

### **Current Proposal & Goals:**

Chicago Public Schools seeks to convert National Teachers Academy into a high school, freezing elementary enrollment and allowing students in grades 2 and above to stay at NTA until graduation. CPS says the conversion and distribution of students will allow the Black, White, and Asian communities in surrounding neighborhoods to integrate within a much needed area high school. The proposal to close NTA would invest \$10 million to convert the building for high school students, while diverting NTA students to South Loop Elementary, whose student population will then be split into three campuses.

### **CUE Town Halls**

Chicago United for Equity (CUE) hosted a series of three town halls to solicit community input as part of a racial equity analysis, examining the impact this proposal would have on low-income students and students of color. The series drew hundreds of affected attendees, whose input in focus groups shaped this report. Attendees came from the Near South Side, Bronzeville, Chinatown, and South Loop.

### **Community Concerns:**

- Shutting down a 1+ rated program with majority black, low-income student population.
- High cost proposal that simultaneously ignores existing neighborhood high school programs.
- Implications of low-income students shouldering burdens of a plan that benefits affluent peers.
- Continuing the historical legacy of school closures and destabilization in minority communities.
- Ongoing construction disrupting student learning over multiple years at NTA.
- Communities pitted against each other in fight for resources and neighborhood needs.
- Lack of procedural transparency and responsiveness to input from impacted families.

### **Alternative Proposals:**

1. **Moving NTA to new building:** *House SLE's K-5<sup>th</sup> grades in current building, and consolidate SLE's 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades with NTA's entire program into the new building at 16<sup>th</sup> & Dearborn, allowing for a high school at NTA's current location.*
2. **Investing in existing neighborhood schools:** *Allocate funding for this proposal to strengthen Dunbar and/or Phillips, adding selective enrollment seats, IB, STEAM, and ELL programming.*
3. **Selling old SLE facility:** *Transition SLE's Pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grades entirely to its new construction at 16<sup>th</sup> & Dearborn, keeping NTA where it is. Sell current SLE property in lucrative neighborhood, netting up to \$35m for new South Loop high school building.*
4. **Redistributing Selective Enrollment:** *Reduce Selective Enrollment seats at Jones College Prep to create 500 new neighborhood openings. Expansion to Phillips, Dunbar, would follow after.*
5. **Developing academic center and high school:** *House SLE's K-6<sup>th</sup> grades in current building, and move 7-12<sup>th</sup> into new construction at 16<sup>th</sup> & Dearborn.*

### **Resulting Recommendations:**

Town hall participants supported CPS *putting its current proposal for conversion of NTA on hold*, while conducting a *transparent study on the racial and socioeconomic impacts* of this plan. Further *analysis of alternative proposals*, which accommodate the needs of all impacted communities in an equitable and responsive manner, is recommended. Attending focus groups advised that viable proposals be voted on in a *public referendum*, allowing for greater community buy-in and sustained coalition building.

**STEP #1: WHAT IS THE PROPOSAL AND THE DESIRED RESULTS AND OUTCOMES?**

**1. Describe the policy, program, practice, or budget decision (for the sake of brevity, we refer to this as a “proposal” in the remainder of these steps).**

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) wants to convert National Teachers’ Academy (NTA) into a new high school, freezing elementary enrollment and allowing students in grades 2 and above to stay at NTA until graduation. CPS says the conversion and distribution of students will allow the Black, White, and Asian communities in the surrounding neighborhoods to integrate within the school community. The proposed decision to close NTA would invest \$10 million to transform the building into a new high school in the South Loop Area. NTA students will be merged into another school, South Loop Elementary, and the 1,900 students from the new school will be split into 3 separate buildings.

**2. What are the intended results (in the community) and outcomes (within government structures)?**

The proposed policy is intended to address a lack of "quality" high school seats in the Near South area. The policy intends to support integration, while increasing outcomes and opportunities in the Near South communities.

**3. What does this proposal have an ability to impact?**

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Children and youth</u></b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Housing</u></b> <sup>2</sup>              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Community engagement</u></b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Services                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting equity                 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Jobs</u></b>                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal justice                   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Parks and Recreation</u></b> <sup>3</sup> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Economic development</u></b> | <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Planning/Development</u></b> <sup>4</sup> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Education</u></b>            | <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Transportation</u></b> <sup>5</sup>       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Utilities                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food access and affordability      | <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce Equity                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Government practices</u></b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <b><u>Segregation/Integration</u></b>    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Health</u></b> <sup>1</sup>  |  |

<sup>1</sup> National Teachers Academy Health Center, run by UI Health, is located at NTA’s campus.

<sup>2</sup> Changing property values as a result of a new high school will impact neighborhood housing accessibility.

<sup>3</sup> Chicago Parks District currently administers the adjacent annex holding a pool and pre-K center.

<sup>4</sup> Chicago Housing Authority plans to redevelop nearby land for mixed-use public housing.

<sup>5</sup> New student drop-off points would be established for South Loop Elementary, impacting local traffic.

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**STEP #2: WHAT ARE THE DATA? WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US?**

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**1. Will the proposal have impacts in specific geographic areas (neighborhoods, areas, or regions)?  
What are the racial demographics of those living in the area?**

Impacted neighborhoods on the near South-Side include Chinatown, Bronzeville, and South Loop. From a macro-viewpoint the area is diverse and reasonably well resourced. Town hall participants from across the attendance boundaries however discussed the complex relationship between these communities of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as the socio-economic imbalances that exist between adjacent neighborhoods, and the historical contexts of each district.

**NTA Community:**

National Teachers Academy is located at a racially diverse, yet compartmentalized neighborhood crossroads. The surrounding population is 40% white, and no single demographic makes up an overall majority. The student populace at NTA is 78% black and 75% low-income, two populations for whom CPS has historically struggled to deliver educational attainment on par with students from other backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. The school significantly outperforms CPS and statewide average reading attainment for black students, both males and females<sup>7</sup>. NTA's Title I program has a 1+ SQRP rating by CPS, rising from a level 3 program in 2014 in a two-year timespan. The closing of 50 CPS programs in 2013 displaced 1,728 students in ward 3, where NTA is located<sup>8</sup>. NTA was a receiving school for many of these students, and 250 previously displaced students currently attend the school<sup>9</sup>.

**Chinatown Community:**

Chinatown falls within the attendance boundaries of CPS' proposed high school at NTA. This majority Asian-American population has long advocated for a dedicated high school for its students, over 70% of whom currently study outside of the neighborhood. Students from this area attend predominantly low-income elementary schools, and over a quarter are Limited English Proficient, qualifying them for English Language Learner supports in instructional settings<sup>10</sup>. Having a high school closer to home would help bolster community identity and preserve cultural transmission for these students. The "high school desert" in Chinatown is a decades-long problem for the area, and with an expanding Asian-American population, especially in the corridor southwest of NTA, the need for a long-term high school solution is growing ever more urgent.

