

THE IMPACT OF CHICAGO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND OPENINGS SINCE 1995

Generation All Policy Brief
February 1, 2017

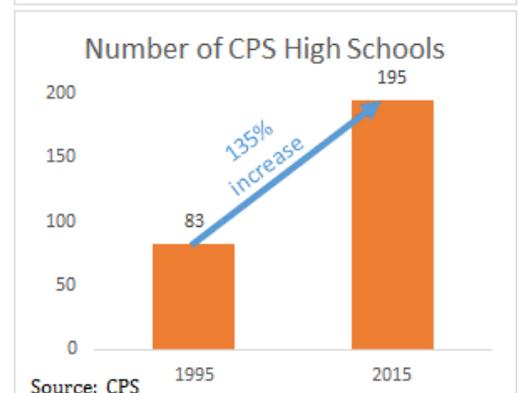
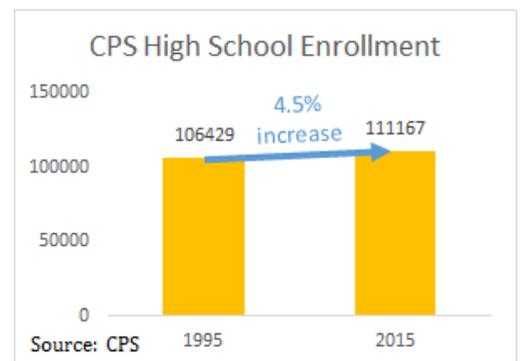
- *Excluding alternative schools, 88.2% of new Chicago public high schools opened since 1995 impose some kind of barrier to enrollment, whether through a lottery or selective criteria such as scoring above a minimum test score.*
- *The burden of school closures and turnarounds has fallen primarily on African-American and Latino communities on the west and south sides of Chicago.*
- *An open, inclusive, citywide planning process that considers neighborhood needs would allow for sound school placements that don't create winners and losers.*

While no high schools were closed in the 2013 closings of 50 elementary schools, 46 high schools have been closed, turned around or consolidated since 1995. During the same time period, 139 high schools have opened, according to CPS Board of Education records and a 2011 analysis by *Catalyst Magazine*. This brief examines the location of these changes, what types of schools have been impacted, and how these openings and closings have increased the number of options for Chicago families but not their confidence in CPS as a school district that will serve them regardless of race, income, neighborhood, or ability.

1. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF CPS HIGH SCHOOLS SINCE 1995:

Chicago Public Schools has opened 139 high schools in the last twenty years despite experiencing only a 4.5% increase in its high school population. These school openings have happened year by year without a clear citywide plan, and every time a school opens, closes, gets turned around or is consolidated, students' education and community ties are disrupted.

School openings and school actions (the umbrella term for closures, turnarounds, consolidations, and attendance boundary changes) are inherently disruptive because they unsettle students' relationships with adults in the building, relationships between school staff members, and relationships between schools and their surrounding communities.



Research has shown:

