



Burley Local School Council Meeting Minutes January 20, 2021

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 pm.

Roll Call:

Present: Catherine Plocher, Mary Renouard, Amy Walsh, Bob Blitstein, Carolyn Skibba, Rob Moon, Teresa Merritt, Jessy Newman, Elliot Ransom, Katie Hall-Jasinski, Erin Stanfill

Review of LSC Meeting Procedures and Acting Secretary:

Because this is the first meeting of the newly elected LSC, Ms. Plocher (principal) provided an overview of the meeting structure and facilitated the beginning until the new LSC had officially elected officers. Katie Hall-Jasinski volunteered to serve as acting Secretary until the official Secretary is in place.

LSC Officer Nomination and Confirmation:

Ms. Plocher began the nomination process with the **Chair** position. Elliot Ransom (parent representative) volunteered for the position. Carolyn Skibba (teacher representative) motioned to approve and Bob Blitstein seconded. All voted in favor.

Next, Catherine Plocher opened the position of **Vice Chair**. Bob Blitstein (community representative) volunteered for the position. Rob Moon (community representative) motioned to approve and Mary Renouard (parent representative) seconded. All voted in favor.

The third LSC officer position is **Secretary**. Carolyn Skibba offered to fill the position if there were no other volunteers. Jessy Newman (parent representative) volunteered. Carolyn Skibba motioned to approve and Elliot Ransom seconded. All voted in favor. Jessy Newman began taking notes in addition to Katie Hall-Jasinski and these minutes were prepared using both of their notes together.

The fourth and final position is responsible for **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** requests. Amy Walsh (parent representative) volunteered for the position. Mary Renouard motioned to approve and Bob Blitstein seconded. All voted in favor.

The Burley LSC officers are:

Chair: Elliot Ransom (parent representative)



Vice Chair: Bob Blitstein (community representative)
Secretary: Jessy Newman (parent representative)
FOIA Requests: Amy Walsh (parent representative)

Approval of Minutes:

The Council reviewed the December 2020 LSC minutes prior to the start of the meeting. There were no issues noted by the LSC. Bob Blitstein motioned to approve the minutes. Elliot Ransom seconded. All voted in favor to approve the minutes.

Note: Upon approval of the minutes, Elliot Ransom assumed his responsibilities as Chair and facilitated the remainder of the meeting.

Technology Report:

Carolyn Skibba shared that the technology focus has been troubleshooting the teacher work stations so that everyone will be able to hear and see what is necessary during in-person and remote instruction, noting that this is very complex. Burley educators are spending a lot of time testing, learning, and inventing ways to make things functional. Ms. Skibba noted that CPS has sent supplementary equipment to support the transition to hybrid – additional devices, spares, some backups. Bob Blitstein shared that he had heard positive feedback from Burley parents and many of the parent representatives on the LSC agreed with this sentiment.

Principal's Report:

Ms. Plocher began the principal report by providing an overview of what she will cover in that report, which includes any updates, the financial report, and information about reopening.

Financial Report. Ms. Plocher provided an overview of the budget and what the different budget lines represent.

- The **115 line** is for per pupil funds, and these represent the majority of funds that Burley gets from CPS. *Note that Burley does not have Title I funds (which are for schools with higher proportions of students from lower income families), for example, nor does the school receive special programs funds.*
- The **353 line** is for Title II funds - these funds compensate schools that don't have the means to cover their budget but they can only be spent toward staffing.
- The **124 lines** are internal accounts. When the school receives money from families (for field trips, donations from a match, graduation fees, for example), it goes into the school's internal accounts. Ms. Plocher and team then transfer the



money from Internal Accounts into the Oracle Budget system Line 124 to be used for their specified purpose.

