

***Sunday, Sept. 2, 2018***

**STATEMENT FROM CPS CEO DR. JANICE K. JACKSON**

“Chicago Public Schools has undertaken an unprecedented effort this summer to ensure that all adults serving in schools have cleared a comprehensive background re-check.

“There is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of adults serving in our schools are fully committed to keeping children safe, and the small minority of employees whose records require deeper inquiry will receive the thorough review they deserve.

“We have left no stone unturned in our effort to ensure all adults who serve in our schools are capable of fostering safe learning environments, and I want to thank everyone who has recognized the importance of this process and participated in this essential initiative to safeguard our students.”

**BACKGROUND:**

**RE-CHECK RESULTS**

In two and a half months, 43,332 CPS active school-based and central office employees were re-checked and 97.9 percent cleared their re-checks and will return to work on Tuesday to help launch a successful new school year.

- 266 active employees have been notified that as a result of information uncovered as part of this process, they are not permitted to return to work at this time. CPS will be conducting thorough investigations in all of these instances to better understand the circumstances of each unique case.
  - Employees were only removed based on the results of their background check if arrests were identified that suggest a potential history of violence, sexual misconduct, or dangerous criminal activity.
    - It is important to note that removal at this time does not necessarily mean employees have done anything wrong or will not return to work after an investigation into their background check results are complete. Rather, it is prudent and necessary to remove these employees based on their background check results so that a

determination can be made about their ability to support safe schools.

- No one was removed in connection with involvement in any political activity or protest.
- 57 of the employees who have been removed due to information uncovered as part of this process are teachers.
- Not all employees who are currently removed from their work assignment have been pulled as a result of background check findings. 245 employees have chosen not to submit fingerprints for a re-check, and they are not permitted to return to work until and unless they submit fingerprints. If they choose not to participate, they will lose their position and be disqualified from future employment in the district.

## **PROCESS OVERVIEW**

- On June 15, CPS announced that it would be requiring all adults who are regularly in schools to complete background re-checks before the beginning of the new school year.

- Former Assistant U.S. Attorney and Illinois Executive Inspector General Maggie Hickey noted in her preliminary findings that "by conducting the background check refresh, CPS has made significant progress toward ensuring that all adults working in schools have been background checked under uniform, rigorous standards."

- In recent years, CPS has made significant improvements to strengthen its centralized background check processes. CPS has been conducting re-checks to ensure that all adults are evaluated through the stringent process that has been in place since 2012 — regardless of when they began serving in the district.

- In her preliminary report, Hickey noted that CPS's current background check process "is one of the most comprehensive background checks in the nation and exceeds most published recommendations regarding background checks of people working with children."

- The CPS background check process utilizes fingerprint-based checks of state and federal databases. When evaluating background check records, CPS considers the nature of the conduct in relation to the position each

individual would occupy and evaluates any patterns of behaviors or allegations. Any individual who has committed an enumerated offense, as defined by state statute, is immediately disqualified from serving in the district.

- To complete this process in time for the new school year, CPS conducted regular outreach to all adults who need to re-submit fingerprints in order to process their background checks.

- When background check results identified a history of criminal arrests and/or convictions, CPS requested additional information and documentation from the individuals so that the district could make informed decisions about each individual.

- The vast majority of employees were willing participants in this process because they understood the importance of what we are doing to keep kids safe. But if employees have convictions or arrests and choose not to provide the documentation we need to thoughtfully evaluate their cases, they cannot be cleared for work until they complete the process.

## **EFFORTS TO PROTECT STUDENTS**

In addition to the district's unprecedented background re-check process, CPS has carried out a series of significant initiatives to protect students. Key initiatives that will better support and safeguard students include:

- CPS established the district's first Office of Student Protections and Title IX to advocate for students and coordinate the district's response to any allegation of abuse. The office was developed in coordination with Maggie Hickey.
- CPS established a partnership with the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center (ChicagoCAC) to help improve the district's response, outreach and prevention of abuse. The ChicagoCAC will help link victims to therapeutic supports, train CPS staff on identifying and reporting abuse, lead a coalition of community providers who have expertise in trauma-informed care and work within CPS to provide mental health services.
- To ensure that allegations of adult-on-student abuse are investigated in a manner that eliminates any perceived conflict of interest, the Board of Education transferred the responsibility of investigating allegations of sexual abuse to the

Office of the Inspector General (OIG). And to ensure that cases dating back to 2000 and further as the cases warrant, were handled properly, CPS has tasked the OIG with reviewing previous cases and identifying if any actions need to be taken to protect and support students.

- The district is updating its sexual education curriculum and educational materials to better educate students on identifying inappropriate relationships and sexual abuse as part of our district-wide education and awareness campaign to help students, staff, and community members identify and report abuse. When class begins this week, posters to raise awareness of the signs of abuse and the resources available to help protect and support students will be visible in all district schools.
- CPS updated its policy on the reporting of child abuse and neglect to identify “grooming” as a form of abuse and require staff to report all suspected grooming and inappropriately intimate behaviors.
- CPS also updated its Acceptable Use Policies for students and staff to prevent staff from interacting with students via non-CPS social media accounts or through text messages or personal email addresses to ensure that all communication between staff and students is appropriate and visible to the district.

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