

2026 Request for Proposals

To Establish New Charter Schools



INNOVATION
& INCUBATION



Innovation & Incubation

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Tier II - Tier IV application materials will be made available to the applicant on a rolling basis.

Introduction and Overview

At Chicago Public Schools (CPS), our vision is that every student in every neighborhood will be engaged in a rigorous, well-rounded instructional program and will graduate prepared for success in college, career, and life. This Request for Proposals (RFP) seeks to identify high-quality school options that accelerate academic outcomes for their targeted CPS student population. In evaluating responses to the 2026 RFP, CPS will consider proposals from development teams and existing operators who seek to open a charter school.

CPS, as the local school district in Chicago, serves as the charter authorizer for the city. Illinois Schools Law requires the review of all charter school proposals submitted to Illinois school districts. CPS releases an annual request for proposals designed to review new school applications, provides recommendations to the Chicago Board of Education on new school proposals, and provides oversight to authorized charter schools. CPS uses this RFP to accept proposals and meet the Illinois statutory requirement. The Office of Innovation and Incubation (I&I) is the CPS office that oversees traditional charter school authorization and oversight for the district.

CPS is the nation's third-largest school district and a leading charter authorizer, implementing all essential practices established by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, critical to fostering high-performing charter schools. Currently, I&I oversees a portfolio of 93 charter and contract schools and serves over 55,000 students citywide.

RFP Resources and Guidelines

In addition to this RFP, CPS provides applicants with the [RFP Resource Guide](#). Applicants will receive the RFP Evaluation criteria after the initial meeting with I&I. Information provided in both resources is incorporated into this RFP by reference.

The RFP Resource Guide includes the information applicants need to complete a proposal in response to the RFP. Applicants to this RFP should familiarize themselves with the full contents of the RFP Resource Guide and refer to the Resource Guide while crafting their RFP proposal responses.

RFP Timeline & Submission Process

The timeline below allows for a thorough review and significant planning and incubation time for any school authorized through this process. Applicants of this RFP can apply to open a school in fall 2027.

Activity	Date	Information
RFP Tier I Released	December 19, 2025	Subsequent Tier's application materials will be made available to the applicant on a rolling basis.
Office Hours with Applicants	February 6th - March 6th, 2026	Before gaining access to the application portal (Epicenter), all prospective applicants are required to schedule a one-on-one meeting with the Office of Innovation & Incubation. During this meeting, we will discuss your proposal and the application process. Please click on the link above and provide at least three dates and times that you are available for the meeting. If you have any questions, feel free to email iandioperations@cps.edu .
- Tier I Application Due - Tier II Application materials Released	March 13, 2026	- Due by 5 p.m. to Epicenter - Tier II Materials released directly to the applicant
Applicant Meeting	Late March 2026	I&I staff will meet individually with lead applicants to discuss their proposal and the RFP process.
- Tier II Application Due - Tier III Application materials Released	May 16, 2026	- Due by 5 p.m. to Epicenter - Tier III Materials released directly to the applicant
Tier III Application Due - Tier IV Application materials Released	July 24, 2026	- Due by 5 p.m. to Epicenter - Tier IV Materials released directly to the applicant
Tier IV Application Due	October 2, 2026	Due by 5 p.m. to Epicenter
Applicant Capacity Interviews	October 2026	
Public Hearing	November 2026	
CPS Board Meeting	December 2026	

The timeline is subject to change

Application Submission

The application materials herein are divided into four tiers. Follow all directions to submit complete application materials by each due date listed above. Subsequent tiers' application materials will be released to applicants on a rolling basis after the prior tier's submission deadline. Materials submitted outside of the submission process or materials submitted extraneous to the questions and criteria provided in the RFP, [RFP Resource Guide](#), and the RFP Evaluation criteria will only be considered at the sole discretion of CPS. In addition, proposals that lack responses or require attachments will not be considered for further review. Applicants are responsible for ensuring their application is complete on or before each Tier's due date. In addition to all required documents, applicants must complete and sign a completeness checklist and submit it with each Tier of the application. The checklists can be requested by emailing iandioperations@cps.edu.

Please note that Chicago Public Schools reserves the right to check all proposals for plagiarism. Any proposals deemed plagiarized will not be considered for further review. All RFP submissions, including all required appendices to the application, must be uploaded to Epicenter. Epicenter is an online web-based system that I&I uses to streamline submission and reporting processes for its current charter and contract school portfolio. Prospective RFP applicants must schedule a [one-on-one meeting](#) with I&I by March 3, 2026, to discuss their proposal and the application process and to request an Epicenter account for RFP submissions. Applicants are encouraged to schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

Even those applicants who have applied in years past must schedule a [one-on-one meeting](#) before submitting any application materials. During this meeting, we will discuss your proposal and the application process. Please click on the link above and provide at least three dates and times that you are available for the meeting. If you have any questions, feel free to email iandioperations@cps.edu.

