

December 22, 2023

Mr. Jianan Shi  
President  
Chicago Board of Education  
1 North Dearborn  
Suite 950  
Chicago, IL 60602

Mayor Brandon Johnson  
Office of the Mayor  
121 N LaSalle Street  
Chicago City Hall, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mr. Shi and Mayor Johnson:

I write to express strong condemnation of the Chicago Board of Education's recently passed resolution that could eliminate school choice for Chicago families, strip minority and low-income students of their preferred education options, and widen the achievement gap. As Chairman of the Congressional School Choice Caucus, I believe that every parent in the country has the right to choose the best school for their child, regardless of their zip code, and I urge you to preserve these critical options for families in Chicago.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Chicago Board of Education approved a teachers' union-backed resolution that seeks to eliminate selective enrollment in Chicago Public Schools in the name of promoting "equity". If enacted, this plan would be devastating to the thousands of students and families who currently benefit from attending a school of their choice. Chicago's 11 selective-enrollment high schools, which emphasize academic rigor, achievement, and excellence, enroll nearly 10,000 Black and Hispanic students. Over 7,500 of students enrolled in these schools are low-income<sup>1</sup>.

These schools are not just the best in Chicago – they're some of the highest performing in the entire country. They have been a lifeline for children from low-income and minority backgrounds whose families are desperate to provide them the best education possible amidst a landscape of failing assigned schools in Chicago. For example, Walter Payton College Prep, one of the schools that could be effectively dismantled by this plan, is ranked in the top 10 high schools in the United States. 96 percent of its students are proficient in math, compared to 11 percent in the district, and 95 percent of students are proficient in reading, compared to 14 percent in the district<sup>2</sup>. It also serves a minority population of nearly 59 percent, doing incredible work to reduce the achievement gap in Chicago. Across the board, data clearly shows that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicago-teachers-union-kills-excelling-schools-to-force-students-into-dysfunction/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/illinois/districts/chicago-public-schools/payton-college-preparatory-high-school-6604>

students at selective-enrollment high schools reach academic proficiency at substantially higher rates than CPS students districtwide.

Schools like this are providing life changing opportunities for students, and families are clearly crying out for more choice—not less. Six years ago, when Chicago Public Schools set up a new application system that allowed eighth graders to apply for a high school of their choice, rather than enrolling in their assigned neighborhood school, parents jumped at the chance to give their child better options. Since then, a stunning 76 percent of Chicago high school students have chosen to attend a school other than the one assigned to them<sup>3</sup>.

Even then-candidate Brandon Johnson recognized the demand for and success of selective enrollment schools, promising not to get rid of them when his name was on the ballot. Now, having secured office on that promise, he's turning his back on the families who rely on these schools and shutting out the students utilizing them to better their future. Chicago's leaders should be looking for ways to increase school choice options for families who want them, rather than cutting them off.

As Chairman of the Congressional School Choice Caucus, I believe supporting both neighborhood schools and schools of choice is not an either/or proposition. I am gravely concerned that this plan will strip away public school choice for families, destroy one of the city's best ways of helping minority and low-income children succeed, and force children into failing public schools that do not work for them. As you work to finalize this plan over the next several months, I urge you to preserve these crucial school choice options.

Sincerely,



Senator Tim Scott  
Chairman  
Congressional School Choice Caucus

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<sup>3</sup> <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2023/12/12/23999129/brandon-johnsons-board-of-ed-looks-to-move-away-from-school-choice-toward-neighborhood-schools>