and define clear goals toward that vision (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011). In addition, effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011). The current structures in place to support Local School Councils make it difficult to effectively train all board members on how to effectively support those values. It is challenging for Chicago Public Schools to support all the Local School Councils.

Chicago Public Schools Local School Council Relations (CPSLSCR) oversees and facilitates the operation of site-based management teams in each school, expanding all aspects of communications among the schools, parents, and the greater community (CPS.edu, 2016). CPSLSCR pursues strong relationships with community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, agencies, and city departments to advance safety both in and outside the school. They also provide systematic and comprehensive training to all local school council members, as well as citywide resources and support to all parents of CPS students (CPS.edu, 2016). The Local School Council Relations has been tasked with not only supporting the LSCs but also parent groups, and the greater community. It would take a great deal of staff and resources to support this scope of work. The individuals supporting these initiatives work incredibly hard, and are doing an
amazing a job. They have been tasked with supporting the established values of school boards, which could be an isolated task. With Network School Councils the department could conduct, assess, critique and report on all facets of the LSC with validity. Their work could go beyond the LSC elections.

**Goals**

The primary purpose of the policy advocacy is to begin to phase out the Local School Councils as Network School Councils are phased in, a vast undertaking. Shifting to Network School Councils will neither result in immediately higher performing schools, nor in administration being supported significantly more. However, once the shift takes place, the Chicago Public Schools will need to properly engage with, encourage, and model for the new Network School Councils. The first goal would be to support the communities in setting expectations for their schools. Next would be to make sure that their schools achieve the best results in meeting those expectations. Lastly, the new councils would need to be trained on how to ensure that public resources are used effectively and efficiently to achieve those results. The main driver to support this work would be rooted in Rick DuFour’s Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). They would focus on supporting administration at the building level with the continuous cycle of improvement.

The newly-formed boards would set a shared mission and vision, aligned with commitments to achieve such mission and visions; they would begin the process of setting SMART goals for the network via training and support from the Office of Local School Council Relations. (This department would be renamed Local Network Council Relations.) CPS staff would be able to support the councils, because the fewer number of
councils would be much more manageable than existing LSCs. Furthermore, instead of being forced as to what schools or councils to support, they would distribute support equitably, as the new reality would align with the goals previously mentioned, particularly the overarching goal of this policy advocacy to support student learning. By freeing up administration with LSC relations, the NSC’s could support administration aligned with best practices recommended by the Illinois Association of School Boards.
SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Introduction

There are quite a few counter-arguments to creating Network School Councils within CPS. This section will present a counterpoint which will then be balanced by a point to support Network School Councils. The number one argument against LNCs could be that the existing LSCs take an active role in the principal selection process. Selecting a principal who is a good fit for all stakeholders is very important for a school. If the district selects a leader, he/she might not have a complete understanding of what precise leadership is needed to best support that school. While teachers should have input on principal selections, they should not be involved directly in the democratic selection process. Furthermore, what happens in some cases, is that with a strong teacher presence on a particular LSC, those teachers have a persuasive influence on the parent representation of the council. The teachers sometimes advocate for a certain leader, who while not as strong as the other candidates, aids in sustaining teacher control of the school. However, the result in these situations is that student learning is negatively affected, as the position is thus filled with a candidate, not the best qualified one, but one who is less likely to drive the change needed for that school.

Another argument to maintenance of Local School Councils is that LSC members assist parents in deciphering true and false information, as the LSCs are near the parents of the school children. The LCSs are readily available to the stakeholders, and provide a non-CPS employee lens, becoming parent representatives as they support parents’ seeing the ‘big’ picture. Parents feel safe when information is being communicated to them from such peers; however, several LSC members are quite selective as to what
information they are willing to reveal to parents. Everyone has an agenda. If the individual members are not supportive of the principals or LSC decisions, they could use their position to create tension with the parents. They leverage the trust of being a parent representative to support their own personal agenda. The LSC members can rally parents, such as the case with PARCC testing, to support their opinion on the amount of standardized testing CPS and the state requires. Instead of working with legislators, they put pressure on the local level administration with teachers to let students “opt out.”