**South Loop Community:**

The South Loop is in the midst of an ongoing population surge, which has exacerbated overcrowding at its South Loop Elementary (SLE). The neighborhood surrounding SLE is racially diverse and affluent, with a median household income range almost double Chicago's overall average<sup>11</sup>. Its adult population boasts

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1: National Teachers Academy School Profile.

<sup>7</sup> See appendices 3 & 4, analysis by Paul Zavitkovsky.

<sup>8</sup> "CPS School Building Closings," Chicago Tribune: [http://graphics.chicagotribune.com/school\\_utilization/](http://graphics.chicagotribune.com/school_utilization/)

<sup>9</sup> Attendance figures supplied by Isaac Castelaz, CUE Town Hall 12/14/2017

<sup>10</sup> See appendix 5: Chinatown Elementary Enrollment and Student Demographics.

<sup>11</sup> See appendix 6: "Demographics of the South Loop"

college degree attainment of over 60%, and 86% of its student population is enrolled in private schools<sup>12</sup>. An influx of students enrolling at SLE has pushed their building past its original capacity. SLE is one of 31 CPS programs considered “overcrowded” as of 2017, meaning it falls outside of the 70-110% utilization range that earns schools an “efficient” status. SLE’s utilization rate is 113%, with 90 students in attendance above its ideal capacity of 690<sup>13</sup>. South Loop’s Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance, a private community group, began advocating for the conversion of NTA into a high school in 2015.

**2. What does population level data, including quantitative and qualitative data, tell you about existing racial inequities? What does it tell you about root causes or factors influencing racial inequities?**

**NTA Community:**

A frequent observation from attendees at the town hall series focused on the racial disparities between NTA’s student population, and the population of its zoned boundary area. The school’s demographics are majority black and low-income, yet the surrounding population that has access to this school is 40% white, less than 25% black, and boasts a median household income almost \$40,000 higher than Chicago’s average<sup>14</sup>. This indicates that a sizeable percentage of these eligible families have opted to send their students to other schools. One NTA parent expressed that “these methods [the proposed conversion] are meant to safeguard white upper-class people and always ensure a space for them, even if it means disrupting communities of color.” Population trends are increasing in the neighborhood, yet many parents, predominantly white and more affluent, appear reticent to rely on NTA as their neighborhood school of choice.

**Chinatown Community:**

Like South Loop and the Near South Side, Chinatown’s population – overwhelmingly of East-Asian background - has experienced growth in recent years. This has spread beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood, especially in the corridor to the southeast of NTA’s location<sup>15</sup>. This expanding community has long demanded a neighborhood high school, and began lobbying in earnest over the past decade for a new high school with college preparation courses, STEAM options, and English Language Learner instruction. The proposed conversion of NTA from an elementary school to a high school will deliver on some of these goals. However, Chinatown activists describe it as a short-term solution, since its limited capacity – coupled with building constraints for high school students – falls short of many of the long-term goals of community advocates. Currently schools outside of the neighborhood offer programs to attract students from Chinatown in the absence of a dedicated local program. One example of this is the specialized language services that have been created for students coming from the neighborhood to Brighton Park, a proactive approach that fills a need for students, while simultaneously ensuring higher enrollment for schools outside of the community.

**SLE Community:**

SLE’s diverse student body features no single majority racial group. About a quarter of students are white, 45% black, and close to 10% Hispanic and Asian students respectively. South Loop’s diverse

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<sup>12</sup> City Data: <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/South-Loop-Chicago-IL.html>

<sup>13</sup> CPS 2017-18 School Utilization and Enrollment Data report.

<sup>14</sup> See appendix 7: “Near South Side Racial Demographics & Median Income”

<sup>15</sup> See appendix 8: “Asian Population Percentage in Chinatown and Near South Side”

learners population is about 6.5%, compared with roughly 9.5% of students at NTA who receive special education instruction, and their low-income population is about 30% of the overall student body<sup>16</sup>. At CPS town halls many SLE parents spoke passionately about the quality educations their children had received through the school. Support for expanding SLE’s facilities is strong among many parents, who view the program as one of few viable options in the area for their students.

**3. What performance level data do you have available for your proposal? This should include data associated with existing programs or policies.**

Detailed visualizations of school progress and quality for both South Loop Elementary and National Teachers Academy are found in the appendix of this report. Overall the two schools can be described as high performing, both having earned 1+ school quality ratings from the district in recent years. As of the 2017-18 school year, SLE had attendance of 791 students and a 113% utilization rate, while NTA had a student body of 727 and a 73% utilization rate<sup>17</sup>. Both schools offer attractive programming options for families, including:<sup>18</sup>

<i><b>South Loop Elementary</b></i>	<i><b>National Teachers Academy</b></i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Band and choir musical electives</li> <li>• Service learning/community volunteer program</li> <li>• Algebra</li> <li>• Debate team &amp; science club</li> <li>• Comprehensive gifted program</li> <li>• Basketball, football, volleyball, track</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition-based preschool</li> <li>• Visual arts</li> <li>• Health curriculum</li> <li>• School-based health center</li> <li>• Family counseling/parenting classes</li> <li>• On-site tutoring</li> <li>• Basketball, football, swimming, soccer, cross-country, track, wrestling</li> </ul>

Of note among these programmatic features are SLE’s comprehensive gifted program, a major draw for parents, and NTA’s family outreach programs, tutoring and preschool, and targeted interventions for high-needs students, including Diverse Learners and Low-income students.

Major differences between the NTA and South Loop center around the needs and typical outcomes of the students the two schools serve. The socio-economic differences between the two student populations is stark, with NTA’s low-income student population over two-and-a-half times that of South Loop’s. NTA’s position as a Title I school indicates the uphill battle that many of its students face, yet the school is above average in student growth and attainment, and among the district’s top-ranked for school quality. SLE for its part has a track record of attainment and growth in the top quartile of CPS programs, and has held its 1+ SQRP for years<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> See appendix 2: “South Loop Elementary School Profile”

<sup>17</sup> CPS 2017-18 School Utilization and Enrollment Data report.

<sup>18</sup> Data excerpted from CPS School Info profiles: <http://schoolinfo.cps.edu/schoolprofile/>. Each school may offer more programs or match these programs from the other’s offerings, but these are all the programs listed on CPS’s Site.

<sup>19</sup> See appendixes 1 & 2: School Info Reports Profiles for NTA & SLE: <http://schoolinfo.cps.edu/schoolprofile/>

#### **4. Are there data gaps? What additional data would be helpful in analyzing the proposal? If so, how can you obtain better data?**

In broad attainment comparisons between NTA and SLE, South Loop has superior metrics in many categories. The stark socioeconomic differences in the student populations of the two schools however beg the question about whether they should be directly compared. A merger of the two schools' student bodies would dramatically alter SLE's student percentage of students from low-income backgrounds, and it is unclear what the potential impact this would have on the school's ability to deliver responsive instruction to these students.

