

January 1, 2024

# Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report

Chicago Board of Education 🍷 Office of the Inspector General



Will Fletcher,  
Inspector General

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**January 1, 2024**

To the President and Members of the Chicago Board of Education, the Mayor of the City of Chicago, the Illinois General Assembly, Chicago Public Schools administration and employees, CPS families and residents of the City of Chicago,

Pursuant to the Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 5/34-13.1(e), the enclosed Annual Report of the Office of Inspector General for the Chicago Board of Education includes a summary of investigations and other matters reported to the Board of Education in Fiscal Year 2023, the period between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

During FY '23, the OIG received more than 2,000 complaints that made a wide variety of misconduct allegations that ranged from relatively low-level violations to serious criminal acts. Regardless of the nature of the misconduct alleged, the high volume of complaints this office receives year after year consistently affirms the public's strong expectation for independent oversight at Chicago Public Schools.

The investigations and performance reviews discussed in this Annual Report summarize the work the OIG completed in FY '23 to fulfill those expectations and pursue its mission. The OIG's oversight is always fairly applied regardless of whether a case addresses suspected acts of individual misconduct or systemic problems and inefficiencies.

On a personal note, I was honored that Mayor Brandon Johnson reappointed me to another term as inspector general. It was an honor that reflects with equal favor on each of the investigators, intake specialists, performance analysts, managers, attorneys and administrative staff at the OIG who have dedicated their careers to public service.

Please feel free to contact us with questions about the report and with any information about fraud, theft, wastefulness and adult-to-student sexual misconduct occurring within Chicago Public Schools.

Yours sincerely,

*Will Fletcher*

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## A. Mission



In Fiscal Year 2023, the OIG's budget was \$7.18 million.

## B. Staff Training and Investigation Standards

Many OIG employees are members of the Association of Inspectors General. The AIG annually offers government oversight training and certification courses for investigators, auditors, and managers. In 2023, six OIG members completed a weeklong Certified Inspector General – Investigator certification program and one employee completed the AIG's Certified Inspector General program.

In addition, OIG employees in the Sexual Allegations Unit participate in ongoing training on investigations and Title IX procedures.

The OIG conducts its investigations in accordance with generally accepted principles, quality standards, and best practices applicable to federal, state, and local offices of inspectors general. In addition, the OIG exercises due professional care and independent, impartial judgment in conducting its investigations and issuing its reports and recommendations. The threshold for substantiated findings is based on a preponderance of the evidence standard.

## C. Complaints Received in FY 2023 and Opened Investigations

In Fiscal Year 2023, the OIG received 2,075 complaints of misconduct, waste, fraud, financial mismanagement, and adult-on-student sexual misconduct.

Of the 2,075 total complaints received, the OIG opened investigations into a total of 685 cases (33%). Several factors restrict the number of cases the OIG can open and investigate, including a continuing focus on significant and often complex issues and

time consumed by post-investigation activities (e.g., preparation and testimony for hearings, trials, and labor arbitrations).

Every year, the OIG receives more credible allegations than it has the resources to investigate, so the investigations that are opened are the result of an assessment of the severity of the allegations and the potential impact or deterrent effect of investigating certain subject matter.

The OIG received 359 anonymous complaints, 17.3 percent of the total complaints received during the reporting year. Although the OIG assesses allegations received by anonymous complaints as it would any other complaint, investigating allegations based on anonymous complaints is more complicated.

The table below reflects the types of complaints received by the OIG in Fiscal Year 2023.

### Type of Complaint Received FY 2023

Complaint Type	Quantity	Percentage
Sexual Allegations (Total) <sup>1</sup>	446	21.49%
Touching: Less than Sexual Abuse	71	3.42%
Sexual Comments - In Person	22	1.06%
Sexual Abuse	17	0.82%
Sexual Act	14	0.67%
Outcry About Past Conduct	9	0.43%
Sexual Electronic Communication	8	0.39%
Grooming	6	0.29%
Failure to Report	3	0.14%
Student-on-Staff Inappropriate Conduct	1	0.05%
Concerning: Other	295	14.22%
Discourteous Treatment	145	6.99%
Residency	138	6.65%
Conduct Unbecoming	103	4.96%
Ethics	86	4.14%
Mismanagement	85	4.10%
Tuition Fraud	62	2.99%

<sup>1</sup> These complaints were handled by the OIG's Sexual Allegations Unit and do not include matters that were referred to other CPS departments because of the subject matter of the allegations.

**Type of Complaint Received FY 2023**

<b>Complaint Type</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Discrimination	55	2.65%
Off-Duty Criminal Conduct	43	2.07%
Bullying/Inadequate Response to Bullying	41	1.98%
Falsification of Employee Time Records	41	1.98%
Fiscal Management	40	1.93%
School Safety/Security	40	1.93%
Corporal Punishment	33	1.59%
Falsification of School Records	29	1.40%
Retaliation	26	1.25%
Violation of Board Policy	25	1.20%
Misappropriation of Funds	23	1.11%
Negligently Supervising Students	21	1.01%
Contractor Violations	15	0.72%
Improper Licensure	15	0.72%
Inattention to Duty	14	0.67%
Preferential Treatment	11	0.53%
Using Verbally Abusive/Aggressive Language	10	0.48%
Failure to follow IEP/504 Policies/Procedures	9	0.43%
Fraudulent Leave of Absence	8	0.39%
LSC Member Misconduct	8	0.39%
Reporting to Work Under the Influence	8	0.39%
Theft of Board Property	8	0.39%
Residing Outside the School Boundary	7	0.34%
Wrongful Termination	6	0.29%
Grade Changing	5	0.24%
Violation of Magnet and Selective-Enrollment Policy	4	0.19%
On-Duty Criminal Conduct	3	0.14%
Unauthorized Use of Board Property	3	0.14%

**Type of Complaint Received FY 2023**

<b>Complaint Type</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Criminal Background	2	0.10%
Falsifying Attendance Records	2	0.10%
LSC Election Fraud	2	0.10%
Unfit for Duty	1	0.05%
Violation of Acceptable Use Policy	1	0.05%
Violation of the Student Code of Conduct	1	0.05%
Other	450	21.69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,075</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

# Faith's Law

Effective July 1, 2023, Faith's Law requires information sharing among K-12 Illinois schools related to adult-on-student sexual misconduct findings.





## Faith's Law and New Measures to Protect Children

On July 1, 2023, a new law took effect in Illinois requiring information sharing among K-12 schools related to adult-on-student sexual misconduct findings. See 105 ILCS 5/22-94. Under the new law, Illinois schools (both public and private) and their contractors are required to conduct an employment history review of prospective employees that includes requesting from their previous employers any information related to findings of sexual misconduct with students. Likewise, those previous employers must share that information with the prospective employers.

Faith Colson, the namesake and driving force behind Faith's Law, worked with Illinois State Representative Michelle Mussman (and various education stakeholders, child advocates and other legislators) to achieve these legal changes to better protect children.

This law is part of the second round of a series of legislative changes that began in 2021 as part of Faith's Law to improve the prevention of, and response to, sexual misconduct in schools. The legislative changes included an amendment to the Illinois Criminal Code, an amendment to the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA), and several amendments and additions to the Illinois School Code setting new requirements for schools. Based on the OIG's experience in this area, the OIG is hopeful that these changes will help to prevent sexual abuse in Illinois schools.

Notably, the information-sharing problem among schools addressed by Faith's Law has been a pressing concern for the OIG for many years. The OIG has raised alarm about this issue and other child protection obstacles in its public reports and in its collaborative work with other agencies.

### The OIG's 2017 Report on Information Sharing with Charters

In 2017, the OIG released a [Significant Activity Report](#) raising public awareness that CPS' charter and contract schools had been hiring former CPS employees who had resigned or been fired for serious offenses and been given Do Not Hire (DNH) designations by the District. Three of those former employees had been given DNH designations for sexual abuse, three more had been given DNH designations for sexual harassment and 22 had been given DNH designations for physical abuse.

One of the former employees that went on to work at a CPS charter school was an elementary school teacher who had been fired by CPS for sexually abusing two of his students in his home and inappropriately touching a third student during class. After the OIG discovered this and alerted the Board, the OIG learned that CPS had notified the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) that the teacher was terminated for child abuse, but CPS was not certain whether ISBE ever began the process to revoke his teaching license.

On June 30, 2017, the OIG issued a report (16-01121) of its findings and recommendations with respect to the poor information sharing between CPS and its charter and contract schools. Among other things, the OIG recommended that the Board should:

find a way to ensure that its chosen charter- and contract-school operators – who teach the District’s own public school students with money the District provides – know when their employees or prospective hires have received DNH designations from CPS for serious offenses. The OIG recommended that, at the very least, the Board should disclose DNH information when it involves proven sexual and physical abusers in the CPS system.

(See October 24, 2017 [Significant Activity Report](#).)

In response to the OIG’s report, the Board implemented protocols to correct these problems and begin sharing information to better ensure the safety of students at CPS charter and contract schools.

While that was a significant improvement for CPS, it did not address the broader problem when former employees who have committed sexual misconduct move to an entirely different district or a private school.

### **Work of the Make S.A.F.E. Task Force a Precursor to Faith's Law**

In 2020, the OIG was a member of the Make S.A.F.E. (Sexual Abuse Fully Extinct) Task Force and worked closely with the Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center, the Illinois State Police, the Sangamon County State’s Attorney’s Office and many others to identify barriers to the protection of children in schools and recommend legislative and administrative changes to break through those barriers and better protect children from abuse.<sup>2</sup> As part of its work on the Task Force, the OIG also contributed to the [Final Report to the Governor and General Assembly](#) that discussed these various issues and made specific recommendations for the Governor and General Assembly to consider.

One of the many issues discussed by the Task Force was the need to prevent school staff members who had committed sexual misconduct from further endangering students by moving to a new school district or a private school that was unaware of the prior sexual misconduct.

The types of background checks that school districts commonly run on incoming employees do not flag administrative investigations like those conducted by the OIG. And, critically, many severe instances of sexual misconduct in schools do not result in criminal charges for several reasons as the OIG has discussed at length in last year’s Annual Report. (See [OIG 2022 Annual Report](#) at 39–41.)

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<sup>2</sup> Faith Colson also contributed to the work of the Task Force as a member of the public.

As stated in the final report of the Make S.A.F.E. Task Force, background checks conducted by schools:

should include that the prospective school district asks the previous school district whether the potential hired candidate has ever been the subject of a sexual and/or physical abuse investigation, grooming investigation, and/or child maltreatment investigation. In addition, the current school district should be forthcoming with any information regarding child maltreatment when asked to complete a background check on an existing employee.

To ensure truthfulness of candidates, new hires should complete and sign a form with their prospective hiring district indicating that he/she/they is not under pending investigation for child maltreatment, sexual or physical abuse and/or grooming behavior towards a child, and/or has never been accused of child maltreatment, physical or sexual abuses and/or grooming behavior of a child, and/or does not have any information in their personnel file indicating child maltreatment, sexual or physical misconduct, and/or grooming behavior of a child.

