

Local Decision-Makers in our Schools

A BASELINE REPORT ON CHICAGO'S
LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS



THE CHICAGO
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Local School Councils (LSCs) are a defining and unique aspect of Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Their statutory role ensures local input on important school-based decisions. As Chicago's public school leaders navigate significant changes — a new elected school board, the end of federal COVID-19 funding, and challenges with student attendance — strong LSCs are essential in helping principals make decisions grounded in each school community's needs.

The Chicago Public Education Fund (The Fund) aims to improve public schools in Chicago by investing in the talented educators who lead them. Given the connection LSCs have to principals, The Fund is increasingly engaged in the important work of LSCs. In recent years, we created workshops and resources for LSC members and conducted focus groups. In 2023, we partnered with CPS to survey LSC members citywide. This baseline report details our findings, highlights stories of the positive impact LSCs have on school communities, and lays out areas where we plan to support LSCs further.



Keeping decisions local is important.

The 1988 Chicago School Reform Act empowered communities and principals by decentralizing authority and creating LSCs to govern schools. Over 500 elected and appointed councils operate in CPS schools today.

Council members are elected by their corresponding school community. Each LSC has important duties that directly affect teaching, learning, and school culture. Their responsibilities include selecting and retaining the school principal, and aligning the school's improvement plan with its budget.

Inevitably, LSCs face challenges. They need to balance diverse viewpoints and often navigate limited resources. They can mitigate challenges by exercising shared decision-making and cultivating a strong, collaborative relationship with their principals.

Learning from council members is vital.

We dedicated the 2023-24 school year to better understanding LSCs across Chicago. LSCs offer perspective and extend decision-making to parents, community members, school staff, and students.



Citywide Survey & Interviews

The Fund launched a citywide LSC Member Engagement Survey in fall 2023 and heard from over half of the LSCs in CPS, highlighting LSC members' strong interest and engagement. To build on these survey insights, we also interviewed 20 LSCs representing various school types, neighborhoods, and levels of vacancy and engagement across the city. These interviews revealed the successes and challenges LSC members experience, and how they collaborate, support school leaders, and contribute to their schools' missions.

The stories in this report show how these elements work in diverse elementary and high school communities. The case studies also show how applying these practices can contribute to a stronger school culture and a better social and academic experience for students and staff. Our hope is that these examples, as well as the survey data highlighted in each case study, will serve as a reference for LSC members and principals, especially as they plan for future school years.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The survey asked members to list up to three factors (out of 12) that contribute to an LSC's success. Case studies in this report focus on the top-cited factors:

Active Community Involvement

Haines Elementary

Transparent Decision-Making

Grissom Elementary

Strong Chairperson Leadership

Bogan High School

Clear Insight Into School Processes

King High School

Survey Findings

The survey provided insights into LSC member experiences and areas for improved support.

We collaborated with the CPS Office of Local School Council Relations, Department of Principal Quality, and Office of Equity to conduct the survey. It collected a racially and geographically broad sample, including teacher, parent, community member, and student responses.¹

ABOUT THE SURVEY

- Open for nine weeks
- Nearly 560 LSC member responses
- Results represent 295 schools

Open Responses

Open responses highlighted opportunities for more training and support — such as practical examples and best practices — to improve their LSC's effectiveness.

“My LSC works hard to build relationships with students and parents. They often work to help build staff and student morale.”

— Teacher in Roseland

“Every member is really committed to the school; they were kind and welcoming when I joined, and clearly have a good relationship with the principal.”

— Community member in East Garfield Park

“Vacant parent positions make it difficult to reach quorum and we don’t hear enough from the parent perspective.”

— Parent in Rogers Park

Satisfaction & Support

Still, the remaining 18% (representing 65 schools) may need support as weaker relationships can negatively impact school culture and shared decision-making.

82%

of LSC members reported positive relationships with their principals.

At the same time, a majority (57%) of LSC members reported soliciting community input infrequently, either annually (26%) or never (31%).

70%

of LSC members believe they connect well with their school community.

66%

of LSC members felt prepared by CPS training.

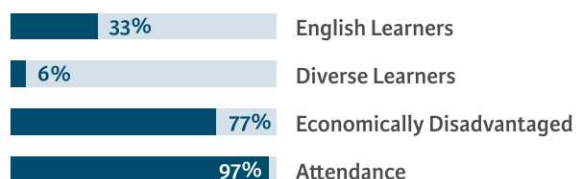
However, hundreds expressed a need for more support, especially in running effective meetings and chairperson training.

¹ Our fact sheet on survey results, available on our website, includes a detailed breakdown of respondent demographics. Due to factors like self-selection, the survey respondents may overrepresent individuals with higher education levels compared to the general LSC population.

