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## Board of Education [remote or in person]

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### Takeaways

- Largely because the State of Illinois only funds 75% of what their own Evidence-Based Funding Formula it should, the Chicago Public Schools expects to have structural budget deficits north of \$600 million per year beginning in FY2026
- COVID relief funds totaling \$1.7 million through FY2023 have enabled CPS to fund many new programs such as wraparound support, more professional development and teacher coaching, and in school support for underperforming schools that they would not have been able to establish without the pandemic.
- CPS is widening its approach to school safety, by going beyond concerns merely for physical safety to include resources for emotional safety and relational support, and this is expected to be reflected in a reduction in the number of police school resource officers in exchange for an increase in the number of other professionals who proactively improve safety.
- The board plans to codify many of its operating procedures driven largely by custom, and this will also increase transparency, for example in making its staff briefings of board members public.

### Follow-Up Questions & Observations

- As school safety becomes more oriented to “whole school safety”, there will be new debates on the effectiveness of various strategies to achieve “emotional safety”.
- I expect there to be an intensifying battle over the new sex education curriculum in the schools regarding lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity, despite that as Public Law 102–0522, Sec. 27–9.1a(15)(d) affirms, any student’s parents can opt out of the sex education curriculum.

- Why does the State of Illinois short CPS 25% of what its own Evidence-Based Funding Formula says it should be receiving?

## Notes

### Introduction: The Twilight of an Appointed Chicago Board of Education

Since 1999, the Chicago Board of Education has been a body of seven members appointed by the mayor. According to the Board's [official website](#), it "is responsible for the governance, organizational and financial oversight of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) ... ." One member serves as President of the Board, currently [Miguel del Valle](#), who led today's meeting. The current structure [will soon change](#). Beginning next year (2024), the Board will expand into a hybrid one of 21 members, with one elected and one appointed member from each of 10 new districts, along with an appointed president. Beginning in 2027, all 21 members will be appointed.

Today's meeting was a hybrid one, with all seven members, most of the participating Chicago Public Schools officials, and many members of the public giving testimony in person. A few officials and about a third [count] of the public testifiers participated via zoom, usually by audio only. Those who connected via video, could be seen on the screen to the side of the room, coinciding with the live stream of the meeting.

The meeting had six distinct parts: (1) reports on and expressions of kudos to teachers, principals, and other Chicago Public Schools leaders for their recent accomplishments, (2) a committee report, (3) testimony offered by members of the public (teachers and other education professionals, parents, and students), (4) reports and mini-hearings on "whole school safety" and budget projections, and (5) Public Agenda items requiring little or no discussion, and (6) "the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, [contractors or volunteers," as well as of litigation. Asides from votes of approval at the end, all the discussion of this last part of the meeting was in closed session, not open to the public or the press.

The only part of the meeting that received attention in the mainstream media ([here](#), for example) was the presentation on the budget in the fourth part of the meeting. That part will be addressed first.

All seven board members were present, including the newly appointed [Dr. Miguel A. Lewis](#).

## “Honoring Excellence” to Teachers, Principals, Chicago Public Schools Leaders, and Others

The opening part of the meeting was devoted to “honoring of standout members of [the] CPS community” — a practice that has become customary at Board meetings. Bogdana Chkoumbova, CPS Chief Education Officer expressed her appreciation for the 49 teachers, counselors, and librarians who became National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) with the [National Board for Teaching Standards](#), by dint of completing that organization’s professional development program. Additionally, 103 “educators” renewed their certifications. She displayed all their names on the screen. Besides Chkoumbova, other officials also applauded the new NBCTs. [Stacy Davis Gates](#), the President of the Chicago Teachers Union, connecting to the meeting on audio only, added that she was particularly proud that 40% of those who attained NBCT status are teachers of color.

