



# THE PLAN FOR **STRONGER SCHOOL COMMUNITIES** **12 POINTS TO EDUCATION LIBERATION**

As a former teacher, Brandon Johnson is passionate about making sure that every student in Chicago – regardless of their race, income or zip code – receives a fully resourced, supportive, safe and healthy learning environment.

Chicago is a decade removed from the greatest mass school closure of Black and Latine schools in U.S. history. If we can build sustainable community schools alongside quality affordable housing, we will reverse the trend. We must also tackle the violence epidemic with more holistic measures that provide resources and trauma intervention for students and families.

**This is how Brandon Johnson's Plan for Stronger School Communities will accomplish this, as well as provide care and nurture for our most vulnerable students, youngest learners, immigrant families and all stakeholders in Chicago Public Schools and City Colleges of Chicago.**

## **Bilingual Ed and Real Sanctuary in Chicago Public Schools**

Chicago's public schools must be sanctuaries for all children, including new and undocumented immigrants and refugees. As an organizer in 2019, Brandon Johnson helped secure historic contract victories in removing obstacles to parents of English Language Learners (ELL) volunteering in schools, and increased transparency around budgeting for ELL resources and materials; establishing ways that Chicago Public Schools must protect immigrant students; barring U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement entry to school buildings without a criminal court warrant; and allowing leave to CPS employees for immigration matters.

As mayor, **Brandon Johnson will support developing pipelines for teachers and school staff – including bilingual teachers and clinicians – so that immigrant students receive the support they deserve.** He will invest in fully funded ethnic studies, bilingual education and dual language programs where students learn native histories and cultures. He will strengthen English as a Second Language instruction and support for students, and for displaced immigrant families living in shelters, provide them CPS Students in Temporary Living Situation status so they receive the benefits all unhoused students deserve such as transcript waivers and microgrants to help meet their needs.

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When there is a large influx of new students in school communities, there must also be a large increase in investments to support those students. Our schools already lack the resources they need, so not providing more resources takes away from all students, which is unacceptable. We must ensure that these children and their families are receiving the support they need beyond the classroom. As mayor, Brandon Johnson will work with CPS to coordinate seamlessly with local community-based agencies and government at all levels to triage support, provide translation and housing placement, and connect students and families with all available services.

## Child Care for All

This moment of increased attention on the crises of our current child care system is a key opportunity in the struggle for much needed reforms. By working together, parents, child care workers, and community allies can win the fight for child care for all and transform Illinois' child care system into a model for the rest of the nation.

Our current child care system is broken: child care is **unavailable** and **unaffordable** for working families, and **unsustainable** due to low pay and working conditions.

- Right now, child care is **largely unavailable** in Chicago. The majority of Chicagoans live in communities that lack enough licensed child care slots to meet families' need for care.
- Child care is **unaffordable**. In Chicago, the average annual cost of child care for an infant is close to \$19,000 – more than the cost of in-state tuition at a public university.
- And for child care workers, low pay and poor working conditions make child care work **unsustainable**. In Chicago, many early childhood educators and teacher assistants make little more than the Chicago minimum wage of \$15.40 per hour. Licensed home providers make on average as little as \$4.21 per hour working 70.5 hours per week. Nearly 20% of early childhood educators in Illinois live in poverty.

We already have a model for how our child care system can work: public schools. Child care is a public good, and should be invested in as such. A better child care system is possible – one in which all families have access to high quality care and where every child care worker is paid a living wage. Every family should have access to affordable child care, no matter their race, zip code, or income level.

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Brandon Johnson will make sure that parents and child care workers have a seat at the table when decisions are made about child care in the city, and he will lift up their voices on the state level, to the governor and legislators in Springfield, knowing that the child care crisis is largely a result of the tax breaks enjoyed by billionaires and corporations in the state.

**The bottom line is that it's time for families to come first, and if corporations paid what they owed in taxes, Illinois could fund free child care for all.** Every child care worker could receive living wages and benefits. An investment in child care is an investment in a workforce powered by women, working parents, our children, and our future. And it's long overdue.

## Committing to City Colleges of Chicago

Brandon Johnson will expand the Sustainable Community Schools model to the City Colleges of Chicago, and connect it to a vision of healthy, green and anti-racist curricula beyond K-12. Imagine a partnership with City Colleges, where a student receives academic programming in the morning during their junior or senior year of high school. They then commute (for free, on the CTA) in the afternoon to a trades center like the Arturo Velasquez Institute at Daley College to learn welding. These are the kinds of partnerships that will be fostered in a Johnson administration.