Active Community Involvement

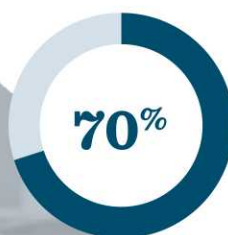
Haines Elementary

480 STUDENTS



PRINCIPAL
AMY MOY-DAVIS

John C. Haines Elementary, Chinatown's only public school, has been led by principal Catherine "Amy" Moy-Davis for over eight years. Amy was born and raised in Chinatown, and her school is backed by passionate, long-standing LSC members, some of whom have served for over 20 years. Focusing on fostering transparent communication and strong relationships, Haines Elementary strives to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all its students and families.



of members shared that their LSC reflects the demographic composition of their school community.²



of members learned about LSCs from the principal, school staff, or other LSC members. The most cited reason to join was wanting to get involved in their school community.²

Challenge

Haines serves nearly 500 students, the majority of whom identify as Asian. With 32.9% of students being English Learners, classes are taught in English and Chinese. As an Asian American principal, Amy understands the importance of inclusivity. Over the years, she has worked to ensure Black families and the growing number of Spanish-speaking families have a voice in schoolwide decision-making at Haines.

Amy's dedication to creating an environment where all students and families feel comfortable and accepted is evident in the makeup of Haines' LSC. "The diversity of the LSC matches the school," noted LSC Vice Chair Karl Kemp. "We have to capture the voice [of our entire community] so that as activities happen in the school, we can say we're represented. And there's sincerity in that. That's the success of the LSC, because we have an administration that fully understands and respects the diversity of their student and parent population."

Approach

Accessibility and transparency are essential practices for Haines' LSC. In addition to weekly newsletters, the school website, and emails, LSC meeting minutes are translated into Chinese. "That's one thing about this LSC: constant communication," community representative June Moy shared. "You're never in the dark about anything." Every meeting includes comprehensive updates on school activities, finances, and ongoing initiatives. Complex topics are communicated in plain language. Amy even uses her weekly emails as a recruitment tool. "Weekly emails about how you can get involved; that was what sparked my interest," said Joylynn Coleman, the LSC's newest parent representative.

This inclusion extends to the principal evaluation process, where LSC members can share their experiences with Amy and the school. "It's our voice, and it's respected," Karl said. Members are encouraged to share their stories and experiences in evaluating their principal, building a more holistic picture with narratives from all sides.

Outcome

The LSC's impact is evident. Amy's inclusive approach has empowered Haines' council, transforming it into a collaborative space where members feel their contributions matter. Community members have championed a new library and an updated fieldhouse. Even after their children graduate, many former LSC members remain involved, mentoring new LSC members and sharing their deep knowledge of Haines.

"I've worked with many different groups, and there's just a togetherness and a family feel that you don't get at a lot of other places. And that's what makes it work," said community representative June Moy.

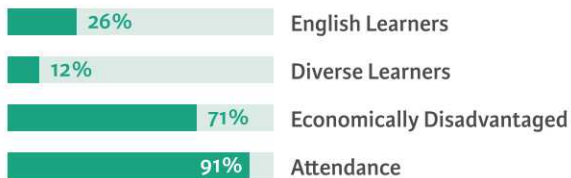
A strong sense of community has informed LSC initiatives, like creating Friends of Haines. This organization has engaged the community in multiple fundraisers and has sponsored staff appreciation activities, field trips, and extracurriculars for students. Many LSC members even serve on Friends of Haines, exemplifying the LSC's full confidence and collaboration with the school and each other.

This focus on community engagement has made serving on Haines' LSC a coveted position. In 2024, the school won its CPS network's competition for most LSC applications.

Transparent Decision-Making

Grissom Elementary

290 STUDENTS

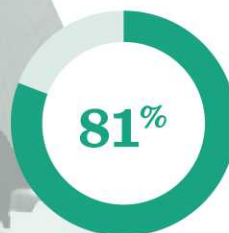


PRINCIPAL
CHRISTINE HURLEY

In 2022, Virgil Grissom Elementary School's LSC searched for a new principal dedicated to maintaining open communication with its tight-knit community. LSC members emphasized the importance of maintaining their cooperative, informal dynamic with the new principal throughout the hiring process. Christine Hurley impressed them with her focus on sharing the "why" behind her leadership decisions. "We only interviewed a few candidates who truly wanted to be here," noted parent representative Joshua Daisy.



of LSC members felt like their principal acted on their feedback.³



of principals shared that their LSC is engaged in school decisions.⁴

Challenge

Shortly after becoming principal, Christine saw an opportunity to improve school operations. The open schoolyard, which acted as a community hub, lacked barriers, making supervision difficult during student pick-up and drop-off. Christine also saw parents cluster near the entrance, congesting the space and causing confusion during dismissal. Many in the small and friendly school community were used to the open space and didn't see safety as a major issue.