- The **353 line** is for staffing. Ms. Plocher does not usually print this budget because the line is at \$0 because the position is fully funded. *Note that the 353 line still is not enough to fund all of the staffing that Burley needs so we rely on other means such as Friends of Burley which funds 1.5 positions (a specialist and a half position); they have been doing that for the last 9 years.*
- **The program line 119029 line** is for teacher supplies. Every teacher receives, per union agreement, \$250 per year for instructional supplies. Ms. Stronsky and Mr. Renfro spent the money on instructional resources for ESL, for example.
- There is a new **miscellaneous line** for \$90,158.05 that didn't exist last month. On 12/31/2020, Ms. Plocher received an email from CPS that said they were doing reviews and saw that Burley was in dire need so they allocated money to help with that. When Burley receives money for those reasons, it shows up in a miscellaneous line and has to be reallocated into other positions. This reallocation is voted on and approved by the LSC.
 - Ms. Plocher requested the following:
 - \$30,000 to open lines to hire miscellaneous employees. Burley already has a few miscellaneous employees from CPS but would like to hire 2-3 more to help when the school reopens.
 - \$10,000 toward covering and funding reproductive health classes
 - \$25,000 toward instructional materials
 - \$25,158.05 toward supplies for remote learning kits, individual supplies since students cannot share, etc.
 - Jessy Newman asked if there was a way to do a community drive for the supplies so that Burley could use the funds in other ways. Ms. Plocher explained that it is difficult to do a community drive for these kinds of materials because you need everything quickly, at once, and to be the same. There will be other ways the community can help going forward.
 - Bob Blitstein motioned to approve the budget transfers and expenditures. Amy Walsh seconded and all were in favor.

General School Updates. Burley received an OST (out-of-school time) grant for \$15,000 that will be used from February to the end of the year. This will be used for remote-only afterschool programming. Burley is continuing to partner with the Merit School of Music for students who want to continue to pursue their instruments. Students need to be committed and there will be an attendance policy. Burley is also looking into Dancing with Class as they try to get fine arts and movement into the mix.



Burley had 35-40 students that were applying to high school and completed the testing for selective enrollment and academic centers at Burley. Ms. Plocher shared that this was good practice for the health screening process that will be implemented when schools reopen.

Reopening Updates. Ms. Plocher noted that there was a sign-up available for public comment and the time for that will be at the end of the meeting. Speakers will be called on in the order in which they signed up. Each speaker will have two minutes. The details from the public comment are presented in that section, starting on page 7.

Families can expect to receive their pod assignments on Friday, January 22 and their specific class schedules by the end of the following week. Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash are hosting a townhall for CPS families and the community on Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 6pm. Information to join the meeting was shared via email. Ms. Plocher shared a condensed version of the slides that they have prepared for the townhall, noting that they took inspiration from the inauguration for the reopening presentation and plans.

Note: the townhall slides (with the slides that were presented during the LSC meeting) are available online [here](#). Key points from the presentation are as follows:

- Students will wear masks at all times except lunch
- All students and staff will be provided masks as needed
- Burley also purchased clear face masks which are especially important for English learners and young learners
- There are shields for all staff who want them and some for students with language and phonetics needs
- There is extra PPE stored in the office
- If students are not able to wear masks consistently, they may be moved to remote learning
- Students will stay in their pods all day - there will be no mixing of pods
- Hand sanitizer is in each classroom and throughout the hallways; the pumps are automatic so no touch is necessary
- All classrooms will have an air purifier; Burley had received 16 at the time of the meeting and more are expected. Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash note that CPS has kept their word on deliveries as promised.
- Students will eat in their classrooms. All meals must be nut free.
- There are stickers and signage placed throughout the building to ensure all remain 6 feet apart.
- Classes will have breaks for handwashing upon entry, before lunch, bathroom, and if they are in closer contact with others.



- The school is implementing rigorous cleaning procedures and adjusted schedules. Custodians will be on evening shift.
- If someone in the school becomes ill, hospital-grade mister will be used to clean the areas.
- Burley has had two inspections for air quality completed. Every classroom has been inspected to determine readiness which includes checking the windows, air supply, etc. All rooms have passed inspection. In addition, Specialty Consulting Inc. came and did an inspection to check the vents, air, etc. They tested 20% of the building. Everything passed. For specific details, please contact Ms. Plocher.
- Everyone who enters the building will be required to complete a health screener. All students should complete the screener in the morning before leaving for school. Families will receive text messages with links to complete the screener available online at cps.edu/healthscreener. Note that you must hit EXIT when you have finished the screener for it to go through. Anyone - teachers, staff, students - who do not pass the health screener cannot enter the building.
- Burley has worked closely with CPS Central Office to create a care room if someone in the school gets sick. Ms. Plocher is paying special attention to the social and emotional health of students who must stay in the care room by creating a space that is warm, welcoming, and safe. Each individual space has its own air out of the building, for example. Students will be sent to the care room if they exhibit any symptoms and parents will be contacted immediately for pick-up. Students will not be able to leave on their own.
- CPS is putting plans in place for staff testing. This will occur in four quadrants/25% of staff. The district is also working on contact tracing protocols but Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash note that parents must report to CPS - teachers and staff cannot report to CPS on families' behalf.
- New arrival and dismissal procedures will go into effect when the school reopens. No one can be on the school grounds before 8:05am. All students will enter the building in pre-assigned waves, by time, and this will be the case for dismissal as well. Burley is working hard to ensure that, for families with multiple students in the school, they are in the same wave or as close together as possible. Because space is limited, families will not be able to wait inside the school. In the case of inclement weather, Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash are encouraging everyone to dress appropriately.
- Families are not allowed in the building. Appointments will be done virtually and forms can be sent in with students or submitted via email. If students forget materials, lunch, technology at home, the school will do their best to work with the student to find a replacement but families will NOT be able to bring things to