An added argument is that LCSs promote a community school environment, as they foster community advocacy. Such advocacy exposes community members to democracy in action, within CPS, at the LCS appears to be the only avenue to navigate CPS for the community. The community can also be part of the Local School Council as one member of the community sits on the council providing a perspective that is unique to parents and teachers. In a book co-written by Dr. Carlos Azcoitia, a former principal and network chief in CPS, there is no mention that Local School Councils are a crucial part of community schools (Purinton & Azcoitia, 2016). The book stresses the importance of having a community-focused leader, developing academic identity, creating partnerships, and evaluating a community leader. If having Local School Councils was an important component to one of the most successful community schools in Chicago, it is not published in any current research or literature.
SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Needed Educational Activities

Local Network Councils are advocated to be a district-wide program, furthermore involving state and district policy change. The first step would be for the district to work with local and state political officials to amend the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, last amended in 1995. At that time, the amendment gave the mayor of Chicago the authority to appoint the five-member board and the chief executive officer. Likewise, this advocated policy amendment is administratively workable based on data of the ineffectiveness of the district since the Act was amended in 1995 (Banerji, 2015). No other school districts or states have adopted Local School Councils since the Act's adoption in 1988. Coming up on 30 years of implementation, there is no substantial data to support the effectiveness of Local School Councils in Chicago Public Schools. To determine effectiveness, or lack thereof, regarding LSCs, there would be a need to conduct a specific program evaluation geared singularly toward the LSCs. This type of evaluation would benefit the NLCs as they could utilize components that might, in fact, be working well within the LSC structure.

Prior to presenting this data and a plan for an amended bill, it would be necessary to first start with educating individuals concerning the vision of the Act. The Act was driven primarily because Chicago was the lowest performing school district in the nation. And although CPS has made gains in 30 years, there is no data is connected to those gains to the Local School Councils. Educating stakeholders on the amount of time and energy administrations spend on supporting LSCs as well as CPS funds allocated to supporting this system would be the first step. Once the stakeholders value the need for
Network Councils, there ought to be an organized campaign for lawmakers to support an amended or a new Act (hereinafter referred to as the “Act”). CPS would use the same structures that they have for Local School Council elections. The LSC elections are rooted in best practices, and since those systems are in place, NLC elections would certainly benefit.

Many stakeholders are advocating for new policy because the mayor appoints the school board and the chief executive officer. The union, on the other hand, heavily supports the Local School Councils. The unions have two teacher-representatives, an integral part of the LSC, ensuring union leadership maintains control at each local level. However, to reiterate, there is no data or research that provides backing that having teachers on a board that supervises and evaluates a building level administrator is beneficial and, in fact, may be problematic.

There would be the need for a great deal of time and energy spent on initial education activities. Many individuals view LSCs as a positive means for local community members to have control of their local school, presenting a potential difficulty which would need to be surmounted. However, with education and training, the majority of individuals will see that LSCs must cease to exist, with the replacement of LNCs.

One major piece of validation used to support the policy change would be to reflect on work done in The New York City Public School District. According to the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE, 2017), there are 32 Community Education Councils (CEC) in New York City. Each CEC oversees a community school district that includes multiple schools within their community (NYCDOE, 2017).
Moreover, there are two appointed voting members who must be residents or own a business within the district. A non-voting high school senior residing in the district, and who is furthermore an elected student leader, is appointed by the community superintendent (NYCDOE, 2017). These community superintendents are similar to the role of Network Chief in Chicago Public Schools.

The NYCDOE’s website also states that the Councils handle promoting the achievement of educational standards and goals relating to the instruction of students; these councils are required to establish a positive working relationship with the community superintendent and local instructional superintendents. Council members must hold quarterly meetings with parent associations, as well as aid school leadership teams. A council member also has a voice in establishing educational policy for the district and in evaluating the community superintendents and the local instructional superintendents assigned to the district (NYCDOE, 2017). This system, the NYCDOE, could be used a template to create the Network Councils in the Chicago Public Schools.

