

November 4, 2025, Special Board Meeting Written Comments
Received between Friday, October 31st and Wednesday, November 5th Submitted
via Written Comments Form

1	To the CPS Board: My name is Deborah S., and I am long-time Chicago resident, public schooling advocate, and a parent of a sophomore at Chicago High School for the Arts. I am writing to you to express my concern regarding the Chicago High School for the Arts, known as ChiArts, and I ask that you strongly consider keeping it open past June 2026, under its current conservatory model. I also ask that you work with all concerned parties (teachers, parents, students, etc.) to form the new future of ChiArts. I am glad to see that there is a resolution in front of you on November 4th to this effect. I strongly encourage you to vote yes and support this unique school. While I have concerns about the financial statements in the resolution (specifically calling out preserving administrative jobs and not instructors), I trust these are items that can be worked together on to make sure the school continues on in it's conservatory model. ChiArts is a unique school that serves a similarly unique community within our city. It provides both academic and conservatory classes to students who have a passion for the arts – who want to make a living in the arts. These scholar-artists are challenged academically and artistically, to grow and learn as much as possible in this environment. These are students who audition and compete to get in to this school. Students who attend longer than normal school days to get that extra training. Students who compete (and are recognized) in national arts competitions. And these students would not get that same experience or exposure without the working artist conservatory teachers who help them thrive and push them to be the best they can be. ChiArts draws from every single neighborhood across the city. It creates a truly unified Chicago community, where every person is seen and heard and celebrated for who they are. Minority voices are celebrated in showcases throughout the year. Students who would be wary of being themselves in a traditional high school experience have the freedom to be their full, authentic selves in this safe space. Personally, my trans child is not just “surviving” high school, he is thriving at ChiArts – something I do not think I'd be able say would be possible at a traditional high school. The ChiArts community and learning experience is invaluable to its families. Students and families choose this school over closer arts programs for the unique opportunity it provides. Many families make daily sacrifices of time and energy to get their students to school – driving or bussing past other high schools in the process - because they feel, right so, that ChiArts is worth it. ChiArts has a proven history of graduating working artists – some who enrich Chicago's art scene today; and some who have chosen to come back to ChiArts to teach as well as create. These alumni provide great examples to our scholar-artists that a viable life working in the arts is possible and obtainable. Please, vote to keep ChiArts open with its conservatory model in place. Please work with the parents and teachers in building the future structure of this school. Thank you for your time and consideration, Deborah S.
2	Thank you to all Board members for your compassion and curiosity over the past month as you deliberate on whether and how to best preserve the value ChiArts brings to CPS and Chicago. Given everything else swirling around us these days, it would have been easy to sweep this under the rug and move on, and yet you engaged, asked questions, and listened to students,