the school in the middle of the day. If a student forgets their lunch, for example, they will receive a school lunch (all CPS lunches are free).

- All homerooms will be assigned to bathrooms. All bathrooms will be gender neutral and there will be 3 classrooms per bathroom.
- The model for instruction during hybrid learning will be simultaneous teaching. The teacher will teach a group of students in person and this will be streamed using classroom technology to remote learners at the same time. CPS is providing support and recently distributed to the school 41 wide angle cameras, speakers, and power cords.
- Students will continue to use their school devices. Students must bring these to and from school each day. Each student will receive a neoprene case with a name tag. Personal devices are not allowed for in school instruction.
- All desks will be 6 feet apart. Anything in the classrooms that was cloth, fabric flexible seating, rugs, etc. has been removed.
- Students will not change classes and specials teachers will instead rotate into the rooms. Physical education is the only exception.
- All students will have time for recess which will be scheduled by homeroom. Students will have access to the turf area behind the school, which will be divided into four areas. No-contact play will be allowed. There will be no use of the playground equipment, nor will there be shared supplies (e.g., balls).
- The staffing at Burley is currently being reviewed by CPS.

Questions and Comments from the LSC Board. Upon conclusion of the presentation, the LSC had time for questions and comments. Ms. Skibba and Ms. Stanfill, as the elected Teacher Representatives on the LSC, requested to share a letter that represents 28 Burley faculty. The goal of the letter was to supplement and support what Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash shared while also providing the teacher lens. A copy of the letter is included in the addendum.

Public Comment

Ms. Plocher shared via email a sign-up for public comment prior to the LSC meeting. All speakers had two minutes. Elliot Ransom kept the time and the speakers were called in the order that they signed up. Some speakers opted to provide their public comments via email (in addition to sharing orally during the meeting) and these are included in the addendum to the minutes.



- John Fitzgerald asked if parents would have the same time Ms. Skibba and Ms. Stanfill had to read the letter, which was longer than 2 minutes. Ms. Plocher and Elliot Ransom explained the LSC meeting process, noting that Ms. Skibba and Ms. Stanfill are elected teacher representatives who shared this letter in their role on the LSC as part of the meeting, which is different from public comment.
- Ms. Plocher began by calling Ryan Griffin, the first name on the speaker list. Ryan Griffin asked for 6 minutes together for those who were first in line so that they could read, in consecutive order, on behalf of what they described as more than 100 parents who signed the letter.
- Carrie Goesel spoke next and shared four quotes about student struggles with remote learning.
- Trisha Ashbrook followed and also shared quotes about struggles with student learning.
- Nancy Griffin then read the letter endorsed by some members of the Burley community. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments.
 - Jessy Newman asked how they were able to gather the information. Ms. Newman, an LSC parent representative, noted that she is a parent at Burley but never received an inquiry asking her about her experience with remote learning. Mary Renouard (parent representative) noted that she did not receive any inquiry either and other LSC members nodded in agreement.
 - Ryan Griffin responded that they used the Burley parent directory because they felt like they did not have representation through the PTA or Friends of Burley.
 - There was continued confusion from members of the LSC as to why some but not all Burley families did not receive the outreach from Ryan Griffin, et al.
 - Rob Moon shared that community representation is important and all agreed.
- Mike Walsh spoke next and described a “sharp disconnect between the rhetoric CTU has put out and what the teachers are saying and trying to do,” while sharing his views about a return to in-person learning. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments. There were none.
- Chris Jones spoke next. He expressed his views about returning to in-person learning. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments. There were none.
- Tracy Stronksy, Burley’s Reading Specialist, spoke next and shared her views. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments. There were none.



