



How to Reinvent Chicago Public High Schools

A Student's Perspective

At the request of Ron Huberman, Chief Executive of the Chicago Public Schools, the Mikva Challenge Education Council worked for eight weeks this summer studying and deliberating on the topic of how to “reinvent Chicago Public High Schools.” This report is the culmination of their summer and will be presented to Mr. Huberman on August 17th, 2009.

Mikva Challenge Education Council
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Introduction

On June 4th 2009, Chicago Public Schools CEO, Ron Huberman, met with the Mikva Challenge Education Council and presented us with a challenge. He asked us if we could create our ideal high school: How would it look? What would be the essential elements? We decided to take the challenge of Reinventing High School as our summer research project, to which we dedicated 8 weeks and 150 hours of work. As part of our research, we talked to the National Association of Charter Schools Authorizers, CPS high school teachers and students, neighborhood organizations and expert panelists that focused on specific issues in schools. We also read numerous publications on this subject and conducted our own primary research by surveying about 400 Chicago public high school students about their experiences at school. With all these resources, we broke down the most essential parts of a high school into categories – or what we call “buckets” –and created policy recommendations for each of these buckets

As the Mikva Education Council, we are composed of 15 students from different public high schools all across the city of Chicago. We focus on youth voice, youth vision and youth power. Our goal this summer was to create recommendations to reinvent high schools from a student’s perspective. We would like to see high schools become a place where students feel safe, important, respected and challenged. We want our high schools to provide students with real-life skills and help students become well-prepared for their post-secondary education and careers.

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Complete List of Recommendations

Bucket: Size

1. Large schools should contain 15-20 students per class when possible.

Bucket: Graduation Requirements

2. All students should be part of an extracurricular activity, outside organization or have a part-time job within or outside the school for at least two years.
3. All seniors should take at least 2 college-level classes during their high school years, whether AP or a course at a college/university.
4. Seniors should be required to apply to at least 5 different post-secondary educational opportunities before their application deadline, whether it is a college/university, trade school, or job placement program.

Bucket: School Day

5. Schools should have block scheduling Monday-Thursday, and all classes on Friday.
6. The school day should begin at 8:30 and end at 3:30.
7. Division/advisory should be moved to the morning and should be restructured to include icebreakers and community-building.

Bucket: Discipline Strategies

8. Teachers are required to take at least 2 or 3 seminars/workshops per year to implement new and improved classroom management skills.
9. For minor incidents, instead of suspending students in school, parent/guardians should be required to shadow their children for the day, or in the event that the parent/guardian cannot show, school counselor(s), teacher(s), student(s) and whoever else was involved should meet and try to get to the root cause of the student's problem, in order to prevent a serious incident from happening.
10. Students should have a say in the school's disciplinary strategies
11. Suspensions should be reserved for the worst violations, like fights that put someone else in danger, or student(s) caught with drugs or alcohol.
12. The administration should reflect with the students when a big school fight occurs. When a one-on-one fight occurs, the two students should reflect with the dean on their behavior and come up with solutions to prevent future fights.

Bucket: School Culture

13. All schools should incorporate student voice through a principal advisory committee that would be composed of student leaders and concerned students.
14. Have small class sizes with a mix of both hands-on activities and lectures.
15. Schools should expose students to other environments outside their neighborhoods through field trips.
16. All teachers, parent/guardian(s) and students are highly recommended to meet at least once a month to discuss the student's academic achievement and parent-teacher involvement, which should include parents spending 5 hours of service to the school if available.

Bucket: Teachers

17. Teachers should be required to have office hours at least once a week so that they can assist students' needs.
18. All current and incoming teachers should be required to take two workshops on social-emotional learning each year: one before the beginning of the school year and the other in the middle of the school year. In addition, non-urban experienced teachers should shadow an experienced urban teacher for an idea of how CPS works.
19. All teachers should be required to give extra credit to students who are academically struggling. However, students who have discipline issues or attendance issues should have to make up missing assignments before getting extra credit.

Bucket: Curriculum

20. Due to students' different learning styles, teachers should apply different teaching methods, such as visual, logical and verbal instructional styles, so the students may become more academically successful.
21. Students should have an option of choosing a customized curriculum starting their sophomore year, based on whether or not they are on track at the end of their freshman year. The classes they can choose from should be diverse, such as home-economics, mechanics, anger management, and photography. Another option is students could also choose to take more core classes such as math and science for 1-2 more years.
22. The curriculum should connect to the student's community and current events going on around the world to keep students interested in school.

Bucket: Academic Resources

23. Provide more resources for hands-on activities where students can learn but also be helping their community. These activities should be both inside and outside the classroom and the lesson should connect to the student's life experiences.

24. Every high school should have a college bridge program where they will partner up with a college/university to prepare students for college and to be able to take college courses at the institution.
25. CPS should promote college, university and corporations to sponsor high schools' technology, such as computers, laptops and calculators.
26. All schools must offer honors, AP and as many vocational classes as the school sees fit due to the school's size.

Bucket: Social-emotional Support

27. Teachers should implement social-emotional learning strategies into the daily curriculum, enabling students to apply them to real life situations.
28. Hire counselor interns to help with paperwork and other school duties, so that the counselors have more of an opportunity to be engaged with the students.
29. Schools should use their resources and partnerships to train peer mentors. Students will have the opportunity to meet with mentors at least twice a month and talk about various issues, such as social-emotional problems and academic or overall questions.
30. A program should be implemented that finds an activity/interest (internship, job, club, etc.) for students who are not already active in an activity.