[Lynn Cherkasky-Davis](#), who sponsors the NBCT program from the Chicago Teachers Union, pointed out that since the union began its partnership with the CPS management 26 years ago, they now have the third largest number of board-certified teachers of any school district. She did not point out that that is hardly surprising given that CPS is the third largest school district in the country. In addition, Cherkasky-Davis offered detailed statistics on both the newest crop of those NBCTs and all current CPS NBCTs. She also described that CPS-CTU partnership, called [Nurturing Teacher Leadership](#), that sponsors teachers seeking NBCT status financially and in many other ways. The program, which is “the gold standard,” elevates the professionalism of educators, and “is committed to providing equitable learning for all students.”. She claimed that research, including an unnamed study by the [Consortium on Chicago School Research](#), “has *proven* that higher standards for teachers means higher achievement and better learning for students.” NBCTs are “committed to social justice and adaptation in the face of adversity and trauma.”

Testimonies by NBCTs, including a school counselor, a chemistry teacher, and a principal, followed. President del Valle chipped in his own congratulations to the three of them, and to CPS NBCTs more generally, and hoped that more and more teachers and other professionals would obtain this gold standard. There is no better way, he claimed, to spend their dollars.

Chkoumbova went on to recognize the importance of Women’s History Month, the Citywide Spelling Bee, and she applauded the 12 Chicago teachers and one principal

who are finalists for the 2023 [Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Leadership](#).

Absent from all the praise, reportage, and testimonies on national teacher certification were any details on what teachers, principals, counselors and others actually had to learn and gain expertise in during their professional development to obtain certification.

Teacher development, Chkoumbova explained, is one of the highest priorities of CPS. In the last budget, they added \$45 million to their spending for professional development.

In further remarks, Chkoumbova mentioned three other programs. One involves 250 Lead Coaches who support teachers, principals, and other leaders. Another includes “interventionists” in the [Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\)](#) “leads”. They “work to identify students who need targeted academic or social emotional interventions in order to access grade-level instruction.” Lastly, there is the CPS Tutor Corps that is operating daily in 232 schools. Slides describing all three programs can be seen in the video of the meeting.

Finally, she reminded everybody that the Accountability Redesign Public Comment Period is open to members of the general public until April 3.

## Remarks by CPS CEO Pedro Martinez

Chicago Public Schools CEO [Pedro Martinez](#) updated the Board on several activities of his office:

- The participation of five CPS principals, as well as an assistant principal, in the inaugural [Leadership Collaborative of the Black Principals Network](#)
- Martinez’s attending the [National education Pathways Summit](#), where he was able to discuss CPS’s COVID “recovery work.” He also participated in a panel discussion to discuss how to create “college and career pathways that are equitable, seamless, and rooted in work-based learning experiences.” He also spoke with Secretary of Education Cardona.
- New federal grant funding for CPS students through [Project AWARE](#), “advancing resiliency and wellness through education.”

He also anticipated some points made in much more detail in the presentation below on The Budget Framework.

## Honorary Student Board Member Application Process

The Board is in the process of finding the next honorary student board member. A [Youtube video](#) highlighting the incumbent, Emmanuel Ofosuene, and his enthusiasm was shown as part of the Board's advertising for the position.

## Committee Update

### Ad Hoc Board Committee on Board Operating Procedures

This special committee of two, including board members [Elizabeth Todd-Breland](#) and [Michael Scott, Jr.](#), studied school board operating procedures from around the country, in preparation for the transition to an elected school board. Todd-Breland suggested that too much of how they proceed on the board follows custom rather than codified rules, and that this ought to change. She and Scott also agreed on some specific proposals. First, the briefings members of the board receive from CPS should be public rather than behind closed doors as they are now. Second, the board should hold more board meetings "in the community" — in local schools — for the purpose of more "community engagement." Third, informed by research on best practices, the board should undertake five-year financial forecasting, in order to achieve better "budget transparency."

Scott stressed the importance of codifying custom and increasing transparency to build trust in the "seamless transition from an appointed board to an elected board."

## Public Participation

Board procedure is to first have union reps and other officials offer their remarks, and then open up to the general public.