The OIG had observed that, without a law requiring this type of information sharing, schools were reluctant to inform subsequent employers of instances of sexual misconduct. In its 2021 Annual Report, the OIG discussed this reluctance, which, apparently, was often due to liability concerns with sharing such information. (See [OIG 2021 Annual Report](#) at 33–34.) For example, as part of the OIG’s sexual misconduct investigations, in some instances the OIG was unable to obtain the evidence of prior sexual misconduct investigations by previous employers until the OIG issued subpoenas requiring the production of that information. Other school districts in Illinois without the subpoena authority of the OIG would have been precluded from obtaining such evidence.

Concurrently with the work of the Make S.A.F.E. Task Force, Colson was working with Representative Mussman to sponsor legislation aimed at protecting students, and, following the final report of the Task Force, Mussman proposed two bills, known as Faith’s Law, that incorporated many of the recommendations of the Task Force, including this recommendation that background checks of staff members include checks for prior sexual misconduct in schools.<sup>3</sup>

“Before Faith’s Law, school districts were reluctant to share information about sexual misconduct investigations in part because of liability concerns.”

<sup>3</sup> Although the Task Force had recommended that ISBE facilitate the sharing of sexual misconduct in a candidate’s employment history, Faith’s Law provides that the schools will share that information directly with one another.

## Summary of Key Changes Made By Faith's Law

The first bill, which became Public Act 102-0676, passed both houses of the General Assembly on October 28, 2021, and was signed into law by Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker on December 3, 2021. The changes made by the first bill include:

- Expanding the definition of criminal grooming to include in-person, written and other conduct intended to lure, solicit, seduce or entice a child or their guardian for the purpose of committing sex offenses against the child;
- Adding criminal grooming, with its new broader definition, to the list of conduct that qualifies as an “abused child” under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act;
- Defining sexual misconduct in the Illinois School Code; and
- Requiring schools to create professional conduct policies that incorporate the new statutory definition of sexual misconduct and to also set standards for staff maintaining professional boundaries with students.

Of these changes, the expansion of the definition of grooming under the Illinois Criminal Code was a particularly significant development for the OIG, and one recommended by the Task Force. Previously, criminal grooming was a criminal offense only in instances when sexual predators used electronic means, such as the internet, to groom children. The OIG highlighted this change in the law in the OIG’s 2021 Annual Report. (See [OIG 2021 Annual Report](#) at 29–30.)

The second bill, which became Public Act 102-0702, passed both houses of the General Assembly on March 30, 2022, was signed into law by the Governor on April 22, 2022, and became effective on July 1, 2023. The changes made by the second bill include:

- Requiring schools and school contractors to conduct employment history reviews in which they contact a prospective employee’s prior employers that were schools, school contractors or another employer in which the candidate had direct contact with children or students, and then requiring those prior employers to share findings of sexual misconduct with the prospective employer. The new law also provides that employers who share this information in good faith will be immune from liability for sharing such information;
- Requiring that schools notify ISBE of any license holder who the school has reasonable cause to believe has committed an act of sexual misconduct, as newly defined in the Illinois School Code, and that act resulted in that license holder’s dismissal or resignation from the school. Further, ISBE can suspend or revoke an educator’s license based on an act of sexual misconduct, as defined in the Illinois School Code;

- Requiring, with limited exceptions, schools to notify parents when there is an allegation that their child is a victim of sexual misconduct and also when, following the investigation into that sexual misconduct, the school has taken formal action with respect to the alleged perpetrator; and
- Requiring ISBE to create and maintain a resource guide for students, parents and school staff, which includes contact information for entities that provide services for students and families when students have been victims of sexual abuse and requiring that schools notify parents about the resource guide and make it available to them.

Notably, this new notification requirement to ISBE expands on the previous notice requirement, which was limited to instances when the license holder committed an intentional act of abuse or neglect of a child, such that the child would be considered an abused or neglected child under ANCRA.

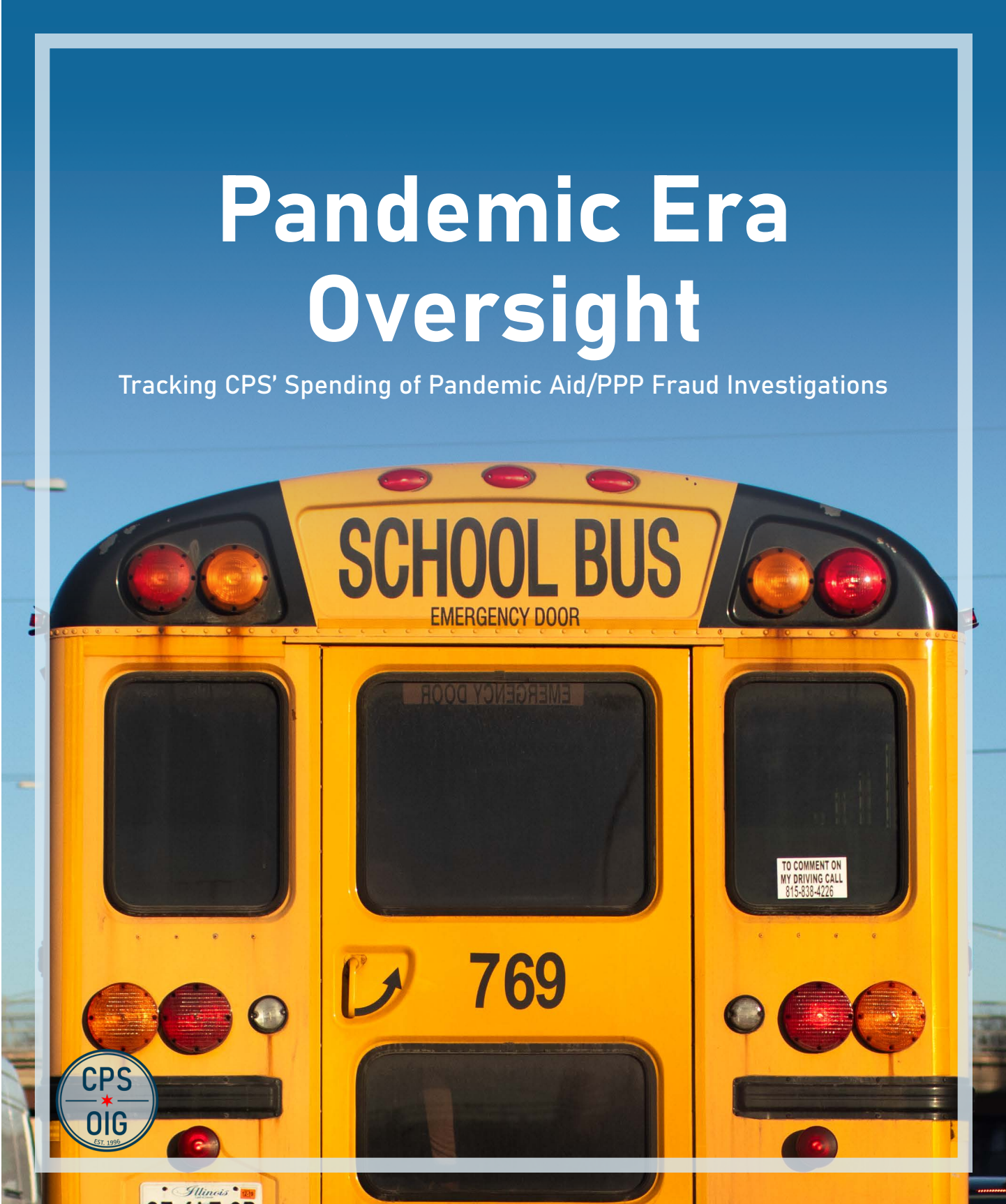
The new notification requirement will extend to those instances when staff members have engaged in sexual misconduct with any K–12 students, regardless of their age, whereas the notification requirement based on ANCRA generally does not apply when the conduct involves victims who are 18 and older. Further, the new requirement could also lead some schools to notify ISBE of more sexual incidents between staff and students who are children if those schools determine that certain conduct did not necessarily meet the standard in ANCRA, but nevertheless met the definition of sexual misconduct in the School Code.

Accordingly, because of this change in the law, ISBE should be receiving notice of more instances of sexual misconduct involving students. However, it is less clear whether ISBE will suspend or revoke more licenses after receiving these notifications. Suspensions and revocations are not automatically triggered when ISBE receives such a notification unless the employee has been criminally charged. The OIG previously highlighted several concerning cases where ISBE had not suspended or revoked a license even though it had been notified by CPS that the license holder engaged in an act of sexual misconduct with a child. (See [OIG 2021 Annual Report](#) at 32.) Hopefully, in the spirit of Faith's Law and its emphasis on child and student protection, ISBE will begin suspending and revoking more licenses in these instances.

In all, the legal changes enacted as part of Faith's Law incorporated and built upon recommendations by the OIG and the Make S.A.F.E. Task Force and should help to better protect children and students — particularly now that the information-sharing piece of the law has taken effect. The OIG is grateful for the work of Ms. Colson, Representative Mussman, the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center and the many others who contributed to these changes.

# Pandemic Era Oversight

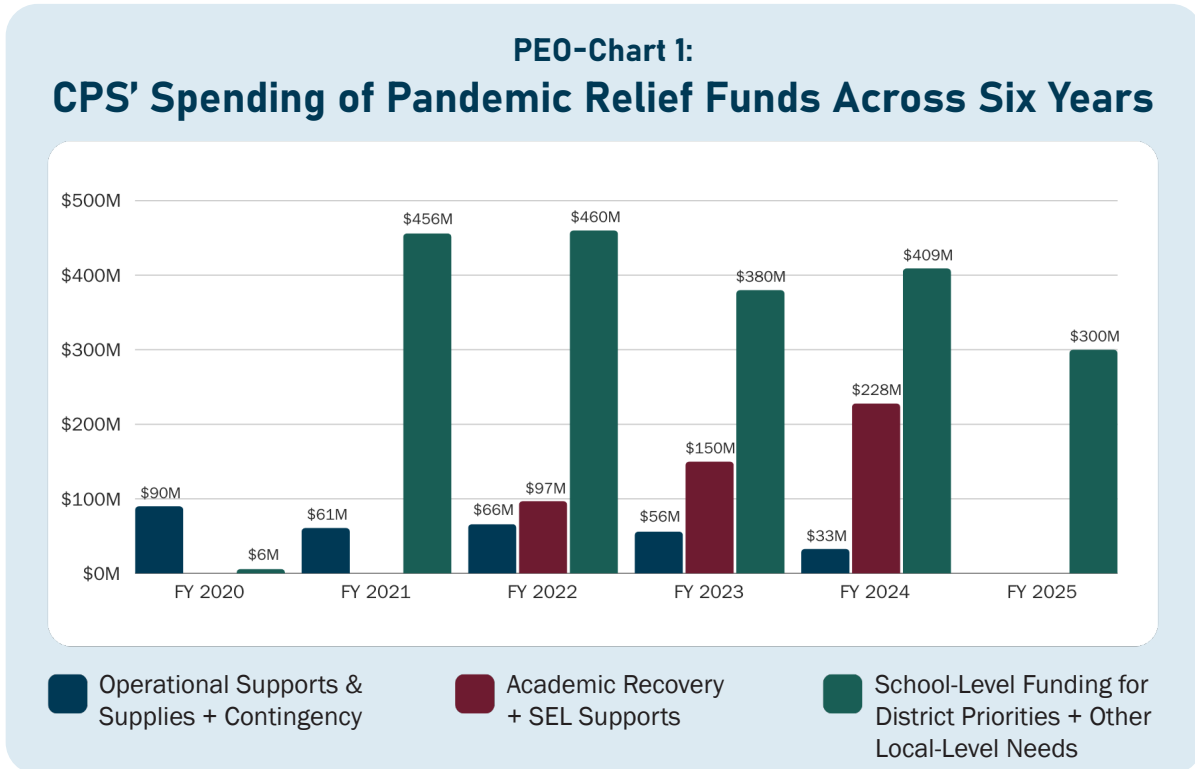
Tracking CPS' Spending of Pandemic Aid/PPP Fraud Investigations



### A. CPS' Spending of Pandemic Relief Funds

In FY 2023, CPS spent \$730 million of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds – the most ESSER money that CPS plans to spend in any year before funding runs out during FY 2025. CPS has been allocated a total of \$2.8 billion in pandemic relief funds through ESSER.