	parents, artists, and the community. There is more conversation to be had, and yet you have set the tone with your engagement. As a lifelong Chicagoan and a former CPS employee, I know that every decision has to make both educational and financial sense. As you make your final decisions on how to vote, one item I would ask you to consider is the type of student ChiArts attracts and the opportunity given to other students in the district. Our amazing describe enrollment high schools provide opportunities for high-achieving academic students to reach their full potential in academic and extracurricular pursuits. Most of not all of the students at ChiArts would not have access to spots at these school. And yet, they have aptitude and passion equal to those who do attend those amazing high schools. This aptitude just comes in a pursuit that does not get as much attention, and yet, those who excel have as much of an impact on our communities as those who excel at math, science, or other academic pursuits. Keeping a selective enrollment arts school, where those who commit spend their academic and extracurricular time in pursuit of excellence, has a place in our district. Even if questions remain about how to sustain it, we need look no further than to how we sustain Young, Books, Northside, Jones, Peyton, and Lane. If more creativity than that is needed, we will find a way. We will. That was once dubbed “the spirit of Chicago.” It was all over shorts and signs in the 70s and 80s when I was growing up. This sense that Chicago could do anything, and although we have a long way to go still on the “we” part of that, the spirit still remains. Those of us who love this school will do whatever we can to show you this school is worth the effort. We just need the support to navigate this transition and fulfill the promise of the school to those already there. Once we have that, anything is possible. Thank you!
3	As a parent of two ChiArts Scholar Artists—a Senior in Musical Theatre and a Freshman in Visual Arts—I’ve witnessed the unique benefits of ChiArts’ Conservatory model firsthand. Both my children have grown under the guidance of experienced industry professionals. My senior is now applying to BFA Musical Theatre programs nationwide, relying on skills developed over four years such as audition techniques and repertoire selection. This education goes beyond standard performing arts training; with an extra 15 hours each week, students gain essential preparation for careers in the arts. Even with long commutes and a school day that extends 3 hours longer than their peers, my kids are motivated each and every day to balance this difficult schedule based on the practical experience they receive. If ChiArts removes its extended day Conservatory model, it would greatly hinder its ability to nurture future generations of talented and diverse artists.
4	Dear Dr. King, Dr. Carmona, and the Chicago Board of Education- Thank you so much for your careful consideration and for opening your heart to the youth of Chicago! I urge you to vote to keep ChiArts open and preserve the conservatory model that has made it a source of pride for our city and a beacon for arts education nationwide! My daughter has found “her people” at ChiArts. For her, it has become a source of inspiration, a source of drive, and understanding. It is a place where she can be herself and not feel out wasted for who she is. And I’m not just referring to the Arts. The academic staff is so wonderful too and they help her work hard and focus on her academics as well, all while balancing this passion for her craft working towards a professional career of her dreams. Vote “yes” to save ChiArts and preserve this conservatory model. Thank you!
5	Good morning board members, I had the pleasure of speaking at last's week board meeting about additional oversight of the Aspira Network due to mid-semester layoffs. On Friday, Aspira Early College high school staff was informed that we no longer can request substitute teachers and would have to conduct internal coverage on top of a printer paper shortage that is requiring that we digitizing classwork to conserve the small printing paper batch. As conditions being to deteriorate at the Aspira

	Network, our staff and students have started to wonder about our school's future. I ask that this board have the Aspira Network be more transparency about Aspira's finances and the steps they are taking to mitigate any additional cut to staff and/or resources.
6	To the Board of Representatives, Thank you for taking additional time to review the unique opportunity you have to support young artists from all over Chicagoland in their education and in their development as artists. Chicago High School for the Arts represents a unique opportunity for creative and passionate artists to develop their craft, and it helps to prepare them for their future and the world they will inherit. By voting to support them as a CPS managed school, and maintain its Conservatory model, you will ensure that children from all over Chicago have an opportunity to follow their passion, as they build their confidence as artists and community members. They will learn from teaching professionals, regardless of their family's ability to pay for the instruction. This is what makes the school so unique. Changing the Conservatory model would remove the entire reason for a school like Chi Arts to exist and pre-professional Art training would again be limited to those children whose families have both the financial means and who equally support their future Artists by taking them around the city for training every day. By supporting the conservatory, future artists can truly represent all that Chicago has to offer, and their unique points of view can be shared with the world. Thank you for recognizing what makes ChiArts unique and vital to our community. I appreciate your time, Sincerely, Parent of a Chi Arts Junior Actor
7	When people hear that EPIC Academy will close its doors at the end of the 2025–2026 school year, many assume it reflects a failure—of leadership, of charter schools, or of innovation. But that’s not the truth. Let me be clear: EPIC is not closing because we are not a great school that kids want to attend. We are not closing because of mismanagement. We are closing because of structural and policy failures that make it nearly impossible for small, high-quality schools in under-resourced neighborhoods to survive—no matter how well they serve their students. A School That Works EPIC Academy, located in South Chicago, serves 244 students and has achieved 97%+ graduation year after year. Just last year we had over a dozen students receive \$1 million in scholarship offers with the class of 2025 amassing over \$20 million in scholarships. We offer four years of College and Career Skills courses through One Goal (whose birth place was Epic). Our students leave with college acceptances, career credentials, and a deep sense of purpose. Our Career Intensives programming allows students to engage with industry professionals to explore their passions. This includes project -based learning and internships. We were planning for the future. We were planning to build a new school building to match our 21st-century ambitions. But we are closing, not because that vision failed, but because the system around us refuses to sustain what works. Overbuilt and Under-Served: The Enrollment Crisis According to the Greater Stony Island Annual Regional Analysis (2024–2025): There are 6,621 more high school seats than students in the region. High school enrollment in the area has declined by 5.9% since 2021, even while elementary enrollment has stayed steady. Despite a 92% high school application rate among 8th graders, only 81% of students received one of their top 3 choices, lower than the district average. According to the district’s 20th day enrollment found on their website: There are 51 high schools citywide with enrollment of less than 300 students, 27 of them are district schools. There are 16 elementary schools within a two mile radius of Epic. The total number of 8th grade students this school year for those 16 schools is 641. EPIC Was Set Up to Compete, Not Succeed We’re caught in a rigged game. Like all CPS high schools, EPIC participates in GoCPS, but the system disadvantages charter schools by design.