The New York City CECs are more involved with improving schools then managing the day to day operations of the building level administrators, which aligns perfectly with the Illinois School Board’s Association balcony analogy. School boards should be on the balcony observing the dance floor; they are not on the dance floor. However, in Chicago, the board members function contrary to the Association's recommended fundamental best practice of a functioning school board.
Staff Development Plan

Once lawmakers approve the policy, there will need to be a great deal of community forums, staff trainings, and clear procedures and protocols provided by the district. The first item to discuss would be procedure and protocols, one of the many strengths of Chicago Public Schools. Chicago Public Schools has a plethora of resources, plans, implementation guides, and school improvement plans. The Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE²) would need to be involved with developing the Network Councils procedures and protocols. FACE², as an organization, has years of experience to bring to the inception processing of creating Network Councils rooted in best practices. Likewise, there are a few high functioning Local School Councils in the district, and many lessons to be learned from their best practices to ensure that certain protocols do not need to be revisited at the Network Council level. Chicago Public Schools also has a very large and competent legal department, which would ensure that the procedures and protocols follow any new Act passed by local and state lawmakers. Once these procedures and protocols are created and approved by the board, the district will need to work on two parallel paths. They will need to train staff, and hold community forums.

There are going to be a great deal of questions and ideas that will come from the community, and as such, this input will increase the quality of the Network Councils. The community will offer a perspective that is unlike that from inside the district. They will be able to point out potential blind spots, and help to facilitate well-rounded and stable policies, procedures, and inauguration of the LNCs. There are many members of the community that are not directly connected to their local school, but have a desire to
be involved. This advocated Act will provide an opportunity to invite new stakeholders in to bring together a positive community collaborative culture with CPS.

After they finalize the plans with community input, CPS will need to support adult learning. The best framework to drive this work would be from Eleanor Drago-Severson’s *Leading Adult Learning*, a comprehensive work which provides effective practices for supporting adult development in schools (2009). Drago-Severson uses Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) constructive-development theory as her foundation to aid in gaining an understanding of how each one of us individually develops as an adult learner. As leaders, we need to embolden our staff to transition from rule-based learning to interconnected learning. Many of us are unable to shift through the stages of the constructive-developmental theory because we are not given time to reflect on our practice. We are expected to perform without any guidance or coaching through our adult learning.

Drago-Severson’s work (2009) on adult learning includes a topic known as: *Ways of Knowing*, wherein she names several ‘ways’ of knowing:

- **Instrumental knowers** are rule-oriented and work well in situations where there are proven customs and concrete guidelines. These learners adapt to a view that states there is a “right way” to do the job at hand.

- **Socializing knowers** are other-oriented, and are concerned with satisfying social or community expectations, and having the approval of eminent others. Whatever you might think of these learners (as their boss, peer, or subordinate) translates to what they think of themselves.
• Self-authoring knowers are self-reflective, as they generate and have a well-developed sense of their own values and standards, and they look to their own judgment to decide their actions. What is important for these learners is demonstrating their expertise and sharing their ideas.

• Self-transforming knowers are interconnected and need to be exploring paradoxes and contradictions, not only within themselves but within organizations and relationships. They want to grow through feedback and collaboration (Drago-Severson, 2009).

The adult learner is engaging in conflict, and even controversy, to enhance his/her team’s learning as he/she seeks out other people’s thinking, thus increasing not only the capacity of themselves, but furthermore the capacity of the team and the organization. Depending on the topic, situation or professional development individuals can shift from instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, or self-transforming. The goal when leading adult learning is to find ways to enhance adult development in way that creates a culture of self-transforming adult learners. CPS will need to inspire its staff so that they are driving the system, continuously improving it, and involving all stakeholders in the process.

**Time Schedules**

The time schedule for complete policy implementation would be three years. The first year would be spent collecting input from all the various stakeholders. We would need to ensure that our reality of the effectiveness of CPS LSCs align with the stakeholders’ reality. If the perception is that the existing LSCs are highly functioning and supporting student learning, we will need to present stakeholders with data and
rationale to support a major change. Once we have completed our community listening
tours, presenting data and rationale, we will need to work with policymakers to amend
the Chicago School Reform Act. This process will take approximately one year.

