Radical Inclusion: An Engagement Model for Accountability Redesign

Natalie Neris

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RADICAL INCLUSION: AN ENGAGEMENT MODEL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

REDESIGN

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November 16, 2021

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RADICAL INCLUSION: AN ENGAGEMENT MODEL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

REDESIGN

Natalie C. Neris

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

National College of Education
National Louis University
November, 2021
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ABSTRACT

To ensure that Chicago Public Schools’ school accountability policy is equitable and representative of the insights and perspectives of those most impacted, this study advocates for CPS to enact a Radically Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement (RISE) policy to enforce a more inclusive policy redesign process. This policy advocacy document examines the history of school accountability through five intersecting domains: education, economics, social context, political context and moral/ethical considerations. Reflecting on my experience as a third-generation CPS student, a CPS parent, former teacher and school leader, I challenge the reader to consider the intention and impact of school accountability on Chicago’s students and to confront the beliefs and practices that have enabled inequity to persist.

Throughout this study I advocate for an inclusive policy redesign process that will work to open the system and promote collaboration to ensure stakeholders are able to bring critical and necessary perspectives into the policy proactively. Making the school system more accessible by implementing an inclusive stakeholder engagement process will require CPS to build the infrastructure to engage stakeholders about the policy and its implications to mitigate unintended and harmful consequences. Here I propose a policy and outline an implementation plan that helps the district move its principles and values of equity and inclusion into practice.
PREFACE

I became a CPS teacher in 2002, just as No Child Left Behind was signed into law. Early in my career I understood the importance of measurement to inform instructional practice. I saw data as a powerful tool that, when used with integrity, could support improved outcomes for students. In my almost 10 years as a classroom teacher I watched as teachers and school leaders wrestled through data to build their own capacity -- to understand data and use it -- often with little support and much uncertainty.

As CPS moved to adopt the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) in 2013, I saw high-stakes testing take the front seat and observed as instructional practice in schools shifted from being centered on students, to being centered on tests. I saw the difference in challenges that school leaders faced while trying to provide a quality education to students with vastly different needs. In my role as Chief of Academic Accountability, I felt the discomfort of having to hold schools accountable to a single standard, knowing that the growth they made wasn’t always quantifiable, the resources they had access to were not equitable, and the challenges they faced were often symptoms of larger systemic issues.

What I recognized quickly about the district’s accountability policy is that the value placed on a school based on its SQRP rating did not always reflect what was actually happening within the walls of the school. In my experience, there were schools with top ratings whose students didn’t necessarily have access to a quality education. The inverse was also true -- I saw and experienced schools with lower ratings whose students were thriving and growing in ways not quantifiable. This led me to interrogate the
accountability policy to understand more deeply how a school could have a public rating that did not reflect its reality. I learned quickly that, as has happened historically with education policy, those closest to the ground were furthest from the policy’s development. This has contributed to the policy’s short-sightedness. While the policy may have been well intentioned, a lack of diverse perspectives and experiences contributing to the policy development has led to harmful and unintended consequences.

One of the greatest leadership lessons I have learned in my career is the importance of bringing people along, especially as it relates to implementing change. In our work to further equity, it is important to challenge society’s traditionally defined notion of expertise. In my lived and professional experience, I have found that families and communities are the experts of their experience and capable of designing their own solutions. While reform efforts in Chicago have largely been led by those outside of the system imposing solutions and ideas onto communities, I have learned that traditionally identified “experts” do not have a better understanding of the problem/challenges that policy seeks to solve, than those who have experience in the environment. To that end, radically inclusive stakeholder engagement is necessary to develop a policy that intends to garner support and foster real change and improvements for Chicago students.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been one of the longest, most challenging professional and personal journeys of my life. In the process of getting to the finish line I have experienced tremendous joy and tremendous loss. I have been challenged to confront my insecurities, my confidence has been challenged -- many days I felt defeated and questioned if accomplishing this doctoral degree was possible for someone like me.

I am eternally grateful for the spirit of my ancestors -- my grandmothers, especially -- who remind me that I can endure temporary discomfort with ease -- and that when I am in alignment with the spirit of God there is nothing I can not do. To God be the glory!

This would be impossible if it weren’t for the love, support and encouragement of my family (especially my mama and daughters!) and my tribe of amazing friends who have inspired me and encouraged me on this journey (no matter how many times I stopped and started to write this thing!). I am eternally grateful.

I want to acknowledge my Chair, Dr. Harrington Gibson, who has been a patient and kind champion and supporter throughout this entire process. Finally, I must acknowledge my mentor, Dr. Cheryl D. Watkins, who has always seen me -- who has opened my mind and heart to what is possible -- who holds me to the highest standard with love and compassion. Thank you forever and ever.
DEDICATION

To my mother -- I am your legacy. Thank you for never giving up.

To Julia and Samantha -- you are my greatest teachers and my reason for everything.

To Marcus, Ray and Drea -- I love y’all so much.

To every CPS student - there is a path forward, I promise.
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SECTION 1: VISION STATEMENT

The Role of Equity in the School Quality Rating Policy and School Accountability Measures

A fair and transparent method of measuring school quality is an essential component of education reform efforts that seek to promote equity and close the achievement gap between White students and their Black and Brown counterparts. The same data that has been overused to stigmatize Black and Brown communities (Chicago Beyond, 2019) could also be used to promote equity. Used responsibly, a transparent accountability policy, composed of meaningful school quality measures, can inform cycles of continuous improvement in school districts, as well as serve as the basis from which schools and communities collaborate to plan for school improvement.

Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) current accountability policy, the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), serves as the common accountability framework for all district-operated, charter and alternative schools. Since the policy was enacted in 2013, the district has been lauded for its growth, as evidenced by a 2017 report by Stanford University professor Sean Reardon, who found that Chicago students’ growth rate was higher than 96 percent of all school districts in the United States. The report also noted that among the 100 largest school districts in the country, Chicago had the highest growth rate between third and eighth grade; and the average Chicago student’s test scores improved by roughly six grade-level equivalents in five years’ time – 20 percent more growth on average (Reardon, 2017).
Despite the tremendous growth that CPS students have experienced, Figure 1 illustrates the achievement gap in the district, the one that shows the distance between the growth and achievement of Black and Brown students compared to White students, persists (CPS, 2019, “Key Findings” section). Additionally, Figure 2 illustrates the gap of Black student attainment scores in math from the district average has been widening between 2017 and 2019; Black students are the only population persistently performing below the national average in Math Attainment.

**Figure 1**

*Reading Attainment*

![Graph showing reading attainment over years for different student groups.]

*Note.* While the district has made tremendous progress over the last decade, NWEA attainment scores have plateaued for 8th grade cohorts.

**Figure 2**
Math Attainment

![Graph showing Math Attainment scores for different groups over years]

*Note.* Notably, the gap of Black student attainment scores from the district average has been widening between 2017 and 2019; Black students are the only population persistently performing below the national average in Math Attainment.

According to the Annual Regional Analysis (ARA), a fact-based data report produced by CPS to provide families with a clear set of information about schools in their communities, while there is evidence of student growth in the district overall, we continue to identify a disproportionate number of schools on the south and west sides of the city as the lowest performing according to the school district’s SQRP (CPS, 2019, p. 7). Not surprisingly, these schools are located in communities that have been plagued by systemic racism, injustice, disinvestment and complex social factors associated with poverty - all factors impacting student-level performance (Jensen, 2009). While the district’s accountability policy can serve as an important tool in measuring school quality, it falls short in its responsiveness to the needs of diverse communities. With revisions to
the policy to consider equity, CPS has the potential to develop a powerful accountability tool that can be used to inform resource efforts, foster fair decision making, and promote comprehensive school improvement efforts.

The Covid-19 global pandemic has exacerbated and put on display the inequities and opportunity gaps that exist across Chicago communities (Kids First Chicago, 2020, p.4). The pandemic has served as a reminder of the injustice that so many communities face. For those already working to overcome a history of unfair policy -- from housing to jobs to education -- the pandemic compounded trauma and hardship. Take, for example, the data on Covid-19 in Chicago, it is not a coincidence that the communities with the least amount of access to broadband internet - and therefore information, were also the communities who experienced the most Covid-19 deaths at the pandemic’s onset (IDPH, 2021, “Regional Covid 19 Metrics” section). These same communities also have the lowest rated schools in the district (CPS, 2019, p.8) according to CPS current accountability policy.

Kimberle Crenshaw developed a theory of intersectionality in her exploration of the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural and political violence against women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw suggests that “Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects” (Columbia Law School, 2017, “Crenshaw Interview” section). Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays and Tomlinson (2013) suggest that “we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places” (p.305). In that vein, I seek to apply the critical race theory of intersectionality to the context of school accountability in Chicago.
The purpose of this Policy Advocacy Document is to analyze CPS’ school accountability policy and to advocate for an evolution of the policy to one that is inclusive of the insights and perspectives of stakeholders most impacted by the policy’s outcomes. In doing so, the policy will be responsive to the unique and intersecting needs of Chicago’s students.

**SQRP and Defining Accountability**

School accountability is the process of evaluating performance on the basis of an articulated set of measures. It can also be understood as the obligation a school has to account for student performance, accept responsibility for said performance, and share performance results with families in a transparent manner (Figlio and Loeb, 2011). Following the movement of individual states to introduce accountability systems in the 1990’s, accountability measures have become a centerpiece of both Democratic and Republican federal administrations’ education policies (Figlio and Loeb, 2011). The presumption underlying school accountability policies is that the data reported will be used to inform continuous improvement efforts (McMahon, 2017). This level of accountability is critical to mitigate educational inequity. Done right, accountability policies serve as a thermometer for schools and districts and provide important data to inform school improvement efforts and resource allocation.

**Chicago Public Schools School Quality Rating Policy**

In 2013, CPS adopted the SQRP as the Chicago Board of Education’s policy for evaluating school performance (CPS, 2019). The policy outlines the criteria for determining a school’s quality rating. It weighs growth greater than attainment and
includes multiple measures of learning and student outcomes, including assessments, attendance, progress toward graduation, school climate data, and college enrollment and persistence. The performance benchmarks within the policy are tied to national assessments and norms, where possible (CPS, 2020).

The SQRP establishes the indicators of school performance and growth and the benchmarks against which a school’s success is evaluated. Through this policy, each school receives a School Quality Rating and an Accountability Status on an annual basis. (CPS, 2019). According to the CPS SQRP Handbook (2019), the School Quality Rating and Accountability Status serve several purposes:

1. Communicating to parents and community members about the academic success of individual schools and the district as a whole;
2. Recognizing high achieving and high growth schools and identifying best practices;
3. Providing a framework for goal-setting for schools;
4. Identifying schools in need of targeted or intensive support; and
5. Guiding the Board’s decision-making processes around school actions (i.e. closing/consolidation) and turnarounds (p. 2).

The structure of SQRP.

The SQRP is based on a weighted point system. For each indicator in the SQRP, schools can earn between 1 and 5 points for reaching progressive benchmarks of performance. Each indicator has a specific weight in the SQRP. Weights may be different based on the number and type of indicators that are available to a particular school, but
the sum of the weights for the school will always be 100%. The points received for each indicator are multiplied by their weight and then added together. Based on the overall weighted score, schools are assigned a School Quality Rating of Level 1+ (4 – 5 points), Level 1 (3.5 – 3.9 points), Level 2+ (3 – 3.4 points), Level 2 (2 – 2.9 points), or Level 3 (1 – 1.9 points) (CPS, 2019).

A school’s **School Quality Rating** (Figure 3) is used to determine their **Accountability Status**. In general, schools receiving a Level 1+, Level 1, or Level 2+ rating are deemed to be in *good standing*, the default status for a school. When a school receives a good standing status, they are still obligated to follow federal and state law and CPS policies, however, they benefit from some autonomy, including the ability to develop their own school improvement plan and budget alongside their Local School Council (LSC), who also maintain principal contracting authority in schools that are in good standing (CPS, 2019).

Schools receiving a Level 2 rating are in *remediation status*, and schools receiving a Level 3 rating are in *probation status*. When a school receives remediation status, the Chief Education Officer (CEO) may draft a new school improvement plan; require additional training for the LSC; direct the implementation of a new strategic plan; and/or mediate disputes or other obstacles to reform or improvement at the school. When a school receives probation status for at least one year, the Board of Education is authorized under state law to take additional corrective measures. These measures require a hearing and Board approval and may include ordering new LSC elections; removing and replacing the principal; replacing faculty members; reconstituting the attendance center and replacement and reassignment by the CEO of all employees of the attendance
center (also known as a “turnaround”); operating an attendance center as a contract
turnaround school; closing of the school; or any other action authorized under the Illinois
School Code (CPS, 2019).

**Figure 3**

School Quality Rating Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Rating</th>
<th>Indication</th>
<th>Accountability Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1+</strong></td>
<td>Highest Performance</td>
<td>Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td>High Performance</td>
<td>Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2+</strong></td>
<td>Average Performance</td>
<td>Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td>Below Average Performance</td>
<td>Remediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
<td>Lowest Performance</td>
<td>Probation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. The School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) is the Board’s policy for evaluating school performance. Each school receives a School Quality Rating and an Accountability Status every year.