- John Fitzgerald spoke next and shared his views about returning to in-person learning. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments. There were none.
- Emily Skowronek, a Burley teacher, shared her concerns about returning to in-person learning. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments.
 - Amy Walsh then asked Ms. Skowronek if there was anything about the plans for returning to school that she would change/improve, or if there were any other conditions that would help her to feel better about returning. Ms. Skowronek shared that both doses of the vaccine and time are what it would take.
- Jackie Fournier spoke next and shared her fears about returning to in-person learning. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments.
 - Elliot Ransom took the opportunity to share that he is reminded of the power of community, being able to come together with vulnerability, grace, and humility.
 - Bob Blitstein said that everyone who spoke is right. He noted that he sympathizes with the parents and students who want to be in school and to socialize. He also understands where the teachers are coming from. He was hopeful that everyone is respectful of everyone's situation.
- Barrett Roberts spoke next and described protocols that schools in the community have put in place to keep the numbers low. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments. There were none.
- Chris Ashbrook spoke next, sharing that his wife, Tricia spoke earlier. He shared his views about returning to in-person learning and said that families understand the risks and are willing to take those risks to have their kids in school. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments.
 - Carolyn Skibba asked if there are things we can do to make this work. She shared that Burley is committed to making it work and doing the best they can but this is frightening and is going to fall short of what people hoped for school.
 - Ryan Griffin said that CPS needs to tone down the rhetoric, that they have a duty to set an example of how we can move forward. He said that, if anyone wants to talk to other parents who are trying to find a safe place to have this constructive discussion, they should reach out. He also noted that they have created a collective of parents together across nine different schools.



- Amy Wiktor, a Burley educator, shared personal stories of her experience with quarantining and isolation. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments.
 - Amy Walsh asked about the deadline for teachers who didn't submit for ADA and Ms. Plocher shared there is no deadline because medical conditions are ongoing.
- Danny Sternberg spoke next and shared his views about returning to in-person learning. Elliot Ransom asked the LSC if there were questions or comments. There were none.
- Ms. Alao spoke next and asked Ms. Plocher to describe the supports for social and emotional learning with remote learning.

Public Comment Response and Follow-up. Because the LSC meeting ran for 3.5 hours, Ms. Plocher and Jessy Newman requested that all statements shared and any additional statements or questions that were not heard be sent to Ms. Plocher by Friday (January 22) for inclusion in the meeting minutes as part of the addendum. After public comment, members of the public had questions about the LSC passing a resolution. Ms. Plocher shared that, if the LSC wanted to pass a resolution, they would need to hold a separate meeting about the resolution and to approve the resolution once written. The board will discuss and make a determination regarding next steps.

Ms. Plocher shared that the goal for the current LSC meeting was to stick to the agenda, with time for public comment as always. Ms. Plocher also noted that what happens with remote learning and decisions about in-person learning are made by CPS, not Burley. Erin Stanfill clarified the role that the LSC plays and what it would mean to pass a resolution. Jessy Newman also clarified that Burley does what the district tells them to - that the LSC meetings have a forum for public comment but the LSC does not make decisions in this area. John Fitzgerald asked for an LSC parent representative to support the letter. Chris Ashbrook asked for a resolution.

Next Meeting

Next meeting is Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 6:00pm.

Close of Meeting

Elliot Ransom motioned to adjourn the meeting. Carolyn Skibba seconded and all were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 9:20pm.



Addendum: Copies of Public Comment Submitted Via Email to Catherine Plocher

Burley Faculty Statement to the LSC

signed by 28 faculty members

Although we are here today in our capacity as elected teacher representatives, we are no strangers to the life of a CPS parent. [Carolyn Skibba] I've been a CPS mom for 14 years, 10 of them right here at Burley. [Erin Stanfill] And my son is currently in kindergarten, so I have the unique opportunity to see remote learning through the early childhood lens as both a teacher and a parent. Our comments today have received signatures of support from 28 members of the teaching staff.

We'd like to begin with some reassurance: CPS teachers have plenty of experience with making the best of a difficult situation, providing learning and structure within challenging conditions, and projecting joy and confidence to reassure students during hard times. It was not so long ago that the Burley staff overcame a flood and fire two weeks before the start of school and still managed to welcome children with a smile. During remote learning, we have invented and reinvented our virtual classrooms, spent countless hours learning what was essentially a new job, and kept our focus on students' growth and well-being. We feel fatigue and frustration, and the idea of being back in a classroom with children fills our hearts with excitement and hope. We are fully committed to making the uncertainties of hybrid learning feel manageable for students and to providing the best education possible, in spite of the difficulties ahead.

