

**Report to the Civic Committee
March 8, 2021**

Kids First Chicago’s mission is to improve education for Chicago’s children by ensuring high-quality public school options are accessible to all families in all neighborhoods. We work to ensure that our education system is fair and accessible for all families.

To achieve this goal, we focus on three strategic priorities:

1. We support communities and families in understanding and navigating to high-quality school options, as well as advocating for policy change.
2. We partner with district and city leadership to design and implement policies that prioritize families’ needs.
3. We provide unbiased data expertise to community and school district stakeholders alike.

PRIORITY AREAS

We take a human-centered approach to implementing our strategies. Importantly, in addition to our focus on data and metrics, we listen and get a better appreciation for how key issues are understood by and affect families by engaging with and directly supporting them. We use comprehensive data, along with parent input, to identify and analyze barriers to school quality. We bring parents and district leaders to the table to address solutions—together. Our strategic integration of policy/system change work with community engagement has differentiated our efforts nationally.

1. K1C staff provides direct support to families navigating Chicago’s PK-12 public education system and to communities working to improve their schools.
 - **Our field team continues to bring Chicago Public Schools parents together each month in a virtual “living room”** where they can build community, grow in their understanding of how the education system is working for their kids, and learn from each other as we all navigate this new normal for education during the pandemic. **The February meeting focused on the opportunity to engage in CPS’s upcoming process to collect public input for an updated accountability policy.**
 - **In an effort to help the City and others understand parents’ perspectives regarding the School Board, we held a workshop with nearly 30 Parent Advisory Board Members and Parent Champions in our network. We were able to glean important insights into parents’ goals for the School Board and we presented these findings to the City to help guide the Mayor’s planning on this issue. We met directly with Mayor Lightfoot to share the findings. We are currently planning additional parent workshops in March and will work to help parents elevate their goals to the appropriate elected and government officials as this debate continues into the spring.**

2. K1C promotes policies that are rooted in authentic community needs and supported by data. Through a strong partnership with key agencies like CPS, we help families engage in the policy and system redesign process.
 - Following the release of K1C's policy brief, "*Digital Equity in Education in the Coronavirus Era*," K1C worked with the City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), philanthropic partners, and internet service providers (ISPs) to launch Chicago Connected to provide free, high-speed internet to over 100,000 students over the next four years. This is the largest (in terms of families supported) and longest (program duration) effort of any U.S. city to date. K1C continues to serve on the project management team during the implementation phase and is developing a data dashboard for all stakeholders to utilize in measuring project success. Media coverage has been abundant, with features in the Wall Street Journal, Axios, and other national outlets, as well as substantial ongoing coverage by local newspapers, TV, and radio. **In an article on the status of partnerships between ISPs and K-12 school systems around the county to extend high-speed internet to families to help with remote learning, *Education Week* stated that Chicago Connected is "widely regarded as the gold standard" for this type of agreement.** K1C parents have been featured in every major promotion and have served as spokespeople for the program.
 - As of **February 21**, Chicago Connected has provided **nearly 60,000 CPS students** and **nearly 40,000 households** with free high-speed internet service. Chicago Connected now serves more students than the entire student enrollment of cities like Cleveland, Washington DC, and New Orleans. Chicago Connected has become a national exemplar, with more than 20 cities reaching out thus far to establish their own comparable public-private partnership program. The city of Philadelphia recently launched PHLConnectED, a carbon copy of Chicago Connected in terms of its design and structure. **Miami Connected was also launched in early February 2021, with a similar project architecture to Chicago Connected.**
 - **In response to feedback from Chicago Connected families, community partners, and the project management team, Comcast and RCN have both doubled internet speeds for Chicago Connected customers. RCN boosted speeds from 25 mbps download/3 mbps upload to 50 mbps download/10 mbps upload. Comcast boosted speeds from 25 mbps download/3 mbps upload to 50 mbps download/5 mbps upload. Moreover, Comcast's speed increase will be extended to all Internet Essentials customers nationwide, meaning that roughly 8 million customers nationally will receive a benefit that originated from discussions in Chicago.**
 - K1C is managing the 35 Chicago Connected community partners responsible for providing personalized outreach to eligible families and digital literacy training to newly-connected households. These community-based organizations (CBOs) have been critical to bridging the trust gap and driving additional sign ups. **K1C has**

designed the model for how community partners and CPS schools will collaborate to collectively ensure all eligible, non-participating families are aware of the opportunity to provide free, high-speed internet for the next four years.