My Awareness of This Issue: School Accountability as a Teacher

As a teacher, the students who entered my classroom were brilliant when they arrived. My greatest challenge was preparing them for the rigors of secondary and post-secondary education - helping them to believe that education could be their path to liberation - while acknowledging that even my best attempts could not overcome the intersecting challenges that they faced as Black and Brown students in a city whose achievement gap mirrors its wealth gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law just as I was entering the teaching profession in 2002, and with it came an increase in standardized assessments. Under NCLB, schools were required to measure achievement and establish annual achievement targets to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Under NCLB, there was great pressure for teachers to use data to inform instruction, but little training and professional development on how to analyze and use data for instruction were readily available.

Like many other teachers, I was deeply invested in becoming the best educator that I could be for my students. I sought opportunities to grow in the profession and relegated my late nights, weekends and summers to innovating my practice and preparing to implement new strategies in the classroom. While I was hopeful for what my students could accomplish, I also felt tremendously discouraged. I could see the disconnect between inputs and outputs. I experienced the tireless work of a teacher, saw the around-
the-clock work of school principals and experienced the unspeakable resiliency of students and families. Yet, it didn’t feel like any of that mattered, especially if the results of these efforts were not evident in student test scores.

I believed in high expectations and accountability as a classroom teacher, but it did not translate into the services or support my students needed— it translated into a demoralizing experience wherein all the work we did was never enough. Students with intersecting challenges could grow on standardized assessments, but still struggle to meet proficiency. In my third year of teaching, I taught summer school to 8th grade students whose transition to high school was dependent on their assessment scores. That summer my student JR grew 24 points— which by any standard is tremendous growth in a short amount of time. The sad part is, according to the accountability policy, it did not matter that he grew— he did not grow enough and that meant he would have to repeat the 8th grade. JR’s journey to meet proficiency was not without challenges; his 24-point growth was not without work. When we consider the intersections of immigration status, language barriers, housing stability, poverty— and all of its associated factors, growth meant resilience— it meant possibility. Falling short of proficiency never enabled us to celebrate the growth we did make— it always felt like a losing proposition for the teachers and our students.

School Accountability as a School Leader

Although SQRP was not in place during the time I was a teacher, my experience the policy since its enactment in 2013, first as Chief of Academic Accountability (CAA) for one of the largest charter school networks in Chicago, and then as Executive Director (ED) of a single-site charter school in Chicago. As CAA, I was responsible for
monitoring the academic progress of 15 CPS charter schools. My responsibility was to ensure that schools were making progress and executing a strategic plan aligned to the metrics in SQRP, and that students in priority groups, like special education and bilingual subgroups, were being served according to the law.

As CAA I saw the difference in challenges that school leaders faced while trying to provide a quality education to students with vastly different needs. I felt the discomfort of having to hold schools accountable to a single standard, knowing that the growth they made wasn’t always quantifiable, the resources they had access to were not equitable, and the challenges they faced were often symptoms of larger systemic issues. My role as CAA gave me insight into the uphill battle that schools in historically disenfranchised communities face on the path to closing the achievement gap, and deepened my understanding of racial and educational inequity in Chicago.

In my role as ED of a single-site charter school, I learned first-hand the many insidious challenges that school leaders face day-to-day. As a school leader I was accountable to maintain the school at a Level 1 on the SQRP. Because my board of directors assessed the school’s quality based on the SQRP, it left the organization vulnerable to blind spots that would ultimately impact student learning. In the ED role, I saw the impact teacher quality and retention had on student learning and school culture; I heard the urging from parents who believed that quality after-school programming was an indicator of an excellent school; I saw the consequences of student mobility - often caused by housing instability. These were all factors that impacted student learning, yet they weren’t factors measured on the district’s accountability policy. While we were
accountable to high standards in the SQRP, factors outside of our control were often critical factors that impacted student performance on standardized assessments.

**School accountability as a parent and advocate**

In addition to being a product of CPS and an educator in the system, I am also the parent of two CPS students. As a parent and advocate, I see how inequities impact communities across Chicago. Although SQRP is an accountability policy that intends to set high standards for all schools, it does not account for the impact of structural racism and poverty – and penalizes schools who continue to be plagued by the consequences of these inequities.

Currently, my oldest daughter attends one of Chicago’s few selective enrollment high schools. Her acceptance into a selective school means that she has access to a wealth of resources and a school experience designed to facilitate her success in high school and beyond. Her school, located on Chicago’s northside, offers honors and Advanced Placement classes, provides free tutoring, access to technology, counseling services, a comprehensive sports program and hundreds of clubs to meet the needs and interests of every student.

In addition to providing students with an engaging experience at my daughter’s high school, parents are welcomed and greeted by the school’s Friends of Committee, a parent-led non-profit designed and organized to offer the school’s parents an avenue to stay involved in their child’s education and be a part of the school community. As well as recognizing teachers, administrators, and staff with an annual appreciation luncheon, *Friends of Lane* offers teacher grants to provide the materials students need to expand learning opportunities. During my daughter’s first orientation, the committee presented
the school’s principal with a check for over $600,000 -- all money raised by parents to be used at the principal’s discretion. Since that time -- and even during the COVID-19 global pandemic -- this group of parent volunteers continues to raise money and serve as a supportive body to the school.

It is not by coincidence that my daughter attends a selective enrollment school in Chicago -- it is by design and it has required planning and calculating from the moment she entered kindergarten. This knowledge of the system and how it works is a privilege that I recognize many do not have. What she has access to at her school should be accessible to every student in every neighborhood across Chicago -- yet, my 18 years of experience in education have shown me that her experience is the exception and not the rule. There are high schools across the city who would benefit tremendously from access to resources and innovation -- whose students would excel with greater STEM programming and 21st century learning opportunities -- students who despite intersecting challenges could persevere in the right school environment. At my daughter's school, changes have come and the school has evolved in large part because parents of those “selective” students would not have it any other way. These are parents who have the financial resources and the time to volunteer and run programming at their child’s school. This is not the average parent. Inequity in the district is insidious. The result is the selective school being rewarded for high SQRP ratings and less-privileged schools being penalized and disempowered, rather than transformed in response to the needs of the people.

These are important factors when discussing school accountability because they surface the issue that schools are held to the same standard across the city -- yet the
resources and access (to capital and otherwise) varies depending on your zip code. It is not a coincidence that my daughter’s school’s SQRP has been and remains the highest possible rating.

We sell children in Chicago a dream when we tell them that they can achieve anything they put their minds to and become anything they desire as long as they go to school. We lead them to believe that education is the path to a thriving life -- and then we enact policy that demonstrates a misalignment between our lived and aspirational values. We have an accountability policy that sets a similar north star for students across the city. This policy does not take into consideration factors parents believe are indicators of a quality education, nor does it take into consideration access to resources or the intersecting social factors that impact performance and make high-quality education a possibility.

**Critical Issues in the Policy Problem**

There are several critical issues with the policy, all of which are undergirded by a lack of diverse and inclusive perspective in the policy’s development. SQRP’s overreliance on standardized assessments provides a narrow perspective of school quality and does not consider non-academic factors impacting student outcomes. The policy also does not consider inputs like quality of instruction and school funding, which are also critical factors contributing to improved outcomes for students.

**SQRP’s accountability metrics do not provide a holistic view of school quality.**

**Over reliance on standardized assessments.**

One issue in the current SQRP policy is that it relies too heavily on quantitative metrics and does not consider non-academic factors that impact student outcomes. In
SQRP, standardized assessment data is more heavily weighted to determine school quality; as a result, schools typically organize around this assessment data with the goal of seeing growth in those numbers on the accountability policy. The issue with using standardized assessments to measure student achievement is that research shows that factors such as family income and parent educational attainment are strong predictors of standardized test scores (Coleman et al. 1966; Davis-Kean, 2005; Goldhaber et al. 1999; Jencks, 1972; Jencks &Phillips, 1998). This suggests that a school whose students are affluent and whose parents are well educated will perform better on standardized assessments even if they experience low-quality teaching. The reverse can also be true for poor students who enter school less prepared than their affluent counterparts. These students may receive the highest quality education and never see their efforts reflected in standardized assessments or measured on the SQRP.

The use of standardized assessment as the most heavily weighted metric in the SQRP, then, is inherently biased. This is not to suggest that we should have lower standards for low-income students, Black and Brown students or English learners, but it does suggest that even if their standardized assessment scores are lower, their schools may still be doing a good job at educating them. Deeming a school high quality based on standardized assessment scores, and promoting a punitive policy for those schools that don’t measure up is then counterproductive.

**Lack of focus on teacher quality as factors in student performance**

The focus on quantitative metrics alone can mask major instructional and school culture challenges. Elmore (2004) suggests that “getting more students to learn at higher levels has to entail some changes in both the ways students are taught and in the
proportion of teachers who are teaching in ways that cause students to master higher-level skills and knowledge” (Elmore, 2004, p.14). Research suggests that teachers who understand how students learn and know how to facilitate student learning are significantly more effective in the classroom (Schneider, 2017), yet measures of school quality focus primarily on student outcomes and fail to give parents and the public any indication of the quality of teaching that contributed to those outcomes.

CPS has been a district on the rise for the last decade, but its positive trajectory has slowed considerably – even before the global pandemic closed schools for much of the 2019-20 school year. Maintaining and growing achievement is currently a systemwide challenge and to the extent the system can’t respond to this challenge, the roots of which include instructional practice, it will also not be able to deliver for the highest-need students in the system. A 2007 study of 25 of the world’s school systems - including 10 top performing systems - found that the critical factor in the success of the highest performing school systems in the world was instructional practice. The study found that “three things mattered most [across high-performing systems] 1) getting the right people to become teachers, 2) developing them into effective instructors, 3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child” (McKinsey & Company, 2017).

Despite efforts by the district to restructure itself, and policy developed in service to school improvement, we continue to fall short. We continue to experience improvement that is not accelerating fast enough for those who need it most or is not sustained over time. The problem, Richard Elmore suggests, “is understanding the conditions under which people working in schools seek new knowledge and actively use
it to change the fundamental processes of schooling” (Elmore, 2004, p.12). While the
impact of good teaching practice is broadly researched and its impact well noted, “most
educational reforms never reach, much less influence, long-standing patterns of teaching
practice, and are therefore largely pointless if their intention is to improve student

Teaching is intellectual work and teachers are the most critical lever in improving
outcomes for students (Mincu, 2015). Yet, as a school leader in Chicago, I often had to
run a pseudo college of education in the schools I led. This was not necessarily because
teachers were inept at their jobs or unwilling to learn, although I have observed many
teachers in my career who should have chosen a profession other than teaching. Part of
the issue I have observed with teacher practice in connection to student outcomes is that
teachers are often trained to teach differently depending on the programs they attended in
undergrad, the professional development they have invested in varies and their
knowledge and deep understanding of the cultural dynamics in a given school or
classroom setting depends, in large part, on their race and lived experiences.

As a school leader, you are confronted with the challenge of balancing many hats
-- the most important of which is instructional leadership. A strong instructional leader is
able to build the internal infrastructure to support all of the moving parts. In theory, if
those systems are working as they should be working, then we should see student
achievement continue to improve, despite intersecting social factors/complexities that
students may be facing. This is ideal, but this is not always the case. This theory only
works if every adult in the school building works it.
A teacher’s capacity to improve their practice is dependent on strong instructional leadership ---- but not entirely. You can have weak instructional leadership, as I had at the start of my teaching career -- and seek opportunities outside of your school building to help you become an effective teacher. Either way, it is the responsibility of the school leader to bring all of the adults in the building -- with all of their differences -- in alignment with the system. Teachers must be reflective enough to recognize and respond to their own areas for growth. Sometimes this means improving your pedagogical practice -- sometimes it’s by examining limited beliefs about students -- teacher practice matters, it impacts outcomes for students, yet there exists no transparency in the current policy regarding the quality of instructional practice.

**The need for equitable resource allocation to support school improvement**

Chicago is a segregated city — along racial lines and socio-economic lines (City Lab, 2020; WBEZ, 2010). The result is that students in different regions of the city have access to varying levels of resources to meet the high standards set forth in the SQRP. This is a result of the external resources that support the typical CPS student and that are necessary to meet these academic standards. While student funding for CPS students at the same grade level is equal, wealthier communities routinely supplement their children’s educations with additional programming and even charitable giving to their schools. Despite the fact that the state of Illinois moved to an equity-based funding model in 2017 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2017), CPS uses a student-based budgeting formula to allocate resources. This means that funds are distributed per pupil across the district, regardless of a school’s SQRP rating. A school situated on the south or west side of the city, for example, could receive a low SQRP rating and instead of
working to address the access and opportunity gap and intersectional issues impacting student achievement, the accountability policy works to further disempower schools and communities working to overcome by decades of marginalization.

An equity analysis of the Austin community on Chicago’s west side, reveals that of the 14,963 CPS students residing in the Austin community area in the 2018-19 school year, only 8,869 CPS students attend schools located in the Austin community. Of these students, 86% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, compared to 77% CPS overall; 80% of students are African-American and 18% are Latino. When measured against the district’s SQRP, 47% of elementary seats in Austin are rated high-quality (Level 1+/1) compared to 61% districtwide. When it comes to high school, no high school seats in Austin are rated high-quality (Level 1+/1) compared to 42% districtwide (Chicago Public Schools, 2019).

The disparities in school performance are not surprising when one considers the resources allocated to address the persistent gap in achievement, which is rooted in a gap in opportunities. Rarely do we address funding that serves to further widen the gap in resources available to students along the lines of race and economic status. In addition to the per pupil dollar amount allocated by the district, more privileged schools in the district benefit from greater access to resources.