Freedom of Information Act

All documents submitted to CPS are public records and subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 140/1-11). CPS intends to post all applicant proposal materials in due course after each application tier is due. Applicants should be mindful of the public nature of these applications and should avoid listing the design team and the proposed board member's home addresses and home telephone numbers. To protect the identities of proposed school leaders or teacher candidates whose current jobs may be jeopardized if released publicly, applicants may provide a supplemental submission that redacts those individuals' names and identifying information. Applicants cannot redact the names or contact details of design team members or proposed board members. Redacted submissions must be provided by the relevant Tier application deadlines. If an applicant does not provide a redacted version of its application materials on submission, I&I will post the unredacted application materials to the RFP website.

Redacted and Unredacted Personal Information of Children and Members of the Public

A successful application must demonstrate significant community support. As part of that support, interaction with members of the public is essential. Evidence of that support at times requires listing the names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of members of the public, and sometimes the ages or current grade level of school-age children. To protect the members of the public, and especially information of school-age children, all applicants must separately submit to Epicenter both a redacted and an unredacted version of all materials containing personal information of members of the public.

Additional Information

For questions regarding the RFP, please email iandioperations@cps.edu or call the Office of Innovation and Incubation at (773) 553-1530.

Please Note

Chicago Public Schools reserves the right to make changes affecting policies, requirements, funding, and any other matter discussed in this RFP. Further, Chicago Public Schools reserves the right to request additional information and documentation from applicants, as it deems necessary for its review, and to determine when an application is complete. Applicants shall bear all costs of responding to this RFP.

Tier I Application and Addendum Questions

Proposed School Overview

All applicants must complete this section in its entirety.

Section 0.1: School Information

Provide all requested information in the following tables.

Table 0.1 Proposed School Information	
Name of the proposed school ¹ :	
Name of Organization Applying:	
Non-Profit Status:	
Proposal Type:	
Address of the proposed facility and the alternative, back-up facility:	
Geographic Community of the proposed school ² :	
Proposed Opening Date:	

Table 0.2 Applicant Team	
Lead Applicant (Main Contact):	Board Chair Contact:
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone Number:	Phone Number:
E-mail Address:	E-mail Address:

¹ Please note that Illinois law (ILCS 27A-7(a)(1)) requires that the name of the proposed charter school must include the words "charter school."

² The Annual Regional Analysis (ARA) found [here](#), outlines the 77 Chicago community areas. CPS encourages applicants to refer to these regions, community area names, and/or zip codes when listing communit(ies) to help facilitate a common understanding of boundaries.

Table 0.3 Design Team

Please provide the names of all persons on the design team (roles and current employment).

Full Name	Current Job Title and Employer	Position with Proposed School

Table 0.4 Design Team Previously Submitted Proposals

If the design team previously submitted a proposal to Chicago Public Schools to open a new school, please provide details. Write N/A if not applicable.

Name of Proposal(s)	
Year(s) of Submission	
Outcome	Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Denied <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn <input type="checkbox"/>

Table 0.5 Proposed Principal/Head of School & Applicant Team Information

Please provide the names of all persons on the applicant team (roles and current employment). Applicants proposing a new school model must provide a candidate for Principal/Head of School. Add rows if needed.

Candidate	Current Employment	Position with Proposed School	E-mail

Table 0.6 School Management	
If the design team previously submitted a proposal to Chicago Public Schools to open a new school, please provide details. Write N/A if not applicable.	
Do you intend to contract with a third-party Management Organization (MO) to manage the educational program and/or operations of the school but not hold the charter directly?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, name the MO:	
Does the proposed charter holder or MO operate schools outside of Chicago?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, list the school name, school type, and school location for each school operated by the charter holder or MO. Add rows if needed.	

Table 0.7 Other Partner Organization	
Please list other partner organization(s) (if applicable). Only cite a partner organization if you expect them to perform an integral role in implementing the school model. Respond "N/A" if not applicable.	
Name of Partner Organization	Affiliation

Table 0.8 Proposed Enrollment

Provide the number of students in each grade for the first five years and at capacity.

