



Public Agenda

Pursuing Excellence: Chicagoans' Views on their Public Schools

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<https://publicagenda.org/resource/ck12-2024/>

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Chicago Public Schools (CPS)—like many school districts—faces challenges. These include declining enrollment, budgetary pressures, pandemic-associated learning losses, and the need to staff schools with educators and administrators who can meet the diverse needs of students and families.

CPS is also grappling with a changing policy environment. In 2024, the city will [begin shifting to a larger school board](#), whose members will be elected instead of appointed by the mayor. Federal COVID-19 relief funds are running out. And a moratorium on school closures in the city [is set to expire in 2025](#). But the city and its public schools are rich in talent and other assets. Test scores indicate that [CPS is making progress](#) on addressing pandemic-associated learning losses and CPS's accountability redesign process has included [robust stakeholder engagement](#).

Amid these challenges and opportunities, Public Agenda, with support from the Joyce Foundation, set out to take stock of Chicago residents' priorities for their public schools. The goal is to help city and district leaders and other stakeholders make decisions that are informed by Chicagoans' concerns and aspirations. Findings are based on a representative survey of 2,127 adult residents of Chicago.

In brief, Public Agenda's survey finds that Chicagoans think the biggest problem in the city's public schools is that students are not learning enough academically. A plurality of city residents—particularly parents—think the system's main goal should be to prepare students for college. But few Chicagoans believe that the city's public schools provide high-quality education and most think white students have access to better public schools than students of color. The majority of Chicagoans think politicians and educational leaders are focused on petty political battles instead of what is best for students, and few are confident that the CPS budget is spent effectively. To improve schools, Chicagoans favor training teachers and principals, replacing underperforming teachers, and demanding that schools implement improvement plans. Parents want CPS to prioritize spending on tutors and classroom aides to support academically struggling students. As the city prepares to elect school board members for the first time, less than half believe that an elected school board will better serve students. This report highlights instances in which there are differences of opinion between parents and nonparents and differences of opinion by race/ethnicity or across neighborhoods in Chicago.

The survey was designed by Public Agenda and fielded December 28, 2023 to January 16, 2024 by NORC at the University of Chicago in English and Spanish. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. Margins of error are greater for subgroups. To inform the development of the survey, Public Agenda conducted seven demographically diverse focus groups in English and Spanish with adult residents of Chicago. Selected questions in this survey are trended with a [survey of adult residents of Chicago conducted in 2013](#) for the Joyce Foundation by NORC. Throughout the report, “parents” refers to Chicagoans who indicate they are parents or guardians of children currently enrolled in any K-12 school in Chicago, including CPS, charter schools, private schools, or homeschools. For more detail about the methodology and for a topline with full question wording, see the methodology.

This Public Agenda project is supported by the [Joyce Foundation](#).

Joyce is a nonpartisan, private foundation that invests in evidence-informed public policies and strategies to advance racial equity and economic mobility for the next generation in the Great Lakes region.

Public Agenda is a national research-to-action organization that digs deep into the key challenges facing our democracy to uncover insights and solutions. Founded in 1975 by the social scientist and public opinion research pioneer Dan Yankelovich and former secretary of state Cyrus Vance, we engage with advocates, journalists, policymakers, and the philanthropic community to ensure public voice is heard in conversations that shape our shared future.

Findings in Brief:

- 1. Chicagoans' top concern about the city's public schools is that students are not learning enough. However, while parents prioritize spending on academic support, nonparents prioritize career and technical training.**
 - Insufficient academic learning is the issue that the largest share of Chicagoans believe needs to be addressed in the public schools.
 - Most parents' primary expectation for schools is to prepare students for college. But a growing share of city residents expect schools to prepare students to get good jobs.
 - More parents prioritize spending money to support academically struggling students than on career and technical training. But Chicagoans would rather see more career and technical training in the public schools than more honors classes.
 - Parents are divided over whether students have recovered from the impacts of the pandemic.
- 2. Chicagoans do not believe that the city's public schools provide high-quality, equitable education. Poverty and other challenges impacting students is the most cited reason why schools might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically.**
 - Hardly any Chicago residents grade the city's public schools an A.
 - Most residents think white students have access to better public schools than students of color in Chicago.
 - Poverty and other challenges impacting students is the most cited reason why schools might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically.
 - Chicagoans' believe that the best indicators of school quality include student and teacher attendance, high school graduation rates, and students' mental health and well-being.
 - To improve schools, Chicagoans favor training teachers and principals, replacing underperforming teachers, and demanding that schools implement improvement plans. They are divided over closing academically struggling schools.
- 3. Chicagoans are skeptical about how CPS spends money.**
 - Few city residents are confident that the CPS budget is spent effectively. Parents are split over whether CPS needs more money or needs to spend more wisely.
 - No approach to balancing the city budget is popular, but laying off teachers and cutting extracurriculars are especially unpopular.
 - While over half of Chicagoans support educating migrant children, even more express concern about the cost of doing so.
- 4. Few Chicagoans identify under-enrolled schools as a problem. When asked how to address them, support is strongest for investing in neighborhoods with declining populations.**
 - More Chicago residents are concerned about over-enrolled than under-enrolled schools.
 - To address under-enrolled schools, support is strongest for trying to attract more students to schools and more families to neighborhoods. But about one-third of

Chicagoans say they have no opinion about each of the solutions to under-enrollment provided in this survey.

5. Chicagoans, especially parents, are divided over school choice.

- Half of Chicagoans, including modest majorities of Asian, Black, and Latino residents, believe students should be able to attend any public school, even if neighborhood schools languish.
- Two-thirds of Chicagoans believe CPS should prioritize improving neighborhood schools over school choice, but parents are divided on this question.

6. Few Chicagoans think politicians are focused on students. Less than half think an elected school board will positively impact students. Chicagoans do not feel well-informed about the city's schools.

- Most Chicagoans think politicians are focused on petty political battles. More city residents trust teachers and principals to look out for students than trust the teachers union, board of education, CPS central office, or mayor to do so.
- Most Chicagoans are unaware that school board members will be elected in 2024. Four in ten think an elected board will serve students better than an appointed board.
- Television news and word of mouth from friends or family are Chicagoans' main source of news about K-12 education. But most Chicagoans do not feel very informed about the city's public schools.

1. Chicagoans' top concern about the city's public schools is that students are not learning enough. However, while parents prioritize spending on academic support, nonparents prioritize career and technical training.

- Insufficient academic learning is the issue that the largest share of Chicagoans believe needs to be addressed in the public schools.
- Most parents' primary expectation for schools is to prepare students for college. But a growing share of city residents expect schools to prepare students to get good jobs.
- More parents prioritize spending money to support academically struggling students than on career and technical training. But Chicagoans would rather see more career and technical training in the public schools than more honors classes.
- Parents are divided over whether students have recovered from the impacts of the pandemic.

Insufficient academic learning is the issue that the largest share of Chicagoans believe needs to be addressed in the public schools.

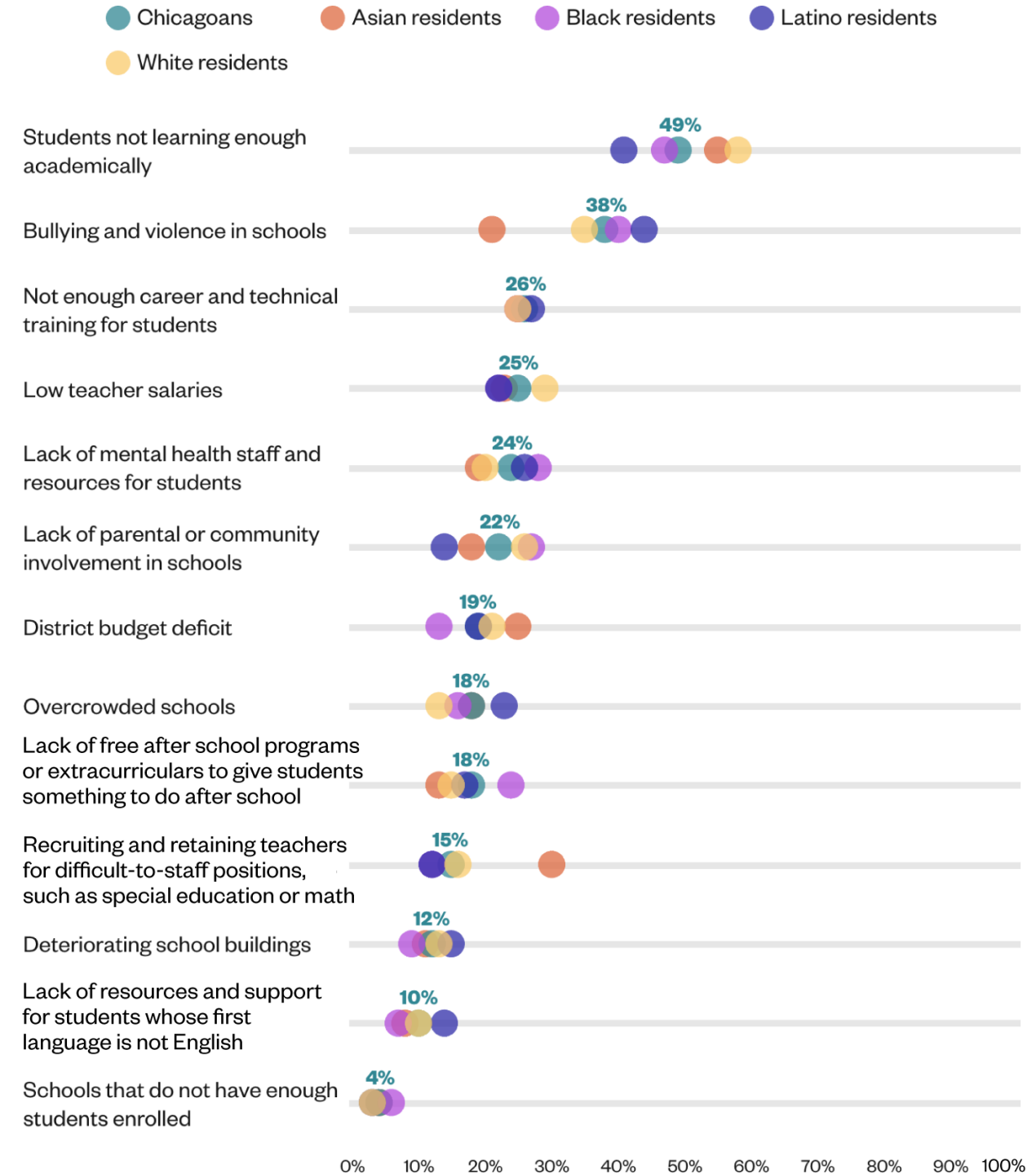
When asked to select the three most pressing issues in the city's public schools, Chicagoans most commonly cite students not learning enough academically. This is the most cited issue for Asian, Black, and white Chicagoans; and across all of the city's neighborhoods. It is also the most commonly cited issue for both nonparents and parents—which includes parents and guardians of children currently enrolled in any K-12 school in Chicago. Chicagoans' other top concerns include bullying and violence in schools and insufficient career and technical training for students; see Figure 1.

Although CPS faces a budget deficit, this is only the seventh most pressing issue for Chicagoans. And although CPS, like districts in other cities, [faces long-term enrollment declines](#), only 4 percent of Chicagoans see under-enrolled schools as a pressing issue. In fact, 18 percent of Chicagoans are concerned about overcrowded schools, including more parents (27 percent) than nonparents (16 percent). Learn more about how Chicagoans think the city should address under-enrolled schools in the under-enrolled schools section and how they think the city should address the deficit in the budget section.