As mayor, Brandon Johnson will embrace the spirit of democracy in endorsing an elected City Colleges Board of Trustees, and unlike the current mayoral administration, vows not to break the promise of an elected representative governing body once elected. He will also provide free developmental education for students, faculty and staff, and return programs back to colleges that had them prior to the 2010-2017 Reinvention initiative – especially health programs.

## Fully Funding, Staffing and Resourcing

Families should not have to leave their community to find a school with a music program, a sports program, a nurse in every school or a library with a librarian. We have to use what we already know about the strengths, weaknesses and assets in our schools to ensure that we are directing resources to where they are needed to make every school community flourish.

Student-based budgeting (SBB) and the former SQRP rating policy have had a devastating impact on our schools. SBB, in particular, has contributed to principals whose budgets are strapped to choose between keeping a veteran teacher or having a librarian and a functioning library. Schools struggling with enrollment need to have a process by which root causes are identified and resources are deployed to ensure students still have the richest possible education, and schools have an opportunity to grow their enrollment.

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It is hugely frustrating that five years after school funding reform, Chicago Public Schools is still receiving a billion dollars a year less than the minimum state guidelines recommend. **The current funding structure, which provides state dollars on a per-student basis, creates a huge disadvantage for schools in communities like Chicago** where enrollment and Black populations are declining. But the state, in its evidence-based funding model, has recognized that student and community needs must drive school funding, and that all districts must be brought up to a certain level of resources to meet those needs.

As mayor, **Brandon Johnson will work side-by-side with Governor J.B. Pritzker and the General Assembly** to overhaul the CPS school funding formula and make sure our school communities receive the state funding they need and deserve.

## Green Schools Facilities Plan

Drastic improvements to CPS buildings are long overdue, including the need to **replace outdated and ineffective heating and cooling systems, improve ventilation and insulation, and remediate asbestos, lead, and mold** that pose a risk to students and staff.

As mayor, Brandon Johnson will launch immediate efforts at these upgrades, and promote a campaign for green schools to aid the district and City Colleges of Chicago in mitigating and preparing for the unfolding climate crisis by:

- Retrofitting, weatherizing CPS schools to make them more energy efficient
- Remediating schools for lead, asbestos, and mold
- Installing new electric, energy efficient heating and cooling systems
- Installing new ventilation systems
- Installing solar panels at CPS schools to produce clean energy
- Supporting green technology with climate justice curriculum
- Sourcing 100% of the energy used by CPS from renewable sources
- Expanding solar energy career programs in place at Juarez and Prosser
- Supporting a pathway to green careers for CPS students
- Implementing composting, community gardening, sustainable practices

## Housing the Unhoused

Homelessness and housing insecurity affects nearly 20,000 Chicago Public Schools students, who may be living on the streets, in shelters, doubled up with family members or living in other temporary living situations. **Black students, who make up less than 40% of CPS students, are 80% of the unhoused.** No child should have to endure this kind of instability and hardship.

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As mayor, Brandon Johnson will support the expansion of housing assistance, as well as the **Bring Chicago Home ordinance** – a proposal for a one-time tax on homes sold for \$1 million or more that would generate revenue dedicated to housing and programs to alleviate homelessness. The Johnson administration would also use community outreach to launch a citywide assessment of public buildings and empty schools to discuss repurpose possibilities. **There are many facilities across the city that can serve as SROs and affordable housing units at cost to address the crisis of the 65,000+ unhoused in Chicago.**

In Boston, Mayor Michelle Wu worked with Boston Teachers Union president Jessica Tang to provide actual housing for nearly 4,000 homeless students. When Chicago teachers proposed a similar program in 2019, the current mayor said a contract is “not the appropriate place for the city to legislate its affordable housing policy.” **Brandon Johnson will not refuse to house unhoused students and families**, but will have the city’s Department of Family and Support Services work directly with the district to match housing with the needs of our most vulnerable students.