A 2016-2017 school year analysis of the revenue schools used to supplement the school budget provided by the district found expenditures, including funds generated from fundraising. This includes any monies transferred to the school’s accounts by “Friends of” organizations, school fees, other gifts/grant income, and rental space income, which was starkly different depending on what region of the city a school is located.
Austin schools, on average, spent $12 per student from their school’s internal accounts, compared to the district average of $74 per student. For comparison, the schools in the Lincoln Park community, the city’s northside region, on average, spent $578 per student — with single school spending reaching as much as $1000 per student above the school’s per pupil amount allocated from the district (Chicago Public Schools, 2017).

Similarly, an analysis of capital expenditures from school years 2014-18 in buildings that currently enroll students found the top types of expenditures included: New Facility Construction, $392M, Building Envelope Renovations, $282M, IT & Educational Programming, $171M, Major Renovations, $131M and Building Interior, $125M. On average, schools in the Austin community had a capital expenditure of $839K per school in the 4-year period, compared to the District-wide average of $2.3M. Avalon Park, on the other hand, had an average capital expenditure of $13.7M per school (Chicago Public Schools, 2018).

In alignment with the district’s 5-year vision and in its efforts to improve equity in schools, the district’s FY2021 budget allocated $44 million dollars to their Equity Grant program to ensure “those who most need support will receive the necessary resources to help them reach their full potential” (CPS, 2020, “Budget Highlights” section). The district’s hope with the FY21 budget was that schools most impacted by low or declining enrollment - located mostly in the south and west sides of the city and in Black and Brown communities - would continue offering high academic programming and that the equity grants would support those efforts. My criticism of this effort is that it is a bandage and not a long-term solution. The grants are off-setting the fact that we have a local school funding model that is inequitable and does not meet the needs of Chicago
students. If the district can utilize University of Illinois’s (UIC) Hardship index to determine who is in greatest need and qualifies for an Equity Grant, I am left to wonder if they might be able to use the same or a similar formula to design a funding formula that is rooted in fairness.

If the point of the accountability system is to improve schools, and changing practice costs money, there are investments that need to be made that the SQRP is not promoting. You can set all the goals you want, but if you don’t have the resources to meet those goals, it’s not school improvement. By not allocating resources to low performing schools, CPS is essentially just labeling them, rather than supporting them. As a result, SQRP ends up being a tool that is not constructive, but rather, demoralizing and destabilizing.

**Policy Recommendation**

To address the critical issues in the policy, I am recommending the district implement a more inclusive policy redesign process. An inclusive redesign process will help to open the system and promote collaboration to ensure stakeholders have the space to bring critical and necessary perspectives into the policy proactively. Opening the system by implementing an inclusive stakeholder engagement process will require the district to build the infrastructure to engage stakeholders about the policy and its implications to mitigate unintended and harmful consequences.

Apply an Open Systems Lens to Policy Redesign
It is apparent that previous accountability policies have been short-sighted. I would attribute this to the fact that the district’s accountability policies have been designed by policymakers whose experience and perspectives about CPS schools are often limited or non-existent. I am advocating for a Radically Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement (RISE) policy that would require the district to implement radically inclusive stakeholder engagement in the redesign of the district’s school accountability policy.

**Theory of Action**

If CPS engages stakeholders in co-creating policy through radically inclusive stakeholder engagement then policies will be more reflective of the needs of those most impacted and policy outcomes will improve. Radical inclusion asks us to shift toward liberatory design, a mindset that promotes self awareness to liberate designers from habits that perpetuate inequity (Liberatory Design, 2021, “What is liberatory design” section). It asks us to involve more families and communities in co-creating policy, rather than limiting input to a small subset of them. It asks us to spend more time and target our efforts to reach those furthest from opportunity in the school system and to broaden the stakeholders we seek to engage (The Open Systems Institute, 2021, “Open Principles” section). It is about gathering a fully inclusive group to collaborate at every step of the engagement process. Radically inclusive stakeholder engagement will lead to the development of more equitable policy that is fully informed by the ideas, insights, and perspectives of those most impacted.

**Restructuring the policy to address the problems**
The challenge with the current accountability policy is that it has blindspots. It was designed with a limited perspective and therefore has had unintended consequences. If the district is to design a policy that causes the least amount of harm to students and communities, they must establish radically inclusive stakeholder engagement that creates the infrastructure for diverse perspectives to be part of co-creating the policy. This is what it means to open the system.

At a basic level, open systems let information in and closed systems keep information out. Open systems are adaptable to the information they receive from the outside world. “Open Systems are obsessed with their external environment because they know that upon them rests information, the critical lifeblood of understanding how to make the system relevant and dynamic” (The Open Systems Institute, 2021, “Blog” section). If the district is to continue leaning into its equity agenda, creating new ways to engage with the outside environment, i.e., families, communities, principals, teachers, is a necessary component of that work.

SECTION 2: ANALYSIS OF NEED

The Analysis of Need section will examine the history of school accountability through five intersecting domains: education, economics, social context, political context and moral/ethical considerations. Throughout this section I will seek to paint a picture for the reader of the history and origins of school accountability and its implications for education and schooling in Chicago. I will make the connections between policy and practice, and, using critical race theory as a lens, I will attempt to illustrate how the domains interact to impact education and school accountability. Throughout this section I will challenge the reader to consider the intention and impact of school accountability on
Chicago’s students and to confront the beliefs and practices that enable inequity and perpetuate institutional and structural racism.

Educational and Political Analysis

Throughout this analysis I will situate myself, a third-generation product of CPS, within the historical context of school accountability. To provide the reader with an important background, I will build the narrative beginning at Brown vs. The Board of Education, the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case that declared racial segregation of students in public schools to be unconstitutional.

Brown vs. the Board of Education

Brown vs. The Board became law in the midst of The Great Migration, a long-term movement of African Americans from the south to the urban north. For Chicago, this meant that Black families made up a quarter of the city’s population by 1960 (Great Cities Institute, 2019). The increase in Chicago’s Black residents coupled with white flight, led to overcrowded neighborhood schools in black communities and smaller class sizes in white schools (Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2005, Willis Wagons section). Despite advocacy efforts to promote desegregation of schools -- and federal policy requiring schools to desegregate -- Chicago’s then superintendent, Benjamin Willis, rejected calls for desegregation, even installing portable classrooms, known as Willis Wagons, to address overcrowding in black communities, as opposed to integrating white schools, citing a belief neighborhood schooling and decrying claims of inequality made by parents and stakeholders (Todd-Brelend, 2018). “Willis’s opposition to integration and his denials of racial disparities perpetuated systemwide racial inequality” (Todd-Brelend, 2018, p.26).
Public outcries intensified in the wake of commissioned reports recommending dramatic steps to redress educational inequality. Threats by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to withhold federal funds until a desegregation plan was developed were thwarted by Mayor Richard J. Daley's intervention (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.31).

Even after Willis’ resignation as superintendent, his successor was unable to develop and implement a desegregation plan in the district because of political pressure from white parents and the Board of Education.

It was not until 1980, with the help of federal and state intervention, that Chicago was required under a Consent Decree to develop a plan for desegregation (Jackson, 2010). The encyclopedia of educational law defines Consent Decrees as follows:

Consent Decrees in educational disputes are negotiated equitable agreements between plaintiffs and defendants in elementary and secondary school settings and in higher education. They involve a wide array of issues, such as desegregation and special education, wherein courts accept the agreed-upon settlements. In Consent Decrees in education defendants, usually school boards or other educational entities, agree to discontinue specified illegal activities such as segregation based on race, disability, or gender.

Organizations often utilize a Consent Decree to prevent their case from entering a courtroom. It can be seen as an admission of guilt, as organizations often find themselves on the cusp of lawsuits they believe they can’t win. Consent
Decrees as they relate to racial discrimination in education are no different.

(Jackson, 2010, p.6)

To set the backdrop for school accountability in the district -- it is hugely important to understand that CPS was required under a consent decree to integrate Black and White students -- just 40 years ago. That is the context in which I wish to ground the analysis that follows.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Until the mid-1960’s the relationship between educational policy and educational practice involved rules and guidelines developed locally; state departments and federal education policy were far removed from local education issues (McLaughin, 1990). The passage of the federally mandated Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) changed that and helped catalyze accountability policies that exist in U.S. schools today.

ESEA was a civil rights law that sought to decrease the achievement gap by providing federal funding to support schools whose students were disproportionately impacted by poverty (McGuinn, 2015). As Kimberly Jenkins Robinson (2018) suggests, “President Johnson signed ESEA into law in 1965 as part of his broader “war on poverty” because he viewed education as an essential ingredient for mobility, and he acknowledged that many schools did not have adequate resources to provide essential skills to children from low-income families” (p.926). The 1965 passage of the ESEA, with its support for compensatory education and innovation, aimed to strengthen state departments of education, libraries and, subsequently, bilingual education, signaled the
substantive involvement of the federal government in local educational activities (McLaughlin, 1990).

As the ESEA was being signed into law in 1965, and in response to provisions in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare commissioned research to be conducted ten-years post Brown vs. the Board to assess the availability of equal educational opportunities to children of different race, color, religion, and national origin (Coleman, 1966). The results of the study, published in the 1966 report, Equality of Educational Opportunity, also known as the Coleman report, highlighted the inequity that existed. The report was the first time the U.S. had evidence about the achievement differences between Black students and White students on a broad scale. The report found that even when resources were relatively similar within regions, educational outcomes between Black and White students were not. The Coleman Report would ultimately compel reformers to seek changes in student and school performance, rather than solely increasing resources (McGuinn, 2015), as ESEA intended. Importantly, the Coleman report offered a view of US schooling that was informed by rich and extensive data. This catalyzed a new way to study schools and contributed to the way that data is used to understand schools and school quality today.

The Coleman report called attention to the achievement gap between Black and White students. The solution, from the federal government's perspective, was ESEA. ESEA emphasized the importance of resources and school accountability. While the ESEA was modified and reauthorized many times since inception, its most notable reauthorization came during the standards movement of the early 1980’s. The publication
of *A Nation at Risk* had ushered in a new wave of school reform, one focused on improved academic results for all students.

Prior to ESEA's 1994 reauthorization, known as the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), only schools that received federal dollars under Title I were held accountable via high-stakes testing. The 1994 reauthorization emphasized high-quality teaching and professional development and required state, district, and local school plans to outline strategies for providing teachers, administrators, other school staff, and district-level personnel with professional development to help ensure that low-achieving students in high-poverty schools met challenging new standards. With the passage of the IASA in 1994, the aim of the legislation broadened to include high achievement for all students; this expansion ushered in federal support for the standards and accountability movement.

Under IASA, states were required to develop common state-wide standards for reading and math, assess students in benchmark grades, and develop and implement an accountability policy for evaluating school quality via student outcomes (Forte, 2010; Robinson, 2018). In 2002, following IASA’s standard’s movement, congress signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) into law. NCLB’s aim was to close the achievement gap for poor Black and Brown students who, after decades of school reform, remained in failing schools (Robinson, 2018). NCLB required schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by improving the performance of all students, especially minority sub groups. While NCLB was applauded for its focus on high standards and closing the achievement gap, its one-size fits all approach was not responsive to the varying needs of specific communities and was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015.
Under ESSA, states became responsible for developing their own accountability goals, with limited oversight and guidelines from the federal government (Robinson, 2018).

**Historical Context: Chicago**

As federal education policy was evolving, so were local politics and local education policies and practices following Brown vs. the Board. With the district’s refusal to desegregate and to acknowledge inequality, Chicago saw parents and young activists protest to demand equal access to education and against the use of portable classrooms as a solution to overcrowding in Black communities, eventually leading to Freedom Day boycott of 1963 where “protestors demanded the integration of CPS students and staff, removal of Willis and others in his administration, publications of reports on school attendance and conditions, and improved school facilities, among other things” (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.29).

Following Benjamin Willis’ tenure, James Redmond became superintendent of CPS in 1966. In his first-year, Superintendent Redmond authorized two studies that ultimately recognized both student and staff segregation to be a major issue in Chicago’s education system. According to 1966 statistics only 28% of white students were actively enrolled in schools where there were more than 5% Black students and only 4.5% of Black students were actively enrolled in predominantly white schools (Kirby, Harris, Crain, 1973). In addition to these studies, Superintendent Redmond received a report entitled *Report on Office of Education Analysis of Certain Aspects of Chicago Public Schools Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* from the United States of Education for Civil Rights in January 1967. The report highlighted four major areas of
concern for CPS; those concerns included faculty assignment patterns, boundaries and student assignment policies, the apprenticeship training program and open enrollment for vocational and trade school (Kirby, Harris, Crain, 1973).

With the help of a planning grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Superintendent Redmond sought the direct consultation of national and local organizations like the Chicago Urban League and the Chicago Teachers Union, university experts, and Chicago school administrative staff in the development of the district’s plan for integration. In response to the report by the United States of Education for Civil Rights, the team assembled stated:

Particularly are we concerned about racial and economic deprivation in our midst.