In its FY 2024 budget, CPS provided the following breakdown of its past and expected federal pandemic relief expenditures by category in **PEO-Chart 1**:



Source: CPS FY 2024 Budget Book

Note: CPS' spending of pandemic relief funds across six years totalled \$2.792 Billion.

#### FY 2023 Pandemic Relief Fund Expenditures

The single largest area of CPS ESSER spending during FY 2023 has been employee salaries and benefits, which has accounted for 75% of CPS' total ESSER spending through October 2023.<sup>4</sup> Much of this spending on salaries and benefits has gone towards new or existing full-time, regular employees such as centrally funded teacher and counselor positions.

In FY 2023, CPS significantly increased its use of ESSER funds to staff programs outside of the regular school day, including \$30 million for summer school and \$25 million for Out-of-School Time programming. In FY 2022, the OIG issued a performance review that

<sup>4</sup> ISBE ESSER Spending Dashboard, available at [www.isbe.net/Pages/ESSER-Spending-Dashboard.aspx](http://www.isbe.net/Pages/ESSER-Spending-Dashboard.aspx).

found systemic problems in the way CPS used its extra pay system to pay staff for some of this type of work. In FY 2023, the OIG has continued to investigate misuse of the extra pay system, including two investigations detailed in Section 6 below.

The OIG is also reviewing other District-wide ESSER spending directed toward employees, including reviewing the \$45 million that CPS allocated for professional development and instructional coaching in FY 2023.

The OIG's 2022 Annual Report also highlighted ESSER spending on technology as another area of concern. Through May 2023, CPS reported spending an estimated \$114,339,402 on technology in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, much of which has been covered by ESSER funding.<sup>5</sup> In FY 2023, the OIG completed its performance review of CPS' technology asset inventory and recovery procedures, which identified several significant flaws with CPS' management of technology resources. The OIG's performance review is discussed in Section 4.A below.

### What Are ESSER Funds?

On March 27, 2020, Congress set aside approximately \$13.2 billion of the \$30.75 billion allotted to the Education Stabilization Fund through the Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) Fund. The Department awarded these grants . . . to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the Nation.

-OESE.ed.gov

### FY 2024 and FY 2025 Projected Pandemic Relief Expenditures and "Fiscal Cliff" Concerns

As of the end of FY 2023, CPS has reported spending \$1.82 billion in ESSER funds, or 65% of the total amount allocated to the District. CPS projects spending another \$670 million in FY 2024, leaving only \$300 million for the final year of ESSER spending, FY 2025.

A primary concern for CPS — and for all districts receiving ESSER funding nationwide — has been ensuring that ESSER expenditures do not lead to a "fiscal cliff" in which the District is committed to increased permanent spending that was paid for by ESSER funds that cannot be covered once those funds run out. CPS has already disclosed that

<sup>5</sup> CPS' most recent CFO Emergency Expenditure Report is available on the CPS website at <https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/covid-19-resources/covid-19-spending>.



CPS has forecast a \$391m deficit for FY '25 after federal pandemic aid runs out.

it anticipates a \$391 million shortfall in its FY 2025 budget, even with the remaining \$300 million of ESSER funds available during this fiscal year.

Beyond these projections, CPS has not yet disclosed specific anticipated effects of the end of ESSER funding in FY 2025, although a comprehensive review of the sustainability of ESSER-related spending is reportedly underway.

As the OIG noted in its 2022 Annual Report, in 2022 CPS significantly increased its level of transparency regarding its plans for future ESSER spending by providing more detailed categories of District-wide expenditures in its annual Budget Book,<sup>6</sup> such as projected spending totals for school assistants and other part-time operational support (\$19 million), re-engagement, home visits, and truancy prevention (\$15 million), and mental health supports and trauma-informed interventions (\$15 million). CPS has also increased spending transparency at the school level by including ESSER funding allocations to individual schools in the interactive school budget portal.<sup>7</sup>

## B. PPP Fraud by CPS Employees

In Fiscal Year 2023, the OIG continued to investigate suspected cases of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) fraud involving CPS employees who submitted fraudulent loan applications with false personal business income information to obtain loans designed to help business owners keep their employees on their payroll during the pandemic.

### What Are PPP Loans?

The Paycheck Protection Program... provides small businesses with funds to pay up to 8 weeks of payroll costs including benefits. Funds can also be used to pay interest on mortgages, rent, and utilities.

- U.S. Department of the Treasury

Critically, because the loans in this program are nearly all forgiven, the recipients generally did not have to pay them back. Given the relatively few controls in place to prevent fraud in the program, the incidence of fraud nationwide was extremely high. The OIG previously publicly reported on its work in this area in its [Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report](#), as well as in a September 6, 2023 [Significant Activity Report](#).

<sup>6</sup> The FY 2024 Budget Book is available at [https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/about-cps/finance/budget/budget-2024/docs/fy2024-budget-book-final-approved-1\\_1.pdf](https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/about-cps/finance/budget/budget-2024/docs/fy2024-budget-book-final-approved-1_1.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> School budget data is available through CPS' interactive school budget portal located at [biportal.efs.cps.edu/analytics/saw.dll?Dashboard](https://biportal.efs.cps.edu/analytics/saw.dll?Dashboard).

Based on the OIG's data analysis, which involved matching CPS employee names and addresses with names and addresses of PPP loan recipients, the OIG has identified more than 810 full-time salaried CPS employees that received PPP loans. The OIG has recently expanded this number by including employees whose PPP loans list suburban addresses associated with those employees, and one of those cases is discussed in the summaries below.

PPP fraud is a serious crime, and the OIG is engaged in ongoing discussions with law enforcement agencies regarding the OIG's PPP matters.

Due to the prevalence of PPP and other pandemic relief fraud, the OIG has recommended that CPS require prospective CPS employees to disclose whether they received any pandemic relief funding as part of the onboarding process.

Summaries of the OIG's investigations of employees engaged in PPP fraud are set forth below. With the exception of cases 21-00174 and 23-00163, the cases below were already reported in the OIG's Significant Activity Report.

» *Central Office Administrator Engaged in PPP Fraud, Failed to Report Self-Employment Income (22-00652)*

An OIG investigation found that a Central Office administrator fraudulently obtained a forgivable PPP loan of more than \$15,000 by making false statements on their loan application, including the false claim that they had earned \$75,000 outside of their CPS employment as a sole proprietor in 2020.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's CPS annual salary was more than \$200,000.

In their interview with the OIG, the administrator admitted that they misrepresented their self-employment income and expenses on their PPP loan application and other documents. The administrator stated that they intentionally inflated their self-employment income on the application to qualify for a larger PPP loan. The administrator admitted that they received and spent the PPP loan proceeds and also admitted to submitting a PPP loan forgiveness application that resulted in the entire balance of their PPP loan being forgiven.

The administrator also told the OIG that they consistently earned income through self-employment during their entire tenure as a CPS employee but failed to submit a secondary employment approval form to CPS as they were required to do. The evidence also showed that the administrator did not disclose any outside income on any of their Statements of Business and Financial Interests that they were required to file with CPS for several years.

The employee resigned from CPS shortly following their OIG interview. The OIG recommended that CPS give them a Do Not Hire designation and would have recommended their termination had they not already resigned. The Board followed the OIG's recommendation.

» *CPS Administrator Obtained PPP Loan by Falsely Inflating Income (22-00653)*

A CPS administrator fraudulently obtained a forgivable PPP loan of \$20,000 by falsely stating that they had earned nearly \$100,000 in net income as a sole proprietor in 2019. The administrator's false statements and fraud were particularly egregious because the employee's role at CPS involved monitoring CPS' use of public funds.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator had an annual salary of more than \$120,000.

In their interview with the OIG, the administrator admitted that they received the PPP loan. The administrator told the OIG that they had multiple sources of income in recent years outside of their CPS employment but admitted that they did not earn anywhere near the \$96,000 in income that they claimed on their PPP application.

The administrator told the OIG that they had paid a person to complete the loan application for them. The administrator claimed not to recall the identity of this person. However, when asked to provide evidence to corroborate their claim that another individual prepared their PPP loan application, they were unable to do so.


The administrator also admitted to completing and submitting the loan forgiveness application which led to their PPP loan being forgiven in full. The investigation found that the administrator also made several false certifications on the loan forgiveness application.

The OIG recommended that the administrator be terminated and that the Board place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file. The Board followed each of these recommendations.

» *Regional Administrator Created Fake Business to Fraudulently Obtain PPP Loan (21-00333)*

An OIG investigation found that a former regional administrator fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by falsely stating that they had approximately \$100,000 in annual income from their business, when, in fact, neither the business nor the income existed.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator was earning a salary of more than \$165,000 per year at CPS.

A dark blue square with a white border containing a quote. The quote is in white text and reads: "Administrator spent PPP funds on luxury items and a trip to Las Vegas."

Administrator spent PPP funds on luxury items and a trip to Las Vegas.

The administrator admitted to the OIG that they did not have their own business, nor did they have any employment or business income outside of their work with CPS. This admission was consistent with the financial disclosure information they reported to CPS.

Records showed that the administrator received the PPP funds in their personal checking account and spent the funds within two months of receiving them, largely on a personal trip to Las Vegas and expensive luxury items.

Like most PPP loans, the administrator's loan was entirely forgiven.

The OIG recommended that the administrator receive a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file and would have recommended their termination had they not already resigned. Accordingly, a Do Not Hire designation was placed in the administrator's personnel file.

» *School Manager Engaged in PPP Fraud and Tax Fraud (22-00651)*

A high school administrative employee obtained a \$20,000 PPP loan by falsely claiming that they earned self-employment income of over \$100,000 in 2020. The manager admitted that while they had other employment in 2020 besides their CPS job, they did not earn more than \$100,000 in 2020 as they claimed on their PPP loan application.

