

About Julie Woestehoff

Julie Woestehoff is the interim executive director of Parents Across America.



She was the executive director of Chicago-based Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) from 1995-2014 and is a veteran Local School Council member.

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LSC 101

What are Chicago's Local School Councils?

How have they increased parent and community participation and empowerment?

Have LSCs improved schools?

How can other communities use the LSC model?

What are Local School Councils?



LSCs are elected, representative local school governance bodies for Chicago Public Schools created by Illinois law in 1987.

See Illinois School Code Chapter 105 Article 34

Why were LSCs created?

LSCs were established in 1989 in a wave of community-based reform sparked by organizing around the 19-day Chicago Public School (CPS) teacher strike in 1987.

Parents, teachers, and community groups joined together to demand a greater voice in school policy making.

Read: [School Reform Chicago Style](#)



Parent groups form

Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) was created when 500-1000 parents began to meet once a week to criticize school leaders for being irresponsible in funding schools -- district deficits resulted in frequent school strikes and program cutbacks.



Mayor Harold Washington, a strong supporter of community empowerment, created a Parent Community Council to promote community voice in education reform. Sadly, he passed away before the school reform law was enacted.

LSCs are made up of

- 6 elected parents.
- 2 elected non-parent community residents.
- 2 teachers and 1 non-teaching staffer chosen in a non-binding poll and appointed by the Board of Education.
- 1 student in high schools (also appointed).
- The school principal.

There are approximately 6,000 LSC members serving at any one time.

[Official LSC guidelines 2014-16.](#)



What are the LSC's major powers and duties?

LSCs:

- Select the principal for a four-year contract.
- Evaluate the principal annually.
- Approve the school budget.
- Approve the school improvement plan.



Key elements of the LSC law

- Parent majority, now a plurality; must be chaired by a parent member. (This was done to avoid conflicts of interest with district employees that undermined New York City regional councils.)
- Direct decision making over principal hiring, budgets and annual plan.
- Required training, ethics rules.
- Two required public meetings per year to report on budget and school and student progress.



LSCs make a difference!

LSCs include the vast majority of elected officials of color in Illinois.

Between 1989- when LSCs began to choose school leaders- and 1996, the proportion of principals of color increased from 44% to 66% in elementary schools and from 60% to 70% percent in high schools. Women were less than half of all CPS principals in 1989, but more than 70% by 2007.

[\(CCSR Work of Principals 2008\)](#)



LSCs, you hold the keys!!

LSCs make a difference!

Researchers suggests several benefits of this change.

For example:

- Principals, teachers, and students of the same cultural group relate to one another more easily, influencing school climate
(Bossert et al. 1982).
- Early studies of women in the principalship suggest that women “more readily exchange information. . . , work more hours, are more inclined to be innovative, are more likely to be democratic leaders, and are more preferred by teachers and superiors than men” *(Lee, Smith & Cioci 1993).*

LSCs Make a Difference!

A Harvard researcher found that LSCs increase accountability between local officials and the community, build social capital, and encourage low-income parents and parents of color to become more involved in their community. *(Fung 2004)*



FUN FACT: The current chairman of the Illinois Senate Education Committee is Senator William Delgado, whose first elected office was as an LSC community representative.

Principals and teachers like LSCs!

In their 1997 survey of LSC members, “Charting Reform,” the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) reported highly favorable feedback from CPS principals on the LSC principal selection process.



A 2003 CCSR survey of CPS teachers found that, of those who knew about LSCs, 70% said they were **“really helping to make this school better,”** up from 63% reported nine years earlier.

More good news about LSCs

- LSCs have been a notably clean form of government. And not just compared with other Illinois elected officials!
- LSCs have: **replaced principals** who were not attentive to school needs, directed discretionary funds to pay for school bands and other **fine arts programs**, created **computer labs**, fought for repairs, renovations, additions and new schools to **relieve overcrowding**, implemented **parent programs** to increase parent involvement, and added **gifted programs**.



But, most importantly...

LSCs improve schools!



