WE WILL CHICAGO

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Lifelong Learning Meeting #7

December 2, 2021, 2:00PM | 2 hours

Documented by: Sonal Soni

ATTENDEES

- Marisa Schulz
- Guillermo Cruz
- Jane Fleming
- Terry Hogan
- Quenna Barrett
- Alicia Bunton
- Kathleen Dickhut

- Emilia Chico
- Patrick Day
- Mark Potter
- Abigail Rose
- Rachael Smith
- Aisha Jean-Baptiste

- Peter Fitzpatrick
- Renuka Sharma
- Rebecca Amato
- Meida McNeal
- Mariana Garcia
- Jacob Watson
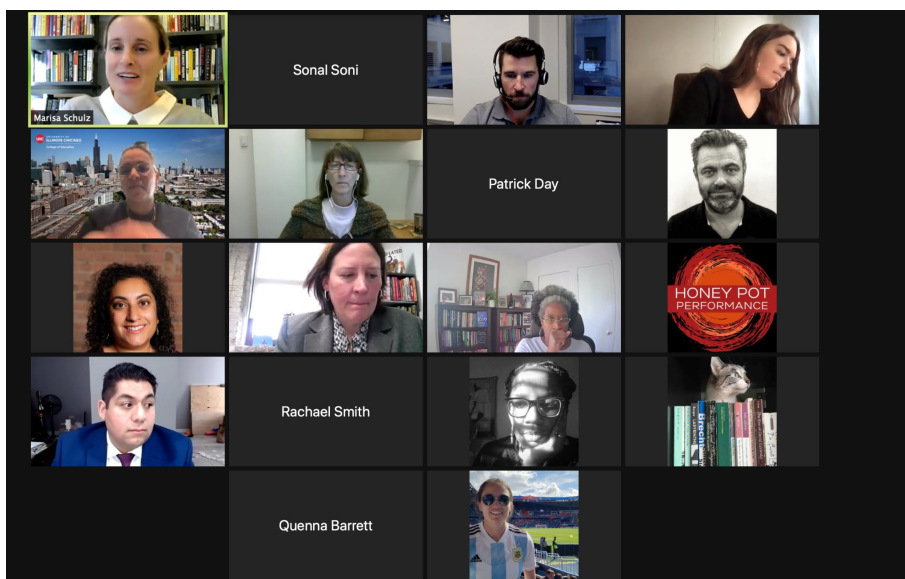
MEETING GOAL

To complete and refine objectives with the Advisory Committee's pillar report feedback in mind.

WHERE WE ARE

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
We Are	**We Have and Need**	**We Will**
Setting the Stage	*Develop A Policy Toolkit*	*Set Policy Framework*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 While a variety of resources and learning opportunities are available to city residents, access to these resources is not equitable. Community feedback shows that individuals want to enter higher education programs and learning opportunities in general, but a main barrier is not knowing where or how to start. Community suggestions include creating neighborhood hubs in public spaces like libraries, employing resource liaisons to assist residents in accessing resources and expanding information online.

2 Financial and social factors, such as access to financial assistance and affordable child and/or elder care, can also create barriers for lifelong learning opportunities.

3 This meeting's conversation also highlighted the important role Chicago Public Schools (CPS) personnel play in the continuation of lifelong learning efforts.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

"It's not that there are no [learning] opportunities, it's that folks don't know how to plug in. [They] don't know how to get connected to them. We also saw a lot that folks were not connected to each other, to other organizations, to other folks doing similar work, or that they were not being connected to civic entities or other municipality resources and opportunities."

Quenna Barrett | Goodman Theatre, Associate Director of Education

"I think it's important to note that [most of what the community] suggested or asked for here [exists] in some form or another … [It's] more a problem of equity … none of this is radical, in my opinion. But the question is, how do we make [it so that resources don't] even come up as a need?"

Jacob Watson | Independent education consultant, facilitator, director/producer

WE WILL CHICAGO

"We really ought to be calling out specifically our commitment to public education in our objectives and naming CPS as a critical institution in the city as a provider of lifelong learning."