Grade	Year 1 20-	Year 2 20--	Year 3 20--	Year 4 20--	Year 5 20--
K					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
Total:					

Section 0.2: Executive Summary

Provide a succinct narrative overview of the proposed school. The Executive Summary should include the following components:

- Name of the proposed school;
- Type of proposed school;
- The mission, vision, core values, educational philosophy and model, and culture (or a discussion of any of these elements that are still in development);
- A brief overview of the intended operational structure designed to manage a high-quality school;
- A list of the targeted communit(ies) and intended student recruitment areas, and the rationale for proposing to open a new school in the targeted communit(ies);

- A brief explanation of how the proposed school type and model will drive success for the anticipated student population; and
- An overview of current parent and community engagement and support for the proposed school.

Respond in three pages or fewer.

Domain 1: Community Engagement and Support

Domain 1: Community Engagement and Support assesses whether the applicant garnered authentic support from the parents and community (ies) they will serve and demonstrated true demand for the proposed school.

Section 1.1: Community Overview

All applicants must complete this section in its entirety.

1.1.1: Targeted Communit(ies)

Complete Table 1.1.1 Recruitment Area by providing the address and the Chicago community area for the proposed facility location(s). Additionally, the proposed student recruitment area (defined by street boundaries) and the targeted Chicago communities within the recruitment area should be included. If proposing a virtual model, note so and provide the proposed facility location(s) that will serve as the school headquarters or central office.

To accompany Table 1.1.1, provide a brief explanation of how the proposed student recruitment area was determined.

Table 1.1.1 Recruitment Area		
Proposed Facility Locations (Include the Chicago Community Area)	Proposed Student Recruitment Area	List of Targeted Communit(ies) within Recruitment Area

1.1.2: Community Characteristics

Provide a detailed summary containing information critical to understanding the community or communities in the target recruitment area (e.g., the major political, historical, economic, educational, demographic, and community-specific trends).

In the response, provide an overview of community assets and key social, economic, housing, and demographic data for the communit(ies) the proposed school seeks to serve. Community data assets may be best shared as a table within the narrative; please refer to the [RFP Resource Guide](#) Section 1.1.2 for examples.

To supplement the narrative response, provide a table in Appendix 1.1 that details the existing K-12 schools in the proposed recruitment area.

Cite all references. The narrative summary should be five pages or fewer.

Appendix 1.1 Existing Schools

In Appendix 1.1, applicants must identify the existing K-12 schools in the proposed recruitment area. Complete a table that includes the following information for each public school:

- School Name
- Community Area
- Governance
- School Grades
- # of Students Enrolled
- Space Utilization % and Status (for CPS-operated school buildings)
- Admission Requirements (Y/N)
- Student Demographics by Race/Ethnicity
- % Low Income Students
- % Diverse Learners
- % Limited English

Complete a table that includes at least the following information for each private school: School

- Name
- Community Area
- Governance School Grades

Applicants may include additional data on existing schools as relevant to their application.

1.1.3: Anticipated Student Population

Based on your knowledge and research of the community, Chicago educational landscape, and existing schools in the identified recruitment area, what has the design team determined about the anticipated student population for the proposed school? In your response, address the following:

- Using population and other relevant data, outline where the proposed school anticipates drawing students from to meet enrollment targets;
- Outline the anticipated student populations in the proposed school across the first five years of operation and describe how you determined the projections.

Include in your response:

- The anticipated percentage of:
 - Students in Temporary Living Situations
 - Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible Students
 - Diverse Learners
 - English Learners
 - Advanced Learners (Gifted and Talented Students)
- The anticipated student population by race/ethnicity and any additional demographic groups critical to understanding the likely student population

Respond in three pages or fewer.

Section 1.2: Community Outreach and Engagement

1.2.1: Community Connections

Outline the design team and proposed board members' existing ties to the targeted community by completing Table 1.2.1.

Table 1.2.1 Design Team/Proposed Board Connections to the Community		
Design Team/Proposed Board Member Name	Proposed Role at the School	Description of Community Connection

1.2.2: Community Outreach and Engagement

Briefly describe the design team’s strategy thus far to learn about the community and build partnerships and relationships. In your response, compile a comprehensive Community Outreach and Engagement Activities Table (Table 1.2.2) that includes all in-person and/or virtual outreach and engagement the applicant has conducted to date with the targeted communit(ies). For each completed outreach activity, provide evidence of the following:

- List the date when the activity occurred;
- The name or nature of the activity (e.g., “One-on-One Meeting,” “Email Blast,” “Informational Session for Parents”);
- The audience/partners reached through the activity (e.g., the name and affiliation of individual(s), “community residents,” “prospective parents”);
- The number of individuals reached by the outreach or activity (e.g., “emailed 200 individuals on ‘abc’ organization’s mailing list,” “30 parents completed survey”);
- Identify and briefly describe the role(s) of engagement (Listen, Inform, Consult, etc.) each activity offered to community stakeholders (e.g., “Inform – Emailed link to proposed school’s website”); and
- Provide a brief description of how the activity furthered the design team’s knowledge of the community, informed community constituents regarding the proposal, and/or built partnerships with stakeholders. Note any efforts to seek input/feedback on the proposed school.