... When a condition so pervasive in our city bears in upon the schools, the schools cannot hope to solve the problem except in commitment and action shared by the community—a genuine shared commitment with all groups who can make common cause with the Board of Education for quality education for all. We see an obligation to undertake a comprehensive educational program aimed at reversing a pervasive social condition that has become deeply rooted in our society ... and seek educational pathways to a better society. (Herrick, 1971, pp.344-345)

In August 1967 Redmond presented the plan to the Board. It was entitled: *Increasing Desegregation of Faculties, Students, and Vocational Education Programs*, known as *The Redmond Report*. Redmond’s integration plan relied heavily on busing and included the development of magnet schools, located in parks and white residential areas, that would offer specialized programs and be open to all students. His plan also included
a quota system that would limit the number of Black or Brown students attending an integrated school. Under this plan, pairing of less-experienced teachers with experienced teachers, aides and interns, as well as the integration of teaching staff became mandatory. Additionally, a metropolitan area educational council was to be created to develop student-teacher exchange programs within the city and surrounding suburbs – and City officials would be encouraged to adopt strategies to bring about city-wide integrated housing and long-range planning fully supported by the federal government (CPS, 1968). The Redmond report was summarized in the Chicago Tribune:

Educational parks would be developed during the next thirty years with each serving about 20,000 pupils: eight of ten are designated for the lakefront and about twenty would be located on the outer borders of the city. Each center includes elementary schools, specialized schools, and high schools: the plan requires the closing of three hundred neighborhood schools (Chicago Tribune, 1967, “Board OK’s Redmond Plan” section).

While concerns were raised about the district’s ability to afford Redmond’s plan to integrate schools, the plan received all but 1 yes vote from the Board and was adopted in August 1967. To emphasize his concerns at the time – and his lack of real commitment to the plan - then Board President, Frank M. Whiston stated:

I think . . . that we are talking about tremendous sums of money. We are broke now. We don't know where we're going to get money, but we are going ahead with a program and I think we're beginning to invite some criticism. If it gets to a point where we cannot get enough money to put this program well on its way--for example, if the program is going to cost $40 million or $20 million or whatever it
may be, and we only get $5 million from someone, I wonder where we should start the program. At that point I want to continue to be free to express myself and while I'm voting aye, I do it with the provisions that I can change as we go along. (Stringfellow, 1991, p.36)

Not surprisingly, white citywide opposition to the plan was significant; as a result, racial and political battle lines were clearly drawn. This division became especially clear as the ideas outlined in Redmond’s plan moved toward implementation. In December 1967 the school board voted eight to two in favor of busing five thousand students to stabilize racial integration for the following year; students would be bussed primarily from the Austin and South Shore communities. This caused public outrage. Opposing groups viewed busing as an end to the neighborhood school concept – others claimed opposition was rooted in concerns with pollution and traffic congestion – even claims of a communist plot were suggested (Chicago Daily News, 1968). This eventually led to a special board meeting in March 1968 where the school board changed one of the busing plans outlined in the Redmond Report from compulsory to voluntary, appeasing those who opposed the plans and slowing implementation of Redmond’s plan for integration of the district. Superintendent Redmond would be the first leader of the district to propose a plan for integrating schools. Despite these efforts and the efforts of superintendents that followed Redmond, the failure of board initiatives to integrate led to threatened federal intervention and resulted in the 1980 Consent Decree.

It’s important to understand the context and foundation on which school accountability has been built in Chicago. High school graduation rates were higher in the 60’s than the 4 decades that followed. As the population continued to change in Chicago
(between 1970 and 1980 the number of white students in the district fell by nearly 60%) high school graduation rates plummeted. My mother was a kindergartener in CPS in 1965, when the graduation rates in Chicago were 65%, by the time she graduated from high school in 1978 the graduation rate in CPS was down to 53%. By the time I graduated from CPS in 1998 the graduation rate was at 42% (Chicago Reporter, 2021, History of Chicago Public Schools section).

There were many factors that contributed to the decline in graduation rates in Chicago. The 1960’s in Chicago also saw its first teacher’s strike - and the 70’s brought with it the continued rise of the democratic political machine, rising union tensions and a financial crisis in the district that would shift power, bring a greater focus on student outcomes -- and usher in the Chicago School Reform Movement of the 1980’s.

**Accountability and school improvement.**

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 put the country on alarm regarding the state of the U.S. education system. The report, put out by president Reagan’s administration, essentially blamed U.S. schools for the country’s economic challenges. The report urged policymakers to confront issues like the short school year and weakness in the teaching workforce. The reforms of the 1980’s brought an “important change from the minimum-competency era: they shifted the focus away from holding students accountable for their scores, to using students’ scores to hold educators directly accountable” (Koretz, 2017, p. 27). This shift served as an impetus for a more broad use of high-stakes testing.
Achievement testing’s intended purpose was to improve instruction by giving teachers access to information that could be used to inform instruction (Koretz, 2017, p.26). The reform era of the 1980’s, however, made improving performance on specific tests the goal, and high-quality instruction the consequence. A Nation at Risk brought to the surface long-standing issues that existed in public education: schools were designed to build workers and to transfer rote knowledge, and as technology continued to advance and other countries began to compete with the U.S., politicians were alarmed. The National Commission on Excellence in Education, an advisory panel set up by Terrell Bell, President Reagan’s secretary of education, made the concern plain in A Nation at Risk’s introduction:

...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur - others are matching and surpasses our educational attainments.

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have well viewed it as an act of war…(Koretz, 2017, p.25).

Academic excellence and accountability became top priorities in the U.S. The United States Education Department, in “A Nation Responds”, which is a response to “A Nation at Risk”, claimed that the commission’s findings had generated a “tidal wave of reform which promises to renew American education” (U.S. Department of Education, 1984,
These reforms, *A Nation Responds* predicted, would have a dramatic and powerful impact on educational practices throughout the country.

**The Chicago School Reform Movement of the 1980’s**

While *A Nation at Risk* did not present new information and *A Nation Responds* did not elicit confidence that improvements in the education system would happen, shifts in Chicago’s demographics did create space for Black and Brown communities to build coalitions across difference to elect Chicago’s first Black Mayor, Harold Washington. This was significant because Chicago had been subject to a white-led democratic machine since the 1930’s. Specifically, Mayor Richard J. Daley “dominated local politics and exerted significant power at the state and national levels” (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.145). This was evidenced when federal dollars earmarked for Chicago were frozen because of Superintendent Willis’ inaction in creating a plan to desegregate schools and create equal educational opportunities for students. Mayor Daley, a force in the Democratic Party nationally, met with Democratic president Lydon Johnson, and the funds were released. Instead of withholding funds and holding the Board accountable to implementing federal law, the Board of Education was given more time to form committees and develop reports to assess discrimination, though few tangible changes were made. (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.31). With Mayor Washington’s election, “Black activists, organizers, and educators finally saw an opportunity for inclusion, representation, and power in city politics” (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.143).

With the U.S. education system under scrutiny to improve, a financial crisis looming, and a heated political landscape in Chicago, Washington came into office
during a major turning point in education -- and against an impossible backdrop. A Nation at Risk all but blamed U.S. schools for the country’s economic state - that, and the formation of the all-white School Finance Authority in CPS, created openings for “corporate interests to become more involved in providing public services, including education” (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.144). While Mayor Washington’s election brought with it hope for historically divested communities,

Chicago was taken up by groups with different politics and prescriptions for remedying the ills of public schooling; policymakers, teachers and teachers’ unions, government leaders, business executives, parents, students, and community groups...corporate interests also took on a more prominent role in school politics, compromising Black political power. (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.144).

**Students of Reform**

At the intersection of racial tension, financial woes, a Consent Decree, politics, labor strikes, poverty, drugs, gang violence and police brutality were Chicago students - like me. As children, my siblings and I were what research refers to as school dependent. The only hope that we had to create a life for ourselves outside of poverty was to go to school; the alternative was what surrounded us every day.

My parents were CPS students in the 1960s and 1970s. My father’s family migrated from Puerto Rico in the early 1960s and Humboldt Park became home, while my mother’s family moved to Humboldt Park in the 1960s, after originally settling on Chicago’s far southside. Both my mother and father attended their neighborhood CPS
schools before meeting at Orr High School, on the west side in 1974. My father dropped out after 9th grade and went on to work in a steel factory; my mother graduated from Orr in 1978, three months pregnant with my older brother. They would go on to have four children - three of us entering CPS during Harold Washington’s time as mayor.

By the time I entered kindergarten in 1985 both my parents worked - my mother had 2 jobs at times, yet they could barely afford to raise a family. My parents were force fed the message of education as the great equalizer from the moment they entered CPS in 1965 -- as the “war on poverty” was underway via Title I -- and Benjamin Willis was erecting mobile classrooms. My parents sent me to school with the belief that education was the way out of poverty. They believed they were poor and subject to the conditions that they faced solely because of their choices. In truth, the systems around them -- including education, failed them.

In 1987 I was a 2nd grader in my neighborhood school when teachers went on strike for the 7th time in 9 years, and as the U.S. Secretary of Education declared Chicago schools the worst in the nation. My parents were oblivious to what was happening in education - they were focused on making ends meet and depended on school to thrust our family out of poverty. Quality wasn’t a consideration. As was with our lived experience, we knew how to make due.

My parents could not have known that, while they were struggling with all that existed as a consequence of generational poverty and racism, business leaders, education nonprofit groups, grassroots community organizations, CPS administrators, the CTU and parents were coming together for an Education Summit that “focused on broadly
overhauling CPS’s structure and the quality of education that students received” (Todd-Breland, 2018, p.167). Feeling the urgency from Bennett’s criticism of CPS, the mayor hoped to change the education system and invited the newly created Parent Community Council (PCC), CPS, CTU and Chicago United to debate their proposals for school reform in Chicago during the summit meetings. The formation of the PCC was a significant effort made by Washington to leverage the power of parents in his pledge to overhaul the system (Shipps, 2006; Todd-Breland, 2018).

After Mayor Washington’s sudden and untimely death in November 1987, relationships that had seemingly been forged during summit meetings quickly eroded. “Without Washington’s leadership to defuse tensions, personal, ideological, and political conflicts emerged within the diverse summit group” (Todd-Breland, 2018, p. 167), this included arguments as to whether or not the district should be decentralized. Ultimately, the 1988 School Reform Act was passed at the state level. Although it did not include many of the provisions that Washington had hoped for, like creating pathways to jobs for CPS students or tying reform efforts to funding increases for CPS. “The 1988 School Reform Act did deliver an unprecedented degree of control to parents and communities through the creation of Local School Councils (LSC) at each school” (Todd-Breland, 2018 p.172). LSCs would consist of parents, teachers, community members, and would, among other responsibilities, have the power to hire the school principal and approve the school’s budget (Shipps, 2006; Todd-Breland, 2018).

**Mayoral Control of Schools**
LSCs brought decentralization to the district with the hopes of bringing forth greater community control, but by 1995, in the Republican-controlled legislature, with the support of Mayor Richard Daley, the business community, and the governor of Illinois, passed the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act. This act reversed the decentralized, local governance trend of the 1988 law. It concentrated power in the office of the mayor, giving him authority over CPS (Shipps, 2006; Todd-Breland, 2018). This was significant because it eliminated both the School Finance Authority, who oversaw the district’s finances since 1979, as well as the School Board Nominating committee, giving Mayor Daley the power to appoint Board members, select Board president, as well as create the role of and subsequently appoint the district CEO. “The 1995 law gave the mayor sole authority to appoint a five-member School Reform Board of Trustees to serve through 1999. Thereafter, the mayor was to appoint a seven-member board with staggered, four-year terms” (Todd-Breland, 2019, p.186).

The 1995 School Reform Amendatory Act was significant because it brought with it what Allensworth, de la Torre, Luppescu, Murphy (2011) refer to as the accountability era. Mayor Daley, set on improving Chicago’s fractured school system, appointed his former budget director, Paul Vallas, to the role of CEO. Vallas had almost no prior education experience, the new position focused on management rather than on educational development. As such, Vallas sought accountability-based reforms designed to improve student achievement and end social promotion. “New graduation requirements required all students to take a college preparatory curriculum. Performance standards were enacted for both students and schools based on standardized test scores, with severe consequences for not meeting the expectations” (Allensworth, de la Torre,
Luppescu, et al, 2011, p.5). By 1997 students in 3rd, 6th and 8th grades were required to meet minimum requirements for promotion before being promoted to the next grade. Vallas’ tough approach to accountability and test-based promotion requirements resulted in increased retention at promotion grades and put schools “with large proportions of low-scoring students on probation, subject to intervention, and, in extreme cases, reconstituted, which involved firing the principal and replacing some staff” (Allensworth, de la Torre, Luppescu, et al, 2011, p.5).

I was a sophomore at Lane Tech, one of Chicago’s selective enrollment high schools, when Vallas became the district’s CEO. In 1990, after finishing 4th grade at CPS, my parents -- like so many parents in my community, made the sacrifice to send my siblings and I to our neighborhood Catholic school in hopes of providing us with a higher quality education. I would go on to attend 2 different Catholic schools before entering CPS as a freshman in 1994. In total, my parents sent me to 4 different schools between K-8th grade in pursuit of a quality education. By the time Vallas instituted accountability reforms in 1996, I was a junior in high school with a GPA in the 1s. I had learned to game the system -- to mask that I did not know how to be a student. In the district’s efforts to improve high school graduation rates, night school was provided as an option. I knew to take chemistry in night school, where I watched movies, rather than at school where success didn’t feel likely. When high-stakes testing became an expectation my junior year -- no one at Lane knew what they were doing. We showed up to homeroom one day and were given tests to take. We never received the outcome of the assessment or knew what it meant. I would graduate from Lane in 1998 with a 1.9 GPA - having never
so much as read a book in my 4 years. The high school graduation rate in the district was 42%.