Bullying and violence in schools is the second most commonly cited issue for Black and white Chicago residents, the top issue for Latino residents, but the sixth most pressing issue for Asian residents. The second most commonly cited issue for Asian residents is recruiting and retaining teachers for difficult-to-staff positions. More Black residents than white residents are concerned about a lack of mental health staff and resources for students and a lack of free after school programs or extracurriculars; see Figure 1.

Insufficient academic learning is the issue that the largest share of Chicagoans believe needs to be addressed in public schools. Few are concerned about under-enrolled schools.

Figure 1. Percent of Chicagoans who select each of the following as one of the three most pressing issues that need to be addressed in public schools in Chicago, by race/ethnicity:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693.

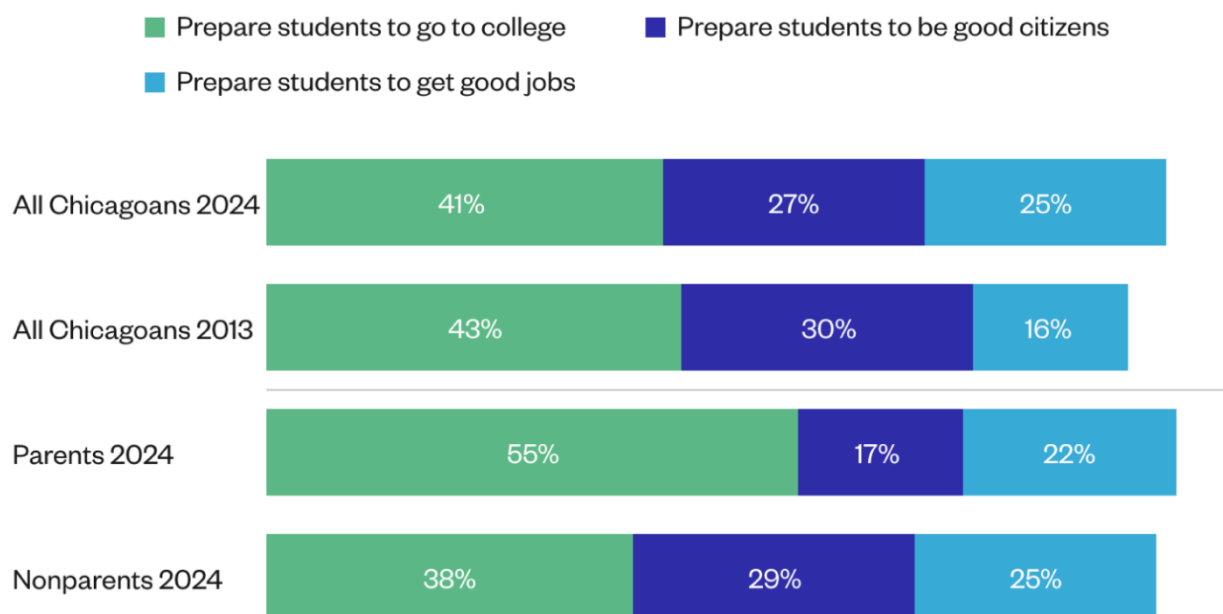
Most parents' primary expectation for schools is to prepare students for college. But a growing share of city residents expect schools to prepare students to get good jobs.

Consistent with the degree of concern they express about student learning, a 41 percent plurality of Chicago residents say their primary expectation for public schools is to prepare students to go to college. Parents in Chicago are especially focused on college preparation: 55 percent of them say their primary expectation for public schools is to prepare students to go to college, compared to 38 percent of nonparents; see Figure 2. In addition, 69 percent of Chicago parents indicate that they would be disappointed if their child did not try to pursue a college degree.

However, 25 percent of Chicago residents say their primary expectation of schools is to prepare students for good jobs, an increase from the [16 percent who said so in a 2013 survey](#) of adult residents of Chicago conducted for the Joyce Foundation by NORC. Furthermore, 48 percent of Chicagoans believe that too many high school graduates are pushed to attend college. Although 67 percent of Chicago residents see college enrollment as an important indicator of school quality, only 35 percent see it as a very important indicator, down from [44 percent who believed it was very important in 2013](#). Learn more about what Chicagoans think are important indicators of school quality in the school quality section.

Preparing students for college is Chicagoans' primary expectation of schools. But a growing number expect schools to prepare students to get good jobs.

Figure 2. Percent of Chicagoans who say their primary expectation of public schools is the following, by parental status and by year:



Base: All respondents 2024, N=2,127; All respondents 2013, N=1,010; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386. Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question or responded “other” and are therefore not represented in the figure.

More parents prioritize spending money to support academically struggling students than on career and technical training. But Chicagoans would rather see more career and technical training in the public schools than more honors classes.

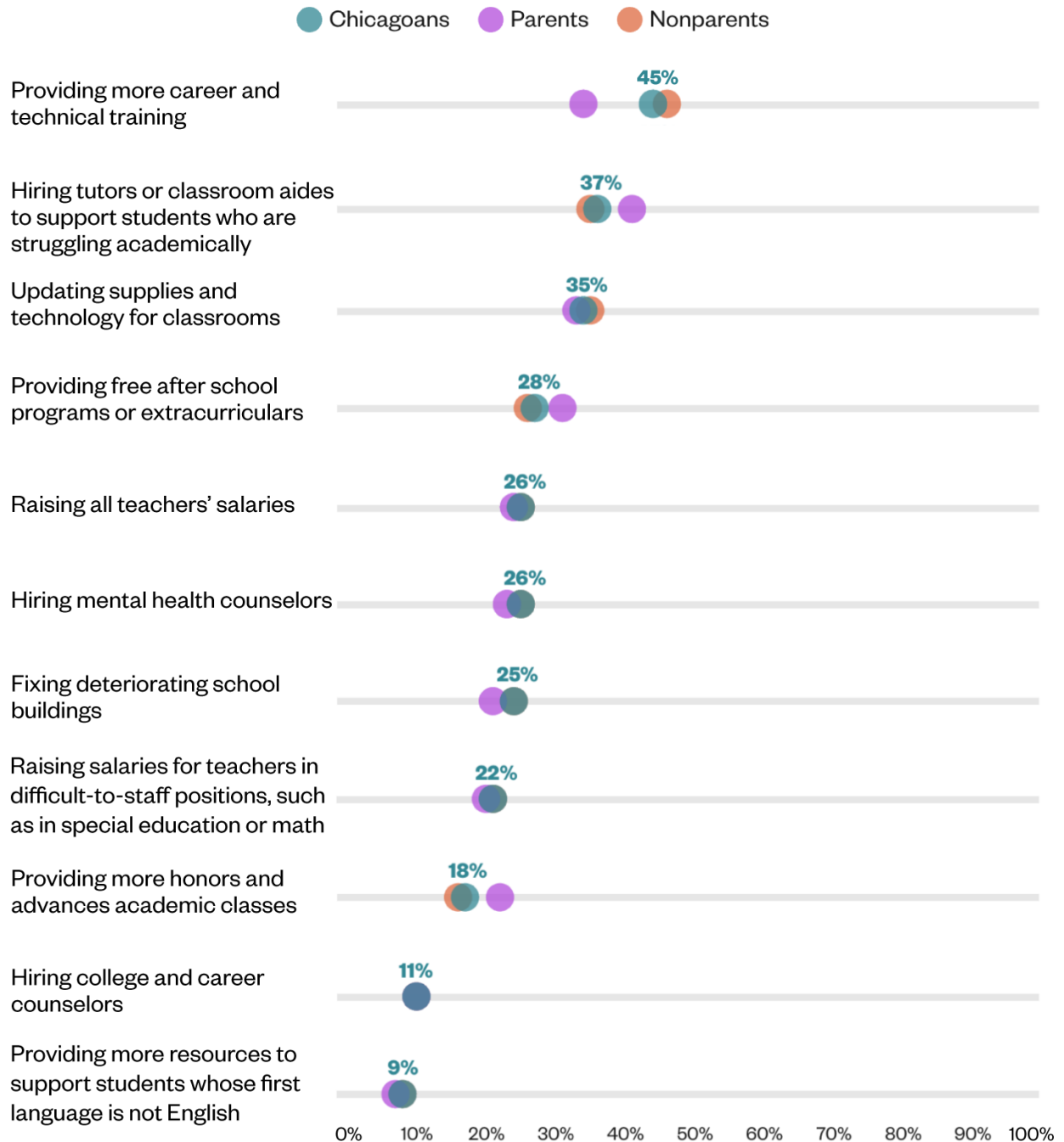
When asked how CPS should spend its money, Chicagoans top three priorities are spending on career and technical training, hiring more tutors or classroom aides to support students who are struggling academically, and updating supplies and technology for classrooms. Lower priorities include providing more advanced academic classes, hiring college and career counselors, and providing more resources to support students whose first language is not English; see Figure 3.

However, parents and nonparents have slightly different spending priorities, which is consistent with the higher priority that parents place on college preparation, compared to nonparents. Parents’ top spending priority is hiring tutors or classroom aides to support students who are struggling academically. For nonparents, career and technical training is the top spending priority. Parents are also more likely than nonparents to support spending on more honors and advanced academic classes.

Nearly two-thirds of Chicago residents (64 percent) say that they would support raising their own taxes if they knew their money would go directly to investing in the priorities—including 20 percent who would *strongly* support raising their own taxes. But few Chicagoans are confident that CPS currently spends its money effectively. And only 23 percent of Chicagoans agree that Chicago should raise taxes on individuals to help balance the city’s budget. Learn more about what Chicagoans think about CPS’s spending and how they believe the city should address its deficit in the budget section.

More parents prioritize CPS spending on tutors and classroom aides. More nonparents prioritize spending on career and technical training.

Figure 3. Percent of Chicagoans who select each of the following as one of three ways the Chicago Public School system should spend its money, by parental status:



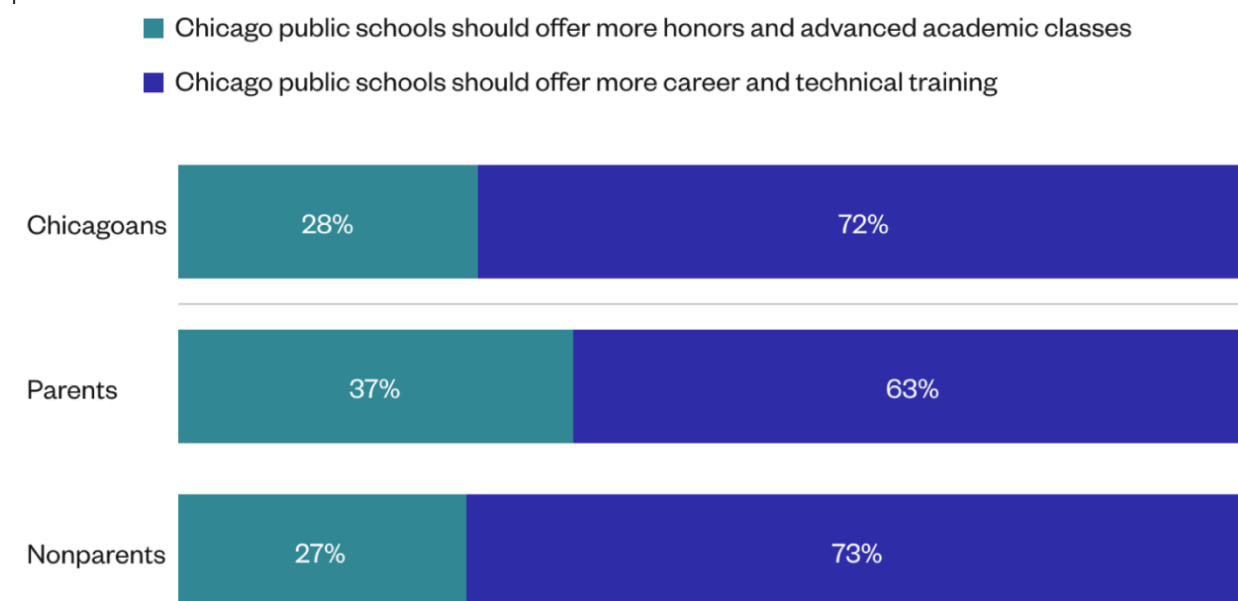
Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386.