At the time of the investigation, the manager had an annual salary of over \$110,000.

In their interview with the OIG, the manager admitted to applying for the loan and later for the loan to be forgiven altogether. They also admitted to never making \$100,000 in outside income during 2020 although their PPP loan application claimed they did. The manager stated that they paid themselves with some of the PPP loan funds but could not say what they did with the remaining funds.

The OIG's investigation also showed that in addition to PPP fraud, the manager engaged in tax fraud by underreporting their actual self-employment income on their 2019 and 2020 tax returns. Business and tax records showed that while the manager did not earn over \$100,000 in self-employment income as they claimed on their PPP loan application, they did earn significantly more than they reported to the government on their 2019 and 2020 tax returns.

In other words, the business records indicated that the case manager simultaneously overstated their self-employment income on their PPP loan application to obtain a fraudulent PPP loan and understated their self-employment income on their federal tax returns to reduce their tax bill.

The OIG recommended that the manager be terminated and that a Do Not Hire designation be placed in their personnel file. The Board commenced disciplinary proceedings, during which the manager resigned, and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in their personnel file.

» *Tech Employee Obtained PPP Loan by Falsely Reporting Self-Employment Income (22-01723)*

An OIG investigation found that a CPS tech employee obtained a fraudulent PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by making false statements on their loan application, including the false claim that they earned over \$125,000 in self-employment income.

At the time of the investigation, the tech employee was earning nearly \$110,000 per year at CPS.

In their interview with the OIG, the tech employee initially said that they had no outside employment and did not own any business. The tech employee later said that they believed they were eligible for a PPP loan on account of their role as an unpaid “contractor” of a family business.

Following their interview, the tech employee contacted the OIG and offered another story: they said they believed they were eligible for a PPP loan because they were an owner and manager of other small businesses (that were never mentioned during the interview), but never provided any evidence showing that they earned income from any outside businesses.

The evidence indicated that the tech employee knowingly engaged in PPP fraud and that their claims that they believed they were eligible for a PPP loan were merely pretext. The PPP loan proceeds were deposited into the tech employee’s personal bank account, and they admitted to spending the funds on matters unrelated to any outside businesses.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the tech employee’s employment and that a Do Not Hire designation be placed in their personnel file. CPS followed each of the OIG’s recommendations.

» *School Administrator Falsely Claimed Over \$100,000 in Income to Obtain Fraudulent PPP Loan (22-00655)*

An OIG investigation found that a school administrator fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by falsely claiming over \$100,000 in self-employment income in 2020. At the time of the investigation, the administrator had an annual salary of over \$160,000.

The administrator stated that they had done side jobs for several years and therefore believed the statements in their PPP loan application were truthful. However, they were

unable to support this claim. The documents the administrator provided the OIG were inconsistent with the administrator's description of their work and failed to show that the administrator had done any of the claimed work, let alone an amount of work that would have led to over \$100,000 in income.

Further, the administrator admitted that they had never claimed any self-employment income on their tax returns or informed CPS that they had earned any outside income while employed as a principal as required.

The OIG recommended that the school administrator be terminated and that a Do Not Hire designation be placed in their personnel file. The Board initiated dismissal proceedings against the administrator, which are currently pending.

» *School Administrator Falsely Claimed Self-Employment Income, Obtained Fraudulent PPP Loan (23-00171)*

A school administrator fraudulently obtained a forgivable PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by claiming false self-employment income of nearly \$100,000 as a chef on their loan application.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's CPS annual salary was over \$140,000.

During the investigation, the administrator admitted that they had never worked as a chef and that the income on their loan application was false. They stated that they had earned non-CPS income from a rental property they owned, but that it was far less than the nearly \$100,000 they claimed on their PPP loan application. They claimed that someone else prepared the application for them but admitted to reviewing and signing it.

The administrator also admitted to submitting the loan forgiveness application on their own, falsely certifying that they had complied with the PPP rules and that the information provided was true and correct in all material respects. As a result, their PPP loan was forgiven in full.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the school administrator's employment and place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file. The administrator resigned and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in their personnel file.

» *School Administrator Engaged in PPP Fraud (22-00722)*

A school administrator fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by making false statements on their loan application. The administrator falsely claimed over \$100,000 in self-employment income to obtain their forgivable PPP loan. At the time of the investigation, the administrator had an annual salary of over \$100,000.

In their interview with the OIG, the administrator initially denied receiving a PPP loan at all. After being shown PPP loan records, they claimed that their identity had been stolen and that they had not applied for or received the loan. When shown bank records indicating that they had in fact received the loan proceeds, the administrator then acknowledged that they had received the loan but continued to deny that they had personally submitted the loan application. The administrator also acknowledged that they had not earned the income listed on the loan application.

The administrator eventually admitted to submitting the fraudulent application and acknowledged that they had received and spent the loan proceeds.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the school administrator's employment and that a Do Not Hire designation be placed in their personnel file. CPS followed each of the OIG's recommendations.

» *School Administrator Claimed False Self-Employment Income to Obtain PPP Loan (22-01721)*

An OIG investigation found that a school administrator obtained a fraudulent forgivable PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by falsely claiming over \$120,000 in self-employment income in 2019.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's annual salary at CPS was over \$120,000.

During the investigation, the administrator admitted that they were not self-employed and had no compensation outside of CPS for several years. They also told the OIG that their accountant had completed the PPP loan application for them and was responsible for the claim that they had earned over \$120,000 in self-employment in 2019.

The accountant denied completing the administrator's PPP application and said that she only advised them on how to go about completing it themselves.

The administrator resigned from CPS on the day that they were scheduled to meet with the OIG for an interview.

The OIG recommended that the school administrator receive a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file and would have recommended their termination had they not already resigned. Accordingly, the Board placed a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file.

» *School Administrator Engaged in PPP Fraud, Obtained Two PPP Loans (22-01722)*

A school administrator fraudulently obtained two PPP loans totaling more than \$40,000 by claiming that they earned nearly \$100,000 in self-employment income in 2019.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator had an annual salary at CPS of more than \$120,000.

The administrator admitted to the OIG that the gross income listed on their loan applications was false. Although they maintained that they did have a business selling clothing, they said that the business had earned at most \$7,500 in a year, far less than the nearly \$100,000 stated on their loan applications.

The administrator claimed that they used the loan proceeds to purchase merchandise for their business but did not provide the OIG with receipts of those purchases.

The OIG recommended that the school administrator's employment be terminated and that the Board place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file. CPS followed each of these recommendations.



CBS 2 News Chicago

» *School Administrator Fraudulently Obtained PPP Loan (22-01720)*

An OIG investigation found that a school administrator fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by claiming that they earned nearly \$100,000 in self-employment income in 2019. During the investigation, the administrator admitted to the OIG that they did not earn any self-employment income in 2019.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's annual salary was nearly \$130,000.

The administrator claimed that another individual completed the PPP loan application for them in exchange for \$5,000, but they would not disclose the individual's name. The administrator also claimed that they did not understand what they were signing but thought that they were eligible for a PPP loan because they intended to start a business.

The administrator's statements were not credible based on the evidence. The administrator also admitted to filling out and submitting the loan forgiveness application on their own, again certifying that all the information they had submitted was true and correct.

The OIG recommended that the school administrator be terminated and that the Board place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file. The Board commenced disciplinary action, during which the employee resigned, and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in their personnel file.



» *School Administrator Claimed False Self-Employment Income to Fraudulently Obtain PPP Loan (23-00170)*

A school administrator fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by falsely claiming over \$100,000 in self-employment income in 2020.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's annual salary at CPS was more than \$120,000.

During the investigation, the administrator admitted that they applied for and received the loan and that the gross income listed on their PPP loan application was false. They claimed that they earned some self-employment income in 2020 and that the amount listed on the application was their combined self-employment income and CPS salary. However, the administrator did not respond to requests for evidence that they had earned any self-employment income in 2020, casting further doubts on their claims.

Based on the evidence, the OIG recommended that the school administrator receive a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file and would have recommended their termination had they not already resigned. Accordingly, a Do Not Hire designation was placed in their personnel file.

» *Teacher Engaged in PPP Fraud, Falsely Inflated Self-Employment Income (18-00462)*

A teacher fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by falsely inflating their self-employment income, claiming that they had earned over \$100,000 in 2020.

At the time of the investigation, the teacher had an annual salary at CPS of more than \$110,000.

When questioned about their PPP loan, the teacher admitted to receiving the loan proceeds. They stated that, while they had done some tutoring work, they had never earned anywhere near the \$100,000 they claimed on their loan application. The teacher initially told the OIG that they completed the PPP loan application themselves, but later claimed that someone else had prepared it for them and that they had only signed it."

The OIG determined that the teacher's claims were inconsistent and not credible. Accordingly, the evidence indicated that they knowingly made false statements on their loan application to fraudulently obtain a PPP loan.

In addition to their PPP fraud, the OIG also found that the teacher had engaged in other unrelated misconduct, which is discussed in Sections 6.F and 6.G later in this report. The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the teacher's employment and place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file. The Board initiated dismissal proceedings against the teacher, which are currently pending.

» *School Support Employee Lied About Having a Business to Fraudulently Obtain PPP Loan (22-00054)*

A school support employee obtained a fraudulent PPP loan of more than \$20,000 by falsely claiming that they had earned over \$100,000 as a barber in 2019.

At the time of the investigation, the employee's annual salary at CPS was nearly \$76,000.

The school support employee admitted that they did not work as a barber and that their only non-CPS income came from a small tutoring business which earned far less than \$100,000 in 2019. They claimed that an acquaintance had completed the loan application for them and that they had only reviewed and signed it and did not really know what they were signing.

However, records showed that the employee was more involved with the PPP loan than they suggested. Therefore, the OIG found that they knowingly made false statements to fraudulently secure the PPP loan.

In addition to the PPP fraud, the OIG also found that the school support employee had engaged in other unrelated misconduct, which is discussed in Section 6.F later in this report. The OIG recommended that the school support employee's employment be terminated and that a Do Not Hire designation be placed in their personnel file. The Board commenced disciplinary action, during which the employee resigned, and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in their personnel file.

» *School Administrator Inflated Self-Employment Income to Obtain Fraudulent PPP Loan (23-00163)*

An OIG investigation found that a school administrator falsely stated that they had more than \$80,000 in revenue from a side business to acquire a fraudulent PPP loan of more than \$17,000 that was later forgiven in full.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's annual salary was over \$120,000.

The administrator admitted to the OIG that they had applied for and received the PPP loan and that the gross income of over \$80,000 that they claimed on their loan application was false. The administrator also told the OIG that they had simply made a mistake on their application and that they had a legitimate side business from which they had earned as much as \$40,000 in prior years. However, when asked for proof of that claim, the administrator was unable to provide any evidence that they had actually earned anywhere near that amount from their side business.

The OIG recommended that the school administrator's employment be terminated and that the Board place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file. This matter was only recently reported to the Board, and so it is still being reviewed.