Mark Potter | City Colleges of Chicago, Provost and Chief Academic Officer

"What alignment [could] we do better with school-aged children, specifically to this pillar, in partnership with CPS or other institutions?"

Guillermo Cruz | Aon Global, Corporate Analyst

"I was thrilled to hear the kinds of things that students are asking for as it relates to getting to choose [their] own essay topic, learning about content [and] being able to discuss controversial issues because those kinds of things are embedded in [CPS'] new curriculum."

Jane Fleming | Chicago Public Schools, Director of Literacy

NOTES

- Marisa Schulz started off the meeting by asking Zoom participants for consent to be recorded, then moved on to the first agenda item: engagement presentations.

Advisory Committee Report—Guillermo Cruz

- The pillar team is encouraged to think expansively about apprenticeships across a variety of sectors. They should also consider programs and initiatives that help transfer certifications and degrees from a person's country of origin to the U.S.

- Questions for the pillar to consider: Where do the educational needs of school-age children from early childhood to high school fit in? Are there opportunities for business-led internships or apprenticeships to develop skills/crafts and launch a career? This is especially helpful for youth who may not fill well in a formal school setting but may need other means to learn skills or crafts to launch their career trajectories.

- The feedback highlights a need to increase language capacity through translation and interpretation services.

- The Advisory Committee asks: Is there space to not only think about awareness of the opportunities but also build awareness about why lifelong education is worthwhile for any Chicago resident?

- This concludes the pillar feedback, which will be used later in the meeting to guide participants in refining the pillar's objectives.

Artist-Organizer Report—Quenna Barrett and Jacob Watson

- Barrett and Watson, co-chairs of the pillar's artist-organizer team, present their findings on community engagement, titled the We Will Chicago Final Report.

- The team spoke with a range of Chicago residents, including young people, who were asked to create an open-ended "what if" question. Some examples include, "What if there were more counselors at schools?" and "What if they taught us how to get around Chicago?"

- Research questions: How do people across Chicago experience meaningful learning? What challenges and opportunities exist within those experiences? And how might this knowledge of Chicagoans' learning needs drive decision-making at the city level around educational infrastructure, resources and access?

  o These research questions helped develop the Brown Bag series of community engagement events inviting people to one particular event, as opposed to multiple.

- The teams' four main areas of focus were: financial disparities, social support, real-word learning and access to information.

- Financial disparities prevent education sector workers' pursuit of higher education and limits their earning potential. As the cost of higher education and other learning opportunities rise, access to education becomes increasingly challenging. Education sector workers also cited a lack of funding and overall low wages, as well as concern with the pay and benefits gap for early childhood workers as compared to K-12 and higher education workers.

- In terms of policy recommendations, education workers highlighted the need for not just free services, but also freely available services. It isn't enough for something to be free of cost. People also need to know how and where to access resources and whether they are eligible for them. Other suggestions included using social media to ensure all individuals, especially younger ones, are tuned in to local resources. Other suggestions: expanding access to computers in areas of the city where digital literacy training and hardware are disproportionately low, increasing access to those materials, and removing financial barriers that prevent people from re-engaging with higher education.

- When assessing social support, the team found access to educational opportunities is not evenly distributed. Cost aside, the ability to participate in formal education programs is limited by caretaking (child, elder, etc.) and professional responsibilities, according to community feedback. For young people, the necessity of working a job often interferes with their educational opportunities. The team also heard about early childhood care eligibility requirements, which often include parents' qualifications and socioeconomic status. These barriers can fail to provide all of the necessary tools and resources for navigating early learning and potential learning challenges. This lack of resources also extends to pregnancy and early parenthood.

- Community members proposed solutions such as investing in local infrastructure to allow people to participate in education opportunities in the first place. For instance, all parents should be provided with adequate services and a more intentional community support system with free or low-cost childcare and eldercare. Making services accessible to speakers of multiple languages expands public knowledge and increases access to different career options.

