



May 19, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jaime Groth Searle, and I am the founder and executive director of The Southwest Collective, a grassroots neighborhood organization on the southwest side of Chicago.

I am also an active CPS parent and LSC member at Edwards Elementary in Archer Heights, a southwest side neighborhood in Chicago, where I have a front row seat to the daily functions within Network 8 / Proposed District N (formerly District K, in the first draft of this map).

Once again, this map dropped in the wee hours of the night, and the public feedback forum was thrown together just as hastily for that following morning, giving us less than 24 hours' notice and even less time to review the map itself.

I will reiterate that this is an infuriatingly regular experience for working parents, who must always drop everything in a last-minute attempt to oversee governance of their children's public education. Even when an important meeting at school is scheduled with ample notice, it is an extra job for me to convince my employer to provide me with the accommodation to attend middle-of-the-day or in-person only LSC meetings, field trips, and all other important forms of parental participation. Today I had to rearrange my schedule at work and for this morning's school drop off to be able to appear in this hearing.

And I am privileged to be able to do that. Many parents are not.

That is the crux of my disappointment with this process as well as this map.

The boundaries of this map for District N, extend from Marquette Park on the south to Kinzie Avenue on the north. So this time, instead of spanning 79 blocks across 12 neighborhoods, the district spans 70 blocks across 10 absolutely fragmented communities, atop which sit wealthy parents to the north, yet again. I'm disappointed to see very little change from the last draft of this map.

When I reflect upon my own experiences within corporate environments in the city's Loop, I remember all too well that this group of very wealthy parents will not likely collaborate in community with the rest of us, and at worst, will oppress families of color due to a willful ignorance about our different experiences within CPS. My coworkers and colleagues have been vocal around the watercooler about leaving the city or choosing charter and private schools. Do you think we stand a chance against their money and privilege? Or that they won't cut and run to some suburb by the time their kids reach, say, 6th grade?

I ask you to enlighten me: how do you think those same parents in the ultra-wealthy West Loop are going to represent this total district? Do you think they ever come around to 47th or 63rd? A parent in that community has FAR more access to choices, and exactly none of those choices are widely available on the southwest side.

Communities that are adjacent to each other can organize together to ensure they have equitable access. But if they are split up and lumped with wealthier, more privileged communities...that is much harder to do. When you review our sister districts on the northwest side, ask why the boundaries are not also shaped like slices of pizza, cut across multiple communities and encompassing the totality of none of them. Instead, their boundaries are neat little boxes that are truly representative of the area.

We need to lead mapping efforts based on common struggles and inequities across race and ethnicity, such as language barriers within school communications and forums, or the lack of adequate after school programming that is culturally relevant, or the lack of public spaces in our neighborhoods, such as libraries. River North doesn't exactly have those problems. Imagine being a parent bringing those concerns to a board rep who lives near the Bentley dealership.

The maps should allow us to unite in our struggle to properly provide for our children as they grow and learn, giving every kid ample and equitable opportunity.

Try it again. I will continue to urge you to get this right, because the future depends on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Groth Searle'.

Jaime Groth Searle, Founder & Executive Director

The Southwest Collective