

**February 27, 2025, Board Meeting Written Comments**  
**Received between Tuesday, February 25<sup>th</sup> and Friday, February 28<sup>th</sup> Submitted via**  
**Written Comments Form**

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1 Hello Board Members and CEO Martinez,

My name is Walter Brzeski and I need all of your help.

The CPS FOIA Dept is refusing to respond to (7) of my FOIA Requests below dating back to 09/12/23 with the first (4) FOIAs requesting the same information and documents.

When can I expect the responsive documents on all of them? The Requests range from not being responded to with the desired documents from 70-356 business days. Yes 356.

1. N014194-091223 - All construction plans, CPS FY2023 and FY2024 Budget details, capital budget spending documents, and board approvals for ADA work to be done at Steinmetz HS for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school year. This work was promised/agreed to by CPS in complaint #2019-DRC-6390 registered with the Illinois Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau. Also, include any and all documents submitted by Chicago Public Schools in this complaint to the Illinois Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau.  
Date CPS was to respond with documents: 10/26/23  
Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 356 (as of 02/25/24)

2. N014563-120423 - CPS' responses to the following FOIA Requests: N014253-092523, N014194-091223, N014245-092423, & N013919-071123  
Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 302 (as of 02/25/24)

3. N015230-050324 - The CPS response to Chicago Public Schools FOIA Request N014194-091223?  
Date CPS was to respond with documents: 10/01/24  
Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 198 (as of 02/25/24)

4. N015374-060624 - CPS response to CPS FOIA Request N014194-091223- All construction plans, CPS FY2023 and FY2024 Budget details, capital budget spending documents, and board approvals for ADA work to be done at Steinmetz HS for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school year. This work was promised/agreed to by CPS in complaint #2019-DRC-6390 registered with the Illinois Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau. Also, include any and all documents submitted by Chicago Public Schools in this complaint to the Illinois Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau - CPS was to have to responded to this FOIA Request on 10/26/2023 and didn't. - It's been 150 business days and 223 calendar days without a response without the requested documents from CPS.  
Date CPS was to respond with documents: 10/15/24  
Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 175 (as of 02/25/24)

5. N015415-061424 - Daily Time Record for Day-to-Day Substitute Teachers sign in sheets for Steinmetz College Prep for the 2023-24 school year. The sheets will include all of the Steinmetz employees absent for each school day, substitute teacher working for them, and time of sign and out for substitute teachers. An example of the sheets will

be provided after I receive an automated reply acknowledging CPS' acceptance of this FOIA request.

Date CPS was to respond with documents: 10/09/24 (73 business days have elapsed)  
Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 169 (as of 02/25/24)

6. N015701-062124 - (1) Attachment A from Carolyn Eggert (Network 15 Operations Manager) in File #9142 Date 01/20/22 re: Simone Griffin and all other attachments in File 39142, (2) 2 screenshots: a. ICT Actions Aspen and b. SCC Action Aspen with incident date, incident code, description of incident, action taken, and date action taken, (3) emails between Michael Boraz (mjboraz@cps.edu) and Simone Griffin (sggriffin@cps.edu) between 12/01/21 to 01/30/22 with KEYWORDS: Investigation, Resignation, Resign, Removal, Suspension, Failure to Report along with emails from Boraz to Griffin on 01/28/20 with KEYWORDS: Importance or Proper Recording and Document Procedures.

Date FOIA Request was narrowed: 07/23/24

Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 165, since narrowed 143 (as of 02/25/24)

7. N016314-101424 - (1) All investigative files regarding Zulma Rivera, Marcie Buckmaster, Ashok Emmanuel, and Victoria Serritella, (2) All investigative files regarding the Steinmetz College Prep LSC and LSC members Jose Quiles and Vanessa Valentin, (3) All investigative files regarding CPS vendor

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2 Want to pledge my full Support for students who are youth in care and/or at risk of becoming homeless. - Former Elected President/Officer & Dr. Jesse

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3 Hello esteemed Board Members and thank you for your time.

For over 25 years, I have had the privilege of living and working in North Lawndale. As a leader in this community and as the current chair of North Lawndale College Prep's board, I have witnessed firsthand the incredible work that NLCP does for our students.

