

To: Interested Parties
From: Daniel Gotoff, Celinda Lake, and McCauley Pugh, *Lake Research Partners*
RE: Lori Lightfoot's Image Takes a Hit amid Unpopular Plan to Re-open School During COVID
Date: December 9, 2020

The following memo summarizes key takeaways from a recently completed survey of likely voters in Chicago on the issue of public schools re-opening.¹ The survey finds more than two-thirds of Chicago voters agreeing that the city's public schools should not be re-opened until the spread of the virus is under control. Solid majorities of voters support a plan to continue with remote learning and transition to in-person learning with a phased approach only when schools are able to meet specific city-wide health metrics, like New York, which opened schools only when city infection rates were reduced below 3%. Moreover, when a metrics-based plan for re-opening Chicago Public Schools is posed against the Mayor's latest re-opening plan, the former wins out by a margin of 2-to-1. Signaling Mayor Lightfoot's growing vulnerabilities, many of the groups most opposed to the Mayor's re-opening plan are voters of color—the same groups that have grown more critical of her handling of the office overall over the past few weeks.

- More than 6-in-10 Chicago voters (61%, including 42% strongly) support a plan for schools to continue with remote learning and transition to in-person learning with a phased approach, with re-opening dependent on CPS meeting specific city-wide health metrics, like New York, which opened schools only when city infection rates were reduced below 3%.
 - Strong majorities of Latinx (73%), African American (59%) and white voters (57%) all support a metrics-based plan, as do 58% of parents of children in Chicago public schools.
- Engaging a debate between a metrics-based plan and the Mayor's proposal to start returning students and staff to schools at the beginning of next year results in fully 56% of voters preferring the former compared to just 26% who choose the latter (text of statements on following page).
 - Support for a metrics-based approach is especially strong among voters of color. More than two-thirds of Latino voters (68%) and a solid majority of African American voters (62%) choose the metrics-based approach. Among white voters, support for the metrics-based plan leads the Lightfoot plan by double digits (48% to 37%). Support is similarly robust among parents of CPS students (55% to 26%). Voters under 50 also strongly side (57%) with waiting until CPS has met specific public health criteria.

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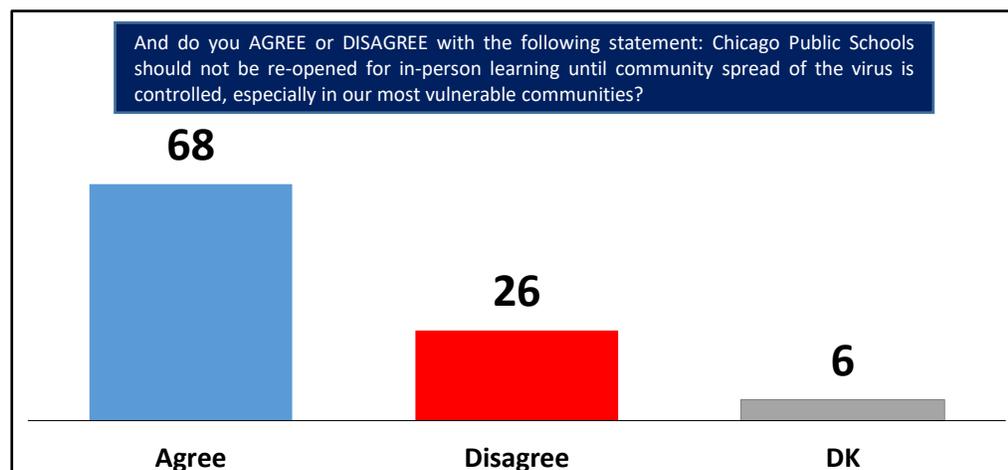
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¹ Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey, which was conducted via phone, using live, professional interviewers over a representative mix of landlines and cells, as well as online using text-to-online methodology. The survey reached 500 likely 2023 municipal voters in the City of Chicago between December 1–3, 2020. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-4.4%.

Next, I'm going to read you two statements about what to do with Chicago Public Schools while the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing. After hearing both statements, please tell me which one comes closer to your own point of view, even if neither is exactly right. [ROTATE]

[REMOTE UNTIL SCHOOLS MEET PUBLIC HEALTH METRICS]	[PHASED RETURN TO IN-PERSON STARTING IN JANUARY]
<p><i>[Some/ other people say...] that with the pandemic raging on, now passing 270,000 deaths, rushing toward in-person learning is a lethal mistake. The proposal being pushed by the Public Schools CEO ignores the safety considerations officials outlined this summer, and doesn't account for transportation challenges, the medical complexities of students with severe physical and mental developmental challenges, critical issues of mass COVID testing, or upgrading ventilation to prevent airborne infection. Turning students and school communities into coronavirus super-spreaders would further endanger the lives of all Chicagoans. Re-opening schools should only happen when they are able to meet specific public health and safety metrics.</i></p>	<p><i>[Some/ other people say...] the Mayor and Chicago Public Schools have a reopening plan that provides equity through high-quality, safe in-person learning—first for younger and special learners starting the second week in January, then for K-8 students starting early February. The Mayor and CPS would continue to evaluate in-person learning options for high school students. The comprehensive health guidelines under this plan include mandatory mask-wearing, temperature checks, symptom screeners, disinfectants and sanitizers, and tracking of infection rates. Continuing to keep students—including our most vulnerable—from in-person services is wrong, and means their social, emotional, and academic needs will remain unmet.</i></p>
<p>Remote Until Schools Meet Public Health Metrics: 56%</p>	
<p>Phased Return to In-person Starting in January: 26%</p>	

- Support for CTU's approach is not terribly surprising, given that fully 68% of voters agree with the statement "Chicago schools should not be re-opened until the spread of the virus is controlled," including 57% of voters who strongly agree.² Just 26% of voters disagree with the statement.
 - There is widespread agreement on this approach across demographic subgroups. A majority of white (55%), African American (75%) and Latino voters (85%) agree with the statement, as do 73% of CPS parents.



- In sum, Chicago families and parents want a plan for re-opening under the pandemic they can have confidence in. They are not prepared to send children and staff back into school buildings until a clear, metrics-based plan is in place and being implemented according to safety protocols. Until that happens, remote learning must be improved to make it more sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders to address the obvious issues of inequity.

² This question was asked of half the sample (n=250 likely voters).