Another question that was repeatedly raised in town hall sessions regarded the white families of South Loop that live within NTA's boundaries, yet choose to send their students elsewhere. This student population represents over 85% of all neighborhood children. Given the prominent location of a level 1+ school in an area experiencing overcrowding, parents at NTA questioned what the motivations might be of parents who would prefer to shut down NTA, rather than enroll their students in it. Securing performance data from students who live within NTA's boundaries, but choose not to enroll, might shed light on their reasons for avoiding the program.

Further questions were raised over what specific percentage of Chinatown students attend private institutions in elementary versus in high school. A clear breakdown of this student population would be instructive for how to best serve their needs, as well as predict how many Chinatown students might be expected to attend a new neighborhood high school.

Further data gap questions included:

##### **Student performance data**

- What is the suspension/detention/expulsion data disaggregated by race for SLE and NTA?
- How does curriculum, behavioral intervention system, and core values of both schools accommodate and impact students of color?

##### **Demographic data**

- What is the teacher demographic data (ethnic, education attainment, years experience, etc.) for SLE and NTA? How does it compare to current and predicted student populations?
- What are enrollment data for the area elementary schools and enrollment projections, including demographics of students?
- What are the changes to the school boundaries in the proposal, and where would current students end up as a result?
- What is the geographic modeling of the distance traveled for students to their schools, and the distance of the closest school for students?

##### **Financial data**

- What are the details of each school's budget? How much money is actually money spent on teacher salaries (not just average cost), aides, and specific programs (e.g. diverse learners, language services)?
- How does this compare with other neighborhood schools like Dunbar and Tilden?
- What are each school's capital funding vs. instructional funding costs and allocations?

**STEP #3: HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES BEEN ENGAGED? ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND ENGAGEMENT?**

**1. Who are the most affected community members who are concerned with or have experience related to this proposal? How have you involved these community members in the development of this proposal?**

CPS led a series of information sessions on this proposal, which included opportunities for public feedback. The meetings were well attended, with overflow crowds, and many community members were able to offer testimony from all sides of the proposed school change debate. Many more attendees who had stood in line and been assigned speaking tickets were unable to participate however, because of limited time and high demand. Calls for further transparent discussions on CPS’ plans remained after these public forums, and CUE’s town hall meetings on the proposal’s impact drew hundreds of community members from Bronzeville, Chinatown, NTA’s community, and South Loop.

Attendees from many town hall groups cited concerns that they were not well informed of plan details throughout the proposal process. The town hall series led by CPS felt perfunctory to many attendees, who cited being praised for their “passionate voices,” while not feeling truly listened to. The sentiment that plans had ‘felt pre-laid’ was echoed repeatedly. NTA participants noted that many of their questions had not received concrete answers for months on end; one notable example centers on where the boundaries for the new high school will be drawn.

Members of the African American and Chinese communities expressed feeling pitted against each other, since the Chinese community has advocated for a high school for years, but the only option the city has offered is to close NTA and convert the building for high school bodies. Members both communities agreed that other options could benefit both groups, but are not being considered by the CPS.

**2. What has your engagement process told you about the burdens or benefits for different groups?**

There are clear costs and benefits to this proposal, as well as many unknowns that may be seen differently by parties, depending on their pessimism or optimism about its future. Laid out in this section are two breakdowns of potential advantages and disadvantages, accompanied by community groups most likely to be affected.

**Benefits:**

<b>Advantage:</b>	<b>Who benefits?</b>
<u>Geographical proximity:</u> A new high school at NTA’s location would offer reduced travel times and walkability to students in the surrounding attendance boundary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● South Loop students</li> <li>● Chinatown students</li> </ul>
<u>Diverse high school attendance boundaries:</u> The new high school at NTA would draw a diverse cross-section of students from multiple enclaves within the neighborhood.  Many participants stated that this would be countered by intensified segregation at high schools further south of NTA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chinatown students</li> <li>● NTA students</li> <li>● South Loop students</li> </ul>

<p><u>Access:</u> Students to the south of NTA, for instance from Drake elementary, would have access to a highly rated, likely first-choice program. For other students whose parents currently prioritize admission to selective enrollment programs, like Jones or Whitney Young, the new high school would serve as an attractive secondary option in the neighborhood.</p> <p>Numerous attendees had concerns about what accessibility and school quality would actually look like.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Near south side</li> <li>• Bronzeville</li> <li>• South Loop</li> <li>• Chinatown</li> </ul>
<p><u>English Language Learner program:</u> The demographics of the new high school, with significant numbers of Limited English Proficient students, would likely merit the implementation of quality English Language Learner supports<sup>20</sup>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinatown</li> </ul>

**Community Reaction to Advantages:**

Attendees at the town hall series were highly skeptical of several of these potential benefits, arguing that they are unlikely to play out so successfully in real-life implementation. Regarding diversity at NTA, speakers posited that the high school’s diverse enrollment would siphon potential students from existing high schools like Phillips, exacerbating segregation at programs whose attendance boundaries currently extend to the more diverse areas of NTA’s potential northern borders. The promise of greater diversity at NTA, they argued, was only the rosier half of a teeter-totter effect that would simultaneously worsen racial inequity further south of NTA.

Assertions about the presumed quality at a NTA high school were met with similar debate. Some participants asserted that its inevitable high ranking would not be due to any extraordinary quality of instruction, but rather the fact that the incoming students would be from reliably lower rates of poverty than NTA’s current student population. This result, many parents stated, would reinforce the gap in school access, instruction, and attainment between poor and affluent students. Parents complained that CPS’ benchmark comparison for predicting attendance opt-in rates at the new school – Lincoln Park High School – was an example of the investment the district is choosing to pursue: more funding for wealthier areas, while simultaneously shutting out poorer students in segregated neighborhoods.