- When it concerns real-world learning, the team found that many youth (elementary through high school) feel that life skills (such as financial self-sufficiency, cooking, political engagement and health) are notably absent from school curriculum. They also expressed a desire for more self-direction and variety within school subjects (including engagement of controversial social and political topics), and access to both technical skills and job experience.

- The team also reported on how [COVID exacerbated the learning and achievement gap](#). The pandemic was mentally taxing for many and highlighted the rigidity of school culture and curriculum, showing the ways in which learning spaces do not accommodate Chicago's culturally diverse, neurodivergent and/or disabled learners.

- Some community proposals include more school therapists, higher quality school supplies, higher wages for education workers, more after school programs, accommodations for working parents, diverse food options with student input and allowing students to take home food for their families.

- The last key theme the team explored was access to information. Participants, especially those representing learning organizations, talked about the lack of channels for accessing information about learning opportunities. The team also reported a lack of community engagement, where residents were unfamiliar with local organizations doing similar work or were not connected to resources in general.

- Community members also expressed interest in creating a centralized resource of learning opportunities, both digital, like a website or app, as well as a physical space—like a library or other public infrastructure. They also suggested employing community liaisons who could help residents access different resources.

Breakout Rooms and Round Robin Reviews

- Zoom participants split into breakout rooms to discuss the pillar's guiding questions and refine their objectives using the Advisory Committee's feedback report.

- Guiding Question #1: How do we support increased awareness, interest, and belonging to learning resources accessible to all Chicagoans at all stages of life (regardless of race, gender, income level, age, ability, citizen status, and language proficiency)?

    o Refined Objectives:

        ▪ Create and support intergenerational community learning hubs (digital or physical) in all neighborhoods.

        ▪ Improve collaboration between citywide organizations and formal institutions to better facilitate access to system-wide learning opportunities.

        ▪ Leverage informal learning opportunities to create pathways toward formal learning opportunities (e.g., learn coding at the library and enroll in City Colleges).

        ▪ Develop an accessible citywide awareness campaign about the importance of lifelong learning and related opportunities

- Guiding Question #2: How do we create sustainable pathways to the workforce for communities that have been historically disenfranchised, including individuals negatively impacted by the criminal justice system?

- Guiding Question #3: How can we build on existing programs and academic curricula to create learning opportunities and deliver on personal growth?

- Guiding Question #4: How might we elevate existing social support systems to increase formal and informal learning opportunities?

- Guiding Question #5: How can we expand the availability and accessibility of places where lifelong learning can occur, especially in communities that have been historically excluded?

- During the Round Robin Review, breakout room participants rotated to see what other rooms were working on and give their feedback; however this portion of the Zoom meeting is not included in the recording. General feedback included specifying language and revising objectives so they are easy to understand.

Q&A/Closeout

- Emilia Chico guides participants through the meeting's conclusion by thanking team members and volunteers for their hard work and outlining future steps. The next meeting in January will focus on Phase 3 of the We Will Chicago plan: setting policy frameworks and assessing performance. Chico also mentions that future meetings will host experts who will report on research regarding community learning hubs, as discussed in today's meeting.

RESOURCES

MEETING #7 ARTIST-ORGANIZER ENGAGEMENT PRESENTATION
Slides

CPS SKYLINE CURRICULUM PROJECT
This meeting mentioned ongoing CPS initiatives including a new pre-K through 12th grade contemporary standards-based, culturally responsive, aligned curriculum designed specifically for Chicago students

CPS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HOMEPAGE
This site outlines CPS' Career and Technical Education initiative (CTE). Its programs offer the opportunity to earn industry certifications, which can be used to gain full-time employment or jobs to help pay for college.

NEXT STEPS

- Ahead of the next meeting, pillar members will make additional edits to the objectives based on the refinement suggestions and today's discussion.

- Team members will also review content to ensure objectives are easy to understand and accessible to the public.

- All drafts and supporting work will be incorporated into policies and subtext in the final report.