## Union Reps

Jackson Potter, CTU Vice President

One of the leaders of CTU, Potter remarked on a number of topics, such as on "the impact of environmental racism on our schools and communities," and on the need to "green those schools." He also made no secret of CTU's preference for their own Brandon Johnson for mayor, rather than Paul Vallas. He took a few pot shots at charter "networks" for taking money out of schools, not properly serving special needs students, and putting \$1 million into Vallas's campaign. He was also disappointed that CEO Martinez has not brought CTU into discussions about the implementation of Project

AWARE, to deal with the problem of “heightened violence in our communities.”

Jen Conant, Head of CTU Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff (CTU-ACTS)

After noting that her division of CTU, comprised of teachers and others who work at charter schools, has a number of issues with CPS, she was particularly concerned today with the facilities plan and climate action plan as they concern charter schools. She also complained that charter schools in Chicago belong and pay dues to the [Illinois Network of Charter Schools \(ICNS\)](#), which has given \$0.5 million to Vallas’s campaign, money that could be better spent “into classrooms” — social workers, counselors, special education teachers, etc. Neither she nor Potter noted that their CTU has given upwards of \$2.4 million to Brandon Johnson’s campaign.

Stacia Scott, SEIU Local 73, Executive Vice President

Her union represents 9,000 support staff in CPS. She complained about [Aramark](#), the custodial management in CPS. After Aramark has been paid over \$1 billion since 2014, the same problems in mismanagement have continued. They distribute supplies poorly through the system, and frequently short custodians in their pay. Contracting with them has been a “failed experiment in privatization.” The Board should take over direct management of their functions. No surprise, she suggested, that the filthiest schools are on the south and west sides.

She also expressed concern about the 400 vacancies for special education classroom assistants to address “diverse learner needs.”

## General Public Speakers

Some highlights:

- Amanda Perez, a parent of daughters at George Washington Elementary School and office manager for the Southeastern Environmental Task Force, complained about the abysmal, unsafe facilities at her childrens’ “crumbling school building.” They need greener resources.
- Biria [?] Hampton, from the Altgeld Gardens community, complained of environmental injustice in her neighborhood, a “toxic donut” surrounded by an industrial waste dump. She touted the activities of the organization, People for Community Recovery, founded by Hazel M. Johnson. The following speaker, Freddie Batchelor, elaborated on another project of that organization to repurpose historical buildings.
- Claudia Aguilera, the mother of students in the Noble School (charter) Network,

touted how successfully her daughter's Chicago Bulls High School in the Network trained prepared her for college.

- Allison Jack of INCS spoke as an advocate for charter schools. She argued that disadvantaged students, including those with disabilities or English learners, do better in charter schools than in district public schools, according to the [School Quality Rating Policy \(SQRP\)](#), CPS's last accountability system (which was dumped in 2019). Later, Levonda Winston, a parent of children at Chicago International Charter School (CICS) Loomis-Longwood, spoke out in praise of her children's school, and hopes that more children will be able to attend
- A couple of speakers from Tilden High School complained of the poor facilities there, and how money that could be spent on repairs were being funneled away to be spent on a new high school in the neighborhood.
- A whole series of speakers — parents, teachers, students — from Bogan High School complained that their school's reputation was unfairly damaged by misleading reports regarding their school's graduation rates of 54–56% in 2019–2021. Several speakers noted that the reason it was reported to be so low was due to many students who never attended the school to be included mistakenly in the school's roles. The Illinois State Board of Education acknowledged that this was a mistake, and they have corrected the procedures by which the graduation or dropout rate is calculated, and these will be applied in the future. But they never corrected the mistaken numbers, and this has had a negative effect on the reputation of the school and the morale of the teachers and students in it. It is still, very unfairly, being rated as one of the worst schools in Illinois. As a result, the Bogan Local School Board has forfeited its rights as an independent entity. Later in the meeting, Jeffrey Broom, Director, School Quality Measurement & Research for CPS, acknowledged that the members of the Bogan High School community were correct, but that CPS was powerless to do anything about it, because the matter was under the jurisdiction of the Illinois State Board of Education. So he cannot do anything to change Bogan's probationary status. Todd-Breland suggested that the problem was part of the larger problem of stigmatizing neighborhood schools. The SQRP accountability system did a lot of harm, and that needs to be acknowledged, she continued.
- Amy Orta, a teacher, and Debra Benjamin Kohler, co-founder of the CPS Family Dyslexia Collaborative, spoke out on the lack of dyslexia remediation in the schools and the need to implement a dyslexia directive. Kohler suggested the lack of dyslexia remediation is one reason for the generally poor reading level of CPS high school students.
- Multiple public commenters shared opinions opposing the City's implementation of [Illinois Public Act 102–0522](#), which calls for sexual health education that is