School Size

The size of classrooms is a problem in schools, due to overcrowding. Classrooms in CPS are overcrowded. Students and teachers lack the ability to have one-on-one time, which affects students' learning.

The Dos and Don'ts of School Size

Do

1. Utilize unused space in the school.
2. Have at least 2 small classes throughout the day.
3. Give students in large schools at least 5 minutes for passing periods.

Don't

1. Have one teacher in the class with a big number of students.
2. Have all students eating lunch at the same time
3. Accept students when the school is already at capacity

School Size Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Large schools should contain 15-20 students per class when possible.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- More one-on-one time with teachers—teachers are able to assist with every students' needs.
- Cuts down on disciplinary problems—teachers are able to control/manage the classroom more effectively.

EVIDENCE:

- In our survey, about a third of students responded that they don't like the fact that classes have too many students.
- “STAR school districts in Tennessee show that students in small classes were more likely to graduate on schedule; they were less likely to drop out of high school; and they were more likely to graduate in the top 25% of their classes.”

Implementation Steps:

- Teachers that remain within the school for a number of years should teach many of the same students throughout their time at the school, in order to build strong relationships with students.
- Re-arrange class sizes in order to even out the classes more.
- Every student should have at least one or two classes a day with a small class size.

Graduation Requirements

Students feel the graduation requirements don't prepare them for college or post-secondary education and many students are not challenged by the current set-up. Graduation requirements should make students aware of life after high school and keep them safe inside the school.

The Do's and Don'ts of Graduation Requirements

Do

1. Have a student-centered way to decide on graduation requirements and electives.
2. Prepare students for college, university, trade school, or a job placement program.
3. Help engage students in extracurricular activities.
4. Enforce graduation requirements.

Don't

1. Choose electives for students to graduate.
2. Exclude vocational courses from graduation requirements.

Graduation Requirements Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 2:

All students should be a part of an extracurricular activity, outside organization, or have a part-time job within or outside the school for at least two years.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

Students need a place to be that will keep them interested and out of trouble. In addition, extracurricular activities are important experiences that prepare students for college and work.

EVIDENCE:

- Most violence occurs in the after-school hours. If students are in extracurricular activities or jobs, they are more likely to stay out of violence.
- Our teacher and student experts agreed that extracurricular activities are often only given left-over money outside of the basic school-day budget. They must be made more of a priority.
- Extracurricular activities only received one-seventh of a percent out of the budget in 2007 for CPS

Implementation Steps:

- Schools must keep track of students who participate in extracurricular activities or have a job.
- Schools should create a required form for students who work to document their work experience, possibly giving them life-skills credit.
- The names of students who work should be given to the activities director.
- Club sponsors should keep a list of students in their programs and submit it to the activities director.
- The activities director should compile the list of the students who work as well as those who participate in clubs at school.
- The compiled list should be kept on file to make sure students are active for at least two years.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

All seniors should take at least 2 college-level classes during their high school years, whether AP or a course at a college/university.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Students feel graduation requirements don't prepare them for college. Attending college courses would give them a better idea of the standards needed and would also give them an opportunity to earn college credit.

EVIDENCE:

- Mikva survey reported that $\frac{1}{4}$ of students (99 Of 398 students) feel classes aren't challenging

Implementation Steps:

- The class would be graded on the same letter grade scale (A-F)
- The higher the grade, the more points towards students' GPA
- College courses would be taken at a college or university so students could experience college life
- The teacher of the AP or college course would help the counselor keep track of the students' participation in course.
- College courses would be during the summer or school year, but students would have to complete two college courses by the time they graduate.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Seniors should be required to apply to at least 5 different post-secondary educational opportunities before their application deadline, whether it is a college/university, trade school, or job placement program.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- It keeps the students' minds on a common goal and it makes them aware that there is some type of post-secondary opportunity for them.

EVIDENCE:

- Experts we talked to said that many students do not have a clear idea or plan after high school and need help seeing what opportunities are out there for them.
- Often, students would have applied to colleges, but do not realize they have missed their chance until it is too late. This is due in part to the inconsistent availability of counselors.

Implementation Steps:

- Counselors would keep a file folder for all the seniors and in these folders would be the colleges they applied to.
- The students are encouraged and reminded that they need to fill out applications and to make copies for themselves.
- College application workshop days will be provided for students who need assistance filling out applications for schools (volunteer college students could assist on these workshops)

School Day

The school day should be organized to fit a student's real needs. Many students feel that since they spend their whole day in school they should have a say in the time school starts and ends, as well as how many minutes would be sufficient to get from one class to another.

The Do's and Don'ts of School Day

Do

1. Be open when there are no classes going on.
2. Use class time effectively.
3. Use block scheduling to engage students.

Don't

1. Have 4 minute passing periods.
2. Have hall sweeps.
3. Start classes too early.

School Day Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Schools should have block scheduling Monday through Thursday and all classes on Friday.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Students will have more time to really learn the material better in each subject.
- It would also give teachers the time to engage students in the lesson plan by doing hands-on activities.

EVIDENCE:

- Research on integrated curriculum showed that when teachers have more time with students, they can use more innovative teaching techniques.
- Council members' personal experiences informed this recommendation.