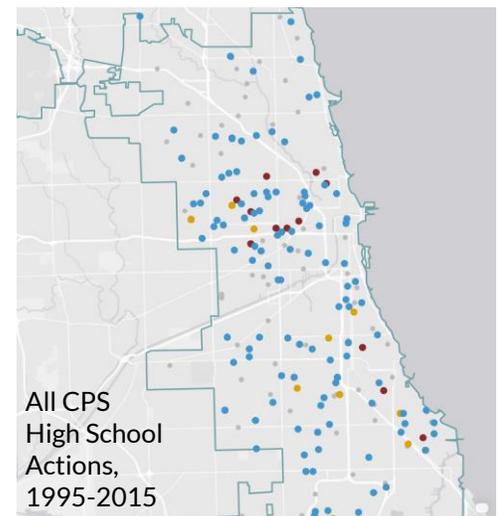
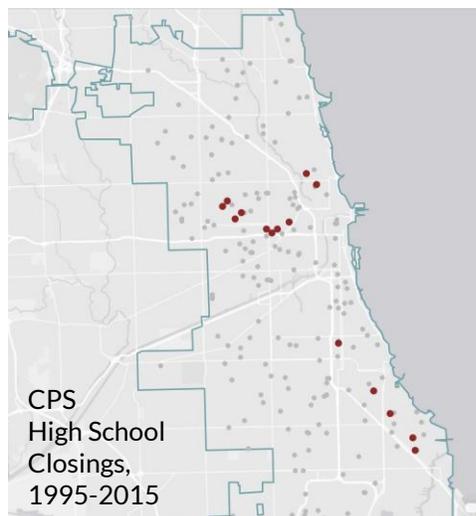
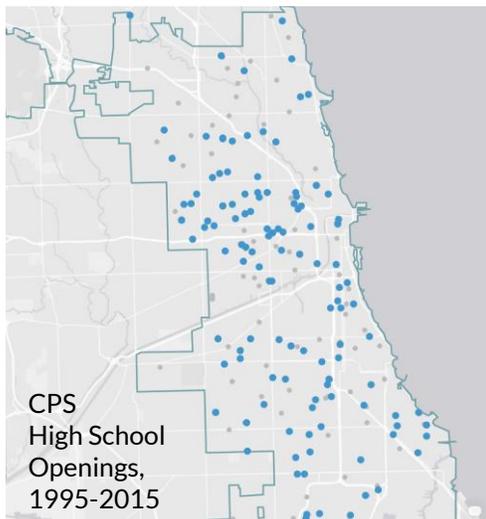
- Disruptions to students' social relationships in school negatively impact their academic performance¹
- The negative impact of school closures on achievement begins before the closure takes place, often upon announcement of the closure²
- High school closures can decrease students' GPA and attendance by 10% and 4% respectively for up to three years and decrease high school graduation by 6-10% and college attendance by 3-5%³
- High school disruptions do not leave much time for students to recover because students often graduate or age out before the impact of the disruption diminishes⁴.

These negative impacts of school closures in Chicago have fallen primarily on African-American and Latino communities as almost all high school closures have been on the west and south sides.

Besides school closures and turnarounds, school openings can also disrupt students and communities. When multiple schools open in the same vicinity, enrollment can shift so much that, due to the move to per-pupil funding, pre-existing schools lose millions of dollars in funding per year, leading to teacher layoffs, narrowed course offerings, and less socioemotional and post-secondary support at these schools.

2. QUICK FACTS ABOUT CPS HIGH SCHOOL ACTIONS FROM 1995-2015

The maps below show all Chicago public high school closures, openings, turnarounds, phase outs and consolidations that have occurred in the last twenty years. Changes in school attendance boundaries are not reflected here.



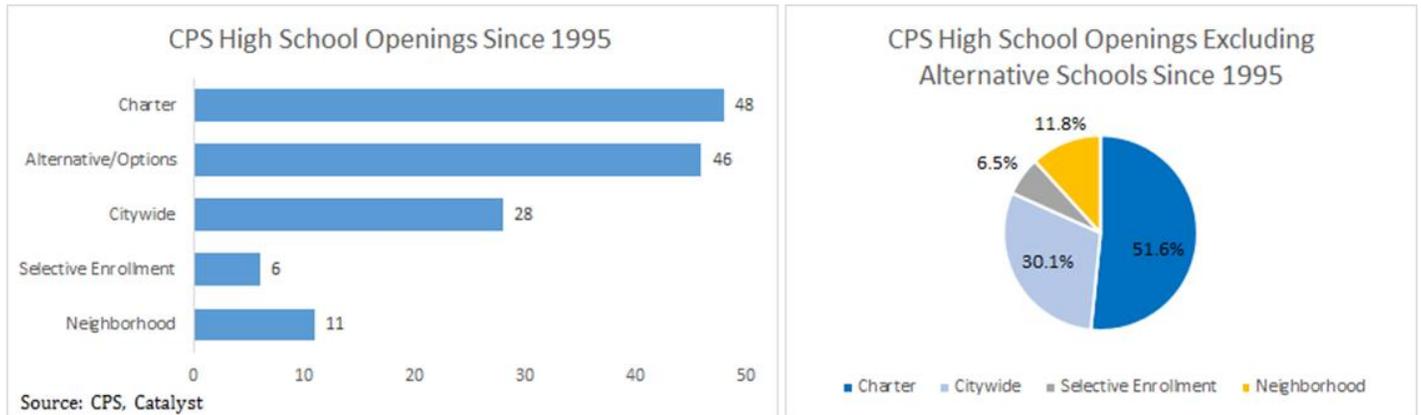
¹ Pribesh, S., & Downey, D. B. (1999). Why are residential and school moves associated with poor school performance? *Demography*, 36(4), 521-534. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10604079>