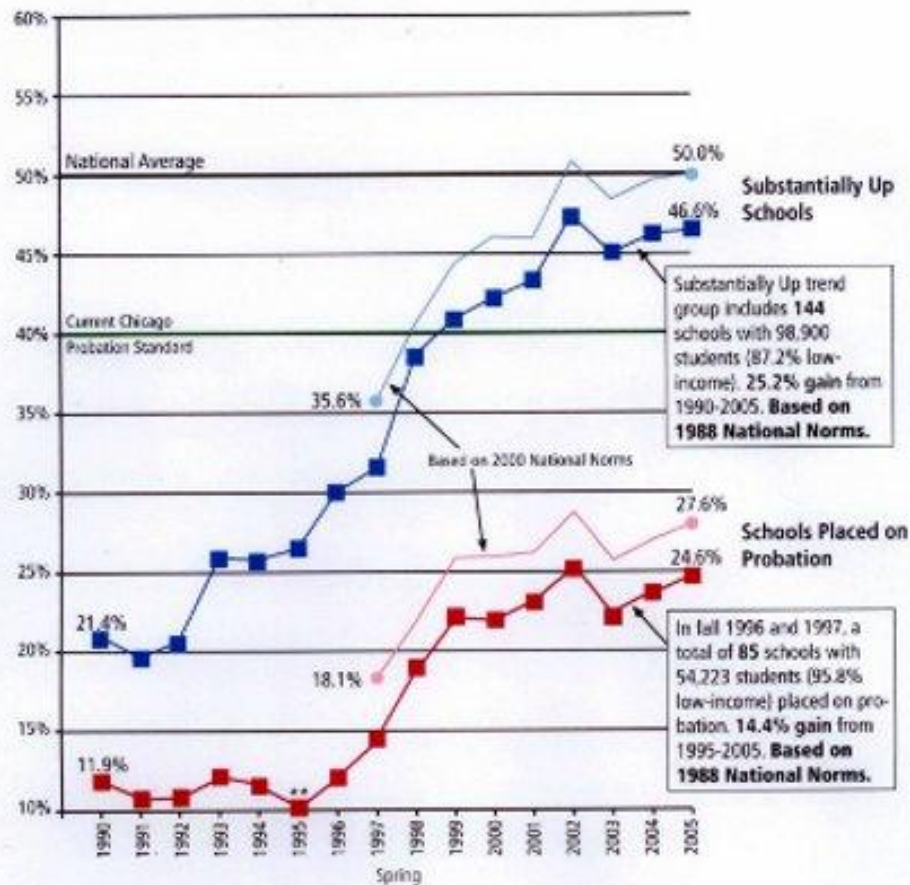
LSC-run schools outperform district schools without LSCs

- In one study, LSC-run schools outperformed similar schools which CPS placed on probation, taking over LSC powers. *(see chart next slide - DFC 2005)*

PURE Fact Sheet [here](#).



Iowa Test of Basic Skills Reading Scores for Chicago K-8 Schools That Were Placed on Probation in 1996 or 1997, Compared with Schools that Were Low Achieving in 1990, but Were Substantially Up from 1990 to 2005*



*Percentages based on 1988 National Norms for "Substantially Up Schools" and "Schools Placed on Probation" are estimated for 2002-2005.

**Progress of the K-8 probation schools is judged from 1995 because the major push to put schools on probation began in 1996. Sixteen of the K-8 schools placed on probation in 1996 or 1997 were closed before the spring 2005 testing.

LSC-run schools also outperform “turnaround schools”

LSC-led elementary schools also far outperform Chicago's privately- or district-run “turnaround” schools despite extra resources given to turnarounds. *(Designs for Change, 2012)*



The DFC analysis ranked 210 city neighborhood schools with at least 95 percent low-income students, based on the percent of students passing their 2011 state reading tests. It found that only 3 privately managed turnaround schools placed among the top 100. Two CPS-run turnaround schools came in 150 and 206th, respectively.

Challenges to LSCs

Since Chicago schools were placed under the control of the mayor in 1995, district officials have undermined and marginalized LSCs.

CPS has:

- Placed hundreds of schools on probation, and taken over LSC powers.
- Closed more than 100 schools and disbanded their LSCs.
- Reopened other schools as “turnarounds” with LSCs that are advisory only.
- Created 100+ charter schools which do not have LSCs.
- Imposed other “alternative” school structures without LSCs (“small schools,” military schools, etc.).



More challenges for LSCs



LSC training, which is required by law, was taken away from trusted advocacy and community groups and put under CPS control. Training has become perfunctory and even misleading.

LSC support groups have lost funding and many have closed their doors.

Too few LSC candidates?

- 17,000 people ran as candidates in the first LSC election. Community and corporate funds paid for major ad buys, other promotional materials, and candidate recruitment and training.
- Since that time, support for LSCs from foundations and political heavyweights has dried up, as corporate-style reform gained a foothold.
- LSC advocates have complained that public attacks on LSCs seemed timed to suppress the number of candidates. They have demanded and won extended nomination deadlines.
- Despite the challenges, some 7,000 people still run for LSC every two years.



Parents and communities support LSCs

City and district officials have regularly but unsuccessfully attempted to do away with LSCs in state law.

However, the LSC model remains strong and participation is consistent and enthusiastic.



What members say about their LSC experience

[“Charting Reform” \(CCSS 1997\)](#) asked LSC members about their personal response to being an LSC member, and found that most were “deeply affected,” feel they have “developed as more competent citizens,” and are “more knowledgeable about schools...” “ They say that “serving on the LSC has increased their sense of self-worth...and that they have acquired valuable civic skills...”

(See more pp. 39-42)



How can parents and communities use the LSC model?

- Make the most of existing advisory and other governance structures available to you in your city, area or state.
- Talk to others about the benefits of creating LSC-type bodies in your local schools.
- Share Parents Across America's [position paper](#) on LSCs, "The Empowerment Parents Want."
- Look at the Illinois [LSC law](#) - it's long and complicated but includes the elements of a strong site-based management system *that works*.



Make your voice heard!!!

For more information:

Contact Julie Woestehoff
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Parents Across America

www.parentsacrossamerica.org

The logo for Parents Across America features the word "PARENTS" in red, "ACROSS" in blue, and "AMERICA" in red, all in a bold, sans-serif font. The word "ACROSS" is positioned between "PARENTS" and "AMERICA" and is slightly smaller and more widely spaced.

You can also find valuable material
on the PURE web site

www.pureparents.org