## Making Every School a Sustainable Community School

Sustainable Community Schools are community hubs designed to provide wraparound academic, health, and social support for school communities beyond the traditional school day. SCS brings students, parents, educators, staff, community and service providers together to promote neighborhood health and well-being. **It is a community-led, community-driven approach to educational justice and equity.**

SCS builds on the traditional community school model to prioritize specific pillars and principles to make schools the anchors of their communities, and to share leadership around meeting student, family, educator, staff and community needs. The seven principles of SCS are:

- Racial justice and equity
- Community self-determination
- Valuing community knowledge and wisdom
- Shared leadership
- Transparency and trusting relationships
- Reflective learning culture
- Whole-child/person approach to education

These principles are recognized through six pillars:

- Curricula that are engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging

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- An emphasis on high-quality teaching, not high-stakes testing
- Wrap-around supports and opportunities
- Restorative/transformational justice and other positive discipline practices
- Authentic parent and community engagement
- Inclusive school leadership

**SCS communities have parent mentors, community programming and partnerships to provide additional support for mental and physical health across the district.** Kelly High School and Beidler Elementary are examples of vibrant neighborhood school communities using culturally relevant curriculum and community partnerships to advance the academic and social/emotional needs of countless children. However, we need to do more and better. That will require greater investments in addressing the needs of unhoused students and families, students living with disabilities and all the newcomers who do not speak English as their primary language. It also cannot continue to be the case that selective enrollment schools, which provide students with the most extensive course offerings, extracurriculars and athletic opportunities, serve only the wealthiest students in the district.

The SCS model is a way to transform neighborhood schools that have been starved of resources for generations.

**Chicago Public Schools should be an entire school district with anti-racist curriculum, a Career and Technical Education pipeline, capital planning incorporating green building initiatives and more.** As mayor, Brandon Johnson will work to expand the SCS model from pre-kindergarten to the City Colleges, providing academic, health and social support beyond the school day.

## Special Education

Less than 40% of Chicago Public Schools are fully accessible for students, staff, and parents with disabilities. Furthermore, more than 40,000 CPS students have disabilities, and over half come from families whose first language is not English. Students with disabilities, particularly Black students, are also more likely to enter the school-to-prison pipeline. The graduation rate of students with disabilities is 13% less than the general population.

As mayor, Brandon Johnson will work tirelessly addressing the needs of special education students in Chicago Public Schools. He will provide greater clinical support to properly diagnose and service the individualized education programs of SPED students, including ramping up pipelines with state and local funding to hire additional teachers, special education classroom assistants and teacher assistants to address the accumulated needs of students living with disabilities.



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A Johnson administration would use Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) capital investment funds to ensure all parts of schools are fully accessible for students with disabilities. ADA cannot be limited only to first floor accessibility. **Any new CPS construction or renovations must include plans to guarantee accessibility throughout school buildings.** In addition, he will make it a priority to make improvements to buildings that currently lack access – including those buildings constructed pre-ADA.

Brandon Johnson will work jointly with the district and the state of Illinois to make sure we are fully funding special education in CPS, and meeting students' individual needs. Under his leadership, the district would be encouraged to take less punitive actions to decrease the number of out-of-school and in-school suspensions for students with disabilities, and ensure that they have access to social workers, counselors, and nurses every day in every school. He will increase access to social-emotional learning (SEL) centered on dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and provide better access to mental health services and diversion programs that can be provided by the city and sister agencies. And he will create a pathway for students to employment and opportunities in the workforce, which will decrease their interaction with the criminal justice system.

## **Students Ride Free on CTA All Year**

When families have to pay hundreds of dollars a year for students to commute to schools outside of their neighborhood because their neighborhood public school is under-resourced, that's adding inequity to inequality. This is a significant barrier to learning in a district that is composed of nearly 73% economically disadvantaged students who qualify for free lunch.

Further, many students cannot walk to and from school due to family concerns about safety, and years of school closures have made for fewer neighborhood schools.

**As mayor, Brandon Johnson will make public transit free for all Chicago Public School students**, whether they're on their way to school, headed downtown to the Art Institute, or going to softball practice. **Our young people deserve the freedom of the city**, and providing them CTA access free of charge is an investment in their daily lives and in their futures.

## **Treating Student and Family Trauma**

Brandon Johnson will address the trauma that existed pre-COVID-19, knowing that the pandemic exposed and exacerbated conditions around Aramark's failure to keep schools clean, bilingual education, access to technology, special education services and more, that city leaders left unaddressed for decades.