"Grissom's open design sets it apart from most fenced-in CPS schools; it is a beautiful community asset," Christine acknowledged, even though she knew they would need to change the entry and dismissal procedures. With a fresh view, she was set to improve the protocols to benefit students and the community.

Approach

Aware of potential pushback, Christine shared her initial entry and dismissal policy with the LSC for feedback. "When I institute a policy," she explained, "it is always grounded in district policy and what is in the best interest of children."

Although her LSC and staff liked the new policy, some community members raised concerns that the changes were unnecessary. Christine responded by enlisting additional support from the CPS Office of School Safety and Security, who audited the procedures and confirmed the proposed alterations benefited students.

The audit identified other issues, such as unlocked gates and a need for a clearer protocol for releasing students into the playground. Christine shared these findings with the LSC, and ensured families were informed through a town hall meeting and newsletters. "She doesn't push us off; she gives us answers," said parent representative Denise Milenkovic. LSC members even helped translate newsletters and communications.

Outcome

The revised entry and dismissal protocols included designated pick-up zones, staggered pick-up times, and additional supervisory staff. Christine made the changes slowly to win over most of the community, saying that "it was part of a yearlong tightening of [procedures]. I think my message never changed. And I had buy-in from the LSC." She continued to refine the protocols to address parent and community feedback. For instance, after hearing concerns about inconvenient pick-up timing, Christine extended the dismissal timeframe to better accommodate parents' schedules.

"We saw determination in Ms. Hurley to get things done," shared longtime community representative Sami Alnemri of Christine's selection as principal.

Christine and the LSC's work revamping entry and dismissal procedures has maintained Grissom's playground as a valuable community space. They continue encouraging parent involvement and work to keep the school and playground accessible. As Natalie Salazar, the LSC teacher representative, shared, "We have a lot of open school days and events where parents are welcome. The more parents are present in the school, the more invested they become."

Christine's approach to decision-making has improved how the LSC functions. "We work together to support her," Sami Alnemri, Grissom's community representative, shared.

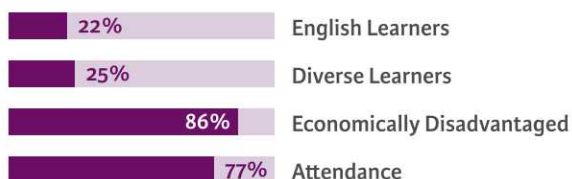
3 2023-24 LSC Member Engagement Survey.

4 The 2023 Principal Engagement Survey, an annual survey of all of Chicago's public school principals conducted by The Chicago Public Education Fund is designed to track school leader satisfaction, development needs, and areas for support.

Strong Chairperson Leadership

Bogan High School

574 STUDENTS



PRINCIPAL
ALAHRIE AZIZ-SIMS

Principal Alahrie Aziz-Sims leads William J. Bogan High School, which serves the Ashburn neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side. At a recent meeting, Bogan's LSC voted to award Alahrie a new contract. This is a major milestone for the council, given that it only had its voting rights restored this year. "That's like a congratulations to us because we've been working so hard to do this," shared LSC Chair Claressa Allison. Bogan's LSC has had to work to engage its community and address misperceptions of the school.

92%

of principals shared that they have a strong relationship with their LSC chair.⁵

78%

of LSC members shared that their meetings run efficiently.⁶

Challenge

Alahrie came to Bogan in 2012 after CPS placed the school on “transformation” status and took over many decisions from the LSC. She saw that this reduction in agency left the LSC without opportunities for productive engagement. Parents were frustrated to see that, despite improved student experiences, the school still lacked autonomy. “We had strong engagement when I started,” Alahrie said, “but without the LSC being able to make those decisions, parents started to feel worn down.”

This sense of frustration also manifested itself in meeting practices. Lack of focus stemming from the LSC’s reduced autonomy led to meandering meetings that could last for hours. “We’d have people going off on a tangent,” said Claressa. The discussion sometimes became unhelpful or even combative, and long, unpredictable meetings made it even harder for community members to productively engage. Alahrie knew that without community buy-in, restoring Bogan’s rights would be even more difficult.