Implementation Steps:

- Schools can test out block scheduling to see if students would prefer it by having them fill out a survey.
- Schools have to make sure that the length of the school day can fit the block schedule.
- Teachers should have trainings on how to utilize long class periods effectively.
- Students should lobby teachers in order to get buy-in for block scheduling.
- Schools need to have qualified master schedule builders to re-work schools with the block scheduling model.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The school day should begin at 8:30 and end at 3:30

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Students need adequate sleep to do well in school
- Students need a long-enough day to have time to learn and receive personalized attention from teachers and tutors
- Students also need time for extracurricular activities.

EVIDENCE:

- Mikva Survey—340 of 403 (~85%) students do not like the school day as it is currently structured, it was the #3 factor students do not like about their high schools after discipline and facilities.
- A teenager's brain typically needs to sleep from 11 pm to 8am. However most students are required to be in class as early as 7:15 am.

Implementation Steps:

- There should be a city-wide policy on when high school should begin and end

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Division or advisory should be moved to the morning and should be restructured to include icebreakers and community-building activities.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- If students have these group activities, they will have a more positive attitude and would form better relationships with other students at their school.

EVIDENCE:

- Speakers from Spry Community Links High School, Big Picture and the Waldorf School all shared the positive benefits of doing community building in the school day.
- In our own experience working together, we found that doing icebreakers and check-ins gave us greater productivity.

Implementation Steps:

- Extend daily division or advisory to 30 minutes
- Have a regular division every day but an hour-long division once a week.
- Provide training for teachers and counselors on how to do team building and ice breaker activities

Discipline Strategies

The strategies that CPS enforces are not effective. The purpose of discipline is to guide students to the right ways of behaving and to learn from their mistakes. If discipline does not affect or change the student's behavior at school, the discipline strategies need to be modified.

The Dos and Don'ts of Discipline Strategies

Do

1. Consider restorative justice such as peer mediation and peace circles as an alternative to disciplining students.
2. Apply rules fairly to all students.
3. Create a program that follows up with students who are chronically truant.
4. Involve parents when the student is continuously disciplined.
5. Create discipline that will be a learning experience for the student.

Don't

1. Discipline a student who is constantly in trouble in the standard way. There is something more behind their behavior.
2. Make an in-school suspension without assigning any work to do during the time. Make it beneficial.
3. Treat students like criminals; they are human just like adults.
4. Give out easy punishments like washing the boards or cleaning tables.
5. Create a "jail like" environment inside the school. If students are treated like criminals, they will not feel safe inside schools.

Discipline Strategies Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Teachers are required to take at least 2 or 3 seminars/workshops per year to implement new and improved classroom management skills.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Some discipline strategies have been used throughout CPS for many years and are not working anymore. We need the teachers to be updated on the newest discipline strategies and classroom management styles through a series of seminars. This way, the students will be able to learn to be more self-controlled and disciplinary problems can be avoided. This will improve class concentration and academic performance.

EVIDENCE:

- Mikva Survey- the number one issue students had with their schools was their discipline strategies, and the number one thing students do not like about their discipline strategies is that they do not change student behavior.
- This recommendation is based upon the Education Council's experiences.

Implementation Steps:

- The administration, along with the dean of students, are strongly encouraged to honestly evaluate how the schools' discipline strategies are working and failing. This will help them to find new strategies, improve the ones that are not really working, and present them to teachers and staff.
- Every third Professional Development day, seminars and workshops will be available on the topic of classroom management, so that training will not interfere with regular school days or days off.
 - Possibly use the "Well managed classroom program".
- Teachers will gather what they have learned and use the new strategies in their classrooms.
- On some seminar days, teachers will have the opportunity to discuss what has worked, what needs to be improved, and what strategies need to be eliminated.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

For minor incidents, instead of suspending students in school, parent/guardians should be required to shadow their children for the day. In the event that the parent/guardian cannot show, school counselor(s), teacher(s), student(s) and whoever else was involved should meet and try to get to the root cause of the student's problem, in order to prevent a more serious incident from happening.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Since detentions and suspensions are having little to no effect on eliminating problems from occurring again, we believe our recommendation will make the students feel that someone does care about them and understand why they did what they did.

EVIDENCE:

- Mikva survey—The largest issue students have with the current discipline strategies is that they do not change student behavior. This recommendation aims to create a more lasting impact on students who are in trouble.
- This recommendation is based on both articles read and the personal experiences of the students.

Implementation Steps:

- The school should notify the parent/guardian about the minor offense and discuss what the parent's responsibilities are once the offense has been committed.
- If the school is unable to communicate with the parent/guardian, a meeting will be set up which will include the student's counselor(s), teacher(s), the student and whoever else was also involved with the offense.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Students should have a say in their school's disciplinary strategies.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- A student's perspective is the most important because they have a first-person view of what is going on inside the school and what works to discipline students. Input from the students should be used to the administrations' advantage to see what is working and what needs improvement. Students would like to see the adults listening to what they have to say and setting boundaries for their fellow classmates, while preventing unnecessary detentions, suspensions and other harsh punishments.

EVIDENCE:

- This recommendation is based upon the Education Council's personal experiences.

Implementation Steps:

- The school administration should set up a monthly town-hall meeting for students who are interested in voicing their opinions, concerns, and ideas about the discipline code and enforcement strategies with the principal, vice principal and dean of students present at every meeting.
- The school can create a council with a core group of students that will meet with the principal, dean and security on a weekly basis discussing the entire student body's concerns, suggestions, and opinions about their discipline strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Suspensions should be reserved for the worst violations, like fights that put someone else in danger, or student(s) caught with drugs or alcohol.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Suspensions are overused and have been proven not to work in the majority of CPS.