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<sup>20</sup> See appendix 6: “High School-aged Students in the Proposed Boundary for the New NTA High School”



**Burdens:**

<b>Disadvantage:</b>	<b>Who loses?</b>
<p><u>Displacement:</u> Transitioning high school students into NTA, while elementary grades are simultaneously phased out, will impact student learning. The emotional and attainment costs of attending a school slated for conversion, as well as the disproportionate impact of historical school closures on low-income families of color, are well documented in Chicago.<sup>21</sup> NTA’s new boundaries will also restrict other area high schools to a smaller, less-diverse attendance pool.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NTA students</li> <li>• Phillips high school</li> <li>• Dunbar high school</li> </ul>
<p><u>Ongoing construction:</u> Students attending NTA during its conversion to a high school building would attend school in an ongoing construction zone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NTA students</li> </ul>
<p><u>Traffic:</u> New drop-off points for multiple South Loop campuses spread out between multiple blocks would be onerous to parents, especially those with children in different buildings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Loop students</li> <li>• NTA students</li> </ul>
<p><u>Financial costs:</u> In the midst of declining district enrollment, and surrounded by numerous underutilized high schools, the ROI of conversion for NTA, and construction of new buildings for South Loop, are highly questionable. Compounded by the district’s financial difficulties, the financial efficiency of this \$73mm proposal is not clear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chicago taxpayers</li> <li>• Surrounding neighborhood high schools with open seats</li> <li>• Chicago Public Schools finances</li> </ul>
<p><u>Public Perception:</u> Participants repeatedly expressed their resentment over infighting between communities of color, mistrust of city intentions, and disapproval of CPS’ approach to transparency and implementation. These costs are hard to measure, but threaten to hamper future urban revitalization efforts. A further loss is the message to Phillips and Dunbar – both majority black student populations – that their schools are not worthy of investment, or of enrolling white students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NTA families</li> <li>• Chinatown families</li> <li>• South Loop families</li> <li>• Phillips HS families</li> <li>• Dunbar HS families</li> <li>• Near south side families</li> <li>• Elected officials and organizers</li> </ul>
<p><u>Loss of parks district facilities and health center:</u> NTA’s campus includes a public parks center with a pool and pre-K annex. It also hosts a public health center run by UIC. The future of both establishments would be in jeopardy in a high school conversion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood residents</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> Torre, Gordon, Moore, Cowhy. “School Closings in Chicago,” University of Chicago Research Report 2015.

### **Community Reaction to Burdens:**

Attendees spoke of the emotional toll they feared for their students as they attend a school slated for conversion. As each subsequent grade from 3-8 moves to NTA, they anticipate the further fragmentation of their school community. Many foresaw a compromised professional environment in which teacher retention will diminish rapidly, prompting a decline in the gains the school has fought hard for over recent years. Even with current students allowed to remain in the school until graduation, the impacts on learning and environment will be detrimental. Other participants discussed the burdens for neighborhood high schools south of NTA. This included Phillips High School, whose prospects will further erode as it is cut off from the fastest growing student populations in their attendance boundaries.

### **Overall CUE Town Hall Responses and Reactions:**

In the town hall series many members of the Bronzeville neighborhood south of Cermak street talked about the “NTA community,” whose students are “almost 80% African-American and low-income.” Many families discussed the fracturing impact that 50 previous CPS closures have had on the neighborhood, citing the potential displacement of NTA as another compounding destabilizer. Others spoke of NTA students whose families previously lived in the Harold Ickes Homes nearby the school, before its demolition in 2010, saying that NTA is now the unifying support for families who were dispersed around the city, and who continue to send their students to NTA. Given the broad changes that have impacted NTA’s community, the rapid growth in the school’s quality ranking – from the lowest CPS rating to the highest quality marker within two years – was raised. Why, questioned numerous attendants, would such success in a program be met by closing it down? The outrage, according to many speakers, is heightened by the fact that NTA is a program in short supply in CPS: it educates a majority poor, black student body, does it successfully, and is threatened with closure to benefit a growing population of affluent, white families in the expanding downtown. In the eyes of the NTA community this closure is representative of a history in Chicago of racial and economic disenfranchisement, and a reminder of the school district’s role in maintaining racially inequitable educational infrastructure.

Several hundred town hall attendees raised further issues challenging the positive outlook for CPS’ proposal, including:

- “NTA will expect to see teacher retention go down as teachers look for more stable employment. Especially for a school such as NTA, whose strong culture is so based in the mindset and expertise of its teachers, a teacher exodus would hurt kids.”
- “Transition logistics will be harmful for students, including having incoming high schoolers occupying the same building as young elementary schoolers”...two populations with a “huge breadth of development between them.”
- Over 1200 parents have signed a petition to keep NTA open.
- “The school would lose outdoor space – the new South Loop Elementary will have outdoor space on the roof – resulting in a much smaller space for growing children.”

Attendees highlighted that specific local residents had great influence in the early phases of the plan’s development, citing that a local Prairie District Neighborhood Association meeting in 2015 was the first time these plans for NTA arose. Vice President John Jacoby floated the idea at this meeting for a new

high school that would be constructed on NTA property, at a time when enrollment was lower and the facility was less heavily utilized.<sup>22</sup> This first proposal was originally for temporary use of NTA's building, while an additional high school building was constructed. In March - May 2017, further rumors began coming out about changes to NTA, including an article published in DNA Info that fueled speculation. At an April 19th aldermanic meeting with Pat Dowell, ostensibly not about NTA, Janice Jackson confirmed that CPS was considering changing NTA's status. NTA's ALSC held a meeting on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, which established more concrete information, and precipitated the announcement of town halls. Attendees highlighted that, while PDNA voices were heard early in the plan's development, NTA community members were forced to work to understand the plan after it was already developed.

Town hall delegations from Chinatown discussed the initial enthusiasm that CPS' proposal drew among parents and families. Chinatown would finally have a high school within close proximity to its boundaries if NTA were converted from its current elementary program. Most in attendance from the neighborhood agreed that a high school on the NTA site would benefit the Chinese-American population, but were unsure of the viability of the proposal beyond the short-term. Education activists from Chinatown expressed their desire for a strong local high school, but several shared that residents felt pitted against south side black neighborhoods in the process, and feared that the high school they are fighting for would not prioritize their long-standing needs. Advocates pointed to the large student population that might take advantage of a local high school – currently only 30% of students from Chinatown attend a neighborhood program – and related skepticism that the program was “for us.”

Attendees shared that when Chinese-American students do not get into a selective enrollment school, they often travel further away to schools that have more ESL programming, such as Kelly High School. This creates an additional burden because those students spend significant time commuting to and from school. Some participants stated that all the burdens seem positioned to harm students who are already the most marginalized, and that the most privileged people don't seem to be bearing any burden of this proposal. A community social worker spoke of the emotional and mental impact of this proposal, saying it sends message that city “doesn't care about you and your needs.”

### **3. What has your engagement process told you about the factors that produce or perpetuate racial inequity related to this proposal?**

Funding levels seem unequal between the proposal to convert NTA and construct new facilities for SLE, compared with current CPS investment in other existing schools. One example of this is Phillips High School, which has received \$17 million over 10 years for basic facility maintenance, and has over 1,200 open seats. Years of underinvestment in neighborhood high schools like Phillips, Dunbar, and Tilden stands in stark contrast to CPS' proposed plans for South Loop and NTA. The legacy of segregation extending to the present day in these neighborhood school communities is deeply rooted and complex. School planning is not to blame for this history, yet the public optics and funding inequities inherent in this proposal threaten to erode public goodwill and do further damage in long-marginalized neighborhoods. Investing borrowed money into the construction of new buildings in an affluent

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<sup>22</sup> Email from PDNA president John Jacoby, 4/16/2015: <http://wearenta.weebly.com/mayor-directed-cps-in-2015-to-close-nta.html>

community, while neglecting an existing program with open seats in a neighborhood next door, has a double impact. Every dollar spent on new school construction drains public coffers further, while ensuring the continued downward slide at an existing program that might have otherwise rebounded from investment.