After the successful community stakeholder phase, we would then draft new
policy to offer to lawmakers. Such policy drafts would be based on the input from many
sources: community stakeholders, CPS staff, and local politicians. If we have specific
policy before year one, stakeholders would see that decisions were made, and the
listening tour was more of a facade, than actual stakeholder input. The crux of the policy
would be to shift from Local School Councils to Network Councils, similar to the model
utilized in the New York City Department of Education. The final stage would be to
implement the policy.

As stated, the district would use Eleanor Drago-Severson’s *Leading Adult
Learning* to develop the staff’s ability to utilize the Network Councils. The Network
Councils would also be part of the Professional Learning Community initiative in CPS.
CPS is already doing fantastic work in supporting district and building leaders in
cultivating their capacities toward development of a Professional Learning Community.
The district would furthermore be able to utilize a continuous cycle of improvement to
help increase the quality of support. There are many school boards in urban districts that
utilize a systematic approach to improving the district. This is a cycle that does not
require district employees. It requires development of council members’ capacity of
understanding how to improve the various schools. Furthermore, this approach would
provide for district leaders, building leaders, and council members to acquire common
vocabulary as they coordinate school improvement.
Program Budgets

CPS is required to support 415 elementary and 85 Local School Councils; moreover, there is an entire department dedicated to aid and sustain LSCs. CPS publishes the financial support of The Office of Local School Council Supports in the budget lines of the Office of Leadership and Learning; this department received $8.3 million during SY16. The funds in that budget line also supported the Family and Community Engagement Office (FACE²). Much of the work that the FACE² staff engages in is reinforcing the LSC. The district uses Title 1 funds to support the LSCs massive amount of paperwork, promotional items, election staff, parent training and parent involvement. The funds used to support the LSC would shift to a focus of supporting this advocated policy change, as current support to LSCs would transfer incrementally during the three-year timeline of the policy implementation. The funds would be distributed evenly throughout the councils; however, certain councils will receive added funds to support needed professional development or staff development. The legal department will also be utilized to sustain this policy change.

Progress Monitoring

The district is shifting to using the framework of Professional Learning Communities. This approach will be used to monitor the progress of the activities. The committee tasked with this enormous shift will be very public throughout the process. They will begin by setting their mission, vision, and commitments for the committee. As they continue through the work, they will utilize the continuous cycle of improvement to drive the work. They will start with evaluating data. They will set targets to reach their first SMART goals as they monitor work and implement interventions when needed.
They will start with setting monthly goals and will meet weekly to foster reciprocal accountability. They will reflect and celebrate at the end of each successful goal date. As the committee progresses in their work they can begin to set bi-monthly or quarterly goals. The short-term goals will help monitor the progress to successful policy implementation.
SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Introduction

There will be the formation of the policy implementation committee. The policy implementation committee (PIC) will need to allocate a great deal of energy, time, and building systems to communicate the progress of the policy implementation. The key to success is transparency. CPS has one of the best district websites in the country wherein you can find information ranging from individualized school improvement plans to access to newsletters from different departments within CPS. PIC will be required to be public and transparent with their practices. They will moreover need to update communications on their current SMART goals through the district's website, social media platforms, as well has hold community Q&A sessions. PIC will also be required to report often to the CPS BOE, which manages PIC, to provide interested stakeholders vital and assorted information via live and recorded meetings.

The CEO would handle facilitating the PIC meetings, but would not manage the committee. As soon as reciprocal accountability becomes effectively established and built into the committee’ protocols, the facilitator role would be relinquished by the CEO, as a PIC member would begin to fill that role. The CEO would remain on the committee as an active member, but no longer act as facilitator.