We know that CPS parents are no strangers to sacrifice either. You are our partners in keeping Burley afloat, and we are grateful for your support. From raising essential funds to organizing events that enrich students' lives, parents keep Burley thriving. Families have had to turn their homes and worlds upside down in remote learning, often with widely variable results, and we know it's been difficult. Kids miss their friends, their teachers, and just physically getting out of the house, and we know many are struggling. Yet you, as parents, have been there,

troubleshooting the technology, waking up middle schoolers, and being our eyes and ears at home when the Google Meet wasn't giving us the full picture. We appreciate your partnership during this unusual and difficult year, and we are all desperate to get back to normal.

Unfortunately, hybrid classrooms won't exactly be normal, and as teachers, we see how that will impact student learning and socialization. We're not here to reiterate the safety concerns that have been expressed across the city, to describe the risks teachers face, or to debate the ins and outs of specific safety procedures. In-person learning will have benefits, but we also want to help prepare you for the challenges and changes it will bring. In a typical Burley classroom, students sit in collaborative groupings, because we know that interaction and teamwork are essential to learning. Students sit shoulder to shoulder on the carpet or couch to share thinking; stretch out on the floor to create projects; and come together at a table with the teacher for instruction and support. Joy, energy, and thinking thrive in a classroom that is rich in conversation, curiosity, and friendship. These aren't frills: they are essential components of learning at Burley, and as teachers, we are saddened that none of them are safe or feasible during the pandemic.

I'm sure some of you are thinking: "That's unfortunate, but come on: remote isn't working, and my kids need to get back to school." No one understands the value of classroom learning better than a teacher. But as much hope as we all have for the return to in-person learning, we ask you to have realistic expectations of the teachers, and of the situation at hand. When we reopen, in-person students will sit at the same desk all day, including their lunch period. Desks will face forward, and movement around the classroom will be restricted. Coats, backpacks, and other belongings will remain with students at their desks, and students will be unable to share supplies. Peer interaction will be masked, distanced, and limited to those seated nearby, and Google Meet will serve as a bridge within the classroom and between in-person and remote students. Bathroom breaks will be tightly scheduled. At recess, students will be limited to socially distanced play with their own pod and remain in a dedicated area of the playground, separate from other pods.

The current, predictable schedule of remote learning will give way to three completely new schedules: one for in-person learning, one for remote learning, and one for Wednesdays. The transition to hybrid will be a bit like the first weeks of school, which will interrupt current instructional momentum as we build new routines. Teachers will be masked, which will impede communication, comprehension, and transmission of social-emotional cues. Teacher attention will be divided between in-person and remote students. An instructional technique that works well face to face may not be effective with remote students, leaving teachers with a very difficult juggling act as we try to meet the needs of students in multiple settings.

Burley teachers, administrators, and staff are prepared to make the best of the hybrid situation, yet we know students struggle with changes in routine and the limits on movement and interaction. The sense of community and togetherness will take time to build. If it weren't for the current health crisis, we would never create the kind of learning environments we will find ourselves in on February 1. We are concerned about the gap between what we know is best for students and the limits and restrictions that are needed in the pandemic. We will bridge that gap to the best of our ability, but the challenge is significant.

While we want to be honest about the stark differences between hybrid learning and a typical classroom, we also want to acknowledge that the Burley administration is moving heaven and earth to make this work in a way that will be as safe, enriching, engaging, and positive as it can possibly be, and they are doing so with almost impossible constraints and limited resources. Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash are fully dedicated to the safety, health, and well-being of each and every student and staff member at Burley School. We see their commitment as they measure rooms, move furniture, plan for routines and transitions, and do everything in their power to bring students and staff back safely. The limitations of hybrid learning in no way indicate any lack of effort, planning, or care on the part of the Burley administration. The teachers and staff see the tireless effort our administrators put forth and feel the very sincere care and concern they have for the entire community, and we are truly grateful.