When Vallas’s time in office came to end in 2001, he would be succeeded by Arne Duncan.

The Duncan administration was characterized by opening many new charter and contract schools, focusing on transforming high schools, closing poorly performing schools, instituting new instructional programs, and working to improve professional development. (Allensworth, de la Torre, Luppescu, et al, 2011, p.5)

Duncan served as Chicago’s CEO from 2001 to 2009. During his tenure he initiated major efforts to improve the use of data at schools and raise standards in the areas of literacy and math. With the leadership of a respected former principal, Barbara Eason-Watkins, as his chief education officer, his administration sought to increase coherence in curriculum, invest heavily in teacher quality, and raise awareness about the importance of literacy and math through various initiatives (Allensworth, de la Torre, Luppescu, et al, 2011, p.5). The district even went so far as to hire over 100 reading specialists and to reorganize central offices around curricular areas to support their efforts. Important to note, during Duncan’s administration NCLB was signed into law. This brought the federal government into school-level accountability -- and required schools to make AYP on the district’s accountability policy. At the same time, the education reform movement in Chicago continued to evolve -- including the expansion of school choice and a greater focus on principal preparation.
I became a CPS teacher during Duncan’s tenure as CEO. After graduating from Lane, and with the support of my faith-based community, I applied for Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU). I was accepted to NEIU through their Student Support Services program -- a support program designed for students who are considered not ready for college based on their high school GPA and ACT score. In 2001, as Duncan was taking the helm at CPS I was completing my student teaching experience, and in the summer of 2002 I sent one resume to one school in my community, Humboldt Park. I had spent my college years desperately trying to atone for my high school experience - feeling shame for not applying myself -- not understanding that there was nothing wrong with me, but rather - the system was not designed to foster my success. I clawed my way through classes, and found the grit and resilience - terms I would later hear people discuss in professional development - to complete my degree requirements to become an 8th grade English teacher.

In retrospect -- and after having had a wide array of experiences as a student, teacher, school leader and parent in CPS, what was significant about Duncan’s administration was his wisdom to place Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins over the education side of the house. She understood the importance of teacher quality to improving outcomes. If Vallas’ time at CPS had set the cultural norm that student outcomes mattered -- Duncan’s administration attempted to build teacher capacity and district infrastructure to improve those outcomes. Before Duncan’s administration, school principals largely managed the operations of the school, but were not necessarily instructional leaders. The investment in teacher practice and the focus on principals as instructional leaders signaled a shift in the role of principals in the district. Some might
say that it shifted the role of principal from operational leader to instructional leader. I will contend that it added to the already impossible role of the principal by making the principal both the operational and instructional director in their buildings --- two critical and different lanes of work in a school building.

I began my career at a community school whose staff had been together for more than a decade. While the culture of the school was the strongest I’d seen before or since - the district’s capacity building efforts did not translate into professional development for me in my first three years of teaching. I learned quickly that taking an initiative, like improving teacher practice, from theory to action in a district as large as Chicago presented challenges. Because the district is so large, it was divided regionally -- each region having its own team of support specialists to serve the schools in their region. Those regional teams were then responsible for translating the district’s initiatives to the schools in their region. In my role as an Instructional Support Leader in the district, we had 31 schools in our region. This meant that district initiatives had to be shared with regional leaders -- who then translated it to the principals in their region -- who then translated it to the teachers/stakeholders in their buildings. This meant variance in how initiatives were implemented. Efforts to innovate and focus on instructional practice as a critical lever for improving outcomes varied by region, by school -- and even by classroom within a school.

By the time Duncan left CPS to become US Secretary of Education for the Obama administration in 2009, I was leaving the classroom to work in one of the district’s regional offices. I had earned a Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2008 -- where Duncan was also honored by the Golden Apple Foundation, and I had achieved
National Board Certification - a highly regarded certification process that Duncan’s administration heavily supported as a mechanism for improving teacher quality. It was at the regional office where I worked as an Instructional Support Leader (ISL) that I began to connect the dots and more concretely see the gaps between policy and policy implementation - a perspective only experience can provide.

As an ISL -- a role created in the district’s restructuring -- I was responsible for increasing the instructional capacity of school leaders or my designated schools. The creation of this role implied that the district regarded teachers as the most critical lever to improve outcomes for students, and that the role of the principal was critical in building teacher capacity. The tension during this time in the district was that reforms were coming from the top rapidly - and had been for decades, that those on the ground never had an opportunity to see the impact of one initiative before new reforms emerged. If you were a teacher at a school with weak instructional leadership the impact of these rapid changes was even more detrimental. The pressure to perform on standardized assessments - to use data in new ways -- while beholden to the systems of accountability that cascaded from the top of the district down -- added to the challenges schools already faced, particularly in Black and Brown communities.

Duncan’s transition to the US Department of Education brought with it Race to the Top (RTTT) - a grant program intended to create the conditions for innovation and reform (US Department of Education, 2016). The idea behind RTTT was that states would compete for large sums of money from the federal government to put forth education reforms aligned to the priorities identified by Duncan’s administration. These states that were awarded the money would go on to serve as models for the rest of the
states, theoretically. The US Department of Education’s priority areas included adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy; building data systems that measure student growth and success and that inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction; recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; and turning around the lowest achieving schools (US Department of Education, 2016).

Illinois was awarded a $42.8 million Race to the Top grant in December 2011 - in the third round of grantmaking by the US Department of Education. The grant was awarded to support the state’s education system in adopting more rigorous standards and assessments, recruiting, evaluating, and retaining highly effective teachers and principals, building data systems that measure student success, and building state capacity; the plan included 32 districts in the state - CPS being one of them.

To understand school accountability in Chicago, it is necessary to understand where policies intersected and the impact these shifts had on the ground. For example, in June of 2010 Illinois adopted a new set of learning standards, the Common Core Standards (CCSS). CCSS emphasized depth of knowledge over breadth and were designed to ensure that students had a comprehensive understanding of key concepts; they were significantly more rigorous than Illinois’ previous learning standards. The new standards were to be implemented across the state beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. Then, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), which changed how teachers’ and principals’ performance was measured in the state. The new evaluation system combined multiple measures of student growth and
professional practice, and a clearly defined process for observation and feedback (ISBE, 2021, Educator Performance Evaluation section). The theory behind the more rigorous evaluation system was if teachers are receiving actionable feedback against a set of agreed upon standards, in a reasonable amount of time, their practice would improve. The more evidence of improved teacher practice, the better outcomes students would achieve on assessments. “Hand-in-hand with the new evaluations, school systems were expected to strengthen their professional development offerings so that educators got the support they needed to help their students improve” (ISBE, 2021, Educator Performance Evaluation section).

In Chicago this meant a lot of change in a short amount of time. Table 1 highlights some of the notable changes the district has experienced since 2009 when Arne Duncan left the district to become US Secretary of Education.

Table 1

Changes in Chicago Public Schools since 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Change Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Arne Duncan leaves CPS to become US Secretary of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Mayor Daley’s school board appoints Ron Huberman, former Chicago Transit authority president, CEO of CPS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Illinois Adoption of Common Core; districts have 3 years for full implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Ron Huberman steps down as CEO, and Mayor Daley names Terry Mazany, president and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust, to serve as interim CPS CEO</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Rahm Emanuel elected Mayor; appoints Jean-Claude Brizard CEO of CPS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Race to the Top Awarded to support major reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>PERA Passed - student outcomes become a metric on principal and teacher evaluation by 2016-2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Illinois granted waiver from some requirements of NCLB</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Chicago Teachers Strike for the 1st time since 1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Jean-Claude Brizard announces his resignation; Barbara Byrd-Bennett succeeds Brizard as CPS CEO</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CPS adopts new school accountability policy, SQRP</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Full CCSS Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>52 CPS Schools Closed for Under Utilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) becomes the state assessment and accountability measure for Illinois students enrolled in a public schools; the assessment is aligned to the CCS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act is signed into law, replacing NCLB</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Barbara Byrd-Bennett requests a leave of absence in the wake of a federal investigation; Board Chair Jesse Ruiz is appointed interim CEO of CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Forrest Claypool is appointed CEO of CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Janice Jackson is appointed CEO of CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) is administered in place of PARCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Top 3 CPS district leaders step down, including Dr. Janice Jackson, Dr. LaTonya McDade, and Arnie Rivera; Pedro Martinez named CPS CEO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RTTT had given significant dollars to 32 Illinois districts to implement reforms with high hopes that these dollars would catalyze improvements in education. Grant dollars coupled with policy reform -- from standards to evaluation to assessment -- intended to set the stage for improvement. In Chicago, the challenge was with implementation. In a district as large as CPS, taking an idea from inception to implementation requires many dependencies. Whereas Duncan’s time at the district did bring several years of stability, since he went on to join the Obama administration, Chicago has experienced 7 CEOs. Among them were Jean Claude Brizard, who was appointed by Daley’s successor, former congressman and White House official, Rahm Emanuel. Brizard served the district for just over a year before he was replaced by Barbara Byrd-Bennett - who left the district in the midst of a contracting scandal that resulted in federal prison time. Board member Jesse Ruiz followed Byrd-Bennett as interim until Mayor Emanuel appointed Forrest Claypool in July 2015. Claypool, who served as Mayor Daley’s Chief of Staff earlier in his career and briefly as Emanuel’s Chief of Staff just before being appointed as CEO, stepped down when CPS Inspector
General Nicholas Schuler called for his termination after he was accused of repeatedly lying during an ethics investigation involving a top CPS attorney (Karp, 2017). Claypool was replaced by his chief of education, respected former teacher and principal, Dr. Janice Jackson - who stepped down from her position as CEO in June 2021.

In 2017 when the 45th president took office he appointed Betsy Devos to succeed Arne Duncan as US Secretary of Education. Devos, the nation’s 11th Secretary of Education, came to the role with no experience in public schools - never having been a teacher, an administrator - never having served on any public board of education or having attended a public school as a student or engaged as a parent. During her confirmation hearing she struggled with responses to basic questions about the Individual with Disabilities Education Act and could not explain the difference between attainment and growth on assessments. Despite harsh criticism and opposition -- especially from teachers’ unions- Devos was confirmed. During her tenure as secretary of education she worked to deemphasize the federal government's role in education and deregulate guidance put forth by Obama’s administration. Her time in office was spent largely promoting the privatization of public schools through vouchers, continually calling for deep cuts to federal funding, rolling back protections for vulnerable children, and threatening to cut federal funding for schools that did not reopen during the Covid-19 global pandemic, regardless of their ability to meet CDC safety recommendations (Green, 2021).

Dr. Janice K. Jackson took on the role as CEO of CPS during Betsy Devos’ administration. While at the federal level Devos was working to roll back protections for vulnerable students, under Jackson’s leadership, a bold and ambitious 5-year vision was
being developed for CPS --- one designed to promote equity. In her opening letter to
stakeholders during the vision’s launch, Dr. Jackson made clear, “Achieving the goals set
forth in this vision will take a commitment from all of us - students, families, educators,
and supporters of Chicago Public Schools” (CPS, 2021, Success Starts Here section).
Under Jackson’s leadership the district set out on a mission “to provide a high-quality
public education for every child, in every neighborhood, that prepares each for success in
college, career, and civic life” (CPS, 2021, Success Starts Here section). While the
district made commitments to academic progress, financial stability and integrity in the
process of achieving the mission, central to the five-year vision was equity. To
accomplish the 5-year vision, Dr. Jackson admitted, “will require examining every
inequity, mining every resource and engaging every community until students in all
corners of the city have access to the high-quality education they deserve” (CPS, 2021,
Success Starts Here section).

In 2018 the district launched the Office of Equity “to ensure every district
initiative, from capital improvements to curriculum design, are pursued with equity as a
goal” (CPS Equity Framework, 2020, p.2). Under the leadership of Dr. Maurice Swinney,
the equity office developed the district’s first Equity Framework. In the framework, CPS
defines equity as

...championing the individual cultures, identities, talents, abilities, languages, and
interests of each student by ensuring they receive the opportunities and resources
that meet their unique needs and aspirations. In an equitable school district, every
student has access to the resources, opportunities, and educational rigor they need,
irrespective of their race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation,
language, learning path, accessibility needs, family background, family income, citizenship, or tribal status. (CPS Equity Framework, 2018, p.16)

The Equity Framework explicitly prioritizes racial equity and acknowledges that “racial and ethnic minorities have been historically prohibited and structurally excluded from educational opportunities” (CPS Equity Framework, 2018, p.16). In the framework, the district addresses the fact that racial equity “requires accounting for past inequities and centering those most impacted” (CPS Equity Framework, 2018, p.17), suggesting a move from a historical lens to an equity lens -- one that promotes fairness, prioritizes those least represented, allocates resources based on greatest need and creates opportunities while eliminating barriers to access (CPS Equity Framework, 2018, p.26).

To guide the district’s equity work and decision making the framework is divided into what is being called the Four Dimensions of an Equity Lens - liberatory thinking, inclusive partnerships, resource equity and fair policies and systems. The district’s belief is that “the interaction between the four dimensions of the equity lens is what creates disruption in the status quo and opens the door for change (CPS Equity Framework, 2018, p.40).