NLCP is preparing students for college, and it is preparing them for success in life. By offering strong academic programs, mentorship opportunities, and unique initiatives like our Phoenix Pact program — a program that helps our scholars secure grants and financial aid at NLCP's partner colleges — our students are gaining access to opportunities they might not otherwise have.

Additionally, NLCP has always been intentional about fostering a culture of peace and restorative justice. For example, our Peace Warriors program teaches students conflict resolution skills that they can continue to carry with them beyond the classroom. NLCP is giving scholars in this community the kind of education that truly changes lives.

The students of North Lawndale deserve a school that believes in their potential and works tirelessly to see them succeed. That is why I urge you to renew NLCP's charter and allow this vital institution to continue serving the next generation of leaders in our community.

Thank you for your time today.

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4 Every teacher dreams of finding their forever school – so few of us have that privilege in our careers. I found mine in December of 2023.

When I joined the Paz staff, I was so beat down, burnt out, and jaded as an educator – due to my experience in previous schools – that I was contemplating if education was even for me.

It took one school year in the Octavio Paz Elementary community to know that education has always been and always will be for me.

However, I quickly realized and learned just how much Acero had abandoned its founding school. Acero had essentially closed Paz years ago – or at least they had in an emotional, financial, and operational sense. It's that or they'd just forgotten we were here altogether. Our students, families and staff thrived off of years of leftover leftovers.

We have 100 students, 13 teachers, and three unused classrooms due to Acero cutting kindergarten, first grade, Spanish, and music. Most of the locks on the bathroom stalls don't actually lock, so you just hold it closed and hope for the best. An aroma of sewer gas – sometimes just pure sewage – frequents the hallways. We have an empty storage room fondly known as “the asbestos room” – because it literally has exposed asbestos. You can't go in there for too long or you'll know why it's called the asbestos room. On warmer days, our kids will stomp on roaches in the stairwell. Our classrooms have two settings: freezing or sweltering hot. Our children were not given a school facility that has a playground, so our recesses are spent in either overcrowded classrooms or on the sidewalk out front.

Yes – the school I just described was supposed to be my forever school. It is the school that made me fall in love with education again. This is the school I have spent 144 days, alongside my beloved colleagues, fighting day in and day out to save.

All of the things I described are surely driving factors behind Acero's and the Chicago Board of Education's decision to eliminate Paz from the conversation altogether. In fact, in the 6 hours I spent at the February 27 Chicago Board of Education meeting, I don't think I heard Octavio Paz Elementary mentioned even once. This is confusing, due to the fact that 10 of our 13 teachers used personal leave hours to attend said meeting.

There are many things Acero and CPS didn't consider, and much less even know. Every teacher in our school knows every student's name and face – regardless of grade level. I am happy to bet on that.

Our parents, family members, and staff are on a first name basis. Our teachers can ask about older siblings that graduated from Paz a decade ago. Our teachers have taught multiple generations of families.

When a 4th and 7th grade student got a new baby brother, both our parents and staff waited anxiously to see pictures and meet our future Phoenix. Our family had grown. On the first day of school, I watched a 4th grader who moved to the United States this year completely light up when he realized his homeroom teacher and most of his classmates could speak his native language.

Our 5th grader who so boldly addressed the board yesterday, gets a little side of tajin at lunch because her mother is one of our cafeteria workers. She joyously shares with her friends, of course.

When loose dogs show up at our front door we know which houses to return them to. If it's the scruffy mutt that barks like an old man, it belongs to a 7th grader who forgets to lock the gate when he leaves in the morning.

A pair of families who migrated to the United States around the same time enrolled their students at Paz and quickly found out they were neighbors. Their students now proudly introduce themselves as primos (cousins).

This is the school community every family, child, and educator deserves. Octavio Paz represents what every school community strives for.

I never would have guessed that my time with this school -- my forever school -- would be cut so short.

5 Subject: Urgent Action Needed: Removal of Principal Zayas from Interamerican Magnet School

Dear Chicago Board of Education,

My name is Marina Centeno, I am writing to express my extreme concern regarding the continued leadership of Principal Zayas at Interamerican Magnet School (IAMS). I have been a parent at IAMS since 2022, with two daughters currently enrolled ( 2nd grade and 1st grade). Despite numerous attempts by parents to raise awareness about the detrimental impact of Mr. Zayas's leadership, including a no-confidence vote in August 2024 and the filing of charges in October 2024, the situation remains unresolved.