One participant at CUE's town halls reflected on the population of the Armour Square neighborhood, which she saw exemplified by the established Italian-American Center on one end of the street and the Chinese herbal store at the other end. She saw many of the Italian-American and Irish-American families sending their kids to parochial schools, creating opportunity gaps that persist, widen, and impact high school options. In this case clinging to private religious schools becomes a method of self-isolation, even within a demographically diverse neighborhood; a kind of "white flight via school," even if people aren't fleeing the neighborhood. This parent observed that when white families see non-white students at a school, they often do not send their kids there, regardless of the proven quality of the school. She proposed that a 1+ program like NTA suffered from the same stigmatization.

Chinatown delegations were in universal agreement on the need for a high school, but shared that this project has been increasingly branded as a South Loop expansion, prompting some Chinese-American residents to describe feeling marginalized and "left out of the conversation in the 40-year long fight for a local school." One activist stated that even political figures from Chinatown could not engage fully in discussions with school planners, saying "if you don't follow their lead, you'll get cut out of the school boundaries." Chinatown residents are increasingly viewing this proposal as a band aid solution; better than the access they have been afforded in the past, yet not envisioned for their community, and not meeting their needs. At the second of CPS' town halls, one Chinatown parent speaking on the NTA question lamented, "we'll take what we can get."

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#### STEP #4: WHAT IS THE PROJECTED OUTCOME ON RACIAL EQUITY?

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**1. Given what you have learned from research and stakeholder involvement, how will the proposal increase or decrease racial equity? Who would benefit from or be burdened by this proposal?**

Converting NTA into a high school and building out facilities at SLE will create, on paper, two highly diverse schools. For advocates of school integration, for which associated learning benefits are well researched and have strong supporting evidence, this is an undeniable benefit. This multicultural convergence comes at a steep cost however. The burdens of shutting down a 1+ rated program with majority African-American attendance fall squarely on marginalized students of color. The benefits go largely to the more affluent South Loop, which gets new buildings and funding without sacrifice. The benefits of a high school at NTA for the Chinatown community appear similarly imbalanced. The plan's long-term viability, viewed within the context of rapidly changing population numbers, is questionable. The proposed high school appears to be a short-term fix for the neighborhood, a placeholder whose value does not outweigh the loss of the elementary program it replaces.

**2. What are potential unintended consequences? What are the ways in which the proposal could be modified to enhance positive impacts or reduce negative impacts?**

The conversion of NTA, coupled with new construction at SLE, has a number of possible negative consequences. Shutting a successful CPS program that serves an at-risk student population sends a message that poor, black students matter less, when balanced with the desires of their neighbors in more affluent enclaves. Whether or not this is intentional on the part of city government and school planners will not matter to impacted families. The damage to community relations resulting from the effective closing of yet another south side school has the potential to reverberate for years to come.

Another consequence of this proposal would be the ignored opportunities to invest in neighborhood high schools like Dunbar and Phillips. With concerted revitalization efforts existing neighborhood programs like these could be rebuilt, ensuring open seats and quality instruction for a wider range of students in facilities that were designed to accommodate the high school students using them. Investing instead in new construction means that these schools will continue declining, squandering a viable opportunity to achieve the goals of the original CPS proposal without eliminating a flourishing elementary institution. Beyond the lack of investment, this plan would intensify educational inequities by solidifying a segregated student body at Phillips, whose attendance boundary currently attends north to Wacker Drive downtown. By opting not to direct funding into this existing program, and instead creating a new high school with boundaries covering the more racially mixed northern attendance zone, CPS ensures ongoing *de facto* segregation at Phillips. Numerous town hall attendees noted the irony of this tradeoff, declaring that it would nullify the benefits of the diversity of any high school at NTA.

As the proposal currently stands, there are few tweaks or small alterations that can be made to gain more public support. Community buy-in could be best secured by presenting CPS' current proposal, along with alternative strategies, to a public vote. Increasing the transparency of the process, responding to public feedback, and seriously exploring the viability of alternative proposals would be strong next steps as the district navigates the growing negative sentiment surrounding current plans for NTA and SLE.

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## STEP #5: WHAT ALTERNATIVES EXIST FOR PROMOTING RACIAL EQUITY IN THIS PROPOSAL?

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Town hall participants generated a number of alternative proposals, and then broke into working groups to further develop the most popular. The range of proposed alternatives fell into five broad categories, including:

1. Moving NTA to new building
2. Investing in existing neighborhood schools
3. Selling old SLE facility
4. Redistributing Selective Enrollment
5. Developing academic center plus high school

### 1. Moving NTA to a New Building

One goal that gained popular support among participants involved finding an alternative location for NTA that would allow the program to continue functioning independently, without breaking up the student population, while allowing for CPS' proposed conversion of NTA's current facility to continue.

The construction of a new annex for SLE provides an opportunity for this idea. It would require sacrifice and compromise from both the SLE and NTA communities, but would preserve two successful programs while accommodating a new high school in NTA's current building. Proposal development participants envisioned the new construction at 16<sup>th</sup> and Dearborn housing South Loop Elementary's 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, while their current main building would host the K-5<sup>th</sup> grades. NTA's entire program would then join the new building at 16<sup>th</sup> and Dearborn, leaving the existing NTA facility available for a high school.

### 2. Investing in Existing Neighborhood Schools

Many attendees advocated for allocating the \$73 million dollar budget, or a portion of it, into strengthening existing programs at Phillips or Dunbar High Schools. By investing in Selective Enrollment seating, International Baccalaureate programming, STEAM curricula, or further attractive education options, CPS might resurrect existing programs, while simultaneously meeting the needs of growing populations in the South Loop and Chinatown. Additional support was raised for the use of TIF-funding in these rebuilding these schools, which could serve as a national model for restorative reinvestment in long-marginalized neighborhoods.

### 3. Selling Old South Loop Facility

This current proposal relies on the construction of a new facility at South Loop Elementary that, coupled with their pre-K annex at 19<sup>th</sup> and Federal, would bring them to a 3-campus total. Leaving NTA as it is allows SLE to transfer all students, K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, into the new facility at 16<sup>th</sup> and Dearborn. This opens an opportunity to sell the old overcrowded facility, whose location is rapidly gaining value.

- One participant's consulting real estate agent estimated the land occupied by SLE's current main building to occupy approximately 64,000ft<sup>2</sup>.
- Benchmark estimates for the value of this land would be between \$14.5-25 million.
- If the pre-K program were moved to SLE's newly constructed building, further land could be made available for purchase, generating up to \$35 million in funds for CPS.
- This option would partially mitigate debt incurred by the current proposal, making it a more financially sound path, while satisfying several warring neighborhood factions.