We know that many Local School councils have come together to write statements of concern or opposition to the reopening plan. We also know that a very high percentage of Burley families are in support of reopening and that our community may not share the concerns that have been passionately expressed in other parts of the city. As a school of relative privilege with a majority white staff and student population, we must acknowledge that Burley does not reflect the makeup of the district as a whole. When Burley families are exercising their choice about reopening, their calculations look very different from how they do for most of Chicago. Burley teachers hear and respect the voices of communities that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and stand with them as they fight for what is best for their families, just as Burley families are fighting for what they see as best for their own children. We see the undeniable racial dynamic of our communities' different perspectives and stand with communities of color as they advocate for equity, safety, and change.

The teachers at Burley are fully committed to our students and will do everything we can to overcome the challenges we face. We ask our parents to continue to be understanding, supportive, and empathetic, because as much as families are struggling, teachers are struggling too. Please recognize that while families are being offered a choice about returning to in-person instruction, teachers and staff are not. We know that the Burley community will rise to the occasion and families will do all they can, both in and out of the building, to protect the safety of students and staff. We urge everyone to use your voices and actions to build a kind, safe, and equitable path out of this pandemic and back into the learning community we love.

Chicago Parents Collective

A CPS parents volunteer group, started on January 12, 2021, committed to the advancement and promotion of quality educational, emotional and social development within Chicago Public Schools (CPS). This group was formed to elevate parents voices on issues impacting their children and is run by CPS parents for CPS parents. Contact Us @ chicagoparentscollective@googlegroups.com

January 20th, 2021

Chicago Teachers Union

JesseSharkey@ctulocal1.org
1901 W. Carroll Ave.
Chicago, IL 60612

Chicago Public Schools

CEO-Jackson@cps.edu
42 W. Madison St.
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS),

To quote President-elect Biden's victory speech this past fall, "It's time to put away the harsh rhetoric, lower the temperature, see each other again. Listen to each other again."

My ask as a CPS parent is simple. Heed the President-elect's message. Listen to each other again.

How did we get here? Politicians and union leaders will all tell their tale of "who did what to whom?" As CPS parents, we don't care. The rhetoric, the walk-outs, the fighting...these are having a devastating effect on families across this city.

You, both at CPS and CTU, must restore our trust with actions. For our children's sake, compromise! We have seen enough of the zero sum politics coming out of Washington. We don't need it here, especially at this moment in our nation's history.

The CPS parent and student experience over these last ten months, and arguably these last 15 months, can be described simply as stressful. Stress on families with sick or at-risk family members. Stress on parents trying to balance work and learning. Stress on children navigating alarms, apps, assignments, and most importantly, social and emotional challenges.

Stress that should not be amplified and weaponized by you as leaders. We should see our leaders working together to navigate this global pandemic, just as countless other school districts have.

And now, what do CPS families face less than two weeks out from reopening? More uncertainty. More stress. More rhetoric. More fighting. The threat of a potential strike.

When parents like us do stand up to speak, we are attacked as unsympathetic to teachers and pro-CPS. That could not be further from the truth.

We recognize and appreciate the sacrifice we are asking our teachers to make. You have done amazing work throughout this pandemic. Teachers have demonstrated their resilience to a rapidly changing environment. That is why we love them and our kids love them.

Truth is, we all wish we could freeze time until this world was 100% safe. What we wouldn't do to push pause on our kid's childhoods until the world was back to normal. But here many of us are, watching with overwhelming fear, day by day, as our CPS children suffer emotionally, socially and educationally. Is hybrid the perfect model? We don't know. But we must not let perfection get in the way of progress. We must acknowledge our mutual fears and remind ourselves of how far we've come in this historic time. The progress we've made living with this virus by prioritizing safety, science, and adaptation is remarkable. These are topics we want our own children to embrace and put into action every day. And how do they learn this? From their role models...their parents, teachers, and community leaders.

We are just parents who love their kids, our school, our teachers, and this city. We are trusting that as a community, we can all act responsibly and follow the path forged by our brave teachers and students who have been back in school buildings. We must put down our social media feeds, gather in a COVID-safe environment, and forge a common-sense path forward that meets the needs of our children. For some that may be in-person. For some that may be remote. And I am positive that every person has carefully weighed the safety of our families and our communities, with the social and emotional needs of children who have not been in a classroom setting in almost a full year. We are all scared. But, we need to work together to make progress happen while keeping everyone safe. We can do our best in our communities. But we need this from our CPS and CTU leaders as well. Is that too much to ask?