- **West Side United (WSU) named Herzl School of Excellence as its Cluster of Care grantee. WSU will launch its community hub by the spring of 2021 and has asked to move forward with this initiative without K1C. We are concerned about the effort remaining centered on community input. We are also engaging parents, partners, and community leaders to better understand their needs and interests in alternative hub opportunities, given how important this remains to a number of our parents.**
- **Data are just starting to come in from the K1C/NORC (National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago) parent survey to understand parents' experiences with remote learning. The survey targets a representative sample of public school parents citywide.**
- **In February, CPS publicly announced its intent to redesign the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), which the district uses to measure annual school performance and hold leaders and schools accountable. K1C is leading stakeholder engagement to design and implement new performance metrics for all public schools in Chicago by April 2022. Natalie Neris, K1C Chief of Community Engagement, will also serve on the district's SQRP Advisory Group that will ultimately recommend a new policy to CPS leadership.**
- The New York Times reached out to K1C to connect with parents and hear their sentiments on returning to school this February. Katrina Adams, a K1C Parent Advisory Board member, was prominently featured in a recent NYT article looking at the ongoing fight between the CTU and CPS, and providing a valuable third point of view routinely missing from these debates. This is a testament to the growing role K1C has played as a conduit to authentic parent voices, as well as the power those voices wield.

3. K1C provides communities and policymakers with unbiased data expertise.

- K1C is developing a dashboard in support of Chicago Connected that will provide real-time updates to key stakeholders about connections, digital literacy training, and more.
- K1C is designing and implementing a digital literacy and workforce development plan to benefit Chicago Connected families. **K1C is launching a test website that will allow Chicago Connected families to access content in a "sandbox" environment and solicit their perspectives on the accessibility, quality, and usefulness of the content presented. The site will be launched March 2021.**

- K1C, on behalf of the City of Chicago and CPS, has launched a survey directed at Chicago Connected families to ensure the Chicago Connected project management team understands (1) the quality of customer service families experience when enrolling in the program; (2) families' perceptions of the overall performance of their internet service and for what purposes enrollees are primarily using the internet; and (3) what digital literacy tools and resources would be most helpful for families to navigate the Internet. **The survey closed on February 14th, with nearly 5,000 families responding. Highlights:**
 - **Over 80% of respondents identified as Black or Latinx.**
 - **52% self-described annual household income of less than \$20,000; 82% self-described annual household income of less than \$35,000.**
 - **40% reported being unemployed.**
 - **27% reported not having access to any Internet service prior to Chicago Connected.**
 - **Over 75% of respondents viewed the program favorably, with over 50% being satisfied or very satisfied with both their internet and customer service experience.**
 - **67% of respondents are interested in technology training (e.g., digital literacy) as part of the program, with the most preferred mode of training being self-paced online training modules.**
 - **40% of respondents want to earn a new degree and/or get a new job in the next five years.**

RECENT EVENTS & FUNDRAISING

- **All Civic Committee and Commercial Club members are invited to join the Kids First Chicago team for a Partner Update on March 18th. Details to follow under separate cover.**
- **K1C has raised roughly \$2.9 million toward its FY21 budget of \$3.25 million. K1C is pleased to report new commitments confirmed in January and February totaling \$425,000, including a joint investment from the Chicago Blackhawks Foundation and the Michael & Nancy Silverman Foundation (\$75,000), a principal gift from Ken Griffin (\$250,000), and generous leadership support from John & Jeanne Rowe (\$100,000).**
- **K1C is pursuing critical renewals from a number of Civic-represented partners, including Crown Family Philanthropies, ITW, and Peoples Gas, among others. We are grateful for the continued, generous personal and institutional support of many Civic Committee members. We hope we can count on your support in the uncertain years ahead.**



02/25/2021, 2:00pm

- Please contact Dave Casper and Daniel Anello about ways to continue to support Kids First Chicago.