Merging SLE's overcrowded programs into one single building would consolidate an unwieldy multi-campus amalgamation, and allow both 1+-rated CPS elementary programs to continue operating. Funding raised by selling aging facilities could then be put towards a new high school in the South Loop, or invested in strengthening existing programs.

#### **4. Redistributing Selective Enrollment**

This proposal involves changing the ratio of neighborhood seats and selective enrollment seats at Jones College Prep. Currently Jones is a selective enrollment school that holds about 1,400 students, with only 200 seats reserved for neighborhood students. This new proposal would do the following:

- Evenly divide the number of neighborhood seats and selective enrollment seats at JCP
- The attendance boundary would be the same zip codes that would have been eligible for attendance at the NTA HS site.
- Develop a partnership with nearby colleges/universities to expand course offerings to Dual Credit courses that would allow students in either Selective Enrollment or neighborhood Seats access to earn colleges credits.
- The number of seats would be re-evaluated after a 1-2 school year trial period to
  - Assess the need for more seats in either category
  - The potential to replicate the success at other schools to create Hybrid
- Program expansion to Phillips, Tilden, and Dunbar would be the next sights.

#### **5. Developing academic center plus high school**

This proposal begins by leaving SLE's K-6<sup>th</sup> grades at their current location, but moving 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades into the new building at 16<sup>th</sup> and Dearborn, to be co-located with a high school. The 1,200 seats would serve roughly 160 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students while allowing for 1,040 high school seats, slightly more than would be viable at the existing NTA campus. Additionally, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade alignment would allow for the establishment of a competitive academic center, as is available in well-regarded neighborhood high schools such as Kenwood Academy.

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**STEP #6: HOW CAN WE ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY, COMMUNICATE, AND EVALUATE RESULTS?**

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**1. How will impacts be documented and evaluated? Are we achieving the anticipated outcomes? Are we having impact in the community?**

Town hall participants supported putting possible proposals to a vote in a public referendum. This would ensure accountability aligned with the goals of each community involved, and would provide a more transparent opportunity for coalition building in support the most popular options. Further study by CPS into the impact on poor students of color of any future proposal, advisedly in the form of a Racial Equity Assessment, will help further ensure that the outcomes of the district's actions align with its mission and goals of equitable educations for all its students.

**2. What are messages and communication strategies that will help advance racial equity?**

CPS should advance a message, reflected in its actions, that all operating schools will receive equitable consideration regarding funding, facilities investment, and district support. This is true of schools regardless of quality ranking; if they continue to operate, they deserve the requisite backing to ensure student success. This is especially important for highly rated programs with low-income student populations.

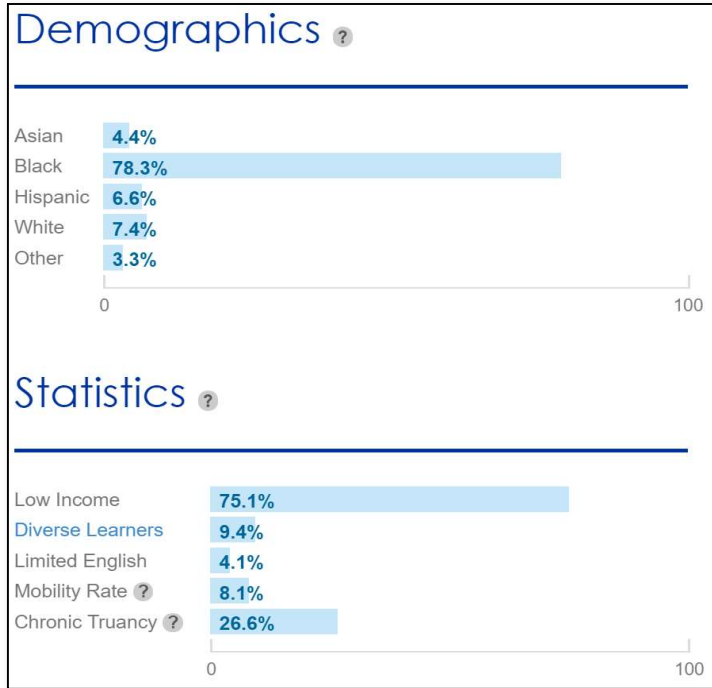
**3. How can government partners continue to partner and deepen relationships with communities to make sure the work to advance racial equity is working and sustainable for the long-haul?**

CPS' town hall sessions on NTA's future were met with capacity crowds of passionate education advocates. There is high demand for transparent and responsive opportunities for public feedback like this. CPS can be successful by devoting further time and resources to these kinds of forums, displaying a willingness to adapt proposals to community demands, and partnering with local advocacy organizations to ensure that messaging is reactive and informed by majority support.