Sincerely,

Burley School Community Members (106) within the Chicago Parent Collective

(and counting after this was read aloud at the most recent Local School Council meeting)

Statement from C Jones

I would like to start by apologizing for not making our voice heard in previous LSC meetings. Myself, my wife Jenna, and our second-grade daughter Presley are all proud Burley enthusiasts. But we have been busy.

My daughter has suffered without the social interaction needed at this key stage of her development. I have heard the words “I hate my life,” “Can I please see my friends?” and “when is Covid going to go away?” more than I care to say. House rules of “no slamming doors,” “no yelling,” “no saying certain words” have all been broken almost daily.

And after the discipline, after the correction, after all the drama, most days I am left with a 7-year-old crying to me in my arms saying she just wants to be able to go to school.

Let me preface the following by giving you a little context for our family. My wife and I are proud union members. We have been members of the Actor’s Equity Association for more than a decade. This union governs all professional theater in the Chicago area and also the country as a whole.

Starting last February, all union jobs went away as live theater stepped aside in the interest of the greater good. Thankfully, we have yet to be unable to pay our rent (though we have had to pay late more than once.) We have yet to be unable to buy groceries. Though it pains me to say our daughter has overheard more than one conversation about not getting the ‘special’ foods we like. And, due to our fluctuating employment, we count ourselves lucky to be one of the families that can have at least one parent home 24-7 to navigate remote learning.

My wife and I, (and indeed, our extended community of actors, musicians, and of course audience members) eagerly await the chance to do our jobs again - jobs we have college degrees, decades of experience, and overqualified resumes for.

But how do you do theater right now? You can’t put six feet between audience members in a theatrical space and remain profitable for a theater. On the actor’s side, you can’t rehearse a play that mimics previously ‘regular’ human interaction – kissing, handshakes, talking at less than 6 feet without a mask – without endangering people. I mention these things because I am literally forced by circumstance to not do the occupation I am most qualified for. So we wait. We both had jobs, lucrative jobs, that were stripped away due to the circumstances of this time.

Can you distance children? I believe you can. Can you enforce mask wearing? I believe you can. Can you sanitize between activities? I believe you can. And hundreds of other schools in this state not only agree, they have proven it, without raising cases of Covid-19.

I want to be absolutely certain that I close my statement by saying the following: My wife and I LOVE our daughters teachers. We loved Mrs. Murphy two years ago, we loved Miss McLaughlin

and Miss Baalrud last year, and we couldn't have been happier to find that Miss Hill was our daughter's teacher for second grade this year.

As for the CTU, we struggle. What is their aim? Do they want more power? Then this makes sense. Do they seek more control? This also makes sense, and who wouldn't want to have more control. Do they want more money? Again, a natural goal and one I think we could all look inward and say we share that goal.

But do they want the best for our kids? Do they want the best for our unemployed parents, or our parents employed as essential workers? Do they even want the best for our teachers, a population that has been shrinking due to the extra demands of virtual learning? I don't know.

I pose the following question to end my time, as a union member who is unable to work remotely or in person, even if I wanted to: Are our children (and teachers) stronger mentally, physically and emotionally now, or when they were able to participate in in-person learning?

My name is Tracy Yu Stronsky, and I am Burley's Reading Specialist and Interventionist and your read aloud friend. I want to reiterate that Catherine and Michelle are committed to making sure everyone is safe when we open our doors to students. We could not make it through this difficult situation without them. I kindly ask that you pass no judgment as I open up my heart and candidly share my perspective, from one CPS parent to another.

When trying to decide what was best for my own 3 CPS kids as we enter yet another phase of pandemic learning - simultaneous instruction - my family weighed the pros and cons of the hybrid and remote models. The one question we kept coming back to was: is the hybrid model safe? What are the risks? And that's when we realized - the question is not WHAT are the risks, but WHO is at risk? And unfortunately, the reality is every child, teacher, administrator, paraprofessional, counselor, psychologist, nurse, specialist - every individual that steps inside the school building is at risk of becoming sick. It is heartbreaking to me that our desperate need to come together could cost us lives. I am not trying to paint a picture of gloom and doom. Sadly, I don't have to. We all know the numbers aren't great. And we know this virus is deadly. According to the Covid Dashboard, last week 60657 had a positivity rate of 6%. There were 138 confirmed Covid cases and 1 death. We know there's another contagious strain out there. And we know that teachers and school staff will not be fully vaccinated for another 2 months. Since the majority of our community has chosen the hybrid model, I would like to remind our beloved Burley community, that it's going to take all of us together, to keep each other safe and healthy. Because now our actions will not only affect those that live in our households, but all the families in our pods. This means we need to follow quarantine restrictions when we travel. This means we need to answer the screener honestly. This means we need to self-report positive cases so CPS can contact trace. This means we need to be responsible and limit our social gatherings to no more than 10. Catherine and Michelle are working around the clock to keep us safe. Let's promise to do our part too. I ask, in fact, I beg you to be covid-conscious, because frankly I'm scared. I am 100% invested in Burley. I love my readers and their families, my colleagues, and my administrators. I hope and pray for our health and safety. Thank you for allowing me to share my perspective.