» *School Administrator Received Fraudulent PPP Loan (21-00174)*

While investigating a school administrator for violations of the residency policy and time fraud allegations, the OIG found that the administrator received a fraudulent PPP loan. The residency fraud investigation is summarized in Section 6.F, below. The administrator resigned during the investigation and did not respond to the OIG's attempt to discuss the PPP loan.

At the time of the investigation, the administrator's annual salary was over \$140,000.

A PPP loan application in the administrator's name claimed that the administrator had grossed exactly \$60,000 in self-employment income in 2020 from a construction business located at the administrator's suburban home. The investigation determined that this business was fictitious. Further, the administrator had repeatedly affirmed to CPS that she had no outside business income.

The administrator initially agreed to cooperate with the OIG's investigation; however, the administrator instead resigned prior to sitting for an interview. The administrator did not respond to the OIG's continued inquiries after the resignation.

Regardless, loan records showed that the administrator participated in the submission of the falsified loan application and received the PPP loan proceeds. The OIG therefore concluded that the administrator was responsible for acquiring the fraudulent PPP loan.

The administrator had already resigned and received a Do Not Hire designation following the OIG's residency investigation. Otherwise, the OIG would have recommended that CPS terminate the school administrator's employment and place a Do Not Hire designation in their personnel file for the findings in the PPP investigation.

# Performance Analysis Unit

The PAU reviews large-scale policies and procedures in search of efficiency recommendations to improve CPS.



### A. Asset Inventory and Recovery Procedures

During the first in-school post-Covid-19 inventory, CPS schools reported an unacceptably high percentage of technology devices as lost or stolen, based on a flawed inventory process in need of a serious overhaul.

An OIG performance review found that during the 2021-22 school year, millions of dollars in tech assets were marked lost or stolen that CPS sometimes didn't try hard enough to find or recover. (22-01569.) In other cases, the OIG found, schools marked as lost tech devices that had been assigned to students or staff but never returned – without any consequences.

All this created the likelihood that CPS used some faulty lost-device figures to replace “lost” items that weren't permanently lost.

Indeed, at individual schools, some lost/stolen rates climbed as high as one out of five tech devices, one out of three, and, at three schools, at least one out of every two, an analysis by the OIG's Performance Analysis Unit indicated. At three dozen schools, 100 percent of tech devices assigned specifically to students were marked lost or stolen, inventory data showed.

**PAU-Table 1: School-Based Lost/Stolen Tech Devices by Assignment**

Asset Site	Total	Lost	Stolen	Lost/Stolen	% Lost/Stolen
School-Based Tech	704,231	72,608	4,897	77,505	11.01%
Student Tech	105,782	26,244	2,370	28,614	27.05%
Staff Tech	28,255	1,590	79	1,669	5.91%
Unassigned	570,194	44,774	2,448	47,222	8.28%

Note: Unassigned Tech refers to tech assets that have not been assigned to a person; they could be assigned to a room or to “None.”

Source: OIG Analysis of SY 2021-22 Data Provided 9/2/22 by Asset Management. Based on the Expected Location; Excludes 25 Non-Compliant Schools, Charter Schools, and Central/Satellite Office Assets.

All told, as indicated in **PAU-Table 1**, CPS schools reported 77,505 tech devices with a total original purchase price of well over \$23 million<sup>8</sup> as lost or stolen during their 2021-22 asset inventories. This marked the first in-school inventory after students returned to normal classes following remote-learning classes, with loaned tech devices, prompted by

<sup>8</sup> The \$23 million figure excludes 35 percent of the 77,505 lost or stolen tech devices that had a blank or \$0 for a purchase price in the SY 2021-22 CPS asset inventory database, supplemented with additional data from the inventory software vendor. Obviously, the items had values at time of purchase, but those values were missing, so the OIG's \$23M figure is conservative. Upon receiving the OIG's performance review, CPS Information Technology Services (ITS) conducted its own analysis using a different data source as a starting point and found fewer devices marked lost or stolen (68,346). However, because ITS had access to more purchase price information than did the OIG, ITS calculated a greater purchase price total (of \$38.3M) for its smaller number of lost/stolen devices. It estimated the depreciated value of those devices at \$2.49M by depreciating their value as of October 30, 2023 – 1 ½ years after the inventory audit in question ended.

the Covid-19 pandemic. Missing items ranged from Chromebooks, iPads, and hotspots to printers, interactive whiteboards, and document cameras.

At 36 schools, audits marked 100% of tech devices assigned to students as lost or stolen.

Records indicated that some inventory workers were too quick to mark devices lost — a designation that must be manually entered into the inventory system; that CPS officials rarely used search and recovery procedures that cost CPS nearly \$2.6 million annually; and that some lost devices were never returned by their users post-Covid-19. The OIG also found other glitches: some inventory entries involving purchase prices or purchase dates were incorrect or missing.

Importantly, incorrect inventory numbers represent an additional problem, as CPS uses this information to calculate what tech devices to buy — at taxpayers’ expense.

At CPS, systemwide, all schools that completed their asset inventories in 2021-22 averaged an 11.01 percent<sup>9</sup> lost/stolen technology device rate, as shown in **PAU-Table 1**.

A top official with CPS’ inventory software vendor advised that, based on their experience providing inventory software to many of the nation’s largest school districts, a lost/stolen tech device rate of more than 10 percent indicates “we probably have a serious challenge on our hands.”

Yet nearly half of audited CPS schools — 47 percent to be exact — crossed that threshold. Conversely, 53 percent had a zero to 10 percent lost/stolen rate, as indicated in the first two lines of **PAU-Table 2**.

Systemwide, 27 percent of tech assets assigned to students were marked lost or stolen in 2021-22 (**PAU-Table 1**). The reported loss of more than one of every four tech devices assigned to students is truly alarming.

**PAU-Table 2:  
School Ranges Based on % Tech Lost/Stolen**

% Tech Assets Lost/Stolen	# of Schools	% of Schools
= 0%	52	11%
> 0 and ≤ 10 %	206	42%
> 10 % and ≤ 20 %	140	29%
> 20 % and ≤ 33 %	65	13%
> 33 % and ≤ 50 %	24	5%
> 50 %	3	1%

Source: OIG Analysis of SY 2021-22 Data Provided 9/2/22 by CPS Asset Management. Based on the Expected Location. Excludes 25 Non-Compliant Schools, Charter Schools, and Central/Satellite Office Assets.

<sup>9</sup> On March 25, 2022, the Chicago Sun-Times reported that CPS had lost eight percent of school-based tech assets during Covid-19. However, this percentage was based on data gathered before the 2021-22 audit ended, when 83 schools had yet to complete their inventory audits and thus could not mark any items lost or stolen. The OIG’s analysis occurred after the audit’s May 1, 2022, end date, when 25 schools had not finished their audits, and it put the school-based lost/stolen tech device rate at 11.01 percent.

Some students lost two, three, four, and even five tech assets, according to the 2021-22 inventory audit. At one school, five devices assigned to one fifth-grade student were marked lost and four assigned to his first-grade sister also were designated lost, according to the entries of one inventory technician. At the same school, two sisters and a brother each were listed with three lost tech devices, the OIG found.

This concerning level of reported lost or stolen tech assets coincided with a massive jump in tech spending in 2021-22 when the District spent more than \$124 million on technology assets – the highest level in the last five school years.<sup>10</sup> Yet, at the time of the OIG’s analysis, far more effort could have been taken to recover these tens of thousands of missing tech devices.

In SY 2021-22, the OIG calculated, CPS spent nearly \$2.6 million on two services that could have helped the District freeze or try to geo-track and recover roughly 60,000 of that school year’s 77,500 lost or stolen tech devices. Yet, as best as the OIG could determine, CPS Information Technology Services officials used those services to try to track a total of only 11 devices in 2021-22. None were recovered at that time.

It does not appear CPS has been doing as much as possible to block lost or stolen devices from being improperly used. As of late April 2023, more than 125,000 tech devices were listed on the District’s Lost/Stolen website,<sup>11</sup> yet key CPS officials could not say what percentage had been deactivated.

### **Reasons for Lost Devices**

The OIG’s review indicated that not every item marked by schools as lost in SY 2021-22 is actually lost forever. Some, or even many, may be temporarily misplaced and found weeks, months, or even years after an audit is completed.

As one CPS official put it: “We know how auditing works at the school level. People put things in drawers, and they find them three years later.”

Additionally, the 2021-22 rate was likely impacted by the fact that it was the first in-school inventory conducted after students returned to school from Covid-19-related remote learning. This means this particular inventory audit was the first in-person attempt to record whether students brought their remote-learning tech devices back to school with them. Officials at several schools told the OIG that some or many students did not return their devices.

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<sup>10</sup> Before Covid-19 closed CPS schools on March 17, 2020, most CPS schools were responsible for buying their tech devices out of school budgets. After Covid-19 hit, ITS began buying tech devices for schools and formally announced that takeover in 2022-23, according to ITS.

<sup>11</sup> Items are added to and subtracted from the Lost/Stolen website on an ongoing basis. Some tech devices have been listed on it since at least 2018.

And, nearly six percent of devices assigned to staff members were marked lost or stolen during the 2021-22 inventory, as indicated earlier in **PAU-Table 1**.

The lost/stolen rate could be inflated by full-time school-based technology coordinators (i.e., “techcos”<sup>12</sup>), CPS-approved vendor technicians hired by schools in lieu of school techcos, and other CPS staff members reporting tech devices as lost, without adequately looking for them, so they could complete their asset inventories on time. Poor training and insufficient use of geo-tracking and device-deactivation recovery efforts also may be at fault.

Consider:

- In the most extreme example of lost staff devices, one teacher was listed with 10 lost tech devices during the 2021-22 audit (the most of any CPS school employee), but eight were found later that same school year, inventory software indicates. The teacher said no one ever told him they were looking for his supposedly “lost” tech devices. They were marked lost by a technician for a CPS-approved vendor and found a few months later, after the audit ended, by a different technician for the same vendor.
- At that same school, a counselor listed with four lost tech assets in the 2021-22 audit searched her office quickly during a Google Meet with the OIG only to pull one “lost” device out of an office drawer and another, in its original untouched packaging, out of an office file cabinet. “I certainly was never told these were lost,” she said. She recommended that, in the future, staff be given a written list of devices assigned to them along with their statuses. She added: “It doesn’t seem like the system is set up for people to care what happens to devices.” A third device marked “lost” by the same technician who erroneously listed this counselor’s teacher-colleague with 10 lost devices also was found a few months later by another technician for the same vendor.
- At another school, one teacher was shocked to learn that two Chromebooks assigned to her had been listed as lost. She said she had never heard of, or talked to, the person named in the inventory audit system as marking them lost, and never was told the items were listed in a police report as being lost. “I am horrified to learn this,” the teacher said.
- This teacher also said that after remote learning ended, “the rumor was . . . half these [student] Chromebooks never made their way back” to the school. In fact, CPS’ asset inventory database indicates all student-assigned assets at this

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout this report, “techco” refers to a full-time school technology coordinator or a school computer technician whose salary is covered by individual school budgets. In 2021-22, the SY under analysis, schools could hire CPS-approved outside vendors to conduct their inventories in lieu of, or to supplement, a school-based techco. Starting in 2022-23, CPS began funding at least four hours a week of tech service per school by outside vendors that could include inventory work.



school were marked lost in 2021-22. Students faced “no consequences” for not returning their tech devices, the teacher said. Eighth graders were supposed to return missing devices in order to graduate but “that wasn’t the case . . . No one holds them accountable,” the teacher said. “No one is really responsible.”

