2019/2020 Local Technical Assistance and Community Planning Programs

Application Number: 18

Project Title: City of Chicago Kids First Chicago Transportation Plan

Applicant: City of Chicago - Kids First Chicago

Project Description:

Kids First Chicago's work includes reducing barriers for families to high-quality schools. We have studied school choice patterns for elementary students in the West Side region in our Annual Regional Analysis (ARA). Last school year, there were roughly 25,000 Kindergarten-8th grade students who live in the region. 79% of those students attend a school in the region and 40% attend a school in the region that is not their neighborhood school. These data have been consistent in the last four years. There is significant school choice within the region and many students are choosing to attend a higher-rated school. On average, elementary students in the West Side region who do not attend their neighborhood school travel 2.6 miles and commute 24 minutes. The ARA also found that there are 12,000 unfilled seats at highly rated elementary schools in the West Side region.

Research is needed to determine whether transportation is a barrier to high-quality school access and choice. Our questions include:

- How are students getting to school in the West Side region, either their neighborhood school or another school?
- Is this a pain point for families?
- Do transportation challenges impact what schools families consider?
- Is racial equity a factor in transportation access? 23% of West Side students are Hispanic and 75% are African-American.
- What solutions can we propose to CPS and other stakeholders to address this potential problem?

Chicago Public Schools only provides transportation to a small number of gifted and magnet elementary schools for students who live within 1.5-6 miles from school and some students with disabilities. Nearly all of the West Side families who are choosing another school in their region are not attending schools where yellow school bus transportation is provided.

We surveyed 225 elementary parents across the South and West Sides and confirmed that convenience is equally important to academics and safety in school choice decisions. We learned that of the various modes of transportation to school, car was mentioned 43% of the time, walking 25%, bus/subway 15%, and school bus 15%.

We would like to drill deeper on the West Side with a larger sample to understand if families are making similar transportation choices and why. Possible deliverables include data collection and landscape analysis of current conditions. With that analysis, we would like to leverage the expertise of CMAP transit planners to identify emerging transportation solutions for pilot. Kids First Chicago works closely with parents and community members to improve education. Our long term goal, in partnership with community champions, is the implementation of potential pilot programs and/or advocacy for broader transportation policy recommendations to reduce barriers to accessing high-quality schools.

Project Location: West Side region: generally bounded by West Addison Street to the north, West Grand Avenue to the south, the Metra Union Pacific Northwest railroad line to the east, and the Metra Milwaukee District/North line to the west.

Downloadable report with map here: https://kidsfirstchicago.org/west-side-region