My name is Emily Skowronek and I teach 7th grade Humanities at Burley. My concerns regarding reopening are numerous, despite my belief that Ms. Plocher and Ms. Nash have gone above and beyond in planning for reopening.

I'd like to share that I'm deeply concerned as a seventh grade teacher about the schedule CPS has mandated for Hybrid Learning as 7th grade is the year that grades and test scores decide student eligibility for High School selective enrollment.

Every day this year, my co-teacher and I have tried our best to replicate the in-person environment students are used to. We've built community and given students the time to talk to each other in small groups daily via breakout rooms. As a result, we have a pretty tight group with a few class mascots, thanks to the daily appearances of neighborhood dogs, Boomer, Brady, and Leila! It's not perfect, but we are in a solid routine. Content-wise, my class is actually ahead of where we were last year, and I am proud of how resilient my students have been and what we've accomplished so far.

Although students will have their Chromebooks when they are in person 2 days a week, we will not be on a meet all together. As I've crunched numbers comparing the minutes my students are in front of a teacher live now to what they'll have in hybrid learning, I come up with a significant loss. It is causing me a lot of worry about not giving my students enough time because I'll have to divide my attention in so many directions.

Finally, I would regret it if I did not mention the other two things weighing heavily on me. First, I do not believe it is safe to open. We are very much in the middle of a second wave, with a vaccine that will be widely available just around the corner. Second, Burley is one of a handful of CPS schools with a return rate of above 75%. In my heart of hearts, I know that is because of the privilege we have in our neighborhood. Our school, because of the hard work of Catherine and Michelle and your support, is clean and operational, unlike so many schools with different demographics. By advocating so loudly to return, whether through actions or words, I do not believe we are sending a message of allyship to communities of color in our city. It saddens me that this does not match the conversations and learning we have in the classroom addressing systemic racism and being upstanders in our communities.

I thank you for allowing me to speak tonight and hope that we all stay safe and healthy in the months to come.

LSC Statement 1/20/2021

My name is Amy Wiktor. I teach 6th grade reading, writing, and social studies. Burley has been my home since before I was even a certified teacher - I did my student teaching here. The only reason I worked anywhere else for a year is because there were no jobs to be had. I've always been proud to say that I'm a Burley teacher - but I'm not only a teacher, and that is what I want to talk about tonight - who I am outside of teaching and what hybrid teaching means for me.

Throughout this pandemic, I have struggled mentally more than I ever have in my entire life. I do a lot to take care of myself - working out, therapy, phone calls and facetimes with family and friends. I also am very cautious, take the quarantine and stay-at-home orders seriously, and thought very long and hard about the choices I've made to drive back to NY, twice, to see my new (and only) niece.

To the best of my knowledge, I am one of very few Burley teachers who live alone, and I believe I am the only Burley teacher who lives alone AND doesn't have family nearby. The day before I returned from my trip to NY, Chicago changed its quarantine requirement. Despite my negative COVID test, I had to quarantine for 10 days when I returned. For me, that means 10 days with no in-person human contact. At all. This quarantine nearly broke me. I wouldn't have gone to NY if it had been labeled in the red zone before I left because I knew I wouldn't be able to handle a quarantine at this point of the pandemic, when I know the toll it's already taken on me.

Returning to school means that I won't have been the decision maker in the event that I have to quarantine. Returning to school means that my quarantine won't just be to protect others, but because I have been exposed to a virus I have diligently been avoiding for 10 months. Returning to school means that my mental health will be on the line. We talk a lot about the impact of staying at home on kids and on families, but very little on how it impacts those of us who are truly alone and isolated. I am afraid of what happens to me when I have to quarantine again.