



In September 2020, with over \$2 million in support from the local philanthropic community, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) partnered with The Chicago Public Education Fund (The Fund) and The Chicago Principal Partnership (The Partnership) to launch the COVID-19 Comeback Fund. This opportunity made it possible for over 200 eligible



The Comeback Fund was designed to reduce burdens on principals, and thus there was no formal grant reporting requirement. However, optional mid-year and end-of-year surveys allowed for data collection around progress made on projects and helped The Fund identify best practices. The mid-point survey was shared with the initial 200 grant recipients and received 139 responses (70% of initial grant recipients). The end-of-year survey received 117 responses (60% of initial grant recipients).

Following additional funding efforts, The COVID-19 Comeback Fund provided additional funding to 15 eligible schools in March and April of 2021. Given the shortened timeline for project implementation these schools had compared to the initial grantees, they do not form part of the surveyed group. Detailed demographic breakdowns of survey respondents can be found in [Appendix A](#), while a full list of survey questions can be found in [Appendix B](#).

<p>: Projects built functional systems to improve families' ability to support learning at home.</p>	<p><i>Technical support for parents and students: troubleshooting coordinator, homework helplines for parents and students.</i></p>	<p><i>Community engagement programs to encourage parent and student connections: workshops on FAFSA and college/career opportunities,</i></p>



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*Principals engaged stakeholders and planned around the needs of their communities.* A majority of mid-point



***As school needs shifted, principals adapted to better support teachers, ensured continuity in learning, and achieved their project objectives*** Throughout the very unique 2020-21 school year, principals were required to make multiple changes to many aspects of their school. For example, in January, 76.9% of school principals noted that screen fatigue was a "challenge" or "major challenge" in implementing their project.


Nevertheless, principals were able to adapt and implement: By January, 80.4% of survey respondents were able to start their project. With only 14% of grantees noting that, for various reasons, they had not yet started their initiative and roughly 5.6% reported differing degrees of project implementation, ranging from starting "on a very limited basis" to "still in planning stages."

Toward the end of the second quarter, elementary principals faced a new challenge: solving the complex logistical and instructional demands to reopen for in-person learning. Unsurprisingly, nearly half of respondents reported overlapping priorities as a "challenge" to project completion (52.5%). When asked about challenges in implementing original projects, 72% of mid-point survey respondents stated that limited staff support was a minor challenge. In response to shifting needs, some project timelines were extended or changed altogether. At the midpoint, 6.5% of schools shared that they had changed the scope of their project.

Despite challenges, in the end, a majority of principals felt they had met their project objectives. A combined 68.3% of mid-point respondents either agreed (43.9%) or strongly agreed (24.4%) that their project had been successful in achieving its planned objective. A majority of school leaders who responded to the final survey reported that their project was on track to meet its goals (65%), while 29.6% somewhat agreed to being on the way to meeting project objectives. In addition, 68% of final survey respondents were "very satisfied" with the likely outcome of their project, and 30% were somewhat satisfied. While some schools chose to extend their project to the end of the school year (55.7%), in late spring, 44.4% of final survey respondents shared that they had completed their project.

"It allowed us to engage students and staff in before- and after-school activities. This experience allowed us to learn to create systems and structures to promote programming, recruit teachers, capture attendance, etc. We've learned a lot, and this learning will set us up to launch a stronger enrichment program in the fall. It also was impactful because it allowed our students and staff to develop relationships outside of the traditional classroom setting and will hopefully encourage students to participate in future programming."

"The strategies learned will be used with the further integration of technology for in-person learning in the upcoming school year."



Overall, principals reported feeling highly satisfied with the application and grant process (65% extremely satisfied, 26% satisfied). Additionally, feedback gathered from principals helped identify the following considerations to future programs:

***Embed opportunities for collaboration and stakeholder engagement:***

Without buy-in from faculty and staff, some school leaders faced challenges in implementing their proposed projects. 17.9% of midpoint survey respondents noted that additional time to plan would have allowed them to engage with different stakeholders in their educational communities before deciding on a project. While the nature of the Comeback Fund encouraged rapid deployment of funds, future work with a longer time scale might encourage school leaders to conduct interviews and survey valuable stakeholders on interest and capacity. As an example, this element will be incorporated into our [2021-22 Summer Design Program \(SDP\)](#).