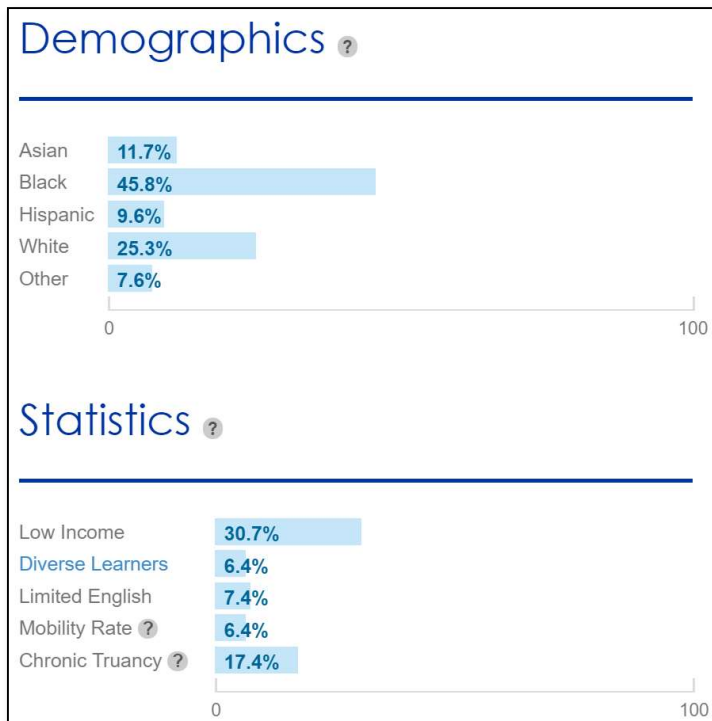
**Appendix**

**1. National Teachers Academy School Profile**



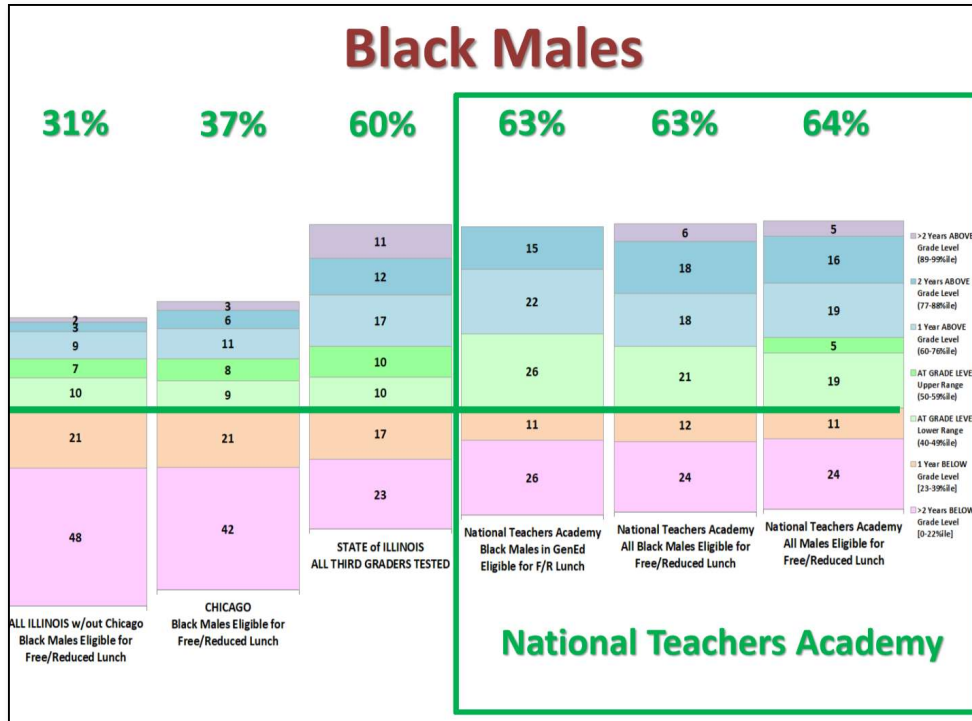
Source: CPS.edu / school profiles (Accessed 1/10/18)

**2. South Loop Elementary School Profile**



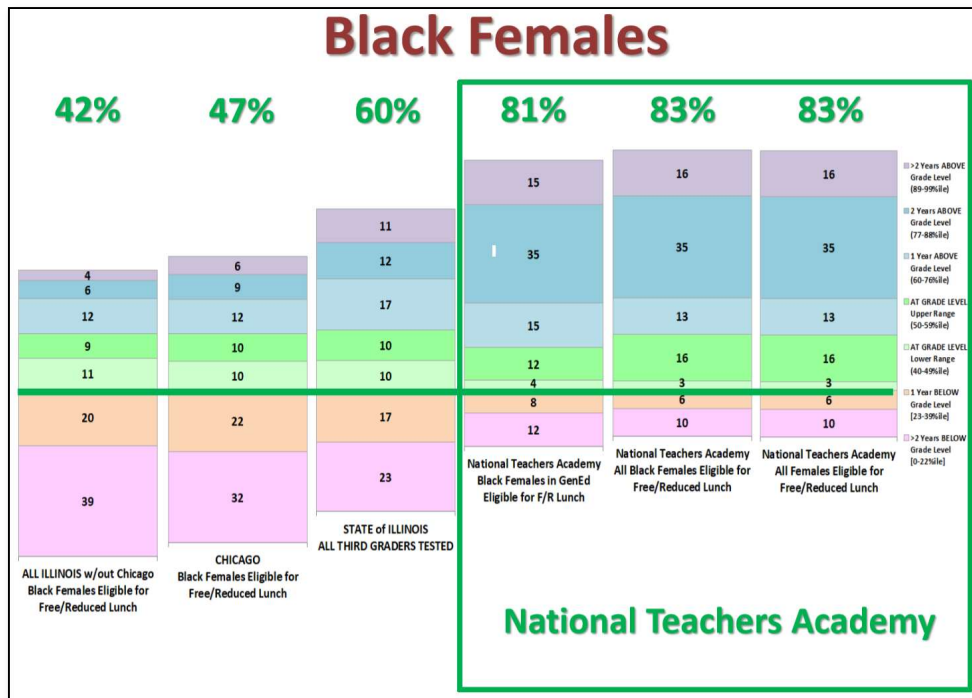
Source: CPS.edu / school profiles (Accessed 1/10/18)

**3. NTA Reading attainment (Black Males)**



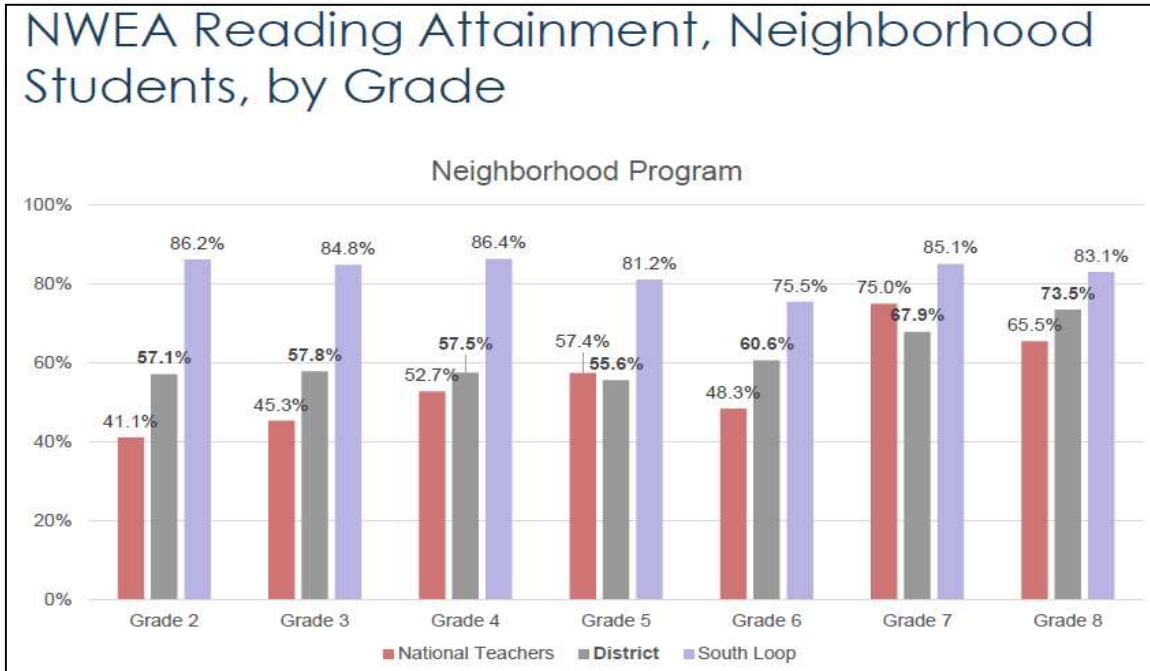
Source: UIC Professor Paul Zavitkovsky analysis of NTA student progress.

