

MEMORANDUM

To: Senate Special Committee on the Chicago Elected Representative School Board
Senators Lightford, Martwick, Aquino, Hunter, Sims, Villivalam, Villanueva, McConchie, and Lewis

From: Courtney Hrejsa, Educators for Excellence
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Date: April 6, 2023

Re: Map for the New Chicago Elected School Board, Board Size, and Board Compensation

Thank you for your commitment to ensuring that equity remains front and center as Chicago Public Schools moves to an elected school board structure. This memo focuses on two pressing issues surrounding the July 1, 2023 deadline for the Illinois General Assembly to draw the election maps.

Pursuant to [HB2908](#) and its trailer bill [SB1784](#), the Legislature is directed to draw two sets of maps by July 1: a map that sub-divides Chicago into 10 districts for the November 2024 election; and a map for 20 districts for the 2026 and subsequent elections until re-districting after each decennial census. These two maps set the stage for a 21-member school board (10 elected/11 appointed seats in 2024 and all 21 elected seats beginning in 2026).

We urge the Legislature to use the map-drawing process as an opportunity to bring greater equity to Chicago's elected school board structure by:

1. Reducing the size of the board from 21 to 9 seats (4 elected/5 appointed seats in 2024 and all 9 elected seats beginning in 2026); and
2. Allowing for board members to receive compensation.

1. WHY THE SIZE OF THE BOARD SHOULD BE REDUCED

- A. **At 21 seats, the CPS board would be significantly larger than almost every other large district nationally.** Among the 100 largest districts in the country, 91 have boards with between four and nine members, with a seven-member board being the most popular. Eight of the remaining districts have boards with between 10 and 13 members.

Only the New York City school board would be larger, with 23 members. However, the NYC school board functions differently than Chicago's elected board will. NYC's serves in a more advisory capacity, with appointed members and limited authority over school management areas such as the district budget. The expansion to 23 seats only took effect in January of this year. Furthermore, NYC does not have Chicago's elected Local School Council structure. (See Exhibit I for board-size distribution of the top 100 districts.)

- B. **At 21 members, the CPS board would be three times larger than any other Illinois school board.** Most school boards in our state have seven members, in compliance with [105 ILCS 5/10-1](#). Districts with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and not governed by any special act may have three members.

While CPS is much larger than any other school district in the state, to base its board size proportionately to population is impractical. Even with a board three times the size of any other Illinois district, the ratios of population-to-school board seats and children-to-those seats will be 10 times the size of the average Illinois district. Exhibit II provides additional details on Illinois school districts.

- C. **The 21-member size is significantly larger than numerous public boards of directors in Greater Chicago which are not school district boards but, like school boards, have critical oversight and governance responsibilities.** For example:

- The Chicago Transit Authority board has 7 members.
- The Regional Transportation Authority Board, designed to ensure representation from the City of Chicago, Suburban Cook County, and the five Collar Counties, has 16 members.
- The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Board, which is elected, has 9 members.

See Exhibit III for additional examples. The lack of larger boards suggests the governance challenges that come with boards of this size.

- D. **Considerable taxpayer expense will be required to support a 21-member board.** Currently, CPS' spending on its board office is about \$1.5 million, or around \$220k per board member; this puts the district on the lower end of per-member board spending among peer districts nationally. Providing the same level of support for a 21-member board, then, would conservatively lead to a total of at least \$5 million, according to the district. Employing an additional staff member for each of the 21 members would be a significant expense on top of this. Additionally, the capital expenditure needed to support this larger board are estimated at around \$10-15 million. With a number of upcoming fiscal challenges to CPS (including declining city budgetary support, expiring federal COVID-related funds, and ongoing enrollment declines), this would place undue fiscal strain on the district at an inopportune time.

We have additional research and details we would be happy to share on the significant expenses that would scale up in the case of such a large board, including experiences from other cities, pending legislation.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Legislature reduce the size of the CPS board from 21 to nine members. With 21 members, CPS would have, by far, the largest board in the country with comparable duties. Nine members would recognize that CPS is the largest district in the state and hence more representation is called for. At the same time, nine members brings Chicago into the range of sizes of other boards serving the public and respects taxpayers.

By reducing the size of the board alongside the drawing of the election maps, the Legislature makes it possible for the transition to an elected school board proceed without undue confusion and disruption and for CPS to set its 2023-24 budget accordingly.

2. BOARD MEMBER COMPENSATION SHOULD BE PERMITTED, ESPECIALLY IF BOARD SIZE IS REDUCED.

The trailer bill [SB1784](#) eliminated the possibility of CPS board members being compensated. We respectfully request that the possibility of compensation be reinstated. Compensation is essential to ensure all district stakeholders, including parents and community members, can run and serve if elected. Volunteer board service is only feasible for individuals of certain means, or those supported by special interests.