Table 1.2.2 Community Outreach and Engagement Activities

Date	Activity Name	Audience/Partners	# of People Reached	Role(s) of Engagement Offered to Community	Brief Description of Outcomes

Applicants must additionally provide a comprehensive Community Outreach and Engagement plan in Appendix 1.2.

Appendix 1.2 Ongoing Community Outreach and Engagement

In Appendix 1.2, applicants must provide a detailed plan for the proposed school's ongoing community engagement through December 2026. The plan should include any and all community engagement and outreach the applicant team plans to do related to the proposed school (including events, activities, marketing strategies, partnerships, surveys, action councils, steering committees, etc.). The community engagement plan should include the following components:

- Identification of stakeholders to the proposed school, and how they will be engaged by the applicant team. Describe how the design team will tailor outreach and engagement to ensure all stakeholders have opportunities to participate and partner in meaningful ways.
- Identification of the design team members' roles and responsibilities in community engagement.
- Outline the specific goals, milestones, and driving principles that will guide the design team's engagement efforts.
- Provide at least 2 anchoring questions (beyond the proposed school generally) that the design team will consistently ask the community during engagement efforts. Provide a rationale for each anchor question and the audiences that will be asked these questions.
- A full timeline and listing of outreach/engagement strategies and activities with the following for each distinct activity:
 - A brief description of the purpose and nature of the activity;
 - How the community will be informed of the activity;
 - The intended/likely audience for the activity and what stakeholder groups will be engaged;
 - The applicable public participation engagement role(s) the activity will offer to the audience/stakeholders; and
 - When and how often the activity will take place.
- How community engagement input and feedback will be collected, tracked and analyzed to inform the school model. Strongly suggested making all feedback collected public so that participants would receive a summary of findings and as a way to keep the community informed.
- How the design team will evaluate and assess their progress against community engagement goals, including the indicators the applicant team will internally use to assess whether the community supports or does not support their proposal.

1.2.3: Community Input

From the applicant team's engagement with the community to date, synthesize any key themes that have emerged from the community's input and feedback in Table 1.2.3. For each key theme, note the constituents/stakeholder groups from which the input was received and describe how the community's input will be further examined or incorporated into the school design, if applicable.

Table 1.2.3 Community Input		
Key Theme of Community Input/Feedback	Source(s)	Incorporation of Feedback

1.2.4: Community Need & Impact of the Proposed New School

Based on the applicant team's outreach, research, and understanding of the students and the community, briefly identify the most critical unmet needs and challenges to the success of the anticipated student populations. Explain how data, including data presented in your proposal and in [CPS's Annual Regional Analysis](#), demonstrate the identified unmet needs and challenges. Additionally, describe how the proposed school intends to address these challenges and unmet needs for the target student population. In the response, address:

- What will the proposed school offer that is not currently available in existing school options and in the Chicago educational landscape?
- How will the proposed school address the needs of the community and build upon community assets?
- Why is the proposed school a good fit to address the identified needs for the targeted student population and community?

Based on your outreach, research, and understanding of the community, assess the impact the proposed new school would have on the students and community(ies) it seeks to serve, if approved to open. In the response, address:

- The anticipated impact of the new school on students, families, community residents, and community institutions;
- If the proposed school anticipates that a majority of students will leave existing community/neighborhood schools to enroll in the proposed school, assess the likely impact on neighborhood schools (based upon the anticipated student population and existing school information provided in earlier responses);
- Questions or concerns raised by community members and stakeholders related to what the proposed new school will mean for students, community members, and community institutions;

- The data and information (both quantitative and qualitative) that informed your assessment, and
- How will you continue to consider the community-wide impact of a new school in the proposal development process?

Respond in six pages or fewer.

1.2.5: Advancing Equity

Define and describe the role of equity in the proposal development process and the proposed new school model. How does this proposal advance equity for students and communities?

Respond in two pages or fewer.