Approach

Claressa became LSC chair in January 2021, when emergency rules allowed virtual participation in LSC meetings. She saw an opportunity with this new engagement and wanted to ensure meetings remained accessible to the community through succinct and well-managed agendas. “So if I see that people are not focused . . . I just put my stern foot down,” she shared. By calmly but firmly redirecting conversations into more productive directions, Claressa has better focused the LSC’s meetings.

Proactive communication with LSC members and the public about meeting agendas also helped to reenergize community engagement. Claressa works with participants to develop meeting agendas, allotting a set amount of time for each presentation and for public comment to ensure an efficient meeting. With these new transparent processes, Claressa consistently reduced meeting times to under one hour, decreasing frustration and uncertainty for meeting participants.

Outcome

Once students, parents, and community members felt they could contribute to meetings, they began exploring the issues keeping their LSC from regaining autonomy. After a review of school data revealed inaccurate graduation rates, the LSC took action to correct the discrepancy, including writing a letter to CPS and speaking to the school board. Following this advocacy, CPS corrected the data and moved Bogan out of “transformation” status. In the process, the LSC gained notice as other councils seek to replicate its success.

“We are seeing students stepping forward to be a part of organized and ongoing leadership,” Alahrie said.

Most importantly, the reengaged LSC allowed students to actively participate in directing the learning at their school. One student decided to join the LSC for the 2024-25 school year after successfully approaching the council for funding for a yearbook program; two other students similarly signed up for the council without prompting from school staff.

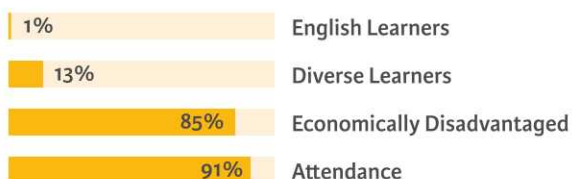
⁵ 2023 Principal Engagement Survey.

⁶ 2023-24 LSC Member Engagement Survey.

Clear Insight Into School Processes

King High School

704 STUDENTS



PRINCIPAL
BRIAN KELLY

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. College Preparatory High School became a selective enrollment school in 2000. Its mission is to develop engaged leaders committed to academic excellence through a rigorous curriculum, extensive Advanced Placement offerings, and robust engineering and performing arts programs. However, its LSC struggled to find a leader who embodied the school's vision, leading to short-term principal contracts and a lack of stable and effective school leadership.

86%

of principals shared that they have a strong relationship with their LSC.⁷

76%

of principals felt that their LSC approaches decisions with an equity lens.⁷

Challenge

In 2019, the King's LSC, searching for a leader who could revitalize the school, welcomed Englewood native Brian Kelly as its new principal. He arrived to find a challenging environment: low trust in leadership and students and staff feeling unheard. "People discouraged me from applying," he explained, "saying it would be a career killer." Parents, too, were frustrated with communication issues and dwindling enrollment.

Repairing the principal-LSC relationship was essential. "I can't effectively serve anyone I don't know," Brian said. He focused on understanding King's needs to rebuild the culture and improve the student experience. Teaching and leading at various Chicago high schools — Morgan Park, Taft, Westinghouse, Austin, and Kennedy — had shown him that the perception of a school by its community plays a critical role in attracting and retaining families.

Approach

Within his first 90 days, Brian conducted listening tours with the LSC, parents, teachers, and community members and analyzed key performance data, including ACT/SAT scores, graduation rates, and attendance. He posed the question, "Why is King no longer the school of choice?" to the community, engaging them in discussions about decision-making, communication, and the opportunity for more academic rigor.

Brian's open-door policy and community outreach helped showcase positive change. LSC Chair Dejuan Shadd shared how Brian extends invites to sporting events, business expos, and classes on entrepreneurship at King to everyone, not just LSC members. "I was impressed with [how] Dr. Kelly wants his school to be welcoming to parents and the community."

Guided by their shared vision, the LSC and Brian have prioritized college readiness and bringing new opportunities for students. LSC Secretary Jarvis Williams noted that Brian's reports are very thorough, timely, and detailed, so when "[Brian] comes with an idea . . . we have no opposition." They work together, even addressing teacher shortages with LSC members volunteering as SAT/ACT tutors on the weekend, ensuring students succeed.

Outcome

Brian has successfully aligned King's vision for students with reality. Enrollment has grown from 486 in 2019 to over 700 students in 2024, a notable accomplishment amid a district-wide enrollment decline. King's LSC credits this partly to Brian's proactive efforts, including personal calls to prospective students.

In 2024, Brian won the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Leadership.