In May 2019 Chicago elected its first Black woman, Lori Lightfoot, as mayor. Exercising mayoral control, Lightfoot appointed a new school board. During their first meeting as a board in June 2019, and against better judgment, the district brought a revised SQRP policy before the board to be voted on SQRP 2.0. Initially, the accountability plan did not garner the five votes needed for it to be approved. Board members expressed concerns that they were unaware of the need to vote on a formula -- others expressed concern about the use of “on track” metrics and the lack of parent and
community engagement around the policy. When a district lawyer warned that a ‘no’ vote on the SQRP proposal would result in consequences for the district, the board reluctantly voted 5 to 1 to approve the policy (CPS Board meeting, June 2019). While SQRP 2.0 was approved, the board made it very clear to the district that they wanted to see a more equitable policy and a more inclusive process for developing the next iteration of the district’s school accountability plan.

In January 2021, in the midst of a global pandemic, the district embarked on a plan for redesigning its school accountability policy, just as Miguel Cardona was preparing to take office as the country’s newest Secretary of Education. Nominated by newly elected President Joe Biden, Cardona comes to the position after having served as commissioner of education for Connecticut. Prior to his nomination to that role in 2019, Cardona began his career as a teacher in Meriden, Connecticut, where he grew up and went to school. He later served as principal of Hanover Elementary School in Meriden for over a decade, and then assistant superintendent before taking his role as commissioner. Cardona comes to the Biden administration with a reputation as a fierce advocate for students in low-income families, students with disabilities and English language learners - those most impacted by inequity.

**Conclusion: The Consequence of intersecting social barriers.**

If you know me, then you know that I grew up in what folks now call west Humboldt Park - we always just said Humboldt Park. I know now what “west” means. West for many people means a “Black neighborhood”. West means poor-er. I grew up financially poor and culturally rich -- in a mixed Puerto Rican and Black neighborhood. I grew up on Hirsch and Spaulding in a two-flat graystone building that still sits nestled
between my first CPS school and Humboldt Park. Today “grandma’s house” is still the convening place for family gatherings -- though she’s been gone for 20 years.

As I have reflected on my trajectory, I am often curious about the distinct difference between my experience and those who surrounded me. I was always surrounded by brilliance - in my family and in my neighborhood. Growing up I saw the brilliance of self-taught carpenters, engineers and electricians -- men and women in my neighborhood who could do anything -- but often never realized their full potential. People look at me often and applaud what I have been able to accomplish. They celebrate my resilience and my strength. When I look back at what I have been able to accomplish, what I am most thankful for -- what I believe is foundational to all that I am and will become is stable housing.

Despite the chaos and dysfunction that surrounded me -- despite the conditions and quality of my education or the poverty my family faced, we had stable housing. When we consider Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, physiological needs like food, water, warmth and rest are foundational to a person’s well being and ability to thrive. There were plenty of times growing up that I observed my mother pulling groceries out of our pantry or refrigerator and walking them across the street to neighbors. My father would wait until everyone ate and then make plates covered in aluminum foil and walk over to the corner store, Sabana Grande, on Division and Spaulding where he'd inevitably find people who were hungry hanging out outside. Though growing up it felt like a breach of boundaries, he’d even go so far as to bring random people -- and sometimes their children -- to our house. They’d sit in the kitchen and my father would start frying bacon and making BLTs for these random people who he’d always refer to as his cousins.
My father was feeding people, my guess is, because he knew what it felt like to be hungry. As a young adult I remember bursting into my uncle’s house during a trip to Puerto Rico and shouting across the room, “Who’s hungry?” I distinctly remember my father pulling me to the side harshly and correcting me. He corrected me and said that I should never ask someone if they are hungry - that implies they can’t afford to eat. Although hunger is a sensation that results from the basic human need for food -- being hungry, in his mind, is something to be ashamed about -- because being poor is something to be ashamed about.

My father committed suicide at the age of 53. He was an alcoholic and functioning addict my entire life -and he ruled our house with fear. Despite the choices he made for himself -- and not saying it explicitly, he wanted us - his four children - to be nothing like him. When he could no longer face himself and what he had become, he chose to take his life.

I was 33 and had just taken on the role of director of school accountability for one of Chicago’s largest charter school networks. Here I was -- an adult - a professional with a career -- an award-winning teacher -- yet the truth of my reality was clear. No amount of schooling helps you to navigate what Alfred Lubrano refers to as “straddling” in his book Blue Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams (2004). I had worked my own way out of poverty -- I had clawed and scrapped and found a way through school because I believed that there was more. I achieved and performed to distance myself from the pain of my father’s addiction and a childhood filled with both love and toxicity. That, not the education I received as a CPS student, was my motivation. When my father died I thought about life expectancy for Black and Brown men -- I wanted to understand how a
man like him gets to the point of committing suicide. I was not seeking to place blame --
I was seeking to understand, so I retraced his life - from January 25, 2014 to the day he
was born, November 15, 1960. What I quickly realized is that he never stood a chance.

Kimberle Creshaw defines intersectionality as a metaphor for the ways multiple
forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves to create obstacles
that are often not understood within conventional ways of thinking. She describes
intersectionality as a prism for understanding certain kinds of problems and suggests that
you can’t change problems until you’ve understood how they came about (Crenshaw,
2017). My father, in many ways, is an archetype.

Today we talk so much about social emotional learning, yet, we have always
needed social emotional learning. At the core of it all is the desire to be seen. When you
are poor, Black, Brown, speak a different language, live in a single-parent home, struggle
with housing instability, are surrounded by violence, are school dependent for meals,
clothing, care -- those intersecting challenges make everyday life a struggle. If a person’s
physiological and safety needs aren’t met, it is not likely that they will be able to self-
actualize to realize their full potential.

Section 3: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT/ARGUMENT

Throughout this section I will advocate for a radically inclusive plan for
stakeholder engagement in Chicago Public Schools. I will present the context of the
policy recommendation, a theory of action that would center students and promote equity,
and outline the policy’s goals and objectives.

Context
In June 2019 SQRP 2.0 went before the Board of Education to be approved for the 2019-2020 school year and was nearly voted down. While the district had convened more than 80 meetings with researchers, education policy experts and educators to brainstorm the new policy, the district failed to engage those most impacted -- CPS families. Though the board ultimately voted yes on SQRP 2.0, they gave the district 18 months to redesign the policy with input from CPS families. At that time Dr. Jackson, CPS’s CEO, pledged to work on a community engagement plan for updates to the policy, however, the COVID-19 pandemic stalled the district’s efforts until January 2021, when CPS finally launched its Accountability Redesign Advisory Group (ARAG), a diverse group of educators, researchers, board members, parents and community members charged with redesigning the district’s accountability policy. I am a member of the ARAG.

To support the policy’s redesign and to guide the work of the ARAG, the district engaged The Center for Assessment (TCA). TCA engages in partnerships with state and district education leaders across the country to design, implement and evaluate assessment and accountability policies and programs. Their role on this accountability redesign initiative is to support CPS to design a technically sound accountability system that is inclusive of stakeholder feedback.

CPS also engaged Kids First Chicago (K1C), where I serve as Chief of Community Engagement, to support the development and implementation of a stakeholder engagement plan. As discussed in the Analysis of Needs Section, the district has an Equity Framework (2020) that identifies inclusive partnerships as a necessary shift in practice to achieve equitable outcomes. In its Spectrum of Inclusive Partnerships, it
identifies collaboration as central to equitable decision making; yet, there isn’t a clear plan for implementation. As a result, the framework remains theoretical and is not applied with any uniformity in policy redesign. This presents an opportunity to build infrastructure to open the system in a way that is radically inclusive and can be applied to other policy redesign efforts.

Advocated Policy Statement

As mentioned previously, I am advocating for a Radically Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement (RISE) policy that would require the district to implement radically inclusive stakeholder engagement in the redesign of all of its major policies, beginning with school accountability.

Theory of Action

If CPS engages stakeholders in co-creating policy through radically inclusive stakeholder engagement, then policies will be more reflective of the needs of those most impacted, resulting in a change in policy outcomes and students being better prepared to succeed.

Radical inclusion asks us to shift toward a liberatory design mindset. This means practicing greater self-awareness to ensure we do not design policy that perpetuates inequity. It requires a shift in power to one that fosters learning and agency. Radical inclusion asks us to involve more families and communities in co-creating policy, rather than limiting input to a small subset of them. It asks us to spend more time and target our efforts to reach those furthest from opportunity in the school system and to broaden the stakeholders we seek to engage. Convening a fully inclusive group to collaborate at every step of the engagement process is a critical aspect of RISE’s success. Radically inclusive
stakeholder engagement will lead to the development of more equitable policy that is fully informed by the ideas, insights, and perspectives of those most impacted. Given Chicago’s hyper-political and hyper-segregated context, radically inclusive stakeholder engagement will lead to more equitable policies that are able to garner the public support and political will to be implemented with success, as well as garner ownership and buy-in to overcome the potential challenges of change that often accompany new policy implementation.

Policy Goals

The recommended policy, Radically Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement (RISE), has three major goals.

**Goal 1:** Ensure district policies are co-created and co-produced by those most directly impacted by the policy

In our work to further equity, it is important to challenge society’s traditionally defined notion of expertise. In my lived and professional experience, I have found that families and communities are the experts of their experience and capable of designing their own solutions. While empathy is a critical and necessary component of policy redesign, it does not replace or hold more value than lived experience. As discussed in the Analysis of Needs section, reform efforts in Chicago have largely been led by those outside of the system imposing solutions and ideas onto communities. It cannot be assumed that traditionally identified “experts” have a better understanding of the problem/challenges that policy seeks to solve, than those who have experience in the environment.
In Margaret Wheatley’s *Leadership in the Age of Complexity: From Hero to Host* (2010), she asserts that the problems we seek to solve are complex and interconnected, with no simple solutions – and unable to be solved by a single individual. She contends that if we want to be able to get complex systems, like school systems, to work better, we must transition our reliance on the leader-as-hero to leader-as-host. “We need to support those leaders who know the problems are complex, who know that in order to understand the full complexity of any issue, all parts of the system need to be invited in to participate and contribute” (Wheatley, 2010, p.2).

**Goal 2:** Promote radical inclusivity to build trust and shared ownership of policy changes and implementation.

Distrust is pervasive in Chicago’s education ecosystem. As discussed in the Analysis of Needs section, a legacy of discriminatory policy and shady politics have created the perfect conditions for division throughout the city, but especially in Chicago education. Parents and community members have observed a public display of division between CPS and CTU since at least 2013. This adversarial relationship has been on display for the city to see in a politicized and polarizing way for many years and with no end in sight (Cardona-Maguigad, 2020; Gregory 2019).

Even as this policy advocacy document is being written we are observing the debate on an elected school board unfold in Chicago. As a life-long Chicagoan, product of the system, parent of students in the system, and educator within the system for more than 18 years, I am watching as a number of Chicago education groups and non-profits push hard and advocate for an elected school board – rallying parents and community members with often limited or bias perspectives.
For a city whose communities have largely been left out of understanding how the system works, this rallying can feel like propaganda. For someone like me – who happens to understand the landscape from a multitude of lived experiences, I see the politics at play. My experience has taught me that too many of the loudest groups and non-profits who purport to support and further equity are often the very groups perpetuating old systems and navigating Chicago politics, instead of disrupting them.

It is as if everyone is vying to have the best idea - the next breakthrough that is going to solve the problems that systemic and institutional racism and inequity have created. Everyone wants the credit, but few are willing to work in deference to communities and to do the work required to co-create policies and initiatives with communities. In my experience, habits of exclusion and finger pointing are the standard in Chicago education. RISE is a thoughtful and deliberate approach to policy redesign in that it seeks to create the table where relational trust can be built and liberatory collaboration can begin to take root. Implementing RISE will require all stakeholders to work together toward a common goal; it will mitigate the blame game and require essential and critical collaborators to come together to create solutions for the problems we seek to solve in education.

**Goal 3:** Open the system by clearly and transparently communicating and making policy redesign processes and content accessible to all stakeholders.

In my experience, the education system has two main parts – processes and structures. Processes refers to dynamic parts of the system that make it come alive – like teaching, learning, communication, and decision making. Structures of the education system include governing structures, organizational structures and hierarchies, like the
roles people play – administrators, teachers, staff, parents, the organization of learning, classroom and school layout, types of school, and structure of curriculum. All of these parts together create a system that is incredibly complex.

Radical inclusion asks us to acknowledge the system’s complexity and to open the system by making it accessible to all stakeholders. This means taking the time to educate and engage individuals or groups that may lack social capital or awareness of a particular policy, but whose perspectives and expertise will promote equity and inclusivity. When stakeholders have an understanding of how the processes and structures of the education system work, they can better contribute to co-creating with the school district, rather than relying on individuals and organizations, who often have personal and political ulterior motives, to lead advocacy and policy redesign efforts.

**RISE Objectives**

1. RISE requires the district to build the infrastructure to support implementation of radically inclusive stakeholder engagement.

2. Requires the district to convene and lead a Stakeholder Engagement Design Team to design a stakeholder engagement plan for major district policies, like school accountability.

3. Requires the district to strengthen communication by sharing stakeholder feedback publicly and communicating transparently about the role of stakeholder feedback in policy redesign.