It would not be incumbent upon the Legislature to establish the specific level of permissible compensation for CPS board members, only to remove the restriction against compensation.

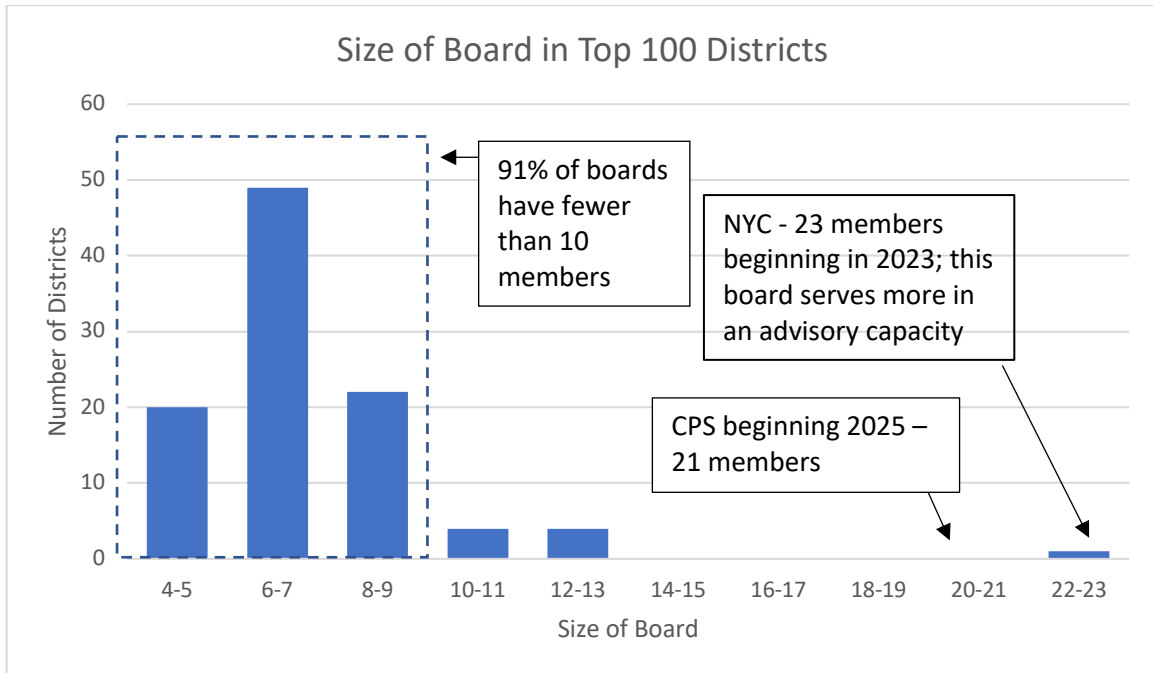
- A. **Several large school districts provide compensation for their board members.** For example, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which has a 7-member board, recently moved from a board member stipend of \$40,000 to a full salary of around \$125,000. The immediate evidence suggests that this high level of compensation leads board members to take their job seriously and to dedicate ample time to their responsibilities. The value of such compensation, however, can only be fully realized in conjunction with a strong understanding of board members' responsibilities and roles in their school system, fostered by robust governance infrastructure and the training and professional development necessary to understand it.

LAUSD is a notable outlier but is far from the only large district that compensates its board members. Denver's school board began receiving stipends of up to \$9,000 per year in 2021, and the board is currently discussing raising that amount to \$33,000 in recognition of the work entailed in serving on the board. Las Vegas, Miami, and Broward County (FL) are among other peer districts where board members are compensated.

- B. **Several local and county boards in Chicago and County permit compensation. They, like a school board, exist to serve a general oversight and governance purpose in service of the public.** Their compensation levels provide some guidance. Their members may have some experience in the relevant field, but do not serve on the board in a professional, full-time capacity. Examples of this type of entity include the Chicago Transit Board, the Civil Service Commission, and the Property Tax Appeal Board. On average, these board members receive stipends of around \$30,000. A comparable elected position, a Commissioner on the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Board, comes with a salary of \$70,000. Exhibit III provides more information on compensation for public-serving boards.

Board service is time consuming and demanding. Board members must have work and personal schedules that are flexible enough to allow them to fulfill their responsibilities. If we are to have a school board that represents the rich fabric of Chicago, we should not erect barriers which impede individuals of various walks of life and socio-economic levels from considering board service.

EXHIBIT I



Source: School board websites; United States Department of Education.

