

Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Vanessa Espinoza. I have two children currently in CPS, at Gunsaulus and Lindblom Academy, and one student in college. I am a longtime advocate for our children's education – I have served on LSCs, BACs, and PACs, Amigos de Gunsaulus, and numerous other committees and working groups associated with education at CPS. **I am here today representing the Kids First Chicago Elected School Board Task Force.**

Let me start by acknowledging that I understand that you legislators have a tough job right now. This is a challenging task to accomplish in a way that everyone will be pleased. We saw the new draft map posted late last night and immediately noticed that you had increased the number of plurality Latine districts to 7 where it had previously been 6. This seems intended to respond to many of the concerns you have heard from CPS parents on the topic. However, two of these districts have such thin margins, that when you consider Citizen Voting Age Population, they probably give a slight advantage to White voters, meaning there are now only 5 primarily Latine districts.

We are CPS parents – we don't have the expertise on this subject that civil rights organizations have and we don't have access to the voting history and modeling that a political organization has – we merely come here to tell you what CPS parents want. But to our amateur eyes, this looks like a cynical maneuver to quiet the complaints while still maintaining the inequities of your first draft. The fact is that we don't know what criteria you used in creating these districts because you have not told us.

Your committee is preparing to vote on district maps that will perpetuate the inequalities and imbalance of power that have existed in the city of Chicago for far too long. If you vote to approve these district maps, you are setting the stage for a plurality white school board to make decisions about policy and how to invest resources for a school body that is 90% children of color. You promised us an elected, representative school board, but you are not delivering on that promise. Representation matters. This map is not representative for the 300,000 CPS students of color and their families.

We have come to these hearings and told you repeatedly that CPS parents strongly prefer a board that reflects their students, has shared experiences, and understands the communities they are from. The Kids First Chicago Elected School Board Task Force even submitted a set of district maps as an example that you can take the diversity of CPS families into account as you are drawing districts, and still adhere to the constitutional requirements guiding district creation. Our maps have 8 primarily Latine districts, 7 primarily Black districts, and have substantially equal population in each district. Unlike your latest draft, our maps also maintain 15% point margins in Latine and

Black plurality districts, creating a stronger opportunity for representation for protected minority groups.

This is critical, because districts E and P in your latest draft are essentially White plurality districts, although the Latine population there is being misrepresented as a plurality. They have a 1% and 3% advantage on paper, which is within the margin of error of census counts. Moreover, district P includes Back of the Yards, where many of the Latine families who enroll in CPS are non-citizens and would not be able to vote - despite the population percentages including them. This map is a misrepresentation of racial equity, and feels deliberately disingenuous.

Yet after hearing repeatedly from parents asking you to consider the disparities in demographics, and seeing an example showing that it could reasonably be addressed, you have put forth another proposal that attempts to hide the problem. CPS parents understandably feel that you have been disregarding their voices throughout this process. And, now, in your final actions as a committee, you have disrespected us by holding your final draft secret for the past week, shutting off any further possibility of public input before you rush this through a vote at the last minute and leave Springfield tomorrow.

I am sure most of you have heard of the term “antiracism.” The idea is that it is not good enough to just not be racist – because racism exists in the policies and structures around us, you have to actually work to dismantle it where it exists. Practicing antiracism through policy means that we have to find ways in which policies produce racist consequences, regardless of whether or not those consequences are intentional. You are creating a system by which the White population will be overrepresented in a governing body whose decisions disproportionately affect children of color. It does not matter if it is unintentional, it is perpetuating systemic advantages to Chicago’s White population at the expense of people of color, therefore it is racist. And to practice antiracism in policy, you have to knowingly work to dismantle those sorts of systemic inequities. You, committee members, had that opportunity when you drew these districts, but you have not had the courage to do so yet.

The district maps that you created and are about to vote on only include 5 districts that are a majority or strong plurality Latine. 5 out of 20, or 25%. And they are meant to represent the 47% of the student population that is Latine. That is unconscionable.

We believe that a school board that reflects CPS’s diversity can better understand the needs of children in our communities and will deliver better results for our students. We urge you to vote no on this proposal, and go back to the drawing board to come up with

a map that better reflects CPS families, including at least 8 primarily Latine districts with solid margins and maintaining the 7 primarily Black districts that you already created. The law gives you until July 1 to complete this task – please take that additional time to get this right for our children.

Vanessa Espinoza