comprehensive,” “age and developmentally appropriate,” and aligned with the [National Sex Education Standards](#). Overall, their comments were aligned with opinions that parents should have more of a say in what is taught and not taught in schools.

- Terry Bruce, who is Black himself, complained that language arts classes don't do enough to teach Black students standard English (separate from AAVE). He said he knows his opinion is controversial.
- Brittney Taylor, a behavior interventionist with [Chicago International Charter School \(CICS\) Lloyd Bond](#), described the encouraging results of the Peer Jury program at her school. She urged CPS to expand her program.

## Presentations

### “Whole School Safety”

Jadine Chou, CPS Director of Safety and Security, gave a presentation on what they call “whole school safety,” which means not only policing in the sense of reacting after something dangerous happens, but also of the creation of a safe environment to prevent unsafe behaviors. The details of CPS plan can easily be gleaned from watching the presentation on the video of the meeting.

Brief background: after the murder of George Floyd, CPS decided to reevaluate Chicago Police Department's School Resource Officer (SRO) to see if there could be alternatives to or complements of the program, if it might be reducing or even eliminating the program. SROs were (and are) only at high schools. CPS did not want to make top-down decisions but rather to allow local schools to make their own decisions through engagement with local community stakeholders. Local safety committees examined data and other input from community stakeholders, then put the data “through a racial equity lens,” and sent up a plan to the local school council (LSC). They could trade in SROs for other professionals who work in a more proactive manner. CPS has spent \$3.8 million on the many alternatives to SROs.

CPS also got a lot of help through contracting with five community-based organizations: [Ark of St. Sabina](#) on the South Side, [BUILD](#) on the West Side, COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues), which is a parent advocacy group, the [Mikva Challenge](#), and [VOYC](#) (Voices of Youth Count). The last two are student advocacy groups. Overall, they engaged almost 3,100 people. All of that engagement has been incorporated into the recommendations for this year.

In 2021, 12 out of 53 high schools who chose to enter into the WSS Planning Process

removed both SROs. In 2022, out of 41 schools in the process, most schools kept one of both SRO officers, while Dunbar High School decided to get rid of both.

Chou stressed that even if the police are not there at the schools, CPS is still working closely with the police. But they really want to separate school issues from police issues. Whole school safety means “physical safety, emotional safety, and relational trust.” They are starting to apply this framework also to elementary schools.

In response to a question by Lewis, Chou speculated that there would have been a faster transition away from SROs had it not been for the pandemic. The focus now should be on a transition from physical to emotional safety.

Chou was clearly proud of the [Safe Passage Program](#). A few schools have this program, whereby adults, mostly parents, are stationed along the main routes by which students walk to and from school. “It works!” claimed Chou.

## The Budget Framework

Michael Sitkowski, deputy chief in the district’s budget and management office, gave a presentation on CPS budget framework. The biggest single challenge in planning out CPS’s budget is that the State of Illinois funds only 75% of what CPS’s budget should be according to the state’s [Evidence-Based Funding Formula](#) suggests it should be. That means that there is \$1.4 billion that CPS ought to be receiving from the state that it has no access to. Sitkowski called this an “adequacy gap.” No other school system in Illinois gets shorted to such a degree.