EVIDENCE:

- Recent Catalyst story about the high rate of suspensions of black students showed that nearly 1 in 4 black males was suspended at least once per year.
- Students who are suspended are “at higher risk of failing courses and dropping out because of the strong correlation, borne out by research, between school attendance, grades and graduation” (Karp 2009).

Implementation Steps:

- The Dean or security must follow a board approved checklist before finalizing the decision on whether or not to give out a suspension.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

The Administration should reflect with the students when a big school fight occurs. When a one-on-one fight occurs, the two students should reflect with the dean on their behavior and come up with solutions to prevent future fights.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- This recommendation is important because in high school, the most common way that school deans address a school fight is through a suspension, and they need to get at the root cause of the problem. Students outnumber adults in a school and need to play a positive role in keeping their school safe and positive.

EVIDENCE:

- Tony Wagner’s book [The Global Achievement Gap](#): At The MET, the administration met with students to discuss serious disciplinary problems. For example, the MET staff brought up that a student was bringing a gun to school for protection; the students intervened and stopped the student from bringing it.

Implementation Steps:

- Have a reflection/meeting with the victim and offender alongside adults such as the school principle, dean and security.
- Hold a workshop on creating a positive school culture with students when a large fight occurs. Have student leaders help run this workshop.

School Culture

School culture is the atmosphere felt within the school. The atmosphere can affect students' performance in the classroom. It is important to make students feel part of the school.

The Dos and Don'ts of School Culture

Do

1. Listen to what the students say and actually take it seriously.
2. Make extracurricular activities available so that the majority of students can feel accepted within their school culture.

Don't

1. Make changes within the school without getting students' opinions
2. Overlook students' opinions.
3. Exclude students' opinions when the principal is about to make changes. The principal should take the time to try to meet with students and address their needs/problems within the school.

School Culture Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 13:

All schools should incorporate student voice through a principal advisory committee that would be composed of student leaders and concerned students.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- By students having constant contact with the principal, they will be able to inform the principal of issues that are occurring between students so that action can be taken.

EVIDENCE:

- Students know best what is going on in their schools. One article on student voice said, “students are a valuable resource for improving school climate and academic quality” (Savrock 2008).

Implementation Steps:

- Contact all principals to reach out to all sports/clubs and appoint a representative to be a part of the principal’s advisory committee.
- The meetings should be held at least once per month and be open for ALL students to come and express their concerns.

RECOMMENDATION 14:

Have small class sizes with a mix of both hands-on activities and lectures.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Different students have different learning styles and through hands-on activities and lectures the interests of all students are met.

EVIDENCE:

- We watched several Edutopia videos and learned about case studies from innovative schools such as High Tech High, Francis W. Parker Charter school in Boston, and The MET in Rhode Island that have shown that hands-on activities help students stay focused and participate in class.

Implementation Steps:

- Along with lectures, teachers do more experiments, projects, plays and other hands-on activities in order to create a better learning environment that will engage students more.
- Each week should have variety such as “activity, lecture, activity, independent work, lecture...” and will keep proceeding as follows varying different mixtures of assignments.
- Provide trainings for teachers to learn new teaching styles, possibly by creating forums for teachers to share best practices.

RECOMMENDATION 15:

Schools should expose students to other environments outside their neighborhoods through field trips.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- There are students who never go outside of their neighborhoods; the field trips will expand their horizons. Also, if the field trips relate to the lesson currently being taught it will spark the student's interest in school and the subject matter they are learning.

EVIDENCE:

- Studies have shown that field trips increase motivation for learning and provide a more positive attitude toward science and environmental concepts (University of Florida)
- This is especially important because in our survey the number one thing students did not like about their school culture is that "students are not focused on learning." Field trips could help students feel engaged in their studies.

Implementation Steps:

- Require schools to take students on field trips at least once every two months.
- They should go to places such as cultural museums and outside neighborhoods to further their knowledge of Chicago and its diversity.

RECOMMENDATION 16:

All teachers, parent/guardian(s) and students are highly recommended to meet at least once a month to discuss the student's academic achievement and parent-teacher involvement which should include parents spending 5 hours of service to the school if available.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Constant communication between students, parents and teachers ensures that the parents are up-to-date on how their kids are doing academically and improved communication could possibly help schools recruit parent involvement in the school.
- Parent involvement in the school improves school culture and could help cut costs.

EVIDENCE:

- Studies show that children whose parents and/or other significant adults are involved with the school tend to improve grades and test scores in students. Another proven benefit is long-term academic achievement (University of Illinois).

Implementation Steps:

- Parents and teachers exchange contact information
- Parents and teachers agree on a time to meet with one another at least once per month to build a relationship. Additionally, the teacher can update the parents on how their child is doing academically.
- Teachers communicate with parents both about the negatives *and* positives in a student's achievement.

Teachers

Teachers need to be respectful and professional at all times with students. It is important for teachers to get to know their students and understand their backgrounds and lives.

The Dos and Don'ts of Teachers

Do

1. Act professionally – be respectful, evaluate situations, think before acting.
2. Motivate – compliment students, positively push students to do their best.
3. Make the best of your resources – Use creative and innovative way of teaching to keep the students engaged and interested in the subject.
4. Be empathic – be able to understand a student's predicament
5. Be culturally competent – Try to understand student's background.