Here's what we've learned through FOIA:

Neighborhood district schools are automatically assigned to students in their geographic area—regardless of what families select—giving them an inflated number of “offers.”

As CPS explained: “General Ed programs at Neighborhood Schools automatically created offers for students who live in the Neighborhood area. This is why Neighborhood Programs in this dataset have higher offer numbers.”

Meanwhile, charter schools like EPIC are not even visible in the default school locator results.

CPS admitted: “The current configuration prioritizes district schools in the initial view... Charter schools are accessible via the more options menu, but not shown by default.”

That's not a “choice system.” That's a controlled distribution system masked as choice. And it disproportionately hurts under-resourced communities.

At the same time, charter schools like EPIC are underfunded. By law, we are supposed to receive 97% of the district's per-pupil funding (PCTC). We don't.

Compare our numbers:

EPIC: 244 students | \$4.2M budget

Bowen HS (District-Managed): 256 students | \$6.36M budget

Two schools. Nearly identical enrollment. A \$2 million funding gap.

EPIC did not fail. Our students didn't fail. Our teachers didn't fail. Our leaders didn't fail. The system failed.

We don't need more narratives about the “end of the charter experiment.” We need the city to look in the mirror and ask: How do we sustain great schools, regardless of governance model, when students and families need them most?

****ATTACHMENTS****

To the Members of the Chicago Board of Education:

I am writing as a concerned Chicago Public Schools stakeholder to respectfully request that the Board review the leadership and hiring practices within the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) under the current Chief, Mr. Joshua Long.

Since Mr. Long's appointment, the department has undergone numerous changes. While some have been positive and aimed at improving outcomes for students with disabilities, others have raised concerns regarding staff expertise, equity, and the department's overall capacity to support schools, educators, and families effectively.

Over the past several months, there has been significant turnover among experienced OSD staff, including individuals with deep institutional knowledge and expertise in special education. This turnover, combined with reports of staff positions being filled by individuals who may lack relevant experience or formal training in special education, raises questions about the department's ability to ensure compliance with federal and state special education laws and to provide appropriate supports across the district.

Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding equity in hiring and promotion practices within OSD—particularly related to women and staff of color. This pattern warrants review to ensure fair, transparent, and inclusive personnel practices across all levels of the department.

Given the importance of this department in serving CPS's most vulnerable learners, I urge the Board to conduct a thorough review of:

- The current organizational structure and qualifications of senior leadership within OSD;
- Hiring and personnel practices under current leadership;
- The department's ability to maintain compliance with IDEA and other special education mandates in light of staffing changes.

As the federal education landscape evolves, it is essential that CPS ensure that OSD is led by individuals with the appropriate expertise, experience, and commitment to equitable, legally sound, and student-centered practices.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns and for your continued commitment to ensuring high-quality educational services for all CPS students.

Respectfully,
A Concerned CPS Stakeholder