In FY2023, the total CPS budget is \$9.4 billion, of which only 69%, or \$6.5 billion, goes to classroom spending. As for the rest, 11% or \$1.2 billion goes to pension spending, 8% or \$762 million to debt service, 7% or \$645 million to capital funding, and 4% or \$400 to central/network offices.

Another big problem with the budget is that CPS is the only school district in the state that has to fund its own pension system; the others the state provides 100%. Illinois provides only 36%, or \$309 million, of the pension costs, whereas Chicago taxpayers have to pay the remaining 64%, or \$552 million. In FY2024, this part of the budget will be the fastest growing. The City will also have to pay \$175 to pay the normal cost and unfunded liability to non-teacher pensions.

There is another inequity in the CPS budget. Chicago has limited access to outside funds for capital projects, such as new buildings and infrastructure, and so must dip into

\$540 of the state’s Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) and other unrestricted funds that should be used in the classroom and use it for capital projects.

Through FY2025, CPS will be using COVID relief money to make up for what otherwise would be a deficit. In other words, COVID money has “extended the gap” until FY2026. But then, “CPS will face projected budget deficits north of \$600 million” each year: \$628 million in FY2026, \$733 million in FY2027, and \$650 in FY2028. Some of the key factors driving these costs will be non-teacher pensions, which will grow to \$315 million by FY2027. Plus, CPS will by that time spend \$30 million on crossing guards and school resource officers that were previously covered by the City of Chicago. CPS will also lose \$200 million in EBF funds because of it being lowered to a “[Tier 2](#)” district.

Federal COVID relief funding — \$1.7 billion spent already, and a total of \$2.5 billion by FY2024 — has allowed CPS to make investments it otherwise would not have been able to make. These include:

- Targeted investments in the instructional core: such as limiting class sizes, and expanding teacher professional development and coaching
- Resource equity: using the [Office of Equity](#)’s Opportunity Index to create new teacher positions and provide additional support for low-performing schools. This included \$50 million in equity grants to 238 under-enrolled schools.
- Stability: Despite that from 2019 to 2022 CPS enrollment fell by 33,000 students (9%), CPS has still increased funding by \$240 million in FY2023 for direct school funding.
- Academic Recovery and Social-Emotional Support: \$230 million in pandemic-related needs

Sitkowski provided more details regarding how CPS has spent COVID relief money. Notable is \$45 million for instructional coaches, one for each of 184 schools, and professional development, both for the purpose of improving teaching. The focus has been on the highest need schools on the South and West Sides. In FY2023, CPS provided \$83 million in wraparound services of various kinds (detailed in the slide presentation). Later, del Valle stressed how many programs they have been able to start because of this COVID money. He would rather not have had the pandemic, but it did trigger spending to meet many previously unaddressed needs.

Martinez highlighted the problems of the inequities with the state that will lead to large structural deficits by FY2026. And he took a polite swipe at the unions for not adequately facing this problem: “With due respect to my colleagues and partners in the unions, nobody is having these conversations” about the looming serious fiscal deficits.

Todd-Breland underlined the importance of CPS officials working with state legislators to redress the serious inequities in the system, the shorting of dollars by the state that will lead to large structural deficits. It was really frustrating for Board members, she lamented, to simply not have adequate funds to meet the needs of young people in the schools.

## Public Agenda

A whole series of resolutions and reports listed in the agenda were passed without any controversy or discussion.

## Closed Session

At 3:21, the Board moved into closed session for about 30 minutes. When they reconvened, they spent only a minute or so to vote on one item in the closed session, the appointment of Estuardo Mazin as point chief officer of Network 2. It passed unanimously.

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**Note to reader:** Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at [documenters@citybureau.org](mailto:documenters@citybureau.org) with "Correction Request" in the subject line. Learn more about Documenters on our [website](#).