In the next section I will outline the plan for policy implementation - taking theory to practice. I will illustrate a model for stakeholder engagement that includes the development of a stakeholder engagement design team to design engagement activities
and engage in participatory analysis of the stakeholder feedback that will be used in the policy’s redesign.

**Section 4: Policy Implementation Plan**

As part of the Chicago Public School’s (CPS) work to develop a new system for measuring school quality, the board of education has requested deeper and more robust stakeholder engagement. The following is an implementation plan for stakeholder engagement that will engage our city’s education stakeholders to inform the creation of a new school accountability system that promotes equity and excellence in Chicago schools.

**Theory of Action**

If CPS engages stakeholders in co-creating policy through radically inclusive stakeholder engagement, then policies will be more reflective of the needs of those most impacted, resulting in a change in policy outcomes and students being better prepared to succeed.

Radical inclusion asks us to shift toward a liberatory design mindset (citation); to involve more families and communities in co-creating policy, rather than limiting input to a small subset of them. It asks us to spend more time, to target our efforts to reach those furthest from opportunity in the school system, and to broaden the stakeholders we seek to engage. Convening a fully inclusive group to collaborate at every step of the engagement process is a critical aspect of RISE’s success. Radically inclusive stakeholder engagement will lead to the development of more equitable policy that is fully informed by the ideas, insights, and perspectives of those most impacted. Given Chicago’s hyper-political and hyper-segregated context, radically inclusive stakeholder engagement will
lead to a more equitable school accountability policy that is able to garner the public support and political will to be implemented with success, as well as garner ownership and buy-in to overcome the potential challenges of change that often result from new policy implementation.

**Stakeholder Engagement for Accountability Redesign**

Recognizing that stakeholders with different identities, perspectives and backgrounds will bring invaluable knowledge, talents, and insights to the design of the stakeholder engagement plan, a Stakeholder Engagement Design Team (SEDT), centered in equity and always in service of students, will be established. The SEDT will bring diverse expertise and perspectives into shared inquiry and co-creation of an equitable, human-centered stakeholder engagement plan.

While the SEDT will be charged with the design and implementation of a stakeholder engagement plan, it is the district’s Accountability Redesign Advisory Group (ARAG) who are charged with making policy recommendations to be approved by the CEO and voted on by the Board of Education (BOE). RISE ensures that the feedback, insights and perspectives used by the ARAG to provide policy recommendations reflects the needs of stakeholders. The SEDT is assembled to support the development and execution of stakeholder engagement plan, this includes engaging in participatory analysis of data from engagement activities to identify themes to be shared with the ARAG. RISE ensures that the policy recommendations made by the ARAG represent the insights and perspectives of all stakeholders. The role of the SEDT is to collaborate to develop and implement a stakeholder engagement plan, analyze stakeholder feedback,
and report the findings from each engagement activity to the ARAG to be used as the policy is being iterated.

Table 2 highlights the distinct responsibilities of the ARAG and the SEDT.

Table 2

*Role of the Stakeholder Engagement Design Team*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Group</th>
<th>Stakeholder Engagement Design Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Review stakeholder feedback on values, priorities and needs with respect to an ideal accountability system.</td>
<td>● Support the development of informational content to be shared with stakeholders creatively throughout the engagement process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Review and discuss research on best practices and other topics as necessary to inform system design.</td>
<td>● Design and implement local and stakeholder-specific engagement activities to ensure stakeholders most impacted serve as collaborators in policy design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Synthesize the above to develop recommendations to the district for a next-generation accountability system.</td>
<td>● Engage in participatory analysis of stakeholder engagement data; identify trends to be shared with the ARAG.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 provides an aerial view and concept map of a proposed plan for implementation of RISE, including the intersection of the work the SEDT and the ARAG.

**Figure 3**

*Stakeholder Engagement Concept Map*
Note. This concept map shows the flow of stakeholder engagement work and the intersection of the work of the ARAG and the SEDT.

The engagement process will begin with five city-wide town hall meetings hosted by CPS. The purpose of the town halls is to 1) To provide stakeholders a space and time to share their experiences with the district’s accountability policy; 2) Strengthen trust between the district and stakeholders; 3) Understand how stakeholders want to be engaged throughout the accountability redesign process. A critical component of the town halls includes the district's acknowledgement of harm caused to communities as a result of previous accountability policies.

In acknowledging the harm caused by previous policies, the district seeks to strengthen trust with stakeholders and learn how stakeholders want to be informed and engaged throughout the accountability redesign process. To that end, an objective qualitative researcher will be charged with capturing, coding and analyzing qualitative data captured from town hall meetings. This data will be shared with the ARAG for consideration in the policy redesign process; it will also be used to ground and inform the work and composition of the SEDT.
Stakeholder Engagement Design Team Composition

Transformative change for equity requires radical inclusion and co-creation, therefore the SEDT will be comprised of three groups of collaborators (Figure 4):

**Advisory Group Members:** Individuals that represent groups of stakeholders like parents, community members, teachers, school leaders, etc.

**Essential Collaborators:** Individuals or groups that are disproportionately impacted by education policies but too often are not included in the co-design process or may not have the policy on their radar; these individuals or groups may lack social capital or awareness of the accountability redesign work, but their perspectives and expertise will promote equity and inclusivity.

**Critical Collaborators:** Individuals and groups that need to be included because the policy, their expertise or local politics demands they be involved.

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**Figure 4**

*Stakeholder Engagement Design Team Composition*
How will SEDT members be selected?

The ARAG will serve as the foundation of the SEDT. In collaboration with the district, the ARAG will identify Essential Collaborators and Critical Collaborators to be invited to design, and support outreach and execution of stakeholder engagement as part of the SEDT, see Figure 4. The SEDT will also include three external qualitative researchers to support data collection and objectivity.

Goals of the Stakeholder Engagement Design Team

The SEDT will lead the stakeholder engagement process and produce stakeholder feedback for CPS and the Advisory Group to use in redesigning the district’s school accountability policy in the following ways:

1. Inform Design of Traditional Stakeholder Engagement Activities
   - Inform general plan for engagement & communication with stakeholder groups.
     - This includes helping to shape the objectives and questions posed for both focus groups and survey administration, as well as supporting the development of frames and messages.

2. Support and Implement Local Engagement Plans
   - Design method & plan for engaging specific stakeholder groups
○ For example, the Chicago Teacher’s Union representative on the SEDT may work with other teachers on the SEDT to design
/inform a plan to engage teachers & other stakeholders who are part of the union;

○ Another example may include a community-based organization designing and implementing a plan to engage their local community on the policy

RISE Implementation Timeline

Phase I: Content Creation & Engagement Design

In Phase I of RISE’s implementation, the SEDT will convene to align on goals of stakeholder engagement, including gaining an understanding of the district’s accountability redesign process and grounding on principles of liberatory design. In this phase the SEDT will design a stakeholder engagement plan that is aligned to CPS’s Spectrum of Inclusive Partnerships, and will establish metrics of success for the engagement process that will be revisited in Phase III when the SEDT engages in evaluation of RISE’s implementation.

A critical deliverable in Phase I of the stakeholder engagement process includes developing informational content about school accountability and SQRP to be shared broadly with stakeholders throughout the engagement process. The goal of this deliverable is to promote equity by providing stakeholders balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding school accountability and the redesign process to prepare stakeholders to fully engage in stakeholder engagement activities like focus groups and surveys, for example.
Content developed may include:

- Overview of Accountability Redesign project, including a clear understanding of the minimum requirements/constraints CPS is working under to create the new policy
- History of School Accountability (where did concept come from & how has it evolved since inception at federal, state, and district levels; intent of policy vs. impact across communities)
- A breakdown of the components of the current policy
- Town hall summary findings
- A review of the work of the ARAG
  - Comparability vs. Flexibility (e.g. should all schools be judged under the same accountability system, or should similar schools be compared to each other)
  - Inputs vs. Outcomes (should the new system show a preference for inputs or outcomes when measuring student/school performance)
  - Broad categories for possible inclusion in the new policy, including academic success (student growth + student achievement), Life skills (readiness + social-emotional), and Supportive Environments (school climate + student support)

Another key deliverable from Phase I of the stakeholder engagement process includes the design of local and stakeholder-specific engagement activities aligned to the policy redesign work of the ARAG. As Figure 3 illustrates, themes and content covered in ARAG will inform the objectives of each engagement activity designed by the SEDT.
As the ARAG begins to consider important design considerations for the policy, that information will be used by the SEDT to inform the objectives and questions posed during stakeholder focus groups, for example. Data gathered from focus group participants will be analyzed with SEDT members and themes will be drafted and shared with the ARAG to be used as the policy is being iterated.

**Phase II: Execution of Engagement Activities**

In Phase II of RISE’s implementation, the SEDT will set out to execute on the engagement activities that were designed in Phase I of the implementation plan. In this phase, ARAG members and essential and critical collaborators will ensure that stakeholders are engaged in meaningful and impactful ways and that their perspectives are elevated and included in the feedback received by the ARAG to inform the policy’s redesign. The objective researchers on the SEDT will work alongside other SEDT members to support data collection during the engagement activities and will help lead the SEDT in participatory analysis of insights gathered from stakeholder groups that will be reported back to the ARAG.

The goal in this phase is to obtain stakeholder feedback and to provide an opportunity for the stakeholders to contribute their perspectives.

This will be accomplished by:

- Holding an initial round of focus groups
  - The objective here is to go more deeply into inputs vs. outcomes, district vs. school accountability, and an understanding of what stakeholders feel makes an excellent educational experience.
● Launching a survey to gather feedback on possible metrics/measures in the new school accountability policy.

● Second round of focus groups to further explore and define possible metrics/measures with stakeholders.

● Holding discussions with stakeholder groups around specific metrics or measures that CPS departments and external stakeholders have developed and would like feedback on prior to being submitted to the ARAG for consideration in the policy.

● Implement Local Engagement plans and Design an Innovative way to engage stakeholders
  ○ **Local Stakeholder Engagement** | Recently, the district utilized a community-led engagement strategy to understand the community’s perspective on School Resource Officers (SROs). The process asked community-based organizations to design plans for engaging stakeholders on alternatives to SROs. The intention here is to apply a similar process where Essential and Critical Collaborators design plans for local and stakeholder-specific engagement.
  ○ **Innovation in Stakeholder Engagement** | Covid-19 has required every industry to seek new and innovative ways to reach their “end users.” As we consider policy redesign and principles of radical inclusion, we must create new ways for parents, communities, and other stakeholders to engage around policy that impacts them. The SEDT will collaborate to develop innovative methods to engage stakeholders and promote greater access and inclusion for those furthest from opportunity.
Radical inclusion asks us to involve more families and communities in co-creating policy - this includes creating multiple and diverse ways for stakeholders to fully engage in the policy redesign process. During this phase, the SEDT will also leverage Engagement Headquarters (EHQ), a virtual platform that provides multiple modalities for stakeholders to contribute their ideas. Figure 5 provides an overview of EHQ’s suite of online tools, which will provide a space for two-way communication. EHQ is a space where stakeholders can interact, share rapid thoughts, and give feedback on ways to improve the policy, as well as bring knowledge and insights to the design of the stakeholder engagement plan. This will provide opportunities for those who may not be able to engage in focus groups, complete surveys or participate in local or stakeholder specific engagement to contribute their perspectives to be considered in the policy’s redesign.

EHQ will also provide opportunities for stakeholders to engage with each other virtually and to interact with learning content that will strengthen their understanding of the policy throughout the redesign process. A critical deliverable from Phase II of the implementation plan includes a codified report of the perspectives and insights gathered from stakeholders as well as insights gathered from EHQ that can be used by the ARAG to support the policy’s redesign.
**Figure 5**

*Communication Tools in Engagement Headquarters*

**EngagementHQ Tools**

- **Forums**
  A safe and interactive space for your community to discuss and debate pertinent issues.

- **Ideas**
  These “virtual post-it notes” are a way for your community to share what inspires them.

- **Places**
  Gather feedback and photos directly on a map with a simple “pin” drop.

- **Stories**
  Help your community better understand, empathize, and relate to others and your project.

- **Guestbook**
  Simple, streamlined, and moderated space for your community to upload comments.

- **Q&A**
  Receive questions in a managed space that accommodates your public or private responses.

- **Polls**
  Ask a single question and get immediate insight with this quick and targeted tool.

- **Surveys**
  Encourage your community to voice their opinions in a convenient and guided way.

*Note.* (From Bang the Table, 2021) EngagementHQ is a digital community engagement platform that helps provide users with multiple modalities to be engaged.

**Phase III: Evaluation of Engagement Process**

In Phase III of the implementation plan SEDT members will revisit metrics for success established during Phase I of the plan. SEDT members will evaluate the
processes used during RISE’s implementation. This includes evaluating the stakeholder engagement process and outcomes, as well as evaluating the project’s implementation to determine if we were able to garner the insights and perspectives of diverse stakeholders impacted by the policy. Part of this evaluation phase includes assessing outcomes of the project to determine whether or not the feedback garnered throughout the engagement process was actually used by the ARAG to redesign the policy. It also includes a reflection about the effects of the collaboration and an analysis about what changes or shifts in implementation would make RISE more effective.

Figure 6 illustrates a proposed timeline for implementation of RISE, beginning with the initial SEDT convening and culminating in the policy’s vote by the BOE.

Figure 6

*Stakeholder Engagement Design Team Implementation Timeline*
Communication

Critical to the success of RISE is communication of progress to stakeholder groups. Table 3 outlines key stakeholders groups and decision makers and the cadence for communication and engagement around the policy’s redesign.