Majorities of both white (52 percent) and Asian residents (54 percent), and about four in ten Latino residents (43 percent) prioritize CPS spending money on more career and technical training, compared to 37 percent of Black Chicagoans. More Black Chicago residents (45 percent) prioritize CPS spending on hiring tutors or classroom aides to support students who are struggling academically.

Providing more honors and advanced academic classes was among Chicagoans' lower spending priorities; see Figure 3. Consistent with that view, when required to choose between more honors and advanced academics or more career and technical training, the majority of city residents favor the latter, including majorities of both parents and nonparents; see Figure 4.

Overall, most Chicagoans believe CPS should offer more career and technical training rather than more honors and advanced academic classes.

Figure 4. Percent of Chicagoans who say which of the following comes closest to their views, by parental status:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386.

Parents are divided over whether students have recovered from the impacts of the pandemic.

About half of Chicago parents (46 percent) agree that Chicago public school students have already recovered from the academic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. But 47 percent of parents disagree and the rest say they do not know. Similarly, about half of Chicago parents (49 percent) agree that Chicago public school students have already recovered from the social and emotional trauma caused by the pandemic. But 45 percent of parents disagree and the rest say they do not know.

2. Chicagoans do not believe that the city’s public schools provide high-quality, equitable education. Poverty and other challenges impacting students is the most cited reason why schools might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically.

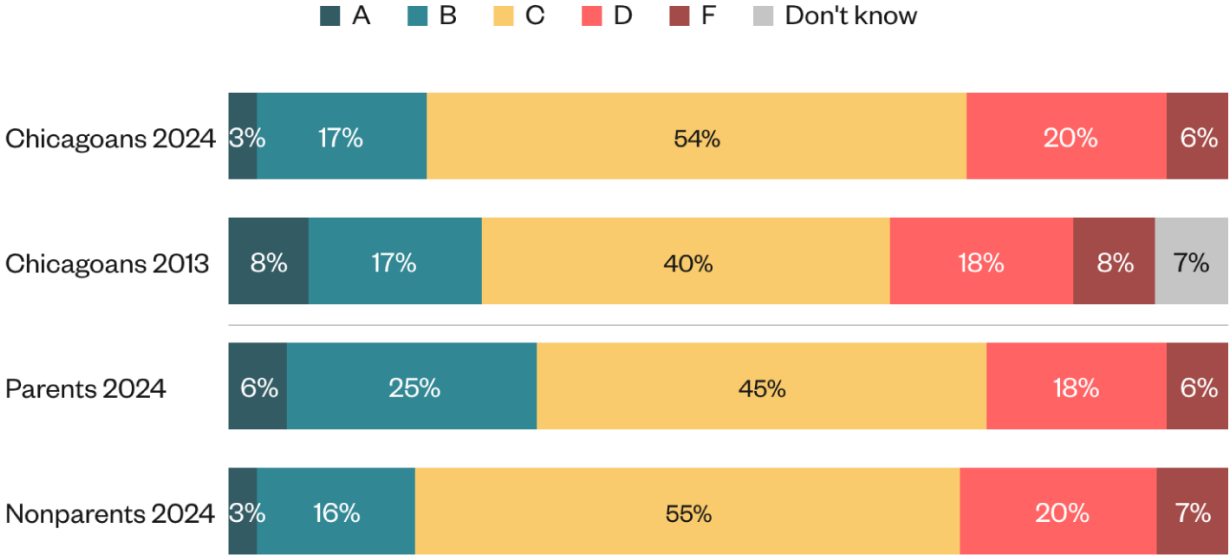
- Hardly any Chicago residents grade the city’s public schools an A.
- Most residents think white students have access to better public schools than students of color in Chicago.
- Poverty and other challenges impacting students is the most cited reason why schools might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically.
- Chicagoans’ believe that the best indicators of school quality include student and teacher attendance, high school graduation rates, and students' mental health and well-being.
- To improve schools, Chicagoans favor training teachers and principals, replacing underperforming teachers, and demanding that schools implement improvement plans. They are divided over closing academically struggling schools.

Hardly any Chicago residents grade the city’s public schools an A.

Only 3 percent of Chicago residents would give a grade of A to the city’s public schools as a whole. Just over half would give the city’s public schools a grade of C. Overall, city residents graded the public schools slightly lower in this survey [than in the 2013 Joyce Foundation survey of Chicagoans](#). Parents are slightly more forgiving with their grades; see Figure 5.

Just over half of Chicago residents grade the city’s public schools a C. Parents are slightly more forgiving.

Figure 5. Percent of Chicagoans who would give Chicago public schools as a whole the following grades, by parental status and by year:

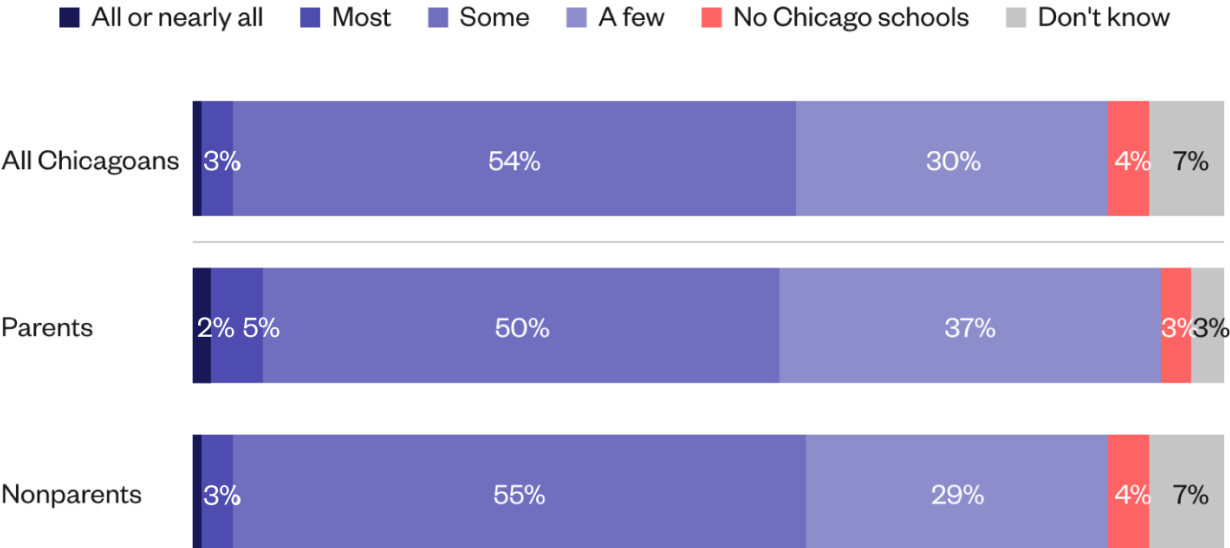


Base: All respondents 2024, N=2,127; All respondents 2013, N=1,010; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386. Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

Furthermore, only 4 percent of city residents believe that all or most public schools in Chicago provide high-quality education, while just over half believe some public schools do so and one in three believe that a few or none do; see Figure 6. Across parents and nonparents and across Asian, Black, Latino, and white Chicagoans, 7 percent or fewer believe that all or most public schools in Chicago provide high-quality education.

Hardly any city residents think that all public schools provide a high-quality education.

Figure 6. Percent of Chicagoans who think all or nearly all, most, some, a few, or no Chicago public schools provide a high quality education, or who do not know, by parental status:



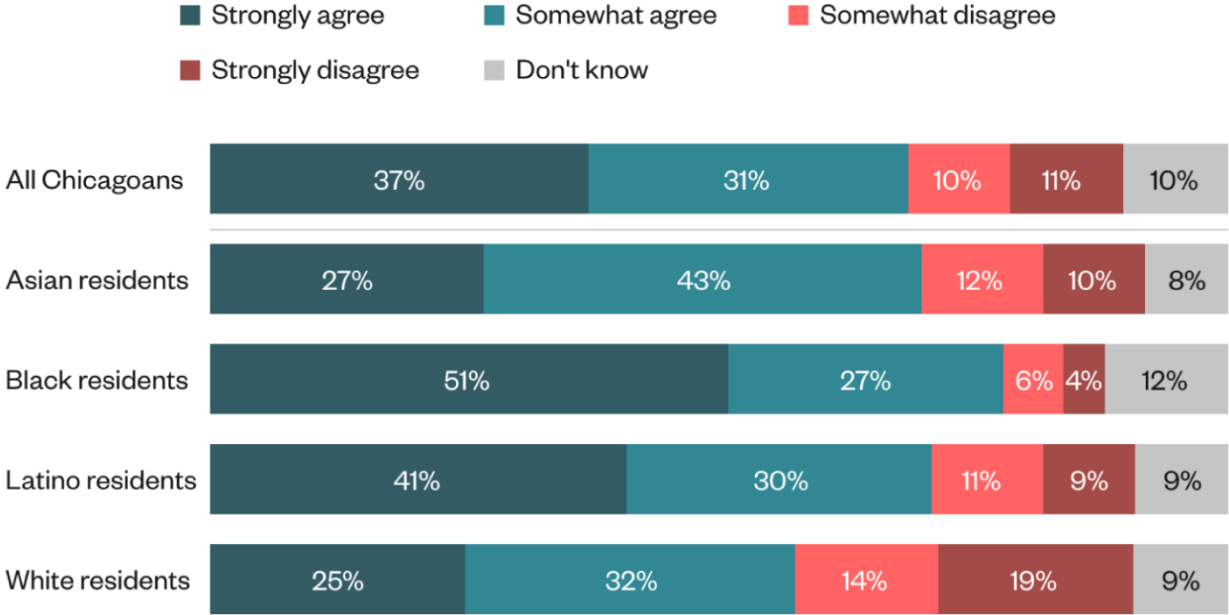
Base: All respondents 2024, N=2,127; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

Most residents think white students have access to better public schools than students of color in Chicago.

About two-thirds of the city’s residents (68 percent) believe that white students have access to better public schools in Chicago than students of color. This includes 78 percent of Black residents, 71 percent of Latino residents, and 70 percent of Asian residents, compared to 57 percent of white residents; see Figure 7.

Most residents think white students have access to better public schools than students of color in Chicago.