Incorrectly listing a CPS asset that may be sitting in a school cabinet or a student’s home as lost increases the risk that asset will eventually become permanently lost or stolen. This is a dangerous practice.

In addition, as mentioned, incorrect asset inventory information can wind up costing CPS unnecessarily as the District uses this information to make technology purchasing decisions.

ITS officials speculated that older lost devices — including those more than five years old — had been “thrown out” due to their age, rather than recycled under a required CPS process, and then marked lost. The disposal would have been done by “someone not responsible or familiar with the inventory process,” rather than a school-based techco or an outside technician, ITS theorized. Also possible, but much less likely, was that some older missing devices were stolen, ITS said.

### **Filing Lost Property Police Reports Is Completely Ineffective**

To complete their asset inventories and be found “In Compliance,” under current CPS procedures schools must file police reports about all items designated as lost. The OIG contends that, as a result, CPS schools have been spending too much time filing non-criminal Lost Property police reports that have consumed police time entering them into the police report system — only to never be acted on by police.

Indeed, key CPS officials could not cite any examples of any tech device marked lost in 2021-22 that was later returned to CPS based on a Lost Property police report.

Such reports often do not contain enough information to be “actionable,” according to Chicago Police Department (CPD) officials. Indeed, key CPS officials could not cite any examples of any tech device marked lost in 2021-22 that was later returned to CPS based on a Lost Property police report.

In addition, CPS officials told the OIG that some police districts have balked at helping schools fill out police reports for lost assets — some of which list more than 100 such assets per school.

The time that schools devote to filing Lost Property police reports, as well as writing mandatory CPS incident reports about lost items, would be better spent trying to find and recover lost and stolen assets.

Furthermore, CPS apparently is the outlier in filing such police reports. The company that provides the software CPS uses for its asset inventories said it services 46 of the nation's 100 largest school districts. CPS is the only district this vendor knows of that files post-inventory police reports for lost items. Other districts only file such reports for stolen items, vendor representatives said.

### **The Data on School-Based Technology Coordinators**

During the 2021-22 inventory audit, only about one of every three traditional schools that completed their audits had a school-based techco or computer technician — or 163 of 490<sup>13</sup> schools, according to CPS position files.

That means two-thirds of schools used outside vendors (most of them approved by CPS) or other school personnel — from principals to teaching assistants — to complete their audits. However, at least two data points indicate schools produced poorer 2021-22 audit inventory results when they did not have their own techcos:

- Of the 25 schools that did not complete their asset inventories, 21 did not have a school-based techco.
- Of the 52 schools with zero tech devices marked lost/stolen, 35 percent had their own techcos, while only 13 percent of the 52 schools with the highest lost/stolen tech device rates had school-based techcos.

In addition, a logistic regression conducted by ITS following receipt of the OIG's performance review indicated that devices at schools with techcos were 36 percent less likely to be reported lost or stolen than devices at schools without techcos.

### **Lack of Accountability**

The OIG analyzed inventory data, communicated with 65 CPS employees from 45 schools and various CPS departments, and conferred with relevant CPS vendors as part of its performance review of CPS Asset Inventory Audit and Recovery Procedures.

One clear theme emerged: the inventory process suffers from a lack of accountability.

In most cases, CPS students are not held accountable if they lose, damage, or fail to return a CPS tech asset. Outside vendors continue to be paid, even if they don't finish an inventory audit. And principals face no consequences if 100% of their student-assigned tech devices are listed as lost or stolen — an analysis that CPS currently does not conduct — or if their school does not complete its inventory audit. These kinds of practices do little to encourage asset inventory efficiency, accuracy, or timeliness.

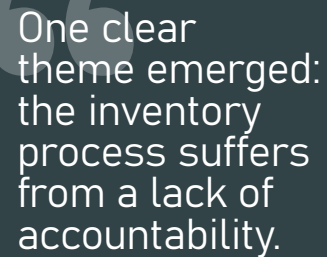
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<sup>13</sup> Only traditional CPS schools conducted inventory audits in 2021-22, so the audits excluded charter and contract schools. In addition, the OIG excluded from its analysis 25 traditional schools that were unable to designate any items as lost or stolen because they did not complete their audits.

A few school-based techcos said they try to get graduating students to return missing tech assets by disabling their devices and posting a “Return to CPS” message on them, or by warning them they would not be able to attend prom or receive a diploma unless their devices were returned, or their family filed a police report about their missing items.

However, most techcos and school officials interviewed by the OIG said they were not told what to do about missing tech assets (other than to file a police report), or they were specifically told not to charge students for lost assets.

Indeed, some students are listed as losing multiple tech devices in their school’s asset inventory. At 284 schools, 2,067 students were reported with at least two lost tech devices each in SY 2021-22, according to an OIG analysis of CPS’ asset inventory data.



One clear theme emerged: the inventory process suffers from a lack of accountability.

It’s time for CPS to create some rules and consequences for students who lose, damage or fail to return tech devices, including those who lose multiple tech devices. The system’s Mobile Device Use Agreement, which students and parents were required to sign upon receiving remote-learning devices, has not been clear enough on this point and needs to be shored up for any future use.

After all, the CPS Asset and Inventory Management Policy states that “Under no circumstances may assets be permanently transferred to employees or students.” It must be questioned whether this policy is being followed when students are reported as having lost several assets or when 100 percent of a school’s student devices are designated as lost.

Also hampering accountability is the insufficient data about inventories that is provided in Compliance Reports shared with principals at the end of inventory audits.

For example, one 2021-22 Compliance Report offered only the following breakdown of both tech assets and non-tech assets (which can include anything from refrigerators to snowblowers): Inventory 1,081; Verified 210 (19.4%); Misplaced 381 (35.2%); Missing 490 (45.3%). The report did not reveal that Missing includes the designations of Lost, Stolen, Disposed, Ignored, Recycled, Returned to Vendor, and Surplus. The Compliance Report, in the form currently shared with principals, obscured the fact that 100 percent of this school’s student tech devices (105 devices) had been marked lost, along with 75 percent of staff tech devices (22).

One principal who received a Compliance Report thought his vendor technician had done an adequate job until the OIG showed him all the devices the technician had marked lost. “I see what I’m getting for what I’m paying — a huge mess,” he said.

Another weak spot: CPS' current search process for devices is inadequate. This is indicated by reports of devices being found shortly after they were marked lost and the minimal use ITS has made of its recovery powers.

Inventory workers should be more thoroughly looking for missing items and CPS should take greater advantage of the device deactivation and geo-tracking powers that CPS is currently paying for. At a minimum, students and staff should be alerted that devices assigned to them are missing and should be given a chance to return them before those items are marked lost and a school's inventory is closed. And no device should be placed on the system's online Lost/Stolen List unless there is a record showing it has been deactivated.

### OIG Recommendations

We are genuinely concerned about the significant loss experienced during the period of the report.  
-CPS

As a result of its findings, the OIG outlined 16 recommendations to improve the system's asset inventory process and procedures. The OIG acknowledges that some recommendations will require added resources. However, this investment would amount to spending money to save money. It is far preferable to "losing" millions of dollars a year in tech devices and then replacing them every year at taxpayers' expense.

The CPS Information Technology Services Department, which has been purchasing tech devices for schools and oversees CPS search and recovery vendors, crafted CPS' response to the OIG's recommendations, following input from other departments. That included the CPS Controller's Office and Finance Department, which oversee the inventory and inventory training process. In its response, ITS wrote in part that:

"In a District of our size, some level of loss is inevitable. However, we are genuinely concerned about the significant loss experienced during the period of the report. We recognize the need to address this issue and agree there are ample opportunities to minimize loss and enhance our asset inventory audit process, recovery rates, school compliance and overall inventory accuracy."

In years past, schools purchased tech devices out of school-based budgets. But since Covid-19 closed schools, ITS also has been making such purchases. It formally announced its assumption of this responsibility in 2022-23, according to ITS officials. With the transition from school-based to ITS-based tech purchases now complete, ITS proposed

Following the OIG's report, more than 11,800 devices have been recovered as of November 2023.

establishing a team that would be responsible for overseeing the “entire asset lifecycle and recovery process for all mobile devices at schools and central office” – more than 950,000 devices. It estimated this annual cost at \$600,000 for five individuals, plus another \$1.75 million in non-personnel costs for various enhancements.

The OIG’s 16 recommendations, and CPS’ corrective actions planned in response to them, are summarized below.

OIG Recommendation	CPS Response
<p><b>1. Make Principals Accountable for Their Schools’ Audit Results.</b> Inventory audits should be among the items on which principals are evaluated annually. A more detailed Compliance Report of each school’s inventory audit should be shared with each principal, their network chief (who oversees most principal evaluations) and their Local School Council (which selects principals and provides school oversight).</p>	<p><b>1.</b> CPS agrees it needs to hold principals more accountable for their audit results and will create a “cross-functional team” to identify what changes should be made to the principal performance review process.</p>
<p><b>2. Train Principals on How to Effectively Oversee Their Annual School Audits.</b> This should include an overview of the search, deactivation, geo-tracking and recovery options available to schools; how to read key reports in the Asset Inventory database; and best practices for imposing consequences for tech devices that are lost, damaged, or not returned.</p>	<p><b>2.</b> CPS agrees to train principals on how to complete accurate inventory audits, the need to search thoroughly for assets, and how to read certain inventory reports. CPS says no geo-tracking training is needed. CPS will automate recovery procedures for devices detected outside the Chicagoland area and will automatically freeze student devices marked lost.</p>
<p><b>3. Make Students and Staff Accountable for their Assigned Devices.</b> CPS should impose consequences for tech devices that are lost, damaged, or not returned. CPS should give principals a menu of possible consequences which could include full or partial monetary reimbursement; restitution via some kind of school or community service; required parent/guardian filing of a police report; or denying students certain privileges. Mobile Device Use Agreements should be rewritten to emphasize that users are being loaned CPS property, that they are required to return devices in working order, that they will be held responsible if devices are lost, damaged or not returned, and, if possible, what consequences might ensue in such cases. As a deterrent, these Agreements should remind students and staff that the CPS Acceptable Use Policy allows CPS to deploy location-tracking software to locate missing devices.</p>	<p><b>3.</b> CPS Mobile Device Agreements were crafted after Covid-19 hit to “minimize barriers for parents.” CPS agrees with the current need to hold students and staff accountable but notes that “there are some nuances we need to consider,” such as accidental damage. It will create a “cross-functional committee” to determine specifics. CPS says it needs to decide “the best way to hold students accountable without overburdening families that are at or near poverty level by creating limits on what they would need to pay to replace or repair a device or establishing a device insurance policy to limit the cost.”</p>
<p><b>4. Improve Inventory Training; Emphasize Search Techniques.</b> Condense multiple scattered training materials, include suggestions on how to better search for missing devices, and explain how to run a report that details lost/stolen devices.</p>	<p><b>4.</b> Training materials will be consolidated and will cover how to generate and read a report that details lost/stolen devices.</p>