The focus on dual enrollment courses has also soared, enabling more students to earn associate degrees at King. Early College and Career credentials jumped from 49.6% to 93.1% between 2019 and 2023. This success reflects strong leadership and collaboration between Brian and the LSC, evidenced by significant improvements in the school's 5Essentials survey⁸ scores. Classes are now more engaging and challenging (+17 points in Ambitious Instruction), teachers collaborate effectively for student success (+14 points in Collaborative Teachers), and Brian provides clear vision and support (+9 points in Effective Leaders).

Further illustrating his impact, Brian earned the historic distinction of being the first principal granted a second contract in King's history as a selective enrollment school.

⁷ 2023 Principal Engagement Survey.

⁸ The 5Essentials survey is part of a data-based school-improvement system developed by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research. The survey is administered to students and teachers once per year, with an optional parent survey.

Strengthening LSCs Citywide

Every LSC, school, and community in CPS is different. LSCs provide local governance at the school level that enables principals to be responsive to their students' and community's needs. Indeed, LSCs were created in recognition that centralization did not work for students and communities with less access to economic power.

Our Commitments

- Leverage data to identify trends in LSC vacancies and explore supports that can fill them citywide.
- Double down on efforts to ensure all LSC voices are represented in the data and reports we publish.
- Analyze data further to identify training needs across different schools and communities over time. This will help us learn more about the characteristics and practices of successful LSCs.
- Elevate successful strategies employed by principals and LSC members across the city in subsequent reports and case studies.
- Facilitate opportunities for LSCs and school leaders to learn from one another's experiences and receive additional support.

In 2025, we will publish a summative report on LSCs to continue bringing visibility to the important role these councils play in shaping Chicago's public schools.



Filling Vacancies

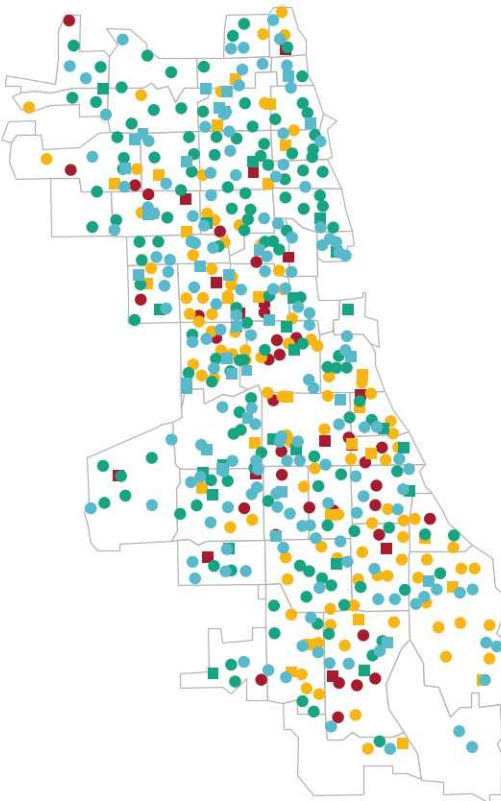
In October 2023, 151 schools (30%) had three to four LSC vacancies, while 100 had five or more. Following the April 2024 elections, this decreased to 122 schools (24%) and 57 schools (11%), respectively. Survey respondents suggested that parent vacancies were particularly hard to fill.

Schools with higher vacancies are more likely to serve economically disadvantaged students and to be in under-resourced communities. While LSCs with any number of members can provide value to their schools, we can use vacancy data to identify schools that can benefit from additional support.

Number of LSC Vacancies	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
CPS Schools	152	121	59	70	52	28	29
Average % Economically Disadvantaged	61.4%	70.1%	72.5%	76.4%	80.4%	77.7%	80.2%
Average Principal Tenure <i>(in years)</i>	6.21	6.22	6.77	5.89	5.72	5.93	4.97

Parent & Community Member Vacancies by School

- ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- HIGH SCHOOL



Collective Action Is Needed.

We cannot do this work alone. Protecting the critical local decision-making of LSCs requires our collective attention and action.

SCHOOL LEADERS can find inspiration in the positive stories of LSC and principal collaborations within this report, sign up for Masterclass workshops on strengthening LSC relationships, and receive coaching on community and LSC engagement.

LSC MEMBERS can gain insights from the selected stories, encourage parents and community members to fill vacant seats, and share their valuable experiences in upcoming focus and working groups.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS can get involved by attending LSC meetings and talking with their school about becoming an LSC member, especially if current vacancies exist.

NONPROFITS AND PHILANTHROPIES can help support LSC members by including them in conversations about school programming and initiatives.

CPS can continue to develop tools and resources to empower LSCs across the city, ensuring they are engaged and valued assets within their school communities.



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Visit our website to learn more about how you can get involved in The Fund's upcoming work with LSCs.

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