Figure 7. Percent of Chicagoans who agree or disagree that in general, white students have access to better public schools in Chicago than students of color, by race/ethnicity:



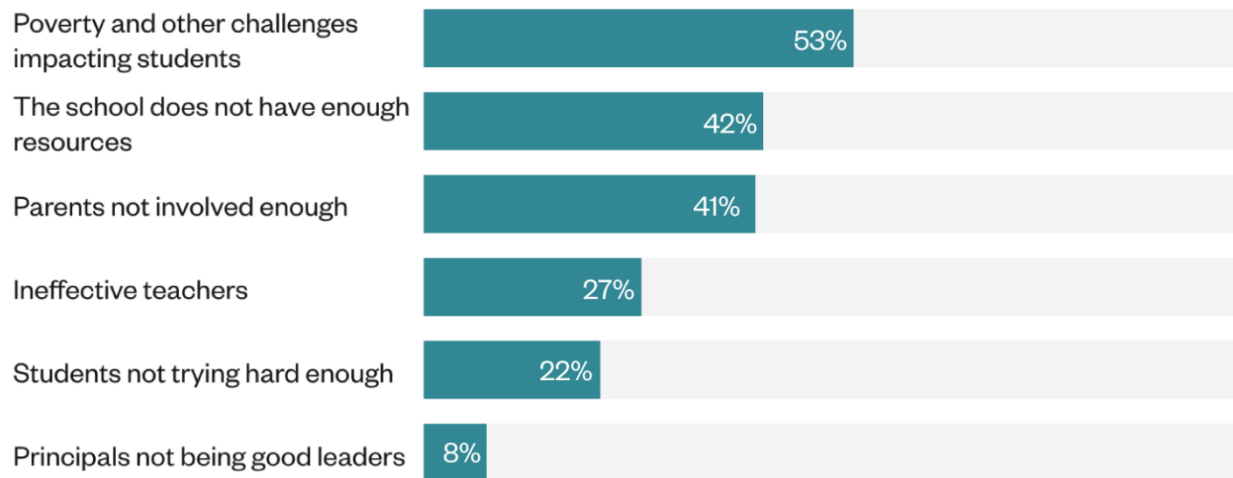
Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

Poverty and other challenges impacting students is the most cited reason why schools might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically.

When asked why they think a school might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically, just over half of residents believe poverty and other challenges impacting students is a main reason. About four in ten believe a main reason is that the school does not have enough resources. About as many believe it is because parents are not involved enough. Fewer Chicagoans blame ineffective teachers, students not trying hard enough, or principals’ leadership; see Figure 8 (next page).

Poverty and other challenges impacting students is the most cited reason why schools might have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically.

Figure 8. Percent of Chicagoans who say each of the following are most likely one of two main reasons why a Chicago public school may have a lot of students who are not succeeding academically:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127.

Chicagoans' believe that the best indicators of school quality include student and teacher attendance, high school graduation rates, and students' mental health and well-being.

Most Chicago residents (83 percent) agree that the central office of CPS should provide the public with detailed information about school performance, including 48 percent who strongly agree. But what do Chicagoans think school performance means? When asked about the importance of ten different indicators of school quality, the four that the highest percentages of Chicagoans say are important are teacher attendance, high school graduation rates, students' mental health and well-being, and student attendance; see Figure 9.

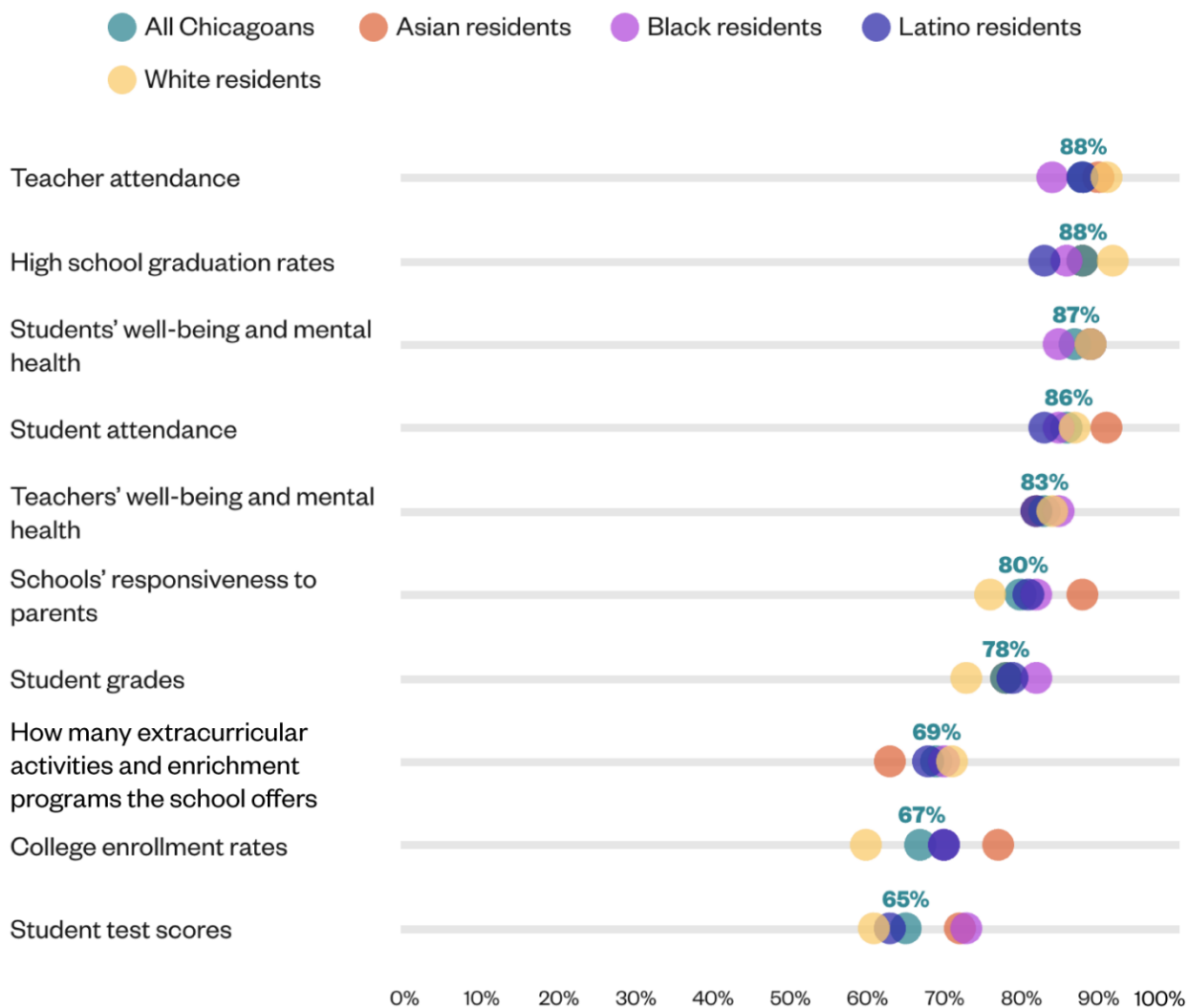
[In the Joyce Foundation's 2013 survey](#), 74 percent of Chicagoans saw college enrollment rates as an important indicator of school quality, compared to 67 percent of residents in this 2024 survey. Slightly more parents (72 percent) than nonparents (66 percent) see college enrollment as an important indicator of school quality. More Asian, Black, and Latino Chicagoans believe college enrollment rates are important indicators of school quality compared to white residents; see Figure 9.

Two-thirds of Chicagoans (65 percent) say test scores are important indicators of school quality. This is similar to the results of [the 2013 survey](#), in which 65 percent of Chicagoans said test scores were important. Slightly more parents (72 percent) than nonparents (64 percent) say test scores are important. And more Black residents, compared to Latino and white residents, say student test scores are important; see Figure 9.

When asked in a separate question whether standardized test scores are useful measures of school quality, 54 percent of Chicagoans agree that they are useful, while 40 percent disagree, and 5 percent are unsure.

Chicagoans believe that the most important indicators of school quality include student attendance, teacher attendance, high school graduation rates, and students' mental health and well-being.

Figure 9. Percent of Chicagoans who rate each of the following indicators of school quality 5 or 4 on a scale of one to five where 1 means not important and 5 means very important, by race/ethnicity:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693.

To improve schools, Chicagoans favor training teachers and principals, replacing underperforming teachers, and demanding that schools implement improvement plans. They are divided over closing academically struggling schools.

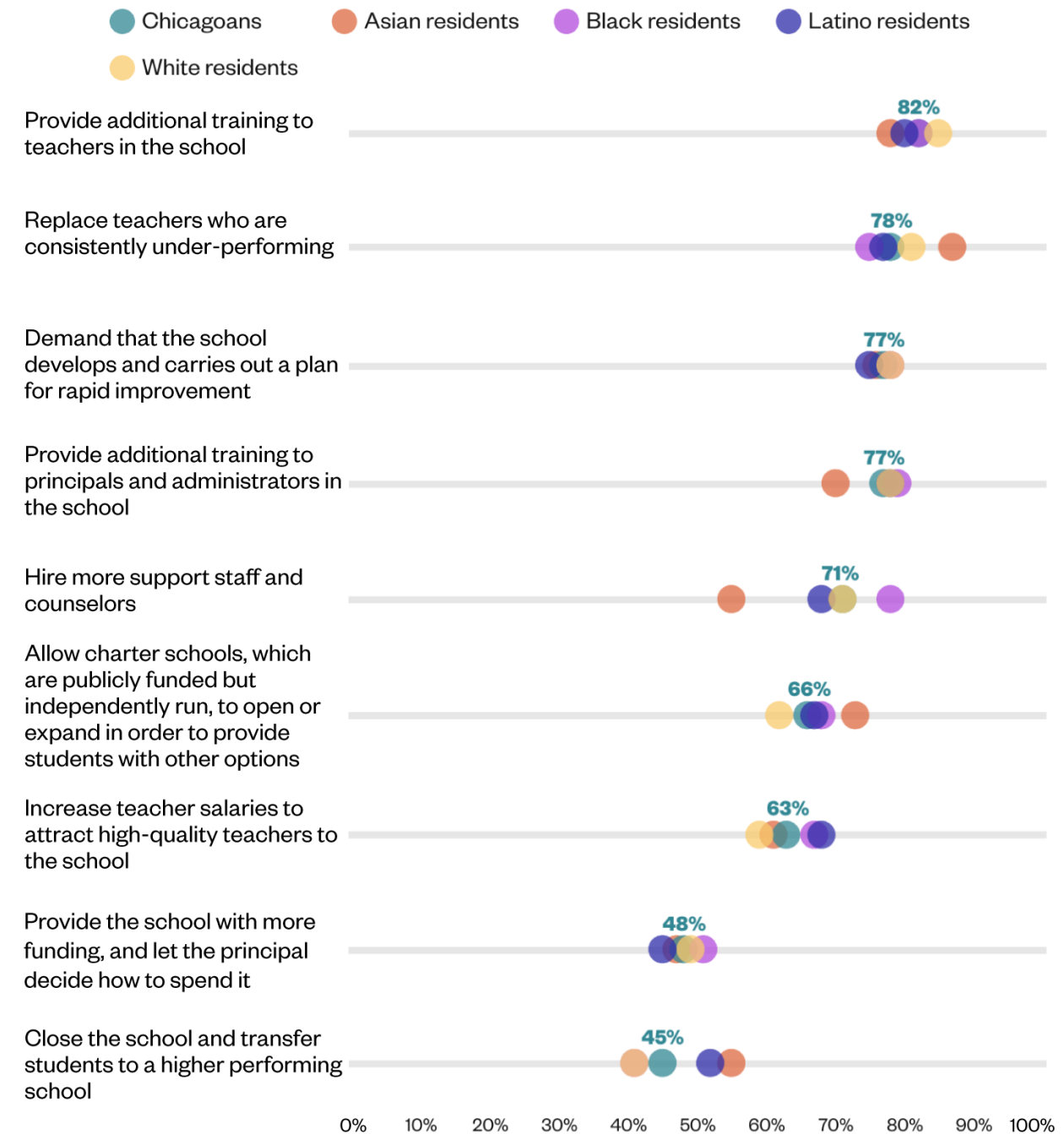
As noted above, students not learning enough academically is the issue that the largest percentage of Chicagoans believe needs to be addressed in public schools; see the learning section. When asked how best to address a public school that has been failing academically, support is strongest for providing additional teacher training, replacing teachers who are consistently under-performing, providing additional training to principals and administrators, and demanding the school develop and carry out a plan for rapid improvement; see Figure 10 (next page).

