

2020 ELECTIONS



Dear Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, Raise Your Hand for Public Education, Chicago United for Equity, et al.,

I am in receipt of your letter dated October 29, 2020, outlining your concerns and recommendations for the upcoming 2020 Local School Council (“LSC”) Elections. I appreciate your letter and the opportunity to partner with the various signatory organizations to increase the number of parents and community members that participate in this year’s LSC elections.

The Illinois General Assembly gave the Board of Education (“Board”) the authority to modify the election process due to the COVID-19 public health crisis. The Office of Local School Council Relations (“OLSCR”) modified the voting process in this election in an effort to keep staff, students, parents, families, and community members safe from the spread of COVID-19 as they vote. The following modifications were put into place: mail-in balloting for parents and staff (or in-person and curbside voting, if desired), online voting for students, and social distanced in-person voting at schools for community members.

We disagree that the LSC elections process, as laid out, violates the Constitution. The Illinois School Code gives the Board broad authority to structure elections in a fair and equitable manner and OLSCR has acted within that authority. However, based on your feedback and concerns, we have reassessed our election processes. We are pleased to share that schools will now accept mail-in ballots that are postmarked by November 18th for elementary schools and November 19th for high schools until November 30, 2020. In an effort to improve communications, schools will continue to share information with their communities by posting information on their school marquees and updating their school websites to reflect pertinent election information. OLSCR will also post an FAQ on the cps.edu website to provide guidance on the most frequently asked questions. More details and information is discussed below.

1. Adopt a “Postmarked-By” Deadline as opposed to a “Received-By” Deadline to Ballots

Currently, our election process calls for ballots to be returned to their respective schools by November 18th for elementary schools and November 19th for high schools. This deadline was established in order for ballots to be counted and challenges to be processed prior to the December Board meeting for those positions that require Board approval.

However, as indicated above, upon further consideration, the OLSCR will extend the deadline to receive ballots postmarked by November 18th (for elementary schools) and November 19 (for

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high schools) to November 30, 2020. As a result of this modification, ballots will be counted by election judges and results published on December 1, 2020, following the Thanksgiving holiday. Information regarding post election challenges is forthcoming and will be made available by school principals and on the OLSCR website.

2. Inform Voters by Improving the Distribution of Candidate Information

Your letter dated October 29th further noted concerns regarding opportunities to share and publish candidate flyers/literature. Candidates were originally given until November 2, 2020 to submit their candidate information to principals for publication and distribution.

However, please be advised that on October 29, 2020, the OLSCR extended the deadline for candidates to submit their flyers and literature to November 4, 2020. Notice of this extension was shared via email with candidates and principals on October 29, 2020. Moreover, the District will continue to keep stakeholders abreast of any new developments by making information available on school marquees, school websites, and on the OLSCR webpage. Information will also be shared with LSC members via email.

3. Ensure Ballot Security and Integrity by Repurpose Existing Secure Drop-Boxes and Publishing Clear Ballot Counting Guidance

You further expressed concerns surrounding the instructions provided to voters on how to securely submit their ballots to their respective schools. Please be advised that this information has been distributed by principals via multiple channels, including, but not limited to their school websites, school newsletters, and school social media accounts.

Additionally, in an effort to continue to promote the elections among school communities, school principals will post LSC election information on their school marquees and update their school websites to reflect pertinent election information, including school hours and ballot drop-off information. The OLSCR will also continue to update our website and publish more detailed information on the elections process for voters.

In regards to your concerns surrounding ballot security, principals are required to place all ballots in the school safe, where they will be stored and securely maintained until such time that they are processed by election judges.

Finally, while we appreciate your recommendation to use the sixty Chicago Board of Elections drop boxes, unfortunately, the number of boxes will not meet the District's needs given our need to serve over 500 schools.

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4. Address Unequal Access by Offering a Way to Request a Mail-In/Drop-Off Ballot

Your correspondence raises concerns that the current election procedures exclude eligible community voters, by not providing them an opportunity to obtain a mail-in ballot. Unfortunately, mail-in ballots for community members is an onerous process that would be difficult for the District to undertake. However, to ensure that the community's voice is also heard in these elections, community members have the option to either vote in-person or utilize the curbside voting option. Vehicles will not be required for curbside voting, thus a community member that does not feel comfortable entering a building, would be accommodated via this option.

Moreover, your correspondence also expresses concerns that the election procedures do not offer voters an option to notify their respective schools of address changes and that the procedures would potentially disenfranchise families that are experiencing homelessness. Currently, parents/guardians have the option to submit a mail-in ballot, vote in-person, or utilize the curbside voting option. Ballots are being mailed to the addresses of record located in ASPEN. Parents who have not had an opportunity to update their home address in ASPEN may avail themselves of the in-person or curbside voting options. Please know that we understand the difficulties encountered by our families experiencing homelessness and that decisions surrounding election procedures have been made with them in mind, hence the addition of in-person and curbside voting to the list available options for our families. Additionally, the District will continue to promote the elections via the channels references above, to ensure that families are aware of the voting options available to them.

In conclusion, your partnership in this process is invaluable and I thank you for thoughtful recommendations. I look forward to your assistance in helping to increase voter participation in the election. Should you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at gwmontesdeoc@cps.edu.

Sincerely,

Guillermo "Willy" Montes De Oca
Director, Office of Local School Council Relations

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