**4. NTA Reading attainment (Black Females)**



Source: UIC Professor Paul Zavitkovsky analysis of NTA student progress.

**5. NWEA Reading Attainment Comparison Between NTA and SLE students**



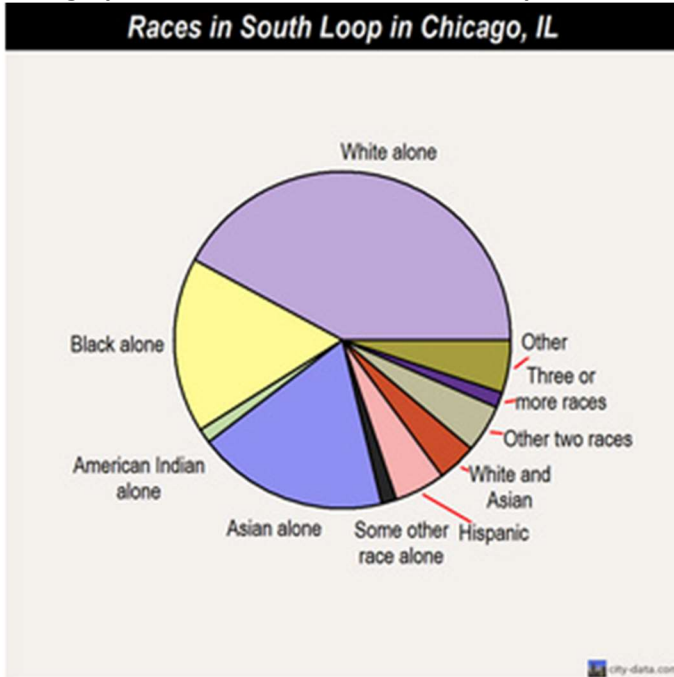
Source: CPS Steering Committee Presentation.

**6. Chinatown Elementary Enrollment and Student Demographics:**

School (Enrollment)	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White/ Other	Low Income	LEP
Haines (688)	82.4%	15.3%	1.6%	0.7%	87.1%	34.7%
Healy (1413)	68.1%	0.9%	20.0%	11.1%	82.4%	26.0%
Ward (586)	68.3%	13.8%	11.1%	6.9%	83.3%	48.6%
Sheridan* (554)	37.7%	18.1%	23.1%	21.1%	44.9%	8.8%
Holden (500)	17.8%	9.2%	59.5%	13.6%	88.6%	28.3%
Armour (270)	4.8%	5.9%	79.7%	9.6%	88.6%	33.9%
McClellan (342)	7.3%	43.0%	33.3%	16.9%	87.7%	16.4%

Source: Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, 12/14/2017 CUE presentation.

**7. Demographics and Income of the South Loop**



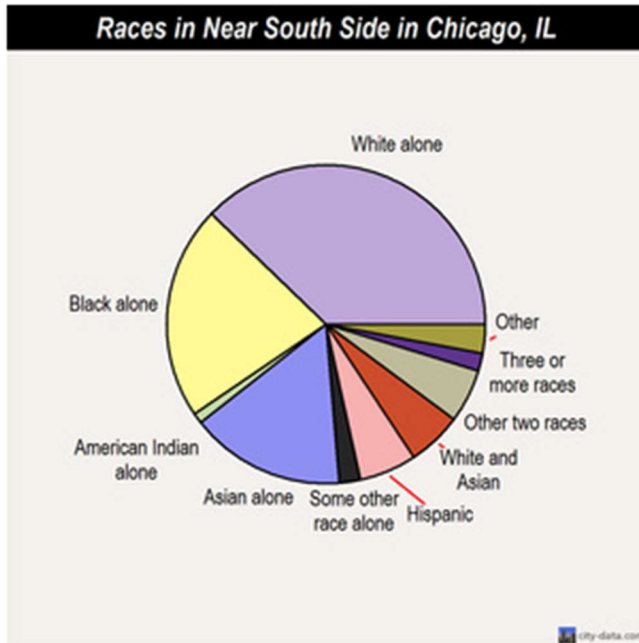
**Median household income in 2016:**

South Loop:  \$98,650

Chicago:  \$53,006

Source: <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/South-Loop-Chicago-IL.html>

**8. Near South Side\* Racial Demographics & Median Income**



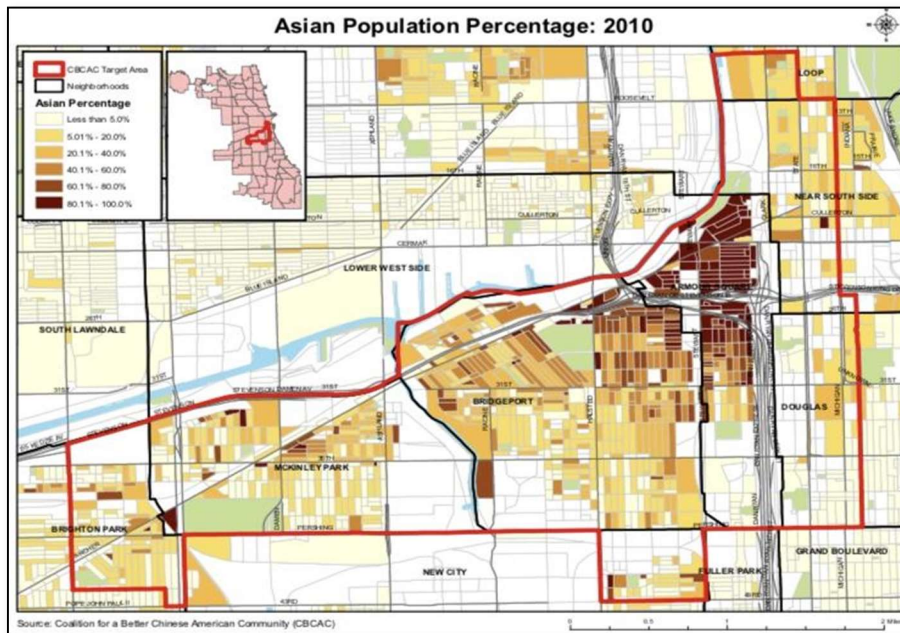
**Median household income in 2016:**

Near South Side: **\$92,736**

Chicago: **\$53,006**

\*South Loop boundaries defined as Roosevelt Rd south to E. 26<sup>th</sup>, S Clark St. East to lake  
Source: <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Near-South-Side-Chicago-IL.html>

**9. Asian Population Percentage in Chinatown and Near South Side**



Source: Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC)

**10. High School-aged Students in the Proposed Boundary for the New NTA High School**

<b>Total HS-aged population in proposed boundary: 2,037</b>	
<b>African-American</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Low-Income</b>	<b>74%</b>

*Source: CPS Town Hall 1/9/2017*