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Violence in our city's streets is traumatizing our children, and that trauma follows them into the classroom. **Asking a student to catch up on math when they are still recovering from the death of a loved one, or a classmate, is inhumane.**

Violence against or experienced by children traumatizes not just the classroom, but entire families and school communities. This means that a wide and continuing range of services is required to help individuals and families begin to heal. We can start with building a CPS Trauma Response Network at schools that have been impacted by violence. Students and families must have trauma support, such as weekly cognitive behavioral therapy, and students need summer jobs and engaging programming.

Trauma is particularly acute in Black and Latine communities where violence and poverty conspire to undermine dreams and opportunities. Brandon Johnson will equip educators and students with the skills to receive paid transformational training such as restorative conversations, peer jury, and peace circles throughout the district. Additional ways to provide support and intervention are:

- Robust and relational violence prevention and interruption
- Stronger and clearer immediate “day of” protocols after a violent incident
- Stronger and clearer immediate aftermath “next day” protocols
- Sustainable longer term infrastructure and trauma support
- Options and resources for victim recognition and memorialization

Our students need thoughtful professionals and healthy means of managing their trauma, but CPS has only about 20% of the number of social workers recommended by the National Association of Social Workers. **Brandon Johnson will support student and staff mental health by infusing schools with mental health professionals like social workers, psychologists, counselors and clinicians** so that unaddressed trauma is acknowledged, and treated, and learning is more of the focus from day to day. **Teachers and staff need adequate time and professional development to help address student needs.** And educators need to be empowered with planning time to reinvigorate curriculum and work with students to ensure instructional practices and pedagogy meet students' needs and interests.

## Understanding Under-Enrollment and Under-Utilization

**Small schools are not inefficient.** Smaller schools can serve as the perfect incubators for the Sustainable Community School model, as well as pilot programs in mentoring, community outreach and partnerships to provide additional support for families and students.



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Regarding under-enrollment and under-utilization, it's important to remember when the district's enrollment decline began. **Where we are today is exactly ten years after the greatest closure of Black and Latine schools in U.S. history.** That's not a coincidence. Enrollment also decreases due to poor program design, like we have seen in the district moving to an online, centralized application process for preschool that puts families with little access to technology at a disadvantage.

To remedy under-enrollment, **Brandon Johnson will advocate making more creative use of excess space in small schools rather than closing them, by co-locating revenue-generating facilities such as child care and health clinics.** These types of entrepreneurial approaches can also help generate more funding for our schools without raising taxes. School communities also need direct investment, guarantees of staffing and program offerings. **Every school should have a library and librarian, adequate clinicians and counselors, thriving arts offerings and sports programs and teams.**

The mayor of Chicago has an obligation to be actively fighting in partnership for the revenue required to fulfill those basic needs for *every* school in the city, not just some.

## Youth Employment and Educator Apprenticeship Pipelines

Year-round youth employment, in conjunction with private sector and city sister agencies, is the type of transformative, meaningful and engaging opportunity that sustains itself with the reduction of violence, trauma and interactions with law enforcement. Brandon Johnson will build a career and technical (CTE) corridor where schools like Fenger, Chicago Vocational, Phillips, Tilden and Dunbar offer specialized programming for building our green economy, aviation, electric vehicles, solar installation, plumbing, construction, cosmetology and more professional education that will **empower our Black and Latine students to become the next generation of unionized trade workers.**

This vision is complementary to one laid out by CPS CEO Pedro Martinez, but our city needs leadership in city hall for support and implementation. We also need to better train young Chicagoans to fill the jobs that exist today. There are around 30,000 unfilled manufacturing jobs across the state, and a good number of them are here in Chicago. But we've abandoned CTE training in our schools. Modern manufacturing jobs require tech skills, and it is our job to give our students the skills necessary to succeed.

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Additionally, the district's programming to develop a pipeline of educators from the ranks of security guards, special education classroom assistants, and paraprofessionals is woefully inadequate. There is no reason that Crane High School, for example, can't provide its students with preliminary certification to practice nursing in Chicago Public schools, along with fully paid college to acquire all necessary licensure in an expedited fashion.

**We have a deep reservoir of incredible Black and Latine women and men already working in our schools** and local school councils that are ready and willing to fill critical vacancies in nursing, counseling, social work, bilingual and special education. **Brandon Johnson will provide the leadership, and the support of programs like Grow Your Own Teachers**, to develop talent from within communities and school communities, to make this simple and game-changing idea a reality.