OIG Recommendation	CPS Response
<p><b>5. Require Annual Training on Asset Inventory Procedures and Passage of an Asset Inventory Test.</b> Given that so many techcos displayed a lack of knowledge about proper inventory procedures, those functioning as techcos should not be allowed to conduct an inventory until they attend mandatory training and pass a test on proper procedures.</p>	<p><b>5.</b> Anyone who uses the inventory system (staff, principals, and consultants) will have to take mandated training. Those who don't will be denied access. CPS plans to require that technicians/techcos pass a test on inventory procedures before starting an inventory.</p>
<p><b>6. Require that Students/Staff Be Notified in Writing of Any Missing Asset Assigned to Them.</b> They should be given a deadline to produce missing items and told of possible consequences if they don't.</p>	<p><b>6.</b> CPS agrees and will work on automating such reports. The notices will explain the consequences of not complying.</p>
<p><b>7. Step Up Training/Use of Geo-Tracking, Recovery and Disabling Options.</b> Since CPS is paying for geo-tracking, CPS may want to geo-track lost or stolen devices in a targeted way, such as by focusing on the missing devices of graduating students or the most expensive devices. Or, CPS could share geo-tracking powers with principals and/or techcos for a very limited time period each year. If geo-tracking fails, CPS should freeze the device and place a "Return to CPS" message on it. The device-recovery vendor says the "typical workflow" is that clients use geo-tracking before advancing to deactivation.</p>	<p><b>7.</b> Devices marked lost in the inventory database will be automatically moved into a recovery deactivation process. Once recovered, they will be listed as "available" in the inventory database. CPS will look into the use of geo-tracking.</p>
<p><b>8. Eliminate Lost Property Police Reports and CPS Internal Incident Reports about Lost Devices.</b></p>	<p><b>8.</b> CPS agrees to eliminate Lost Property police reports during inventories. It will continue to file police reports and internal incident reports for stolen items.</p>
<p><b>9. Push for Improved Performance of Outside Tech Vendors.</b> The vendors who employ outside technicians should be listed in the inventory database so that the lost/stolen rates of these vendors and their technicians can be easily analyzed and tracked by CPS Audit or the OIG. CPS should drop vendors whose technicians repeatedly have poor lost/stolen records or who do not complete audits.</p>	<p><b>9.</b> CPS will develop a matrix "to ensure it is clear to both Principals and . . . vendors their role in the inventory process." A "large swath of missing devices" will require parties to try to locate them before an inventory is closed. ITS plans to keep the list of all tech vendors and their technicians in ITS rather than in a report that can be pulled by the OIG and Audit from the inventory database.</p>
<p><b>10. Help More Schools Hire or Share School-Based Techcos.</b> CPS should find a way to help schools hire more techcos or to pair up schools so they can split the cost of a techco — perhaps by asking Network Chiefs to match up schools in their networks. Several principals told the OIG they could not afford a full-time techco but they could afford the cost of half a techco.</p>	<p><b>10.</b> CPS agrees more schools should have techcos but "this currently is a budgetary decision at the principal level. To ensure equity, the District should centrally fund techcos and have them as a shared service where each techco would be assigned to one or more schools." Adding a sufficient number "will come at significant additional cost and will need to be considered in the next fiscal cycle."</p>

OIG Recommendation	CPS Response
<p><b>11. Add Four New Fields of Information to the Inventory Database</b> and add two fields to one particular inventory audit report, in most cases to enhance accountability or help officials prioritize which devices to recover. New fields should include the vendor who employs the outside technician doing any inventory and whether a device marked lost or stolen has been deactivated. Errors or blanks in other fields should be addressed.</p>	<p><b>11.</b> CPS will keep or track some of this information in Information Technology and is assessing how to address other suggestions. CPS will work with vendors to fix any issues with interfaces that could contribute to glitches such as Purchase Price and Purchase Date blanks or errors.</p>
<p><b>12. Hold Asset Inventories for Schools and Central Office at the Same Time Each School Year.</b> This would allow CPS to assess its progress more accurately over the years.</p>	<p><b>12.</b> CPS agrees.</p>
<p><b>13. Expand Compliance Reports; Assess CPS Asset Inventory Results Annually; Take Action with Worst-Performing Schools.</b> Compliance Reports should be expanded to include each school’s percentage of lost or stolen tech and non-tech devices, as well as lost or stolen student-assigned, staff-assigned, and non-assigned tech devices. Schools with poor results should be flagged for extra training or help.</p>	<p><b>13.</b> CPS agrees.</p>
<p><b>14. Rewrite the CPS Asset Inventory and Management Policy.</b> It currently mentions departments that play no role in lost tech devices.</p>	<p><b>14.</b> CPS agrees.</p>
<p><b>15. Create an Amnesty Period to Recover 2021-22 Lost Assets.</b> More serious search and recovery efforts are needed for the 77,505 tech devices marked lost/stolen in 2021-22. ITS may want to share geo-tracking power in a limited way or target certain devices for geo-tracking before escalating to disabling devices and imposing consequences as needed.</p>	<p><b>15.</b> On July 27, 2023, CPS sent recovery messages to about 50,000 devices reported lost or stolen over the last several years. More than 11,800 had been recovered as of mid-November.</p>
<p><b>16. If Necessary, Consider a New Asset Inventory Vendor.</b> Data glitches and missing data that may be a CPS integration problem with multiple vendors need to be fixed or a new asset inventory solution should be considered.</p>	<p><b>16.</b> CPS is examining its options for asset management solutions.</p>

## B. Update: Extra Pay Rules and Procedures

CPS officials are identifying employees who received unusually large amounts of overtime and other forms of extra pay following a CPS OIG performance review that found that such payments had jumped 74 percent in five years. (20-01014.)

The CPS crackdown on substantial extra pay follows a 2022 CPS OIG performance review that found that the three most common forms of CPS extra pay had grown substantially over a five-year period, rising from a total of \$42.5 million in calendar year 2017 to nearly \$74 million in calendar year 2021. The biggest jump came in stipend spending,

which skyrocketed from \$2 million to nearly \$29 million during that time, an OIG analysis indicated.

Stipends are lump-sum payments used to pay school personnel to complete a project or task, such as year-long work as a Debate Club coach. The other forms of extra pay under analysis are Extended Day, which is paid only to Chicago Teachers Union teachers for hours worked beyond their normal schedules, and overtime, which is paid mostly to non-teachers and members of other unions.

So far, CPS Payroll officials have identified 67 CPS employees who each made more than \$15,000 in stipends – a cutoff officials have preliminarily identified as excessive – in SY 2021-22. Next steps are in the process of being discussed with the CPS Law and Internal Audit departments.

In addition, CPS Payroll officials are preparing to send principals payment records of employees whose overtime or Extended-Day hours amounted to at least 50 percent of their normal work hours during both the first and second quarters of the current school year. Principals should be receiving this data in late January and asked to verify the payment amounts, the OIG was told.

Also under scrutiny are schools with large numbers of historical payroll record corrections or requests for changes in hours worked.

The OIG called for a comprehensive overhaul of extra pay payment procedures and a more thorough analysis of such payments after detecting repeated instances of extra pay without supporting paper timesheets; extra pay without supporting swipes in the Kronos timekeeping system, paper timesheets approved with a principal stamp rather than a principal's signature, "buddy punching," in which one employee swipes a fellow employee in or out, and a 74 percent increase in all three forms of extra pay over five years.

In particular, the OIG called for restricting the use of stipends as much as possible. CPS advised that new guidelines surrounding stipends are still being ironed out.

New language in CPS timesheets now makes clear that employees must swipe in and out to receive Extended Day and summer school pay. At the OIG's urging, timesheets filled out by employees to explain when and why they worked extra hours now require the employees to sign an attestation that the information is accurate and that they realize they can be disciplined – and even terminated – for submitting false timesheet information.

As recommended, Payroll continues to work on updating its training materials and extra pay guidelines for clerks and principals who process and approve extra pay. Payroll also is considering emailing employees extra pay rules and guidelines for their easy reference.



Because OIG investigators have visited schools that cannot seem to locate their paper timesheets, the OIG recommended that CPS electronically store its timesheets. No action has yet to be taken on this recommendation.

For further information on the OIG’s performance review of Extra Pay Rules and Procedures, see the OIG’s [2022 Annual Report](#).

### C. Update: JROTC Enrollment and Procedures

CPS ninth-grade enrollment rates in Physical Education have shot up and JROTC enrollment rates have shrunk since the OIG reported that some CPS high schools were automatically routing CPS freshmen into Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps as a substitute for PE — a CPS graduation requirement. (21-00483.)

Although JROTC is supposed to be a voluntary elective, a [2022 OIG performance review](#) found that at some schools, students were being automatically enrolled in JROTC as if the course was a pre-checked box among their scheduling options. At these schools, if students didn’t want JROTC, they had to find a way to get themselves removed from it. Sometimes this was possible; sometimes it was not.

For schools, however, automatically enrolling students in JROTC could be a money saver because JROTC classes can be used to fulfill CPS’ PE graduation requirement without spending school budgeting dollars on the cost of a PE teacher. That’s because JROTC instructor salaries are covered by the CPS Central Office and the U.S. Department of Defense — not school budgets.

Reforms instituted by CPS since the OIG’s performance review include mandatory training of principals on new requirements that all high school students must be offered PE and not be enrolled in JROTC until their parents sign a far more detailed JROTC consent form.

In 2022, eight CPS high schools were spotlighted by the OIG because 90 to 100 percent of their 2020-21 freshmen were enrolled in JROTC. However, this school year (2023-24), with more schools offering freshmen a PE and a JROTC option, an average of 34 percent of freshmen at those eight schools were enrolled in JROTC. Meanwhile, during that same time, the percentage of ninth graders enrolled in Physical Education soared from 3 percent overall to 66 percent at those schools.

## Freshman JROTC enrollment plunges after overhaul by Chicago Public Schools

After an investigation found students were enrolled in a JROTC high school class “without any choice in the matter,” CPS ended automatic enrollment.