About half of the city's residents support providing the school with more funding and letting the principal decide how to spend it. While 45 percent would support closing an underperforming school and transferring students to a higher performing school; see Figure 10 (next page). Parents and nonparents in Chicago differ very little in their views on how to address struggling schools.

Hiring more support staff and counselors is particularly appealing to Black Chicagoans. In fact, it is the third most favored solution among Black residents, but the fifth most favored solution among white and Latino residents and the eighth among Asian residents. Fewer Black and white residents support closing schools that are academically failing; see Figure 10 (next page).

To improve schools, Chicagoans favor training teachers and principals, replacing underperforming teachers, and demanding that schools implement improvement plans. They are divided over closing struggling schools.

Figure 10. Percent of Chicagoans who indicate that if a Chicago public school has been academically failing for a number of years, they strongly or somewhat support each of the following, by race/ethnicity:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693.

3. Chicagoans are skeptical about how CPS spends money.

- Few city residents are confident that the CPS budget is spent effectively. Parents are split over whether CPS needs more money or needs to spend more wisely.
- No approach to balancing the city budget is popular, but laying off teachers and cutting extracurriculars are especially unpopular.
- While over half of Chicagoans support educating migrant children, even more express concern about the cost of doing so.

Few city residents are confident that the CPS budget is spent effectively. Parents are split over whether CPS needs more money or needs to spend more wisely.

Most Chicago residents (74 percent) say they are not too confident or not confident at all that the CPS budget is being spent effectively; see Figure 11. Seventy-one percent of parents and 74 percent of nonparents say they are not too confident or not confident at all.

Few Chicagoans are confident that the CPS budget is spent effectively.

Figure 11. Percent of Chicagoans who indicate how confident they are that the Chicago public school budget is being spent effectively:



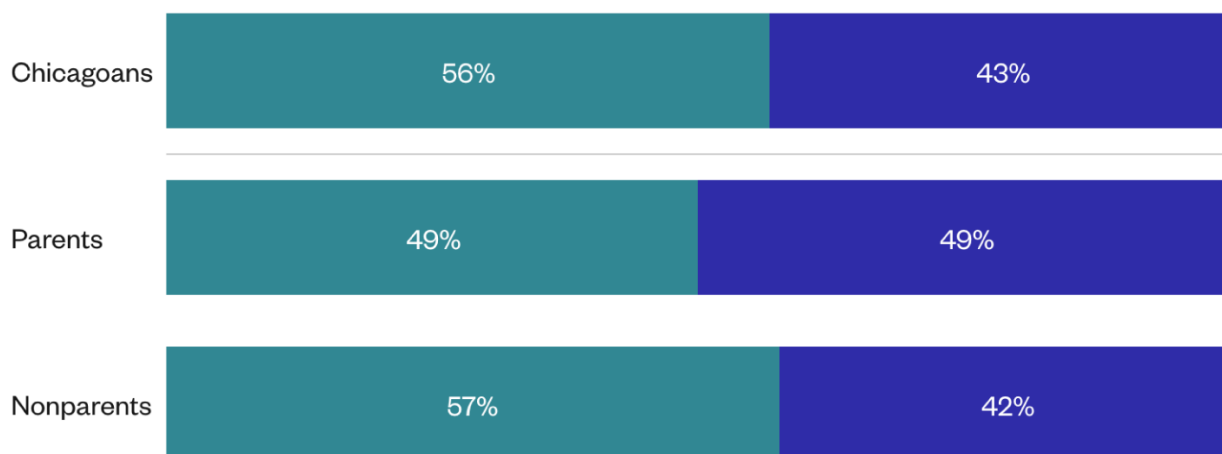
Base: All respondents, N=2,127

When forced to choose, just over half of city residents believe that CPS needs more funding from the city, state, or federal government. About four in ten believe it needs to spend the money it has more wisely. Parents are evenly split on whether CPS needs more money or needs to do a better job at spending the money it has; see Figure 12 (next page).

Parents are split over whether CPS needs more money or needs to spend its money more wisely.

Figure 12. Percent of Chicagoans who say which of the following comes closest to their views, by parental status:

- To balance its budget, the Chicago Public School system needs more funding from the city, state or federal government.
- To balance its budget, the Chicago Public School system needs to do better at spending the money it has.



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

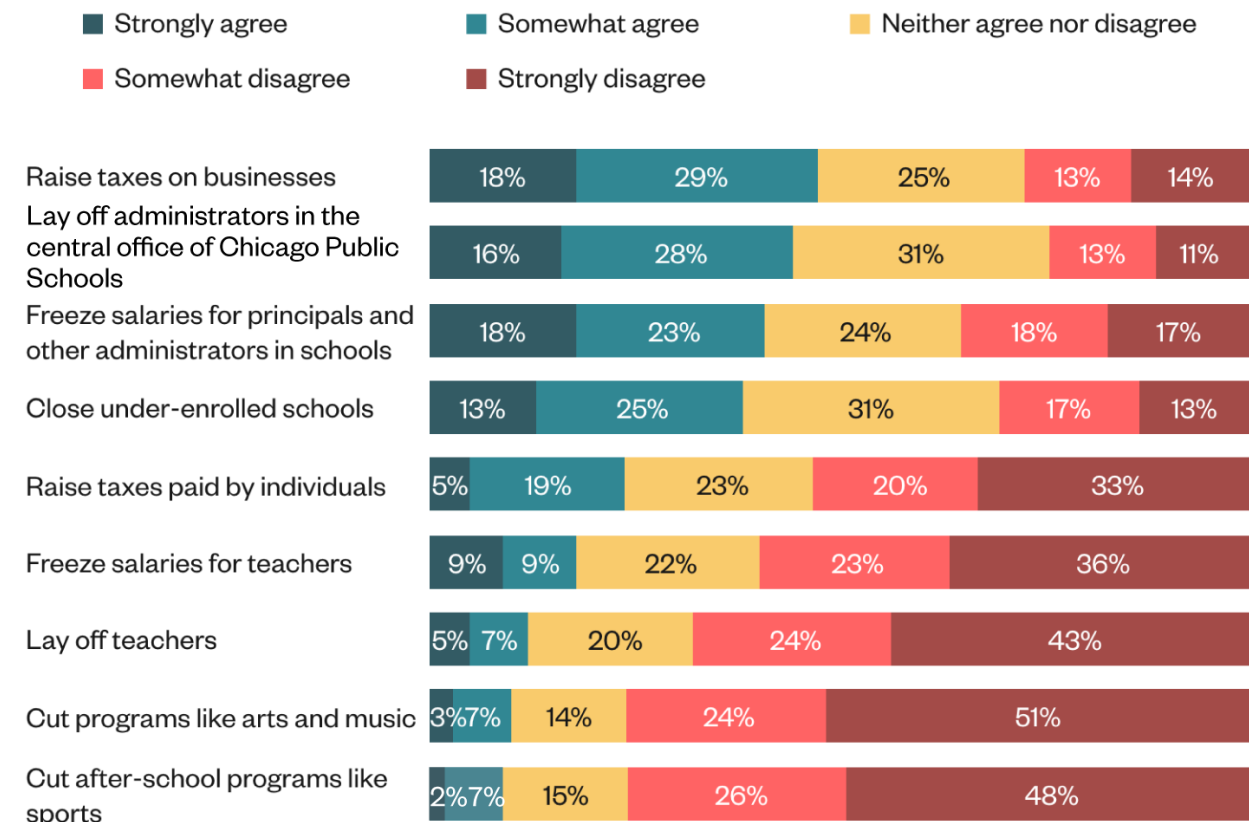
No approach to balancing the city budget is popular, but laying off teachers and cutting extracurriculars are especially unpopular.

When residents are asked how Chicago can balance the city's budget, none of the options presented in this survey attracted majority support, with little difference between parents and nonparents. Support is strongest for raising taxes on business and laying off administrators in the central office of CPS. Support is weakest for laying off teachers, cutting programs like arts and music, or cutting after-school programs like sports; see Figure 13.

While 38 percent of residents indicate that under-enrolled schools should be closed to balance the city's budget, this is down from 55 percent of residents who favored this [course of action in 2013](#). Learn more about how Chicagoans think the city should address under-enrolled schools in the under-enrolled schools section.

No approach to balancing the city budget is popular. Laying off teachers and cutting school programs are especially unpopular.

Figure 13. Percent of Chicagoans who say they agree or disagree that to help balance its budget Chicago should do the following:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

To balance the city’s budget, Asian (43 percent), Black (48 percent), Latino (44 percent), and white (48 percent) Chicagoans all support raising taxes on business to the same degree. And to about the same degree, few support cutting after-school programs like sports (less than 15 percent across all groups). But fewer Black Chicagoans (27 percent) support laying off administrators in the CPS central office compared to Asian (49 percent), Latino (42 percent), and white (56 percent) residents. Also, fewer Black Chicagoans (31 percent) support closing under-enrolled schools compared to white (44 percent) or Asian Chicagoans (49 percent). Latino residents (36 percent) fall in the middle.

Black residents’ wariness of these cuts to balance the city’s budget is consistent with their view that CPS in particular needs more money. While Chicago residents overall—including Asian, Latino, and white residents—are split over whether CPS needs more money or needs to spend its money more wisely, two-thirds of Black Chicagoans (65 percent) believe CPS needs more funding, compared to one-third (32 percent) who believe it needs to spend more wisely.

While over half of Chicagoans support educating migrant children, even more express concern about the cost of doing so.

A modest majority of the city's residents (59 percent) agree that Chicago should provide migrant children with access to high-quality education. Agreement is strongest among Asian residents (74 percent) but majorities of Latino (60 percent), Black (56 percent) and white (57 percent) residents agree as well.

At the same time, 66 percent of Chicagoans believe that the city is already struggling to meet children's needs and that helping migrant children will strain its resources. This concern is modestly stronger among white (69 percent) and Black (68 percent) residents than among Latino (59 percent) residents, with Asian residents falling in between (63 percent).

4. Few Chicagoans identify under-enrolled schools as a problem. When asked how to address them, support is strongest for investing in neighborhoods with declining populations.

- More Chicago residents are concerned about over-enrolled than under-enrolled schools.
- To address under-enrolled schools, support is strongest for trying to attract more students to schools and more families to neighborhoods. But about one-third of Chicagoans say they have no opinion about each of the solutions to under-enrollment provided in this survey.

More Chicago residents are concerned about over-enrolled than under-enrolled schools.

Chicago, like other cities, [faces long-term public school enrollment declines](#). But only 4 percent of Chicagoans see under-enrolled schools as one of the most pressing issues in the city's schools. Instead, 18 percent of Chicago residents—including 27 percent of parents—believe that overcrowded schools are a pressing issue, making it parents' third most pressing issue; see the learning section.