Don't

1. Primarily use worksheets as a form of teaching
2. Be rude
3. Be abusive
4. Be disrespectful
5. Be close-minded
6. Leave school early

Teachers Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 17:

Teachers should be required to have office hours at least once a week so that they can assist student's needs.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Often students fall behind in class and do not know where to turn. Tutors can help, but they do not provide the same insight as teachers who know the material and how it was taught. Office hours give students a reliable time to meet with their teachers to get help with class/homework and address any question or concerns about assignments.
- Also, students learn better when they trust their teachers. During this time, teachers can talk to students about social and personal problems, developing a greater student-teacher connection.
- Student teacher conferences (both for good and bad purposes).
- Teachers are limited by classroom time, so by having office hours, teachers can offer extra help to struggling students.

EVIDENCE:

- According to the Mikva survey, about 50% of students feel that students in their schools are not focused on learning. By creating office hours, students can not only focus on completing the work, but could also talk to that teacher about why they are not focusing.

Implementation Steps:

- A policy should be created that requires teachers to keep office hours to provide more one on one help for students.
- Highly encourage teachers to start this practice voluntarily until policy is in place.

RECOMMENDATION 18:

All current and incoming teachers should be required to take two workshops on social-emotional learning each year: one before the beginning of the school year and the other in the middle of the school year. In addition, non-urban experienced teachers should shadow an experienced urban teacher for an idea of how CPS works.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Teachers will know how to approach students about different issues and learn how to provide help. This will bolster students' confidence, so that they will want to learn more.
- Positive social and emotional experiences help make students feel happy and confident in their work.
- Additionally, such training will help students interact better with peers, thus cutting down on violence.

EVIDENCE:

- This recommendation was based on student experiences and our survey which showed that only 40 percent of students feel that their social and emotional needs are met at their schools. Since teachers play such a critical part in the relationships that students create at schools, it is important for them to have adequate training.

Implementation Steps:

- Before fall, teachers can go through the social-emotional workshop.
- In the middle of the school year, the teachers can reinforce their learning, give feedback on the results and share best practices.
- Before hiring, the non-urban teachers can shadow other teachers or go through a workshop facilitated by experienced urban teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 19:

All teachers should be required to give extra credit to students who are academically struggling. However, students who have discipline issues or attendance issues should have to make up missing assignments before getting extra credit.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- When a student does not turn in an assignment or misses a certain amount of days because of whatever reason a student (after completing the missing assignments) should have the opportunity to improve their grades through extra credit
- Also by denying students extra-credit, you deny them a chance to stay on track. Thus increasing the likelihood that the students might drop out.

EVIDENCE:

- According to teacher2b.com there are some reasons and benefits for allowing extra-credit work. The teacher should consider the individual lives of their students. Perhaps the student's family is moving; they may be sick; they may have a fear inducing situations outside of the classroom. Perhaps their family is splitting up.
- There are many reasons outside of the students' control for doing poorly on an assignment. If teachers are sick, they can simply return papers a little later; give the test the next day, etc. Students don't have that control over their school lives.
- Some teachers have very full, tightly planned courses. In these courses, if some problem occurs so that early in the semester a student's grade falls, a very competent student may never be able to achieve a respectable grade without extra credit. Consider the motivation to work for a student who realizes that no amount of work will improve the final grade.

Implementation Steps:

- Set a deadline for extra credit work to be completed before marking grades so that you don't take paper and test correcting time away from those who have been doing all their work on time. If students miss a day or more, they will have to make up all the missing assignments before they will be allowed to do the extra credit.

Curriculum

The curriculum taught in schools is often seen as boring and not engaging to the students. Sometimes students do not have any input into curriculum or the option to choose their classes for next year. It is important to keep students engaged and connected in their classes while they are in high school to ensure success in their post secondary education or career.

The Dos and Don'ts of Curriculum

Do

1. Connect curriculum to current events.
2. Provide more warm ups for the ACT.
3. More exposure to technology (computers, calculators, projectors).
4. Encourage students to join extracurricular activities and take advantage of community resources.

Don't

1. Rely on a textbook or worksheet to teach students.
2. Focus solely on a certain learning style (visual, auditory, logical).

Curriculum Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 20:

Due to student's different learning styles, teachers should apply different teaching methods, such as visual, logical and verbal instructional styles, so the students may become more academically successful.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- We believe that it is important because the students need to absorb different techniques on how they learn by the time they go off to college. Not everyone learns the same way. Therefore we need teachers to use different learning techniques.

EVIDENCE:

- Read/Research about different learning styles.Ex: www.learning-styles-online.com

Implementation Steps:

- Do learning style assessments at the beginning of the school year so that students can understand how they learn best and teachers can design their classrooms to meet the needs of their students.
- Incorporate the different learning styles on a daily basis to meet with each student's learning needs. For example Visual learners read more and analyze pictures better; read more as a class, discuss pictures in the textbooks, novels or books that the class is reading. Auditory learners prefer to talk; include debates or class discussion as part of the lesson for that day.

RECOMMENDATION 21:

Students should have an option of choosing a more customized curriculum starting their sophomore year, based on whether or not they are on track at the end of their freshman year. The classes they should choose from should be diverse such as, home economics, mechanics, anger management, and photography. Another option is students could also choose to take more core classes such as math and science for 1 – 2 more years.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- A lot of students do not like the limited classes that are offered and would like more vocational classes to be offered. Our vision is to see students enjoying their studies and in class creating experiments, projects, and work in general while seeing a smile on their faces and an "A" on their piece of paper.

EVIDENCE:

- Mikva Survey Results -Students say they do not have classes they are interested in. Only 20 percent of students said that their curriculum teaches them what they want to know.