EXHIBIT II: ILLINOIS SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE AND BOARD MEMBERS

District	Population		Mem bers	Residents per Member	
	Total	Ages 5-17		Total	Ages 5-17
Chicago Public School District 299	2,693,07	393,249	21	128,242	18,726
Township High School District 214	253,207	12,980	7	36,172	1,854
Township High School District 211	235,858	12,975	7	33,694	1,854
School District U-46	230,680	38,660	7	32,954	5,523
Rockford School District 205	185,407	31,624	7	26,487	4,518
Glenbard Township High School District 87	164,065	8,923	7	23,438	1,275
J. Sterling Morton High School District 201	158,054	8,919	7	22,579	1,274
Consolidated High School District 230	156,114	9,315	7	22,302	1,331
Maine Township High School District 207	147,258	7,541	7	21,037	1,077
Average, top 20 non-CPS Illinois districts	148,544	14,344	7	21,221	2,049
Indian Prairie Community Unit School District 204	134,945	26,761	7	19,278	3,823
Schaumburg Community Consolidated SD 54	134,413	15,050	7	19,202	2,150
Joliet Township High School District 204	128,316	6,275	7	18,331	896
Plainfield School District 202	127,929	26,603	7	18,276	3,800
Proviso Township High School District 209	123,098	6,149	7	17,585	878
Community Unit School District 300	119,385	21,475	7	17,055	3,068
Palatine Community Consolidated School District 15	118,487	12,980	7	16,927	1,854
Community High School District 218	116,619	6,256	7	16,660	894
Lincoln Way Community High School District 210	113,036	7,271	7	16,148	1,039
Community High School District 99	111,217	5,559	7	15,888	794
Springfield School District 186	108,318	16,161	7	15,474	2,309
Belleville Township High School District 201	104,679	5,393	7	14,954	770
Average, top 100 non-CPS Illinois districts	78,516	8,224	7	11,217	1,175

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, SAIPE program, 2021 estimates. Available:

<https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2021/demo/saipe/2021-school-districts.html>

EXHIBIT III: ILLINOIS BOARDS & COMMISSIONS BEYOND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Boards offering significant compensation and expecting a full-time commitment.

These roles are generally held by professionals with extensive experience in the appropriate field; this is almost always their primary or sole professional activity.

Board	Size	Compensation (Member)	Compensation (Chair)	Selection
Illinois Commerce Commission	5	\$144,038	\$125,790	Appointed
Education Labor Relations Board	4	\$112,157	\$100,945	Appointed
Illinois Human Rights Commission	6	\$127,894	\$134,342	Appointed
Illinois Labor Relations Board	8	\$100,945	\$112,157	Appointed
Pollution Control Board	5	\$125,790	\$130,086	Appointed
Prisoner Review Board	10	\$92,305	\$103,037	Appointed
Illinois Workers Compensation Commission	10	\$164,066	\$156,253	Appointed

Boards offering small to moderate compensation, and expecting a significant, but not full-time commitment

Some of these roles may require sector experience, but others do not. All these roles tend to serve more general governance functions. These may be the best analog for the Chicago Board of Education.

Board	Size	Compensation (Member)	Compensation (Chair)	Selection
Chicago Transit Board	7	\$25,000	\$25,000	Appointed
Civil Service Commission	5	\$27,212	\$32,676	Appointed
Concealed Carry Licensing Review Board	7	\$39,127	\$39,127	Appointed
State Board of Elections	8	\$40,379	\$62,809	Appointed
Executive Ethics Commission	9	\$40,379	\$40,379	Appointed
FOID Card Review Board	7	\$40,379	\$40,379	Appointed
International Port District Board	9	\$20,000	\$25,000	Appointed
Illinois Liquor Cntrl Commission	7	\$36,598	\$41,825	Appointed
State Mining Board	6	\$16,821	\$16,821	Appointed
Metra Board of Directors	10	\$15,000	\$25,000	Appointed
Property Tax Appeal Board	5	\$56,079	\$69,538	Appointed
Illinois Racing Board	7	\$13,462	\$13,462	Appointed
Regional Transportation Authority Board	16	\$25,000	\$25,000	Appointed
State Toll Highway Authority	9	\$31,426	\$36,077	Appointed

Elected Positions: Legislative & Oversight.

Finally, the CPS Board may be compared to other elected positions in Chicago and Cook County that serve an oversight and governance function. These have a legislative function as well, of course.

Board / Body	Size	Compensation (Member)	Compensation (Chair)	Selection
Chicago City Council	50	Varies, min = \$115,560, max = \$142,772		Elected
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District	9	\$70,000	\$80,000	Elected
Cook County Board of Commissioners	17	\$93,500	\$187,000	Elected

Sources:

Cook County Boards: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/agency/cook-county-boards-and-commissions>

State of IL Boards: <https://www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/Salaries.pdf>

City of Chicago Aldermen:

https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dhr/dataset/current_employee_names_salaries_and_position_titles.html