To address under-enrolled schools, support is strongest for trying to attract more students to schools and more families to neighborhoods. But about one-third of Chicagoans say they have no opinion about each of the solutions to under-enrollment provided in this survey.

This survey explained to Chicagoans that one-third of public schools in the city serve less than half of the number of students that the school was built to serve, and that some people are concerned that money is being spent to keep these partially empty schools open. Chicagoans were asked to think about the district's budget as they considered options to address public schools with low enrollment.

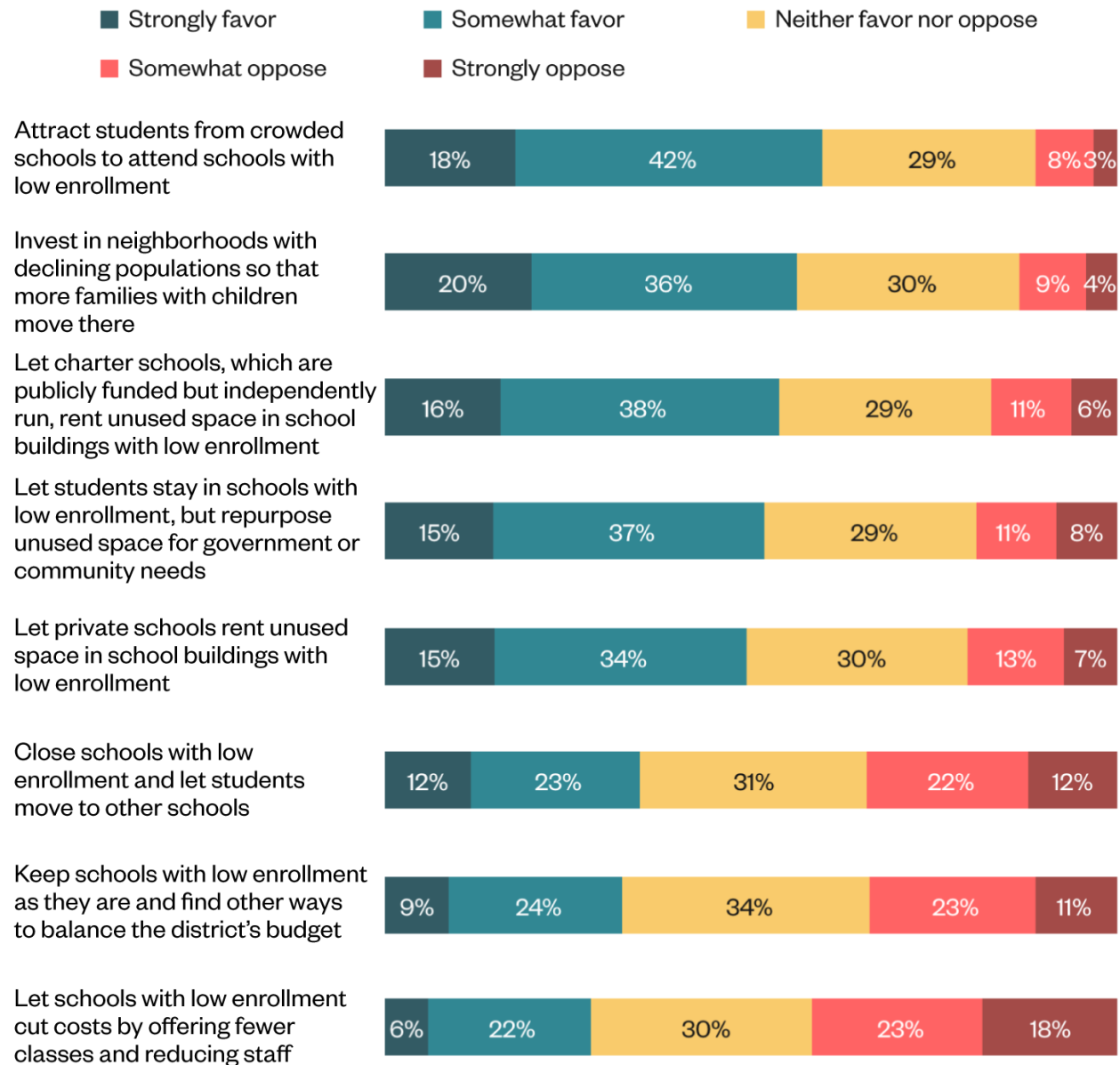
To address under-enrollment, support is strongest for attracting students from crowded schools to attend schools with low enrollment (60 percent) and investing in neighborhoods with declining populations so that more families with children move there (56 percent). Letting charter schools rent unused space in school buildings with low enrollment is the third most supported way of addressing under-enrolled schools. A moratorium on school closures in Chicago is currently [set to expire in 2025](#). About one-third of Chicago residents support closures to address under-enrolled schools, while about one-third oppose closures and about one-third neither favor nor oppose. However, about one-third of Chicago residents neither favor nor oppose each of the solutions provided in this survey; see Figure 14 (next page).

There are only modest differences by race/ethnicity in support of the various approaches to addressing under-enrolled schools. Attracting students from crowded schools to attend schools with low enrollment is the most favored solution among Chicagoans overall and among Latino (59 percent) and white (61 percent) residents. Among Black residents, support is strongest for investing in neighborhoods with declining populations so that more families with children move there (62 percent). Among Asian residents, support is strongest for letting charter schools rent unused space in school buildings with low-enrollment (65 percent).

There are no differences in support for closing under-enrolled schools by race/ethnicity. However, support for closing under-enrolled schools is especially weak on the Far North Side (32 percent), South Side (29 percent), and West Side (28 percent) and is stronger on the Near North Side (53 percent), Northwest Side (45 percent), and in the Loop (51 percent). For more about how neighborhoods were defined, see the topline.

To address under-enrolled schools, support is strongest for trying to attract more students and families.

Figure 14. Percent of Chicagoans who, when told that about one-third of public schools in Chicago serve less than half of the number of students that the school was built to serve and that some people are concerned that money is being spent to keep these partially empty schools open and when asked to think about the district’s budget, said they favor or oppose each of the following to address Chicago public schools with low enrollment:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

5. Chicagoans, especially parents, are divided over school choice.

- Half of Chicagoans, including modest majorities of Asian, Black, and Latino residents, believe students should be able to attend any public school, even if neighborhood schools languish.
- Two-thirds of Chicagoans believe CPS should prioritize improving neighborhood schools over school choice, but parents are divided on this question.

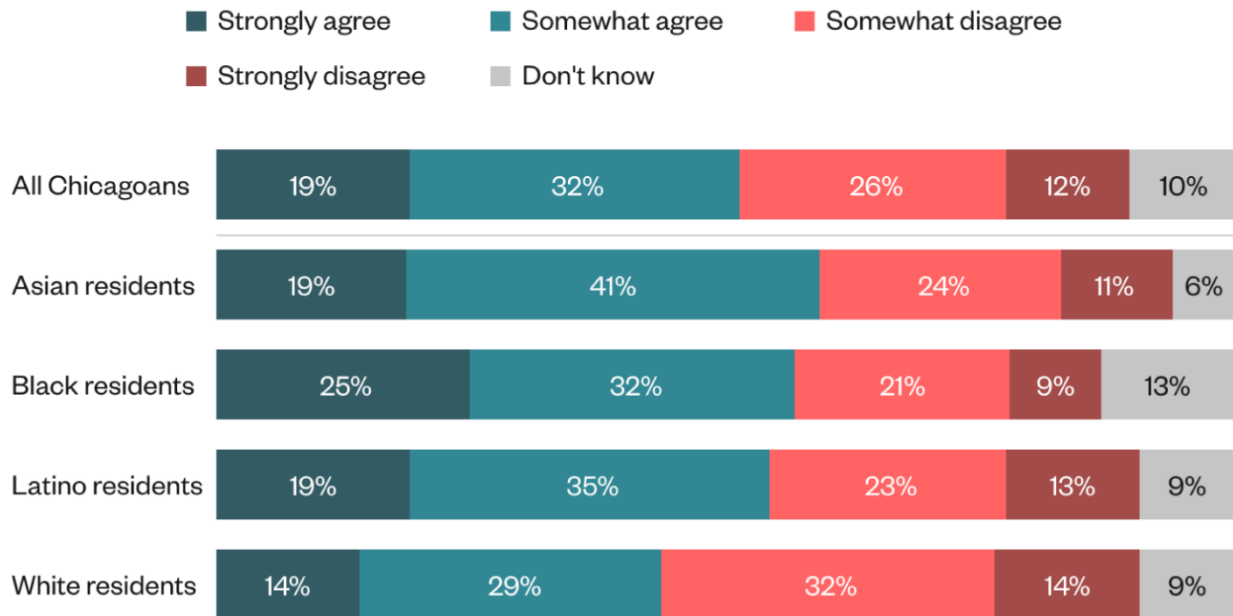
Half of Chicagoans, including modest majorities of Asian, Black, and Latino residents believe students should be able to attend any public school, even if neighborhood schools languish.

Half of Chicago residents (51 percent) believe that students should be able to choose to attend any public school they want, even if it means some neighborhood schools lose students and funding. But 39 percent disagree and 10 percent say they do not know; see Figure 15 (next page). Somewhat more parents (58 percent) than nonparents (49 percent) say that students should be able to choose to attend any public schools they want even at the expense of neighborhood schools.

More Asian, Black, and Latino residents than white residents agree that students should be able to choose to attend any public school they want; see Figure 15 (next page). This view is more common among residents of the Northwest Side (53 percent), the Loop (61 percent), South Side (58 percent), Far South Side (56 percent) and West Side (54 percent), and is less common on the North Side (37 percent). For more about how neighborhoods were defined, see the topline.

Half of Chicagoans, including modest majorities of Asian, Black, and Latino residents believe students should be able to attend any public school, even if neighborhood schools languish.

Figure 15. Percent of Chicagoans who agree or disagree that students should be able to choose to attend any public school they want, even if it means that some neighborhood schools lose students and funding, by race/ethnicity:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

Two-thirds of Chicagoans believe CPS should prioritize improving neighborhood schools over school choice, but parents are divided on this question.

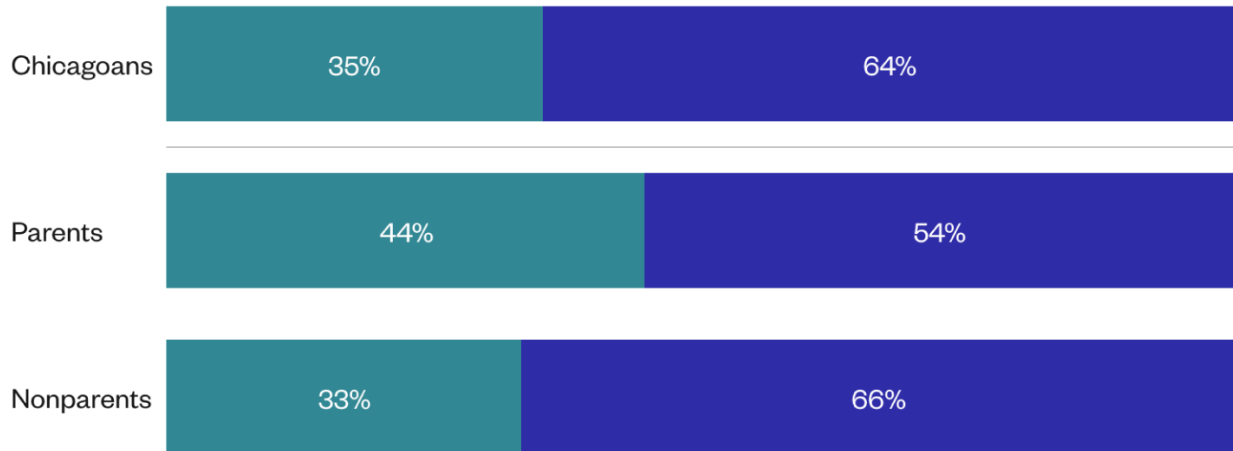
When forced to choose, a 64 percent majority of Chicago residents believe that the CPS central office should prioritize improving neighborhood public schools so students can attend schools close to home. By contrast, 35 percent believe the central office should prioritize giving students options to enroll in any public school they want. Most nonparents (66 percent) believe the central office should prioritize improving neighborhood schools. But parents are split on this question; see Figure 16.