² De la Torre, M., & Gwynne, J. (2009). *When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools*. Research Report. Consortium on Chicago School Research. 1313 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED510792.pdf>

³ Larsen, M. F. (2014). *Does Closing Schools Close Doors? The Effect of High School Closings on Achievement and Attainment*.

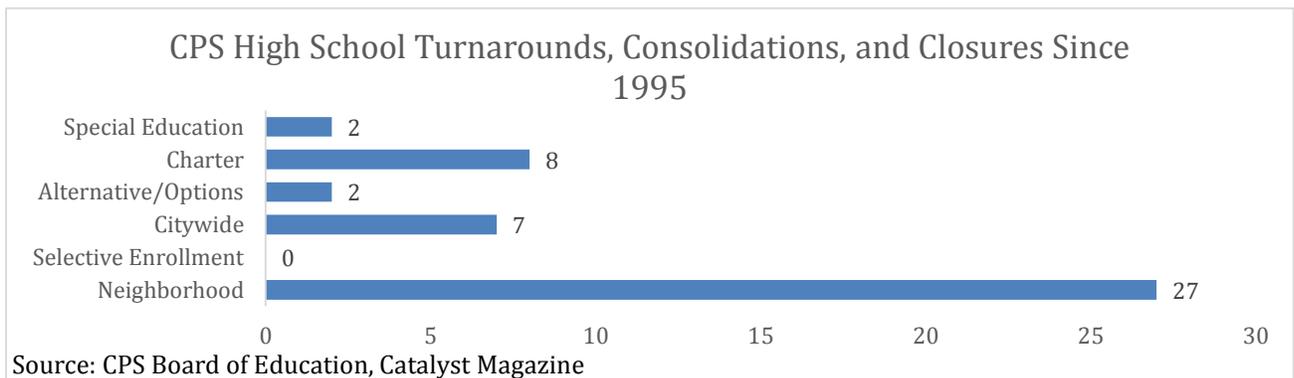
⁴ Larsen, M. F. (2014). *Does Closing Schools Close Doors? The Effect of High School Closings on Achievement and Attainment*.

Openings



- Of 139 high school openings, just 11 are neighborhood high schools that are still open today, 4 of which are small schools at the same location (Little Village Lawndale High School).
- Aside from alternative schools, **88.2% of the new high schools opened since 1995 impose some kind of barrier to enrollment**, whether through a lottery or selective criteria such as scoring above a minimum test score.
- Also excluding alternative schools, 51.6% of the high schools opened since 1995 (48 schools) have been charter schools.

Turnarounds, Consolidations, and Closures



- Neighborhood high schools comprise 58.7% (27 schools) of the 46 high school turnarounds, consolidations and closures that have occurred since 1995.
- Some neighborhood schools have had multiple disruptions within this time period. Bowen, Orr, Austin, and South Shore were all closed at one point, turned into smaller schools and then reconsolidated into larger high schools in each of their communities again.
- Every high school that has been closed has been one that primarily served African-American or Latino students.

3. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES?