My initial experience at IAMS was incredibly positive. The school had a welcoming environment, organized systems, and a dedicated staff. This starkly contrasts as soon as Mr. Zayas became principal. He has demonstrated incompetence, a toxic personality, and a disregard for the well-being of both students and staff.

Here are specific examples of Mr. Zayas's misconduct:

**Budget Mismanagement:** Mr. Zayas ignored LSC recommendations and forced a budget, leading to the loss of a crucial 1st-grade teaching position and the unnecessary hiring of a MTSS teacher, a position that ultimately remained unfilled due to his lack of understanding of its purpose. This directly impacted my daughter, who was placed in an overcrowded classroom with inadequate support. He can't answer appropriation of funds at literally all LSC meetings.

**Disregard for Staff:** Mr. Zayas has created a hostile work environment, leading to the departure of valued staff members, including our librarian and a first-grade assistant (after 2 weeks in the position). He has shown disrespect towards teachers, as evidenced by his treatment of Ms. M., a kindergarten teacher, regarding her medical leave and the lack of support for a challenging student in her classroom. Refusing to bring help so she can return sooner from her medical leave.

**Safety Concerns:** Mr. Zayas's negligence in security protocols, including the positioning of security guards outside the school during critical morning hours instead of inside, resulted in an unknown individual gaining access to the school in November. He has failed to adequately address these safety concerns and communicate necessary changes to the school community. Removing staff and volunteer putting kindergarten kids in danger from on of their peer who has threatened to kill them and his own mom.

**Lack of Communication and Transparency:** Mr. Zayas consistently fails to communicate important information to parents and staff. He operates with a lack of transparency, creating an environment of fear and distrust.

Mr. Zayas's actions are detrimental to the learning environment and the overall well-being of our children. He is actively eroding the positive culture that once thrived at IAMS.

We, the parents of IAMS, implore you to take immediate action and remove Mr. Zayas from his position as principal. We believe that our assistant principal, a capable and decent individual, is better suited to lead our school.

We urge you to prioritize the needs of our children and restore a positive and supportive learning environment at Interamerican Magnet School.

Sincerely,

6 Thousands of Chicago Public Schools students are going without adequate instruction when their teachers are absent and require substitute coverage. This is due to the continuing CPS guest teacher shortage, freezing of their pay, and elimination of the monthly incentive program.

Coverage was significantly better during the previous school year due to monthly incentive pay, with 70% + of absences covered. Records show CPS guest teachers fill some 302,000 teacher absences. Unfortunately, CPS chose to discontinue monthly incentives and froze guest teacher pay.

This decision has been harmful to students in the district, and has significantly reduced the guest teacher pool. The monthly incentive pay was money well spent. Furthermore, CPS own data reveals student learning outcomes improved while the program was in place. Seriously consider reinstating monthly incentive pay for guest teachers.

Without the program, CPS often pays regular teachers overtime at their higher hourly rate to cover classes for which no guest teacher is found to cover. If you calculate funds paid out to regular teachers for this purpose, you will see the district is actually spending more than if they had kept the monthly incentives and used guest teachers instead. This approach no doubt leads to regular teachers having less prep time to prepare lessons, grade, communicate with parents, and reduce stress and burnout. It is a lose lose situation right now.

CPS has PEL certified and degreed guest teachers, some multiple degreed, not being utilized effectively. Many of these guest teachers have been with the district for 1-2, 3-5, 6-10+ years. These are not "temporary employees." They all deserve to be paid a living wage.

Resolve the substitute shortage by increasing guest teacher living wage. You can do this by restoring the monthly incentive program. This action will lead to improvement in student learning, more effective use of full-time staff for the actual work and preparation they were hired to do, and better management of district funds. Substitute teachers must be used in appropriate ways so that students gain beneficial learning.

7 As a long time sub, I work day to day every day. This year without the monthly incentive I will be \$9,000 short of my earnings last year. I am 75, I love my job but if i cannot earn a living wage I'll end up living in my car! There is a shortage of subs , CPS is trying to recruit new people, but they are paying 25% less than last year. I've had my license since 1974. I deserve better than this.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

# THE CHICAGO PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND

I am Mariel Laureano, a Director at The Chicago Public Education Fund. Our organization supports school leaders across Chicago, serving over 350 principals and assistant principals in leadership development programs.