Belief that the central office of CPS should prioritize giving students options to enroll in any public school they want is lower among white residents (28 percent) than Black (43 percent) and Asian (43 percent) residents, with Latino residents falling in between (34 percent).

Two-thirds of Chicagoans believe CPS should prioritize improving neighborhood schools over school choice, but parents are divided on this question.

Figure 16. Percent of Chicagoans who say which of the following comes closest to their views, by parental status:

- The central office of Chicago Public Schools should prioritize giving students options to enroll in any public school they want.
- The central office of Chicago Public Schools should prioritize improving neighborhood public schools so students can attend school close to home.



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are not therefore represented in the figure.

6. Few Chicagoans think politicians are focused on students. Less than half think an elected school board will positively impact students. Chicagoans do not feel well-informed about the city's schools.

- Most Chicagoans think politicians are focused on petty political battles. More city residents trust teachers and principals to look out for students than trust the teachers union, board of education, CPS central office, or mayor.
- Most Chicagoans are unaware that school board members will be elected in 2024. Four in ten think an elected board will serve students better than an appointed board.
- Television news and word of mouth from friends or family are Chicagoans' main source of news about K-12 education. But most Chicagoans do not feel very informed about the city's public schools.

Most Chicagoans think politicians are focused on petty political battles. More city residents trust teachers and principals to look out for students than trust the teachers union, board of education, CPS central office, or mayor to do so.

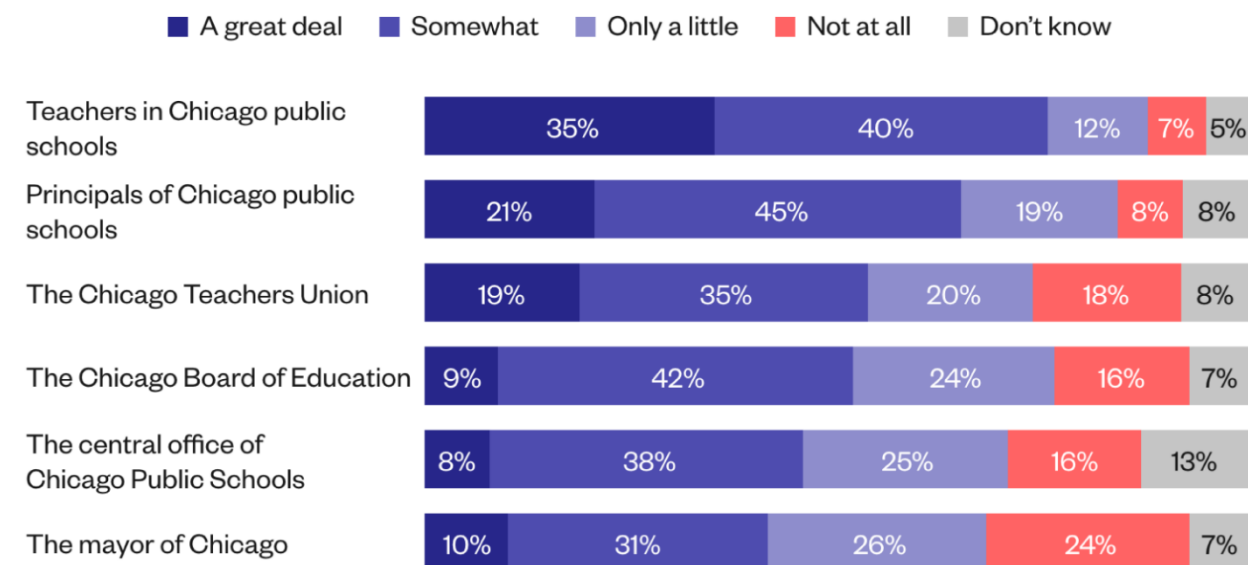
A strong majority of Chicago residents (84 percent) agree that politicians and educational leaders in Chicago are too focused on petty political battles instead of what is best for students, including 56 percent who strongly agree.

Regarding the balance of power between principals and the CPS central office, two-thirds of Chicago residents (66 percent) believe that principals should be the primary decision-makers when it comes to decisions that impact a school. Fewer, 32 percent, believe that the central office of CPS should be the primary decision-maker.

Perhaps not surprisingly, more Chicago residents also trust that teachers and principals are looking out for the best interests of Chicago public school students. Fewer trust the central office of CPS or mayor; see Figure 17.

More city residents trust teachers and principals to look out for students than trust the teachers union, board of education, CPS central office, or mayor to do so.

Figure 17. Percent of Chicagoans who indicate how much they trust that each of the following are looking out for the best interests of Chicago public school students:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in the figure.

Most Chicagoans are unaware that school board members will be elected in 2024. Four in ten think an elected board will serve students better than an appointed board.

In November 2024, part of Chicago’s school board will be elected. By 2027, the entire board will be elected. But 63 percent of residents admit they are not aware that the city will be transitioning

from a school board appointed by the mayor to an elected board. There is no significant difference in the percentage of parents and nonparents who are aware the board will be elected.

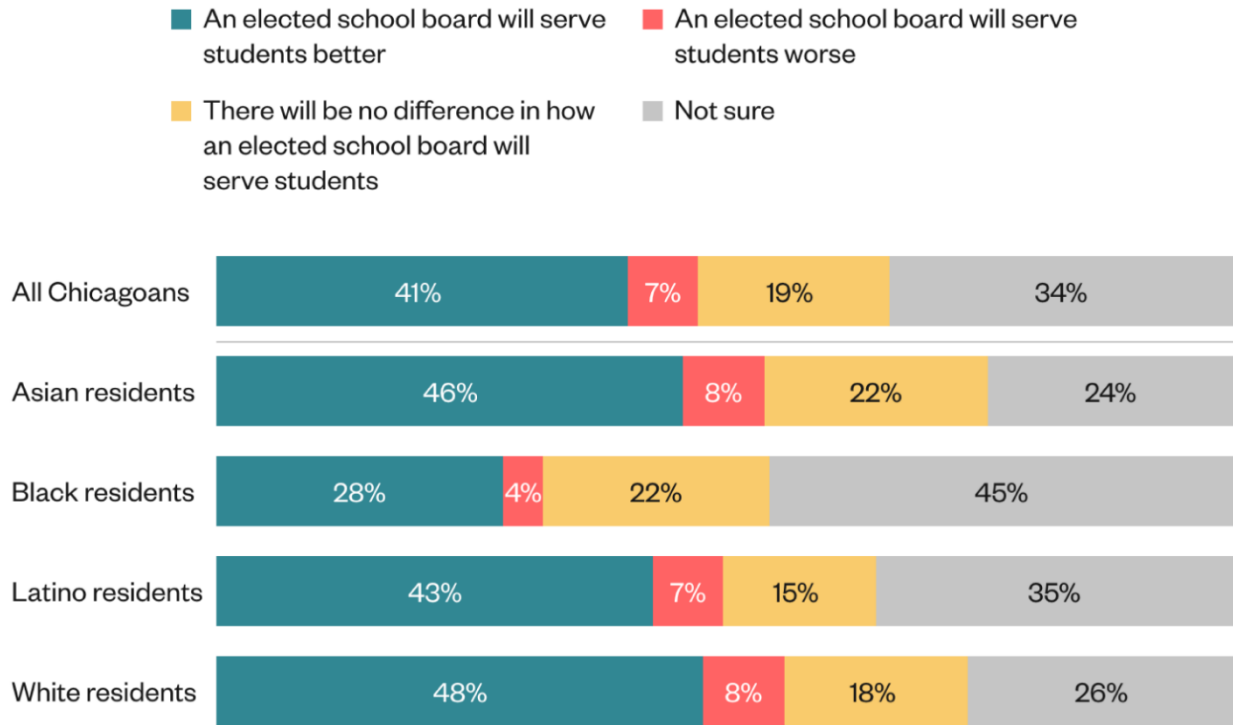
More white residents (42 percent) than Asian residents (24 percent) are aware of the shift to an elected board, with Black (34 percent) and Latino (34 percent) residents' awareness falling in between. Awareness that the board will be elected is highest on the Far North Side, where 49 percent of residents say they are aware. Fewer residents of the Far South Side (33 percent), Near North Side (32 percent), Northwest Side (31 percent), Southwest Side (32 percent), Loop (26 percent), and West Side (31 percent) are aware of the transition. For more about how neighborhoods were defined, see the topline.

Chicagoans seem unenthusiastic about the elected board's potential impact. Fewer than half (41 percent) of city residents believe an elected board will serve students better. About one-third are not sure if an elected board will serve students better or worse. More think there will be no difference than think an elected board will serve students worse. More Asian, Latino, and white residents than Black residents think an elected board will serve students better; see Figure 18 (next page).

The belief that an elected board will serve students better than the appointed board is strongest on the Far North Side (45 percent), North Side (54 percent), Near North Side (55 percent), in the Loop (47 percent), on the Southwest side (42 percent), and on the West Side (43 percent). But this belief is weakest on the South Side (24 percent) and Far South Side (29 percent).

More Asian, Latino, and white Chicagoans than Black Chicagoans think an elected school board will serve students better.

Figure 18. Percent of Chicagoans who believe an elected school board will serve students better, worse, there will be no difference, or they are not sure, by race/ethnicity:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the percent of respondents who refused to answer the question and are therefore not represented in this figure.

Sixty percent of Chicago residents believe that those elected to serve on the school board should be paid. Support for paying board members is stronger among Black (77 percent) than among Latino (61 percent), Asian (58 percent) or white (49 percent) Chicagoans.

Television news and word of mouth from friends or family are Chicagoans’ main source of news about K-12 education. But most Chicagoans do not feel very informed about the city’s public schools.