- 46% of our survey takers said they do not like their school’s curriculum because vocational classes are not offered.

Implementation Steps:

- Do an assessment of student interests in a school to ensure that the school offers the classes that students want.
- Have teachers teach electives that they are qualified in, for example, have an English teacher offer a journalism class.
- Students are allowed to choose their curriculum if they have passing grades at the end their freshman year (Min. 2.5 GPA)
- Counselors should meet with teachers who have taught freshman to see if any students are qualified and ready to choose the classes they would like.
- If rising sophomores qualify, they are allowed to choose which classes they would like based on what the school offers.
- Teachers can recommend to qualified students classes that will meet their interests.

RECOMMENDATION 22:

The curriculum should connect to the student’s community and current events going on around the world to keep students interested in school.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- This recommendation gives students an understanding of what is currently happening in our world and lets them apply what they learned in class to the real world. This approach would broaden their thinking ability and give students a better understanding of current events and their communities’ issues.

EVIDENCE:

- According to a recent survey from VOYCE, some factors over the course of a student’s life that can lead to them dropping out include unchallenging curriculum and irrelevancy to his/her life.

Implementation Steps:

- Hold trainings for teachers to learn how to relate the lesson plans to current events in the student’s community and major political issues around the world.
- Use external partners like Mikva Challenge Issues to Action/Democracy in Action programs, GEAR UP, Facing History, Constitutional Rights Foundation, AVID, and Team Teaching around current events problem. For example, “what should we do about global warming?”

Academic Resources

Because of the lack of funding and resources high schools have been forced to work with the bare minimum. By providing adequate and innovative academic resources, students will have a better chance of learning what is being taught and feeling passionate about it.

The Dos and Don'ts of Academic Resources

Do

1. Have more classes that utilize technology.
2. Have students involved with community organizations.
3. Ensure an adequate amount of books that are up-to-date.

Don't

1. Spend too much money on non-academic resources.
2. Offer a limited selection of classes.
3. Give out-of-date resources to students.

Academic Resources Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 23

Provide more resources for hands-on activities where students can learn and also be helping their community. These activities should be both inside and outside the classroom and the lesson should connect to the student's life experiences.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- From our Mikva survey results we found out many students find their classes boring and irrelevant to their life and future. This will have students more engaged because it will connect to their lives.
- Real life experiences help students prepare for jobs and college.

EVIDENCE:

- According to the VOYCE report on dropouts, teachers say they use the following teaching techniques to accommodate different learning styles of students: hands-on learning/activities and connections to neighborhoods and communities.
- Additionally, students say connection to life experience, real world issues, and relevance of the subject matter to their communities are important to keep them engaged in school. Curriculum should work to broaden students' world view through analyzing local as well as national and international issues.
- Tony Wagner's Global Achievement Gap states that traditional teaching does not prepare students for future work and college effectively.

Implementation Steps:

- Have teachers from different subjects work on a lesson plan to intertwine all subjects into one curriculum that will have student learning while taking action on current events that affect them and their communities.
- Sacrifice some textbooks that are out-of-date for more resources to innovative hands-on learning techniques.

RECOMMENDATION 24

Every high school should have a college bridge program where they will partner up with a college/university to prepare students for college and to be able to take college courses at the institution.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Students find it extremely difficult to stay focused on a subject that doesn't pertain to their life experience, their community around them or their future. By having students visit a college facility, students will be more motivated to study because they will believe they have a chance to go to college

EVIDENCE:

- From our Mikva survey results we found that many students find their classes boring and irrelevant to their life and future. This will have students more engaged because it will connect to their lives and their futures.

Implementation Steps:

- Every school picks a lead for this project. The lead would go and talk to different colleges / universities so that they can create partnerships with them.
- The schools should also help the students enrolled in college bridge fundraise the money so they can take these classes. (Due to the funds that were taken out of the budget for this program).
- There would be a GPA requirement. The students must have above a 2.5 GPA.

RECOMMENDATION 25

CPS should promote college, university, and corporations to sponsor high schools' technology needs, such as computers, calculators, and etc.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Schools have inadequate technological resources. This is unacceptable in the 21st century. If and when a school lacks space or resources such as technology, this program can help.

EVIDENCE:

- Student Survey – 39% of students say that they don't have adequate resources and technology in their schools.

Implementation Steps:

- High Schools could partner with corporations and colleges/universities that have an interest in recruiting their students so that both sides could benefit from this arrangement.
- Give teachers trainings on how to use technology in the classroom to ensure that it is utilized to its full potential.
 - Possibly link students and teachers for these trainings since often times students are more technologically aware than teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 26

All schools must offer Honors, AP and vocational classes as the school sees fit due to the school size.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Because honors and AP classes show students the rigor of class work in colleges.
- Students will be more committed to school if they are challenged and if they have variety.

EVIDENCE:

- This recommendation was based upon Education Council's experiences.

Implementation Steps:

- Each school picks a teacher to run AP, honors or vocational programs.
 - Each school partners with an external group or college for students to use their facilities when needed.
-

Social-Emotional Support

Social and emotional needs are something that students feel very strongly about. Without emotional well-being, there is no assurance that students will achieve their full academic potential.

The Dos and Don'ts of Social-Emotional Support

Do

1. Have teachers get to know their students as well as they can.
2. Take into consideration the different lifestyles of students.
3. Get to the roots of students problems.
4. Teachers should be someone students can trust and talk to.