Managing and developing a school budget is essential to being a CPS principal. Principals allocate available resources - staff time and dollars - to meet student needs, working in partnership with their Local School Council.

This is already a difficult task in a district that, according to the State of Illinois, is funded at only 79% of adequacy.

Especially in that context, for principals to successfully manage their budgets, this board must manage its own. Engaging in deficit spending and borrowing might close a gap today, but school communities, teachers, and, most importantly, students will pay the price sooner than you think. And so, I ask that you do not make the \$175 million payment to the city.

I know the costs of kicking the financial can firsthand. As the proud former principal of Prieto Math and Science Academy, a dual-language neighborhood elementary school in Belmont-Cragin, which I founded and called home for ten years, I saw how short-term solutions to managing deficits directly harmed students and educators. Between 2014 and 2017, CPS consistently spent more than it brought in, leading to four consecutive years of financial crisis. Initial budget deficits exceeded \$1 billion in those years, just like the projected deficits in the current five-year budget outlook.

From 2014 to 2017, CPS emptied reserves, borrowed, and even redirected capital funds. But these short-term, year-to-year fixes were ultimately unsustainable. By 2016, the district had no choice but to impose \$120 million in mid-year school budget cuts—a moment that every principal who lived through it remembers all too well. These cuts persisted through 2017.

For my school, this meant transitioning from 5 classrooms at some grade levels to 4 and from 4 to 3...forcing us to eliminate BILINGUAL intervention supports for scholars. It meant losing valuable teacher coaches focused on grade-level and full-school instructional coherence. It also harmed school culture and the overall morale of the staff. In addition, there was the complexity of messaging to my parents and community about why and how decisions were and NEEDED to be made. As you can imagine, this was NOT an easy task.

That period was an extremely difficult time during which I truly struggled. I wasn't alone. The Fund's annual Principal Engagement Survey showed a sharp drop in principal satisfaction during

# THE CHICAGO PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND

this time, falling from 75% in 2015 to 65% by 2017—a warning sign of the toll financial mismanagement takes on school leaders' ability to LEAD and the overall stability in our schools.

We are approaching another PIVOTAL, decision point.

This Board is being urged to spend \$175 million to reimburse the City for a pension payment that CPS is not legally responsible to pay. That money could instead be used to cover the cost of new labor agreements. If the Board chooses to prioritize the payment to the city, it will have no choice but to borrow to cover teacher contracts—taking on debt that worsens CPS's structural deficit and leads to further problems.

Not only do we not *need to*...but we can NOT *afford to* return to risky year-to-year fixes and deficit financing practices.

I urge this Board to prioritize the needs of our students and school communities over political demands. Do not take this unnecessary step, which will inevitably put CPS back on a path to painful cuts. I know from experience that deficits lead to loans, loans lead to credit downgrades, and credit downgrades lead to more school budget cuts, with the impact being felt mostly at the student level.

Beyond the challenges for students and their families, your budget choices will impact principal leadership. Principal satisfaction last year was only 64%, increasing the risk of significant principal churn. If financial challenges ultimately force another round of school-level budget crises, we will begin to see higher turnover in school leadership, with devastating consequences for the culture of teaching and learning in schools.

This board should not approve this payment to the city. You aren't obligated to do so, and you (we!) can't afford it. Making the payment to the city means borrowing for teacher contracts, which deepens the crisis. Instead, you can direct the CPS team to use its revenue to cover the new labor contracts, avoid borrowing in 2025, and protect its financial future.

Do what is best for school leaders. Do what is best for schools. Do what is best for students.

Thank you.

**Mariel Laureano**  
**Director of Educator Supports**  
**The Chicago Public Education Fund**

Hello Board Members and CEO Martinez,

My name is Walter Brzeski and I need all of your help.

The CPS FOIA Dept is refusing to respond to (7) of my FOIA Requests below dating back to 09/12/23 with the first (4) FOIAs requesting the same information and documents.

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Dates CPS took (SEVEN) 10-business day extensions without my agreement: 11/14/24, 12/02/24, 12/16/24, 01/02/25, 01/15/25, 01/30/25, & 02/13/25

Business days since FOIA Request was filed: 86 (as of 02/25/24)