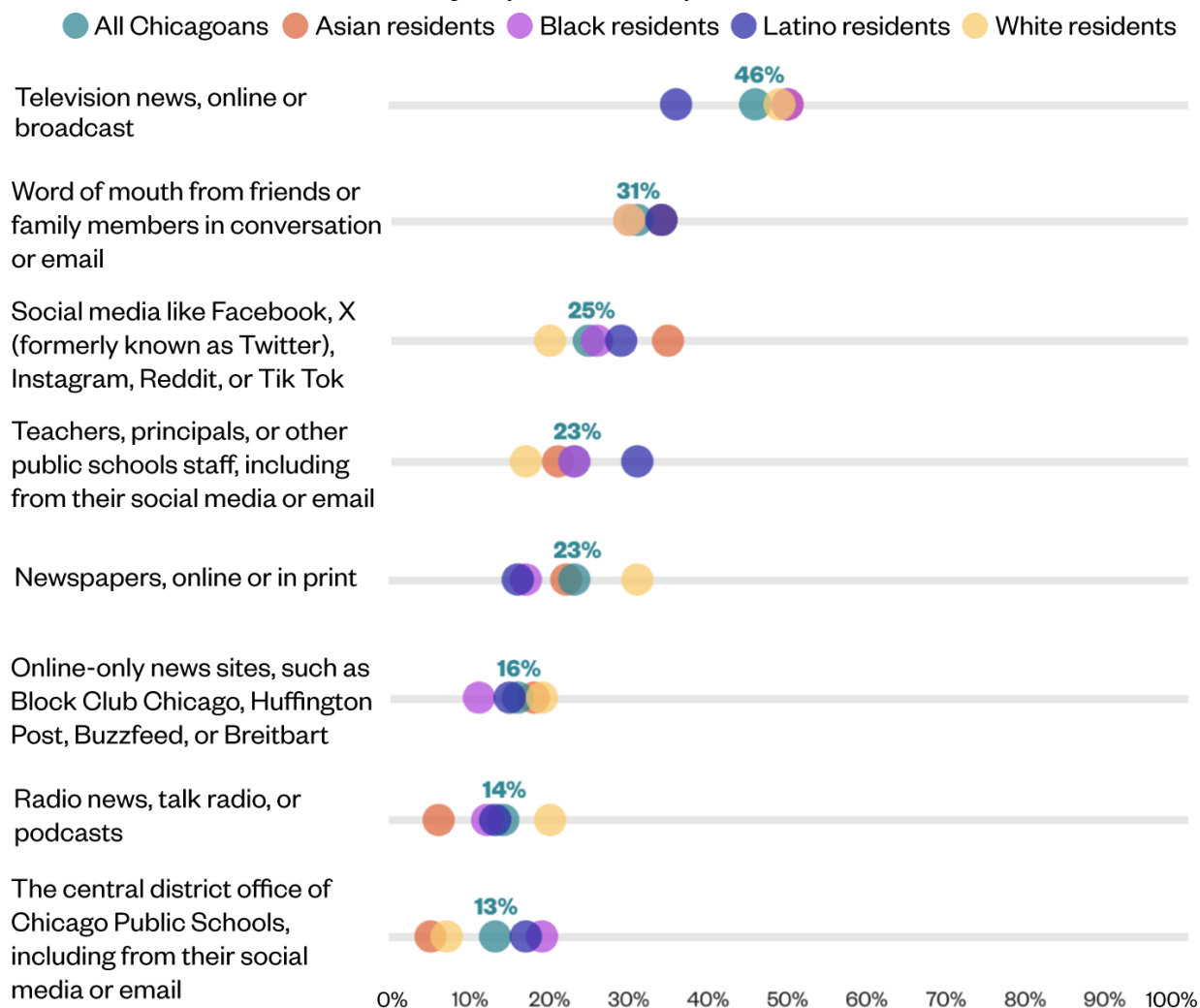
The two main sources of news about K-12 education in the city for Chicago residents are television news and word of mouth from friends or family members. Perhaps unsurprisingly, for parents specifically, the most commonly cited source of news is teachers, principals, and other public school staff, including through social media or email (42 percent), followed by television news, online or broadcast (31 percent).

Television news and word of mouth from friends or family members are among Asian, Black, Latino, and white residents’ top three main sources of news about K-12 education. More Latino

and Black residents than white residents rely on public school staff and the central district office, while more white residents than Black and Latino residents rely on newspapers and radio news; see Figure 19.

The two main sources of news about K-12 education in the city for Chicago residents are television news and word of mouth from friends or family members.

Figure 19. Percent of Chicagoans who say which of the following are their two main sources of news about K-12 education in Chicago, by race/ethnicity:



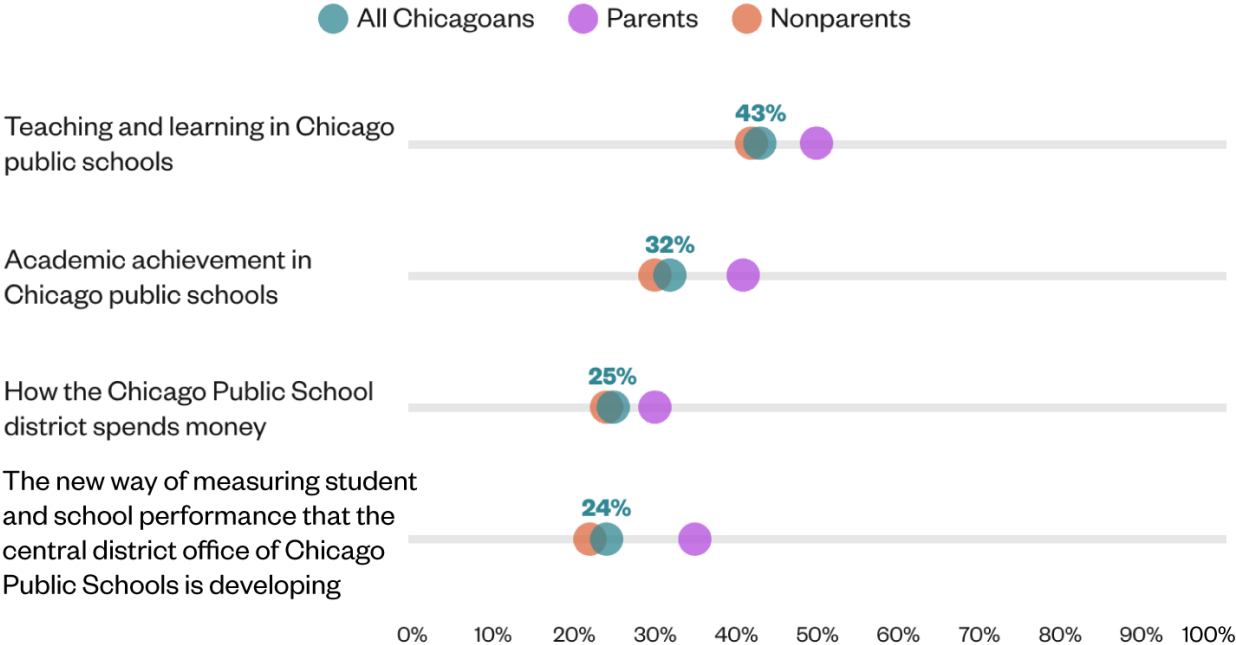
Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Asian residents, n=152; Black residents, n=650; Latino residents, n=558; White residents, n=693.

Most Chicagoans do not feel very informed about the topics related to the city’s public schools that this survey asked about. Although more parents than nonparents feel informed, even among parents, there is no topic about which more than half of parents feel very or somewhat well-informed. The topic that the fewest parents feel informed about is how CPS spends money. The

topic that the fewest nonparents feel informed about is the new way of measuring student and school performance that the central district office of CPS is developing; see Figure 20.

Half or fewer parents feel informed about the city’s public schools, and even fewer nonparents feel informed.

Figure 20. Percent of Chicagoans who say they feel very or somewhat informed about the following topics, by parental status:



Base: All respondents, N=2,127; Parents, n=741; Nonparents, n=1,386.

Methodology

This report summarizes findings from a representative survey of 2,127 adult residents of Chicago, aged 18 years and older. The survey was designed by Public Agenda and fielded from December 28, 2023 to January 16, 2024 by NORC at the University of Chicago. This Public Agenda project is supported by the Joyce Foundation.

When referencing these findings, cite Public Agenda.

Respondents were randomly sampled using NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel (339 completes), along with non-probability panels Dynata (868 completes), Lucid (549 completes), Prodege (365 completes), and Amplify AAPI (6 completes). Amplify AAPI is NORC's custom panel of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders.

The survey was offered in English and Spanish and was administered online via the Web (2,117 completes) or over the telephone by a live interviewer (10 completes), depending on the preference the respondent provided during the panel recruitment. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (either \$2 or \$5) for completing the survey.

The sample includes 312 parents or guardians of a child or children currently enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grade in any school in Chicago, including traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, and homeschooling. Oversamples were collected for Chicagoans who identify as Asian, Black, and Latino; as well as K-12 parents who identify as Asian, Black, Latino, and white. The study also sought to meet quotas for adult residents in Chicago's ten regions: Far North Side, Far South Side, Near North Side, Near South Side, North Side, Northwest Side, South Side, Southwest Side, the Loop, and West Side.

All Chicago residents in the AmeriSpeak panel were invited to the survey. If a panel household had more than one active adult panel member, only one adult panel member was selected at random. For the non-probability sample, quota buckets for demographic strata were defined to reflect known population distributions and worked with the sample providers to slowly release sample over the field period to adequately fill each.

NORC applied cleaning rules to the survey data for quality control. In total, 86 cases were removed from the final set of completed interviews based on three cleaning rules:

- Removing speeders (i.e., those who completed the survey in less than one-third of the median duration)
- Removing respondents with high refusal rates (i.e., those who skipped or refused more than 50 percent of the eligible questions)
- Removing straight-liners (i.e., those who straight-lined grid item questions)

An additional 12 cases were removed for suspicious use of their browser back button.

The final weights are developed through three stages. First, probability and non-probability sample weights are developed separately. Second, small area estimation is leveraged to model core response variables and generate raking benchmarks. Finally, the two samples are combined through TrueNorth calibration to create the final weights. These final two stages make up NORC's TrueNorth® Calibration. To find more on the TrueNorth Calibration please visit: <https://amerispeak.norc.org/us/en/amerispeak/our-capabilities/truenorth.html>.

The final stage completion rate is 28.2 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 21.4 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 78.7 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 4.7 percent.

The oversamples of Chicagoans who identify as Asian, Black, and Latino; as well as K-12 parents who identify as Asian, Black, Latino, and white were weighted down to their proportions in the overall population in the final main study weights. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for all Chicagoans. The margin of error for subpopulations are as follows:

- +/- 5.68 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for parents
- +/- 3.99 percentage point at the 95% confidence level for nonparents
- +/- 13.37 percentage point at the 95% confidence level for Asian respondents
- +/- 6.13 percentage point at the 95% confidence level for Black respondents
- +/- 7.56 percentage point at the 95% confidence level for Latino respondents
- +/- 5.68 percentage point at the 95% confidence level for white respondents

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Selected questions in this survey are trended with a telephone survey conducted February 7 to 28, 2013 for the Joyce Foundation by NORC. The 2013 survey was based on a representative probability sample of the Chicago residents aged 18 years or older (N=1,010). The sampling frame was constructed from random-digit dial and cell phone residential telephone directories in Chicago. Oversampling of parents with children aged five to 17 years old was done to achieve a roughly 50 percent CPS adult proportion in the sample. Further information about the 2013 survey can be found at https://www.norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdfs/Joyce_Tribune_NORC%20education%20survey_with_percent_tables_2-DTP%20Formatted.pdf.

To inform the development of the current survey, Public Agenda conducted seven demographically diverse online focus groups with adult residents of Chicago. Five focus groups were conducted in English in July and August 2023 and two in Spanish in October 2023. Three of the English groups and both Spanish groups were conducted with parents of K-12 school children, including parents of children in traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, and homeschooling. The remaining two English groups were conducted with nonparents.

For a topline with full question wording and neighborhood definitions please [follow this link](#). For other inquiries about the research, please email research@publicagenda.org.