Don't

1. Assume things about students' lives.
2. Act like you don't care.
3. Just ignore students if you tell they are upset.
4. Let students just leave the class if upset; help as best you can.

Social Emotional Support Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 27:

Teachers should implement social-emotional learning strategies into the daily curriculum enabling students to apply the lessons to real life situations.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- This recommendation is important because it allows students to learn various ways to deal with different social-emotional problems outside of the classroom. This benefits the students because they can take the lessons taught and use them with their peers.

EVIDENCE:

- 60% of students who took the survey feel that their social-emotional needs are not met at school.
- Many students said that there are not clubs to get emotional support from their peers, if the teachers have their lessons focus around social-emotional support, the students will be able to help each other.

Implementation Steps:

- Teachers develop different lesson plans that involve social-emotional solutions, I.E. mock situations, cause and effect role plays
- Utilize the CPS social-emotional toolkit, especially cooperative learning.
- Have students write reflections on their progress and thoughts.

RECOMMENDATION 28:

Hire counselor interns to help with paperwork and other school duties so that the counselors have more of an opportunity to be engaged with the students.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Students need more real counseling time from their counselors. If counselors had less paperwork, they could focus more on students' needs

EVIDENCE:

- Mikva survey: 60% of students said that their social-emotional needs were not being met. A large part of this is because counselors are too busy.

Implementation Steps:

- Find interns- aspiring counselors (grad schools, social workers)
- Train them over the summer
- Assign interns to different schools
- Make sure the interns have some sort of social- emotional counseling experience

RECOMMENDATION 29:

Schools should use their resources and partnerships to train peer mentors. Students will have the opportunity to meet with mentors at least twice a month and talk about various issues, such as social-emotional problems and academic or overall questions.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- Students need positive peer pressure to help them make the right choices and stay on track in school. Mentors are more effective if they have been trained.

EVIDENCE:

- This recommendation is important because some high school students feel as though their social-emotional needs are not being met. The students also may not be entirely comfortable talking to the adults within the school. With the students having peer mentors it gives them a chance to be comfortable talking to someone who understands where the mentee is coming from.

Implementation Steps:

- Upperclassmen apply for position of mentor.
- Partnerships send people to also become mentors.
- Have training workshops for mentors run by outside experts.
- Underclassmen meet with the selected mentors.
- Underclassmen pick their mentor.
- The two will meet at least twice month.
- The two can also have outside of school contact.

RECOMMENDATION 30:

A program should be implemented that finds an activity/interest (internship, job, club, etc.) for students who are not already active in an activity.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

- This recommendation gives students an opportunity to be a part of their school community. It helps with the students social development skills.

EVIDENCE:

- www.greatschools.net “Studies show that student involvement in clubs and activities is linked to achievement in upper grades.”

Implementation Steps:

- Students that are not in a program meet with counselor and discuss interests and obligations.
- The two will talk about the various programs that can be offered to the student, and will find alternatives if there is nothing in the school.
- Create a space within the school for advertising of programs—“student resource center”

Conclusion

We hope that teachers, Chicago Public School administration, and students thoughtfully examine our recommendations and implement these essential ideas into their schools. Not one high school is perfect or similar to another. Every school needs improvements in some area. With our recommendations on how to Reinvent High Schools, we hope that we can create schools that meet the needs of students and teachers on an academic and social-emotional level. In considering the various possibilities for improving CPS high schools, we, the students, have learned to be more serious, open minded, considerate and helpful in order to create healthy learning environments. We are young, but we are going to prove that YOUTH have a voice and can make a difference.

Appendix

MIKVA CHALLENGE SURVEY of CPS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. Which of the following are factors that you do NOT like about your high school? (check all that apply)

- School Day (hours open, structure of time)
- Teachers
- Academic Resources
- Curriculum
- Size (school and classroom)
- Discipline Strategies
- Facilities (gym, classrooms, school building)
- School Culture (how does it feel to be in your school)
- Social Emotional Support (The schools ability to help you with your personal life)
- Graduation Requirements

2. Choose your top 3 root causes for not liking your school and rate them in order of importance?

(Same answer choices as above)

3. What don't you like about the structure of your school day? (check all that apply)

- Too long
 - Too short
 - Starts too early
 - Starts too late
 - Ends too late
 - Ends too early
 - Not enough breaks
 - Classes too short
 - Classes too long
 - There is not enough time between classes
 - Nothing, the school day is perfect
- Please provide any additional comments

4. What don't you like about your school's academic resources? (check all that apply)

- Class selection offered
 - Classroom materials aren't current
 - There aren't enough books
 - There are too many books
 - There aren't enough teachers
 - There are too many teachers
 - Too much money is spent on non-academic materials
 - Computer technology not available or not functional
 - Lack of extracurricular activities
 - Not enough supplies in the classroom
 - Nothing, my school has all the academic resources I need
- Please provide any additional comments

5. What don't you like about the size of your school? (check all that apply)

- There are too many students for the size of our building
 - There are too few students for the size of our building
 - My school is too big
 - My school is too small
 - classes have to many students
 - classes have to few students
 - Nothing, my class and school size are fine
- Please provide any additional comments

6. What don't you like about your school's facilities? (check all that apply)

- We don't have a gym
 - We don't have an auditorium
 - We don't have a pool
 - We don't have a field (track, soccer, football, baseball)
 - Students don't have a social space
 - We don't have a science lab
 - We don't have an art room
 - We don't have a computer lab
 - We don't have a band room
 - We don't have clean classes/building
 - We don't have a cafeteria with healthy food choices
 - We don't have a well maintained building (walls and floors falling apart)
 - There is no landscaping outside
 - The bathrooms are dirty
 - Nothing, my school has everything I would want
- Please provide any additional comments