The BOE would then be on the ‘balcony,’ seeing the work of the CEO and the committee, as the BOE uses the foundational principles of the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB, 2017) to support the work of the CEO. The BOE would ask clarifying questions regarding policy, approve policy changes, and approve non-
budgetary expenditures; in other words, the BOE would not be involved in the details of the PIC’s work, focusing solely on policy and budget.
SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

This advocated policy is necessary to ensure that building level administration is working to encourage and reinforce student learning. The current Local School Council structure removes administrators away from promoting and championing student learning. There is no other district in the nation that has adopted the policies from the Chicago School's Reform Act. According to Superville (2014), the enthusiasm that changed the Illinois School Code in 1988 to create the councils has waned; initial financial sustenance from foundations and other nonprofits that initially sprang up to finance and advise this experiment to have dried up, participation in elections has plummeted, and - most significantly - a later State law (1995) put the city's schools under mayoral control.

Meanwhile, the councils' contributions to actual improvement in the 400,000-student system are being debated. There are two sides to the argument of whether LSCs have value or not within CPS. An evaluation of the current functions and potential benefits of LSC would necessarily need to take place to ascertain the benefit, if any, of the current system of LSCs. However, Superville (2014) confirms that no other urban district has chosen this path to transformation of troubled schools, which furthermore raises the question as to whether the councils could ever have lived up to the idealistic goals of their early proponents and provided a model beyond a specific time and place. Districts have not shifted to Local School Councils because building level administrators need to be instructional and operational leaders, and not be drawn into developing the capacity of the LSC. Within CPS, Local Schools Councils require a building level administrator to have the strongest political pillar in his/her leadership capacity; this
comes at the enormous cost of not being able to focus on student learning and school improvement.

The values at the center of the advocated policy should be the students; as we have seen, the Local School Councils create an environment that removes focus and attention away from providing for the students’ needs, as they furthermore create a complex and complicated environment, adding layers of staff, politics, and bureaucracy.

School boards are extremely important to sustaining the work that school districts perform. According to Jay Mariano, school boards in America have been ideally positioned to discuss this needed change in education, and have been charged with governance responsibilities over the public schools (Mariano, 2008). Given their function and responsibility in an era of accountability and high expectations for student achievement, school boards have implemented proven and effective practices within their boardsmanships. Putting a functional system in place to champion and advocate for Network Level Councils while at the same time removing Local School Councils would aid and sustain the students of CPS.

CPS has created a system requiring its principals to navigate an arena mirroring that of a superintendent; a superintendent’s role in the school district has been to provide leadership and management of the system (Cuban, 2001). It is extremely problematic for a principal of a school to provide leadership and management of a system which includes Local School Councils. There is a plethora of factors that happen outside of the principal's role that affect his/her school. Marzano and Waters (2009) shared the importance of superintendents and school boards working together, stating that in “districts with higher levels of student achievement, the local board of education is
aligned with and supportive of the nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction.

They ensure these goals remain the primary focus of the district’s efforts and that no other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 4). It is problematic for LSCs to give their attention to this board’s best practices when certain LSC member are likewise members of the teachers’ union.

Removing the LCS’s from the schools and creating a Network Level board would encourage CPS in creating systems that result in higher levels of student achievement. CPS needs to focus on visionary leadership, school culture, and instructional programs, organizational management, and collaboration with stakeholders as they focus on planning for improved student success.
References


*Policy Advocacy Document*


Appendices

Appendix A: Definition of Terms

*Balcony View* - Dealing with policy and budget. Not on the dance floor (day to day operations).

*BOE* – Board of Education.

*Culturally Proficient* - is a level of knowledge-based skills and understanding that are required to successfully teach and interact with students and to work effectively with colleagues from a variety of cultures by holding all forms of cultural difference in high esteem.

*LNC* – Local Network Councils.

*LSC* – Local School Councils.

*MTSS* - a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, is a systemic, continuous improvement framework in which data-based problem-solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students.

*PARCC testing* - The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers is a consortium that work to create and deploy a standard set of K–12 assessments in Mathematics and English, based on the Common Core State Standards.

*PERA* - Performance Evaluation Review Act.

*Professional Learning Community* – also known as *PLC*, is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.
**SMART goals** - To make sure your goals are clear and reachable, each one should be:

Specific (simple, sensible, significant); Measurable (meaningful, motivating);
Achievable (agreed, attainable); Relevant (reasonable, realistic, and resourced, results-based); and Time bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

*SY* – School Year.
Appendix B: CPS Organizational Chart