Many principals plan to continue their projects into next year. While this is encouraging, a number of those principals also noted that partnerships with community organizations would have helped support long-term implementation of programs and initiatives and reduced principals' workload. This is consistent with overall

*Include touch points throughout the year that provide additional support:*

School leaders valued the ease of the application process and benefited from the speed at which funding was distributed. However, our grant process design somewhat limited



Overall, the schools led by the midpoint and final survey respondents were representative of the schools that received funding through the COVID-19 Comeback Fund, as shown in the table below:

	139 school leaders who received COVID-19 Comeback Funding Distributed and taken via email in December of 2020	117 school leaders who received COVID-19 Comeback Funding Distributed and taken via email in May of 2021	215 school leaders received COVID-19 Comeback Funding 200 Comeback Fund recipients were shared the midpoint and final surveys via email
	AUSL (12), Charter/Contract/Options		

	4.7% ELL, 14.1% with IEP, 87.0% FRL	7.8% ELL, 14.2% with IEP, 87.9% FRL	: 9.0% ELL, 14.7% with IEP, 87.6% FRL
	16.3% ELL, 15.1% with IEP, 75.1% FRL	11.5% ELL, 14.1% with IEP, 79.4% FRL	14.0% ELL, 14.0% with IEP, 77.0% FRL
	19.5% ELL, 16.2% with IEP, 77.8% FRL	21.5% ELL, 16.7% with IEP, 77.2% FRL	20.2% ELL, 16.3% with IEP, 76.3% FRL
	36.3% ELL, 12.8% with IEP, 80.1% FRL	33.6% ELL, 13.1% with IEP, 78.2% FRL	37.5% ELL, 12.7% with IEP, 78.7% FRL



*While we included the most relevant survey findings in this report, we would be happy to provide an additional overview of the responses to any of the survey questions upon request.*

**Midpoint Survey Questions**

Overall, how would you consider student academic progress during the 2020-21 school year compared to a typical year?

- Students are making much less progress
- Students are making somewhat less progress
- Students are making about the same progress
- Students are making somewhat more progress
- Students are making much more progress.

Compared to September 2020, my overall satisfaction as a principal has

- Decreased significantly
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
- Increased
- Increased significantly

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A. : *Grant funds used to support professional development for teachers and school staff members as they improved the remote learning experience for their students.*



Awaiting materials or funding

Calendar constraints

None

Other \_\_\_\_\_

(Multiple choice)

Change in administration (Change in principal/AP/Counselor/Leadership Staff)

Change in grade level the project will serve (drop down option of grade levels)

Change in Project (details \_\_\_\_\_)

Purchase of additional virtual resources (type \_\_\_\_\_)

None

Other \_\_\_\_\_

0= Not at all

1 = To a small extent

2 = To some extent

3 = To a moderate extent

4 = To a great extent

5 = To a very great extent

(Free Response)

(Yes/No question)

Yes *Ideal amount* \_\_\_\_\_

No

(Free Response)

(Optional Free response)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Select all that apply)

School wide survey

Informal conversations with staff, students and parents

Community wide survey

Decision was made by leadership team

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Yes

No

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(Multiple choice)

Extremely dissatisfied

Moderately dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Slightly satisfied

Satisfied

Very satisfied

(Multiple choice)

Sample project plan

Additional time to develop project idea

Clearer guidelines about project categories

List of local non-profit organizations to collaborate with

Other\_\_\_\_\_

Yes

No



Supportive Environment for Students and Staff: Grant funds were used to build a positive and supportive climate for students and staff.

Caregiver Engagement: Grant funds were used to build functional systems to improve families' ability to support learning at home.

Adapted Materials: Modified curriculum, materials, and content for use in a remote learning environment.

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Yes

No

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

K-2

3-5

6-8

9-12

Caregivers

Teachers/Staff

So far, my project has is on track to achieve its planned objectives

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

- Limited staff support
- Student disinterest
- Overlapping priorities
- Screen fatigue
- Fixed timeline challenges
- Purchasing materials
- Reopening plan changes
- Calendar constraints
- None
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Yes

No

Change in grade level the project will serve (Grade Level)

Change in Project (Please Provide Details) \_\_\_\_\_

Purchase of additional virtual resources (Type)

Change in community needs

None )

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Not at all (1)	To a small extent (2)	To a moderate extent (3)	To a great extent (4)	To a very great extent (5)
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Students	0	0	0	0	0
Teachers	0	0	0	0	0
Parents/Caregivers	0	0	0	0	0

Yes  
No

Yes  
No

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of the COVID-19 Comeback Fund:

	Extremely satisfied (1)	Somewhat satisfied (2)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Somewhat dissatisfied (4)	Extremely dissatisfied (5)
Communication	0	0	0	0	0
Eligibility criteria	0	0	0	0	0

Flexibility of funding	0	0	0	0	0
Grant disbursement time	0	0	0	0	0
Application length	0	0	0	0	0
Reporting requirements	0	0	0	0	0

Sample project plan

Additional time to develop the project idea

Clearer guidelines about project categories

List of local non-profit organizations to collaborate with

Opportunities to discuss with other Chicago principals

Additional \$10K

Other \_\_\_\_\_

The \$10,000 grant amount made a significant difference at my school.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Yes

No