7. What don't you like about your teachers? (Check all that apply)

- They are not available after school
 - They are disrespectful
 - They don't care about me
 - They don't trust me
 - They don't understand where I come from
 - They don't challenge me
 - They don't set high standards
 - They ignore me
 - They play favoritism towards others
 - They are not passionate about their job
 - Nothing, all my teachers are great
- Please provide any additional comments

8. What is 1+1?

- 4
- 0
- 2
- infinity

9. What don't you like about your school's curriculum? (check all that apply)

- Classes do not connect to my real life
 - Classes are not challenging
 - Classes are too challenging
 - We don't have classes on things I am interested in
 - I don't have an opportunity to prove my knowledge outside of test, and quizzes
 - Class isn't interactive
 - Too much focus on standardized tests
 - No vocational classes (Wood shop, Home Ec., etc)
 - Nothing, it teaches me what I want to know
- Please provide any additional comments

10. What don't you like about how your school disciplines students? (Check all that apply)

- I feel disrespected by the adults in the building
 - Detentions are given for minor offenses
 - Suspensions are given for minor offenses
 - Rules are not enforced
 - Rules are over enforced
 - The lack of working metal detectors
 - Having to go through metal detectors
 - It doesn't change student behavior
 - The display of favoritism
 - Nothing, my school disciplines students in an appropriate way
- Please provide any additional comments

11. Which is the most effective way to discipline students leading to a positive change in student behavior? (Rate from 1-7, with 7 being the most effective and 1 being the least)

Suspension

Parent notice

Saturday School

Hall Sweeps

Expulsions

Having a police station/police presence

Detention

12. What don't you like about how your school provides social-emotional support?(check all that apply)

- I don't know who to talk to when i have a problem
 - Teachers don't take into account my personal struggles
 - There is no opportunity within the school day to really get to know my peers
 - There is a no opportunity within the school day to really get to know myself
 - My counselors are too busy
 - Not enough time in the school day to get to know myself
 - There is no opportunity within the school day to really get to know my teachers
 - There are no after school clubs to get emotional support from my peers (i.e. Brotherhood, Lady's Lounge)
 - No 1-on-1 time with teachers
 - Nothing, my social and emotional needs are met by my school
- Please provide any additional comments

13. What don't you like about your school culture?

(how it feels in your school, daily routine and student/faculty culture) check all that apply

- Students are not focused on learning
 - There are students that don't make me feel safe
 - There is no clear leadership (don't know principal, school leader)
 - There is not enough security
 - I don't have positive relationships with other students
 - I don't have a positive relationship with teachers, staff, or administrators
 - Would like to have more diversity
 - Would like to have less diversity
 - Nothing, the school culture is positive
- Please provide any additional comments

14. What don't you like about your high school's graduation requirements?

(Check all that apply)

- There are too many requirements
 - There are too few requirements
 - I need more than 4 years to accomplish them
 - 4 years is too long
 - The requirements don't prepare me for college
 - The requirements don't prepare me for life beyond school(life skills)
 - The requirements don't prepare me for options other than college
 - I don't get to choose what classes i get to take to graduate
 - The requirements are not flexible enough for students with other responsibilities
 - Nothing, school requirements are fine
- Please provide any additional comments

15. Please share aspects of your high school that you like.

Demographics

1. What type of school do you attend?

- Charter school
- Neighborhood school
- Selective enrollment
- Small school
- Magnet school
- Career academy
- Special education
- Alternative school

2. How many students are in your school?

- Under 300
- 300-500
- 501-700
- 701-1,000
- 1,001-2,000
- 2,001-3,000
- More than 3,000

3. What is your grade level?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th
- Other (please specify)

4. What is your G.P.A (grade point average)?

- Under 1.0
- 1.0-2.0
- 2.1-3.0
- 3.1-4.0
- Over 4.0

5. How many days have you been absent from your school?

- 0
- 1-5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-20 days
- Over 20 days

6. How old are you?

- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18-up

7. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Other

8. What is your race/ethnicity?

- African American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Multi Racial
- Other

9. What is your family's income?

- Under 30k
- 30k-50k
- 51k-70k
- 71k-100k
- More than 100k
- I don't know

10. How many people live in your household?(including yourself)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

11. Who do you live with?

- I live with both parents
- I live with just my mom
- I live with just my dad
- I live with a relative
- I live with a guardian
- I live on my own
- Other

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John Ayers, National Association of Charter School Authorizers

Linda Becker, Teacher at Little Village Social Justice High School

Linda Lutton, Journalist and Educational Reporter

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Shanti Elliot, Francis Parker Day School

Kelly Tepaste, Vaughn Occupational High School

Francisco Boras, Principal, Spry Community Links High School

Jamie Artega, Mikva Challenge

Sarah Carp, Catalyst Chicago Reporter

Mike Hanning, Alternative high school network

Alfredo Nambo, former Principal of Big Picture High school

SalemaOrtego, Big Picture Student

Colleen Everhart, The Waldorf School

COMPLETE LIST of SITE VISITS

Umoja - North Lawndale College Prep

Spry Community Links High School

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The logo for Mikva Challenge, featuring the word "Mikva" in a large, white, serif font above the word "Challenge" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, all set against a black square background.

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