Out of the eleven neighborhood high schools that have opened since 1995 eight remain: Hope High School, Hancock High School, North-Grand High School, Eric Solorio Academy High School, and the four schools that comprise Little Village Lawndale High School. 93 other schools have opened that do not guarantee a seat for students because they use a lottery system, a cut off score from a standardized test or other hoops through which students and families must jump. This has made it more difficult for families in Chicago to be confident that their child will have guaranteed access to a top quality high school nearby. This uncertainty leads to many families leaving Chicago or choosing a private school option, which further destabilizes the public school system.

The lack of a plan that takes into account neighborhood needs but is citywide has led to an oversupply of schools and unnecessary competition

As the map illustrates, the placement of new schools has been haphazard. New high schools open in close proximity to already existing schools and can struggle to fill all their available seats. Some areas of the city have many high schools while others do not, and the quantity of high schools in a particular area is unrelated to that area's population density. Without a plan, important questions remain unanswered such as how many high schools Chicago needs, where they should be placed, and how they should relate to each other. **The result of not planning is that Chicago has too many high schools for the students it currently has while still being unable to *guarantee* a high-quality educational experience for every student.**

This harms the strength of communities as a whole. The opening of multiple types of high schools in a neighborhood:

- Deters schools from sharing best practices and resources with each other due to the need to compete for funding. A larger number of schools in the same neighborhood compete for the same number of students for finite funds
- Leads to increased sorting between schools as they are incentivized to recruit higher achieving students to boost their scores and prestige
- Breaks down social cohesion in a neighborhood as duplicative social networks are formed at multiple schools



- Decreases parents' sense of agency in ensuring their children will receive a high quality education⁵.

Opening and closing schools without taking into account the impact those actions have on surrounding schools and communities is a short-sighted policy that damages the futures of our students and neighborhoods.

The lack of a plan leads to disinvestment and dropping enrollment in some neighborhood high schools

Neighborhood high schools are particularly affected because they are expected to compete with new schools opening up around them, without significant additional investments. Students at severely under-enrolled high schools suffer because their school is unable to afford all the teachers, coaches, counselors, and advisors necessary for offering a full and enriching curriculum, support services, and clubs, sports, and after school activities for students.

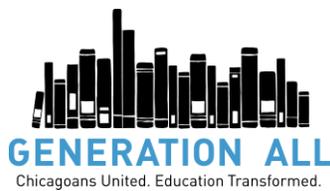
In addition, despite recent improvements in graduation and college persistence rates, neighborhood high schools fight persistent yet often inaccurate negative perceptions by many community residents, students and their families. The climate of competition further exacerbates these schools' efforts to change their perceptions as they lack access to funds that could be used for facilities improvements, enrichment activities, and marketing materials.

4. WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

An open, inclusive, citywide planning process that considers neighborhood needs would allow for sound school placements that don't create winners and losers.

Leaders from Chicago Public Schools, city agencies and the mayor's office need to engage in open dialogue with residents, community groups, school leaders, students, local school councils and neighborhood agencies about decisions on where and when to open and close schools. In the past, decisions about opening and closing schools have been made behind closed doors and without adequately considering economic, housing, and public

⁵ Pattillo, M. (2015). Everyday Politics of School Choice in the Black Community. Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race, 12(01), 41-71.



safety plans. Schools, as neighborhood anchors, serve as essential institutions where various public services can intersect, making it wise for school planning to occur in concert with other citywide plans.

A public dialogue and planning process could also consider how schools and other city services, such as libraries and parks, might work together to better serve neighborhood students. Creating a community-informed, comprehensive, long-term plan for schools citywide could also facilitate schools within a geographic area sharing resources more intentionally and effectively.

Generation All is encouraged that the 2016 teachers' contract includes a provision for CPS to not close any under-enrolled schools until 2018. However, Illinois also received a \$42.5 million grant in 2015 to open 24 more charter schools in Chicago over the next five years.

To ensure a prosperous future for all of Chicago's students, we must put a hold on *opening* and *closing* any more high schools and engage in a public planning process to first assess how many high schools Chicago needs, and then how to ensure that students in communities that have historically been disrupted receive sustainable investments in their schools and communities.