



May 18, 2023

Illinois Senate Special Committee on the
Chicago Elected Representative School Board

Honorable Madam Chair Lightford, Co-Chairs Aquino and Martwick, and members of the
committee:

The Puerto Rican Agenda (PRA) is a nonprofit organization of local Puerto Rican leaders working to ensure the self-determination of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, throughout the diaspora, and in Puerto Rico through policy and advocacy. The PRA continues to develop and execute a community driven vision for the Humboldt Park area where most Puerto Ricans in Chicago live and Paseo Boricua, a business and entertainment district on Division Street between California and Western. Currently, the area just beyond that geography is currently known as Puerto Rico town and is planned to be a center of cultural growth, economic development, and centering of Puerto Rican arts, history, and culture. The PRA functions with a number of committees that work to operationalize its mission, one of which is education. The education committee is composed of education leaders and community members whose interest and purpose is to promote the educational well-being of children, youth, and adults .

The Puerto Rican community has a long history of standing up in support of providing voice and vision for the education of Puerto Ricans and Latinos overall. The PRA has supported education and creatively strategized to develop systems and policies that are important and responsive to our community. One concept includes Community as a Campus Education Initiative (CaaC) which partners with 17 schools in the Humboldt Park community which are feeder schools to the Roberto Clemente Community Academy. The CaaC provides an array of enrichment programs that supplement academics including an organic community sports program, an urban agriculture initiative based on hydroponic technology, wellness services, after school programs, dual enrollment, digital training and emergency resources for families within a collaborative environment.

We applaud the legislature in recognizing the importance of community voice. The current iteration of maps, although updated will reduce the representation of Latinos which goes against the spirit of the law aimed to increase participation of the most important stakeholders, the parents of children in the Chicago Public Schools. The CaaC schools would be divided into different cohorts that would challenge the ability to make effective policy change for those schools and community. As such we want to ensure that representation is reflective of the student body and that the ESRB maps support ensuring the most impact to students and educational hubs such as the CaaC. In effort to ensure that, we recommend the following:

1. Ensure that the elected school board is reflective of the current student body.
2. Review proposed maps to ensure that the Community as a Campus schools are in one culturally reflective district and not divided into two or more districts that reduces the representation and is not conducive to the vision of CaaC.
3. Provide additional opportunity for more robust community input including hearings on the west side, specifically in or near Humboldt Park.
4. Extend the timeline for approval to respond to community input.

The PRA education committee has been raising questions as of the initial plans for this approach. We have reviewed the proposed maps, interrogated them as well as gathered feedback from on the ground partners and have identified a concern that the maps do not reflect the representation of the current student body. Latinos are about 29.8% of the overall City of Chicago Population. The Chicago Public Schools reports that nearly 47% of the school district's students are Latino. The Senate should ensure that the final map works toward dismantling historic discrimination and provide equitable opportunities for the election of candidates that truly represent students. It is critical that ESRB maps reflect and support the Latino Community and in particular Puerto Ricans in those communities where they live and go to school.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please reach out to the PRA if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Ada Lopez (MO)

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Co-Chair Education Committee

Marisol Morales

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Mariana Osonia

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