Table 3

Communication Plan with Key Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Frequency of Communication</th>
<th>Communication Channels</th>
<th>Purpose of Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Caregivers</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Bimonthly briefings and regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement</td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Parent Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Advisory Councils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilingual Advisory Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Local School Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Board, Office of Diverse Learners &amp; Support Services Family Advisory Board, Chicago Multilingual Parent Council</td>
<td>opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td>and other engagement events. Provide regular project updates through email and Engagement HQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Parent Groups</strong> Raise Your Hand, Kids First Chicago, parent participants in Parent Mentorship Program</td>
<td><strong>Bimonthly</strong></td>
<td>Spring/Fall briefings and regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops and other engagement events. Provide regular project updates through email and Engagement HQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Student Groups</strong> Student Advisory Committee, Student Voice Committees, Student Alumni Groups</td>
<td><strong>Monthly</strong></td>
<td>Bimonthly briefings and regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops and other engagement events. Provide regular project updates through email and Engagement HQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Youth-Focused Groups</strong> City Year, Youth Guidance, GoodKidsMadCity</td>
<td><strong>Bimonthly</strong></td>
<td>Co-designing new student engagement opportunities; Spring/Fall briefings and regular email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops and other engagement events.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CPS Administrators (Network Chiefs, Principals, and Assistant Principals)</strong></td>
<td><strong>District Groups</strong>&lt;br&gt;Network Chiefs, Principal Advisory Council, All Network-based, ISP, AUSL, Contract, Charter, and ALOP Principals and Assistant Principals</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Spring/Fall briefings; regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Groups</strong>&lt;br&gt;Chicago Principals &amp; Administrators Association, Chicago Public Education Fund</td>
<td>Co-designing new principal engagement opportunities; regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CPS Educators &amp; School-Based Staff</strong></td>
<td>Spring/Fall briefings; Regular email</td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Groups</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td>via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops and other engagement events. Provide regular project updates through email and Engagement HQ</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Groups</strong></td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>Co-designing new educator and school-staff engagement opportunities; regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops and other engagement events. Provide regular project updates through email and Engagement HQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CPS Community Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Groups</strong></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Bimonthly briefings and regular email updates regarding new/upcoming engagement opportunities and content; participation in Engagement HQ; participation in Rapid Response discussion</td>
<td>Inform with objective information. Consult via focus groups and surveys. Collaborate through workshops and other engagement events. Provide regular project updates through email and Engagement HQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Role Stakeholder Feedback in the Final Policy Recommendation

The RAPID decision-making framework (Figure 7) is a tool to promote radical clarity about decision making (RAPID: Bain’s Tool to Clarify Decision Accountability, 2011). This frame will be used to explain to stakeholders who the final decision makers are on the policy and what role stakeholder feedback and participation on the ARAG will play in the final policy.

In the framework, R stands for “recommender”— the person who initiates or drives the process. The R is the “go to” person who sticks with the process from start to finish, ensures that others understand what they need to do, and keeps things moving along. In other words, the R does most of the work to secure the decision. In the case of the school accountability policy, the ARAG serves as the policy recommender.

The A stands for an individual who needs to agree with or approve a recommendation. An A is essentially an I with more power; an A has a stronger voice during the recommendation process. An A who raises concerns with a proposal must
work with the recommender to develop an alternative or elevate the issue to the person who will decide. In this case, the district’s CEO serves as the A or Approver.

The P stands for perform. Ps are the people who carry out the decision once it has been made. In this case, all stakeholders are responsible for living with and working the redesigned accountability policy. The I stands for input; and I must be consulted on a recommendation before a decision is made. Although an I has the right to be heard, they do not have a vote or a veto. Including someone as an I says that the organization values the facts and perspectives they bring to the decision (Bain, 2011). In the case of accountability redesign, the SEDT is charged with ensuring that input is organized and robust and can serve as a strong tool to be used by ARAG to provide recommendations for the policy’s redesign.

The D in the RAPID framework stands for decide. The D has final authority and is the only individual who can commit the organization to action—or in the case of accountability redesign, approve the final policy. In this case, the Board of Education are the final decision makers and will vote to approve the final policy.

For accountability redesign, the recommender on the policy is the ARAG. While the CEO of CPS must approve the final policy, CPS, along with stakeholders, are charged with its implementation. RISE ensures the stakeholder inputs are diverse and represent the needs and desires of those impacted most by the policy. Once stakeholder input has been considered, the ARAG will move to make a policy recommendation that will be approved by the CEO before the policy goes before the final decision makers, the BOE, to be voted on.
Note: (From Bain and Company, 2011) The RAPID decision-making framework will be used to clarify decision making in the policy redesign process.
Section 5: Policy Assessment Plan

It will be important to frame evaluation aspirationally - to recognize it as a powerful tool that can be used for improvement, and to acknowledge that its use in education has caused harm. For many stakeholders, evaluation has felt like a tool used to make punitive decisions that have negatively impacted certain communities. Therefore, the policy assessment plan for Radically Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement (RISE) must 1.) include Stakeholder Engagement Design Team members as part of the design and implementation and 2.) be rooted in Principles of Liberatory Design.

To monitor progress and evaluate the outcomes and results of R.I.S.E.’s implementation, participatory evaluation - a type of program evaluation, will be used. Program evaluation can be defined as “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, for use by people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions” (Patton, 2008, p. 39). While R.I.S.E. is not a program, it’s implementation involves a focus on process, implementation and outcomes, similar to traditionally defined programs. Participatory evaluation can help improve implementation of R.I.S.E. by involving key stakeholders in the process of evaluation design and decision making, and ensuring that the learning that comes from the evaluation is used to improve future implementation efforts.

In adopting participatory evaluation as the evaluation approach we will need to be mindful that this evaluation method -- one that includes stakeholders with varying levels of experience and different expertise -- has tremendous benefits, as well as important considerations. Participatory evaluation will provide insight into what works and what doesn’t work by those most impacted by district policy. It will provide opportunities for
an inclusive group of stakeholders to collaborate and empower them to take ownership of the process.

While there are great benefits to the use of participatory evaluation, it is important to be mindful of the implications for use of this approach. Participatory evaluation requires more time than conventional evaluation processes. It requires trust to be established among SEDT members and facilitators, and it requires adaptability as a key value. R.I.S.E.’s initial implementation will create a baseline of understanding for what is required to truly adopt a radically inclusive plan stakeholder engagement to redesign district policy. The goal of evaluation is then to support an iterative process to improve the policy and to strengthen organizational learning about what is necessary to develop a fully inclusive engagement process.

We will evaluate two key aspects of R.I.S.E.’s implementation: process and outcomes. Process evaluation will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of R.I.S.E.’s implementation. By evaluating the process of implementation, we will be able to study how the policy’s outcome was achieved and iterate to improve for replication of the engagement model. The focus of the process evaluation in R.I.S.E.’s initial implementation will focus on the effectiveness of operations and cross-functional collaboration, as well as assessing the building of infrastructure for the SEDT and communication broadly. When the final school accountability policy is written we want to be able to analyze how the policy was developed and have clarity about what was required for implementation of radically inclusive stakeholder engagement.

Outcome evaluations help stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of the policy in producing change. In the case of the R.I.S.E. policy, its effectiveness can be measured in
the outcome of the final School Quality Rating policy. Since the purpose of R.I.S.E. is to ensure that district policy is reflective of stakeholders input, the ultimate measure of success is whether or not that input is actually written into the final accountability policy.

Policy Assessment Plan

The evaluation plan for R.I.S.E. will take place in two phases - a foundation building phase and a planning and implementation phase. In the foundation building phase it will be critical for trust to be built among members of the SEDT and the school district. In this phase, members of the SEDT work with the district to gain a deeper understanding of the policy being redesigned and gain a deeper understanding of the intersection of the work of the SEDT and the Accountability Redesign Advisory Group (ARAG). The district is responsible for establishing radical clarity in this phase. Relationship building will also be critical during the foundation building phase. It will be important for CPS and SEDT members to name the cynical and aspirational narratives about stakeholder engagement with the school district and work to integrate the narratives to create a path forward.

In the planning and implementation phase we will pull from the Framework for Community-Based Participatory Research (Community Tool Box, n.d.) to design our evaluation plan. To begin the process of designing evaluation we will first frame the policy goals and establish radical clarity regarding the role of the SEDT in its implementation (Figure 8). Part of the framing will also include strengthening the SEDT’s understanding of the district’s role and commitment to using stakeholder data in the accountability policy’s redesign.
Figure 8

Framework for Community-Based Participatory Research

Note. (Adapted from Community Tool Box, n.d.) This framework will be used as a guide to implementation of the SEDT.

Once the policy’s goals have been clearly established, the SEDT will develop a theory of practice. In doing so, the group will consider the cynical and aspirational narratives surfaced earlier in the process - as well as the complexity of coordinating stakeholders with different perspectives - to develop a strategy and approach to meeting
the goals of R.I.S.E. When an approach has been established and agreed upon by the SEDT, members will determine metrics for success. Metrics for success will include process metrics and outcome metrics.

When the foundation for assessment has been built, the policy will be in full implementation. During implementation of R.I.S.E. the SEDT will meet regularly to design engagement activities and will engage in short cycles of evaluation and iteration embedded into the process to make improvements along the way. While the implementation process is being observed and real-time tweaks are made to improve the process, the SEDT will document more broad progress and challenges against the metrics established. Following each engagement activity the SEDT will assess progress toward goals and analyze qualitative data about the implementation to make improvements to the engagement process.

**Section 6: Summary Impact Statement**

Institutional distrust is a hallmark of our time not just because systems are old or inefficient - but because they have become unresponsive to the communities they serve (Mascareñaz, 2021). In the Analysis of Needs section, I shared a historical context and highlighted the role politics has played in Chicago and its public schools. We’ve seen generation after generation of reform efforts come into the district and not succeed or succeed marginally to the detriment of CPS students. I will contend that this is due to several factors including a history of institutional racism, non-academic factors that impact outcomes, resource equity, and teacher quality. My experience tells me that the challenges brought on by a history of insidiously racist school policies, teacher quality, resource scarcity and factors outside of the school’s control are all things people in the
system already know. The issue isn’t a lack of understanding of the problem -- the issue is that the system has largely remained closed in its attempts to solve the problem. Much like the accountability movement has viewed quality in terms of quantitative metrics --- those charged with creating solutions for schools, in my opinion, have largely held a theoretical perspective, but have lacked the practical experience to truly understand policy implications. The result is a lack of buy-in and a policy whose aspirational values and lived values may be unintentionally misaligned, causing harm and unintended consequences for students.

Currently, the district is in a state of uncertainty. In the last month CPS has lost a total of 4 senior-level leaders: CEO Janice Jackson, Chief Education Officer, LaTanya McDade, Chief Operating Officer, Arne Rivera, and Chief of Family and Community Engagement, Chip Johnson. Each of these leaders will step down effective June 30, 2021. Margaret Wheatley (2017) teaches us in *Who Do We Choose to Be?* that everything in the observable universe moves from birth to death. She notes that if a system is open to its environment it can take in information, process it and reorganize itself -- it can adapt, in other words. Adaptation is necessary for survival in living systems. Wheatley contends that “through its exchanges of information a living system creates newness and diversity, sustaining itself through shifts and crisis” (p.28). Essentially, a system's survival depends on its willingness to learn and to adapt -- to be open. The school system in Chicago is a living system -- a system that has the opportunity to adapt presently and in the face of major shifts.

The alternative is to remain a closed system. A closed system operates as a bureaucracy - creating separation and barriers to keep the outside environment - parents,
families and communities - out. Closed systems represent much of Chicago’s education legacy. A living system that closes itself off has no possibility for change or growth.

Now, more than ever, the district has an opportunity to build on and to further the call for equity put forth in Dr. Jackson’s 5-year vision. RISE is a policy that requires the district to live into its equity framework by moving from theory to practice to open the system. It is a policy that builds on the ideas and leadership of Mayor Harold Washington, whose Education Summit in 1986 sought to bring together CPS, parents, CTU and other community leaders to put forth ideas for school reform. Mayor Washington played a key role in beginning to open the system. He understood that creating change would require policy makers to understand the lived experiences of those most impacted by policy - he valued diverse perspectives. Unfortunately, his untimely death slowed the movement to open the system.

RISE is a policy that centers students. It demands that the district and stakeholders recognize oppression and work through fear and discomfort -- in collaboration -- to solve complex challenges. It does not assume that any one perspective is superior to the next or that expertise exists in a singular place, rather -- it is an amalgam of perspectives and experiences that contribute to the most impactful policy solutions. The vision is to co-create policy with stakeholders -- RISE, when implemented with fidelity and in alignment with the work of the ARAG is a critical lever for making co-creation a reality.

RISE requires CPS to design a stakeholder engagement plan aligned with the district’s Equity Framework. Recognizing that stakeholders with different identities, perspectives and backgrounds will bring invaluable knowledge, talents, and insights to the design of any stakeholder engagement plan, a Stakeholder Engagement Design Team
(SEDT), centered in equity and always in service of students, must be established. The SEDT will bring diverse expertise and perspectives into shared inquiry and co-creation of an equitable, human-centered stakeholder engagement plan that will elevate robust perspectives and contribute significantly to policy redesign.

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