By Contributor | Jan 5, 2023, 6:00am CST  
Alex Ruppenthal

Chicago Sun Times

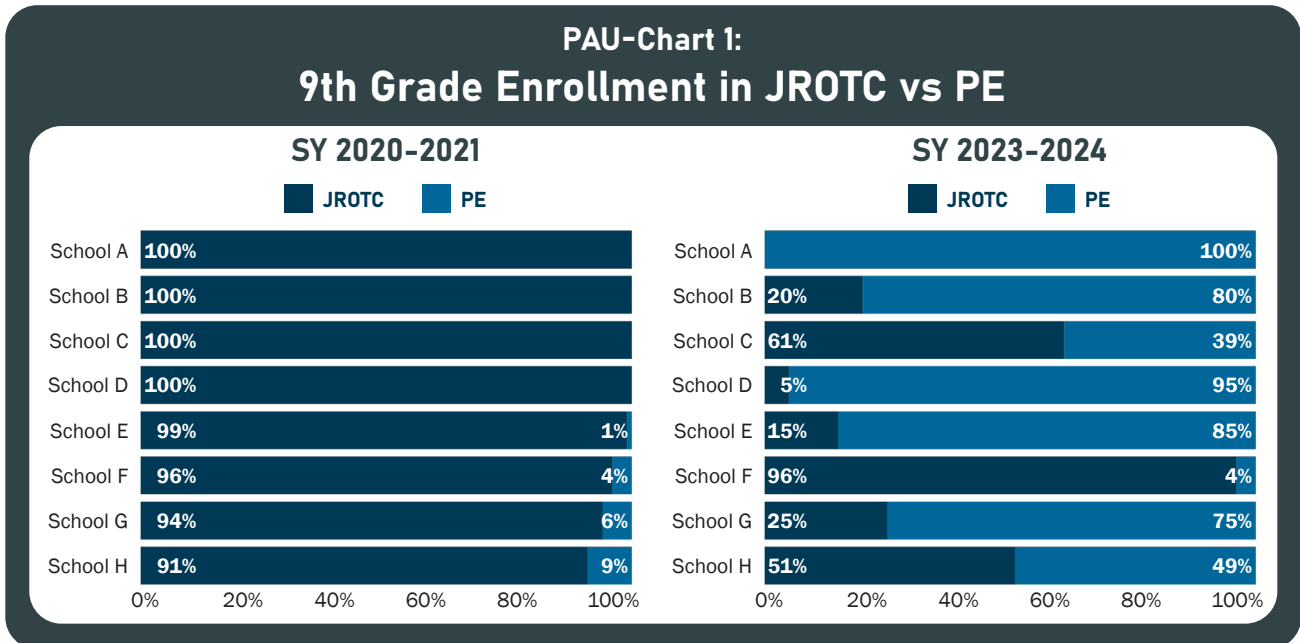
This overall trend also was reflected, though to a lesser degree, at the 40 total traditional CPS high schools that offer JROTC programs.

The OIG remains concerned about one spotlighted high school, identified in **PAU-Chart 1** as School F, whose freshman JROTC enrollment rate was 96 percent in 2020-21, 93 percent last school year, and 96 percent again this school year – far more than any other spotlighted school. Signed JROTC parent consent forms have been filed for all 2023-24 JROTC freshmen at School F, but the OIG views this school’s ninth-grade JROTC enrollment rate as such an outlier that it is worth a closer look.

As part of its reforms, CPS agreed to consider helping JROTC program high schools fund PE teacher positions to ensure that all students could be offered PE and that schools were not automatically enrolling freshmen in JROTC to save the cost of a PE teacher. However, School F has had one PE teacher since 2020 and, as of December 2023, had not asked for financial help to add a PE teacher in the two most recent school years, CPS officials told the OIG. Meanwhile, during that same time period, two spotlighted schools and two non-spotlighted schools with JROTC programs received financial help to cover the cost of PE teachers, officials said.

CPS also had planned to require JROTC students to sign waivers listing their reason for wanting to be excused from PE, but use of that waiver has been delayed until, hopefully, 2024-25, CPS officials said.

Following another OIG recommendation, CPS this year began monitoring the percentage of students taking JROTC classes out of sequence – something inconsistent with JROTC national regulations. That data indicated that at least 50 percent of JROTC students at



Note: In SY 2023-24 six School A freshmen were enrolled in JROTC but had no first-marking period grades due to an instructor scheduling problem.

Source: OIG Analysis of 2023-24 First-Marking Period Grades of Freshmen and 2020-21 Final Marking Period Grades of Freshmen.

six JROTC program schools are taking JROTC classes out of sequence. To prevent future issues in this area, CPS said it plans to train all school-level staff responsible for enrolling JROTC program school students on JROTC requirements.

The OIG also is concerned that this school year, two JROTC program schools have nearly double the percentage of diverse learners in JROTC than as in those schools as a whole. This, too, is inconsistent with JROTC national regulations stating that “under normal circumstances there should not be more special needs students or students with disciplinary problems in JROTC than exist in the overall school population.” CPS responded to the OIG about this concern by stating that “the district has been implementing systems to ensure that each student enrolled has a signed [JROTC] consent form on file.”

Reforms instituted last year to JROTC enrollment procedures are summarized in the OIG’s [2022 Annual Report](#).

# Sexual Allegations Unit

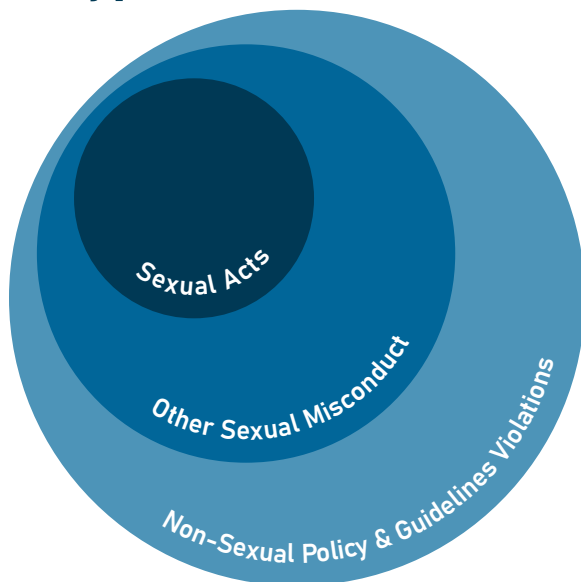
The SAU investigates allegations of sexual misconduct by a CPS-affiliated adult, including employees, contractors, vendors and charter schools, where the victim is a CPS student and/or a minor.



## A. Overview

In 2018, the CPS Board took action to prioritize student safety by authorizing the OIG to create the nation's first, and only, centralized independent investigative body with jurisdiction over a broad range of sexual misconduct allegations involving K-12 school-based staff and students.

### Types of SAU Cases



The OIG Sexual Allegations Unit (SAU) assumed responsibility for investigating these allegations in October 2018. The SAU's investigations are conducted independently and are part of CPS' four-pronged approach to eradicate sexual misconduct throughout CPS, which also includes extensive training for all members of the CPS community, expanded reporting obligations for staff, and supports for students involved in investigations. While the OIG is charged with investigating these allegations, CPS' Office of Student Protections and Title IX coordinates CPS' work in these other areas, while also ensuring compliance with Title IX regulations and the Resolution Agreement

between CPS and the U.S. Department of Education – Office for Civil Rights, maintaining the District's data, and directing the investigations that fall within its jurisdiction.

Since its inception, the SAU has grown into a team of more than 30 uniquely qualified staff responsible for handling hundreds of adult-on-student sexual misconduct allegations per year, ranging from physical acts of sexual abuse to nonsexual conduct that raises the appearance of impropriety or possible grooming concerns. Examples of the types of complaints that are not overtly sexual include staff members driving/calling/texting a student, buying gifts for a student, making a student uncomfortable through perceived staring or invasion of personal space, and otherwise showing an inordinate amount of attention to a student.<sup>14</sup>

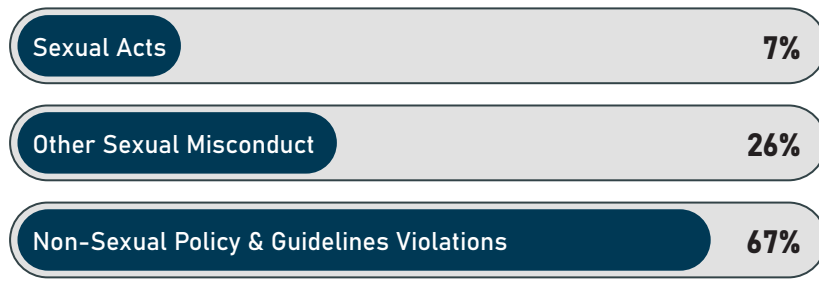
Complaints regarding improper boundaries between staff and students make up most of the misconduct allegations received and investigated by the SAU each year. Out of the 446 total sexual misconduct complaints received by the SAU in FY 2023, 67% of the complaints fell into this nonsexual category, as compared to 33% relating directly

<sup>14</sup> These violations of professional boundaries were first outlined in CPS' 2018 Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries, which have since been revised and included as part of the CPS Reporting of Child Abuse, Neglect and Inappropriate Relations Between Adults and Students policy.

to allegations of sexual abuse, physical contact, sexual comments/communications or grooming (see **Type of Complaint** table on page 2). Breaking this statistic down further, 7% of the total complaints handled by the SAU during this timeframe explicitly alleged sexual abuse or sex acts.

This is an important distinction for several reasons. The SAU’s reporting of data about all types of misconduct allegations that the SAU investigates has sometimes been equated with instances of sexual abuse, which is an

### FY 2023 SAU Complaints Received



inaccurate and misleading interpretation. While conducting thorough and impartial investigations of alleged sexual abuse is an important part of the SAU’s work that requires considerable time and resources, this represents only a portion of the unit’s overall jurisdiction.

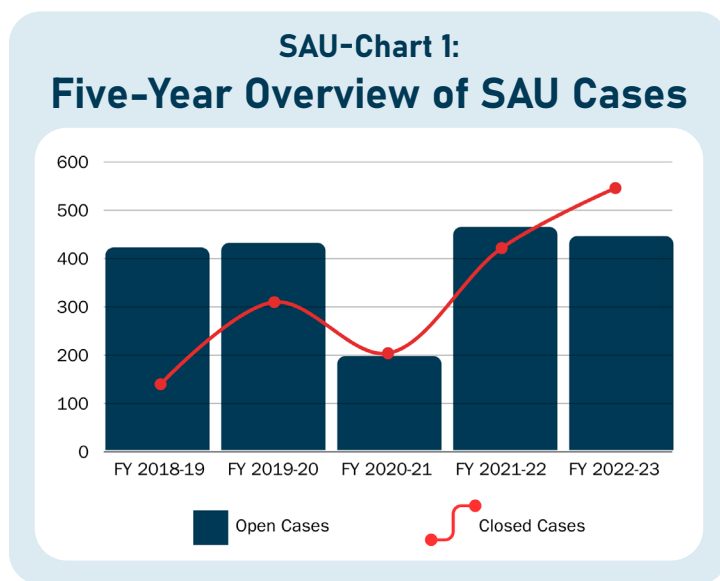
Furthermore, it is critical that the SAU’s work include investigations of complaints that are not overtly sexual. Whereas the GIU has discretion over the allegations it investigates (based on a variety of factors like available resources and the potential impact of an investigation), the SAU opens a case for every allegation of potential sexual misconduct it receives. This includes anonymous allegations, those offering minimal details or names, and allegations of unprofessional behavior that are not explicitly sexual but may indicate grooming concerns. The value in having the SAU’s trained staff handling these allegations for CPS is indisputable; some of the SAU’s more serious substantiated investigations started with allegations that were not explicitly sexual at the outset. Were it not for the SAU and Office of Student Protections, many of these allegations would not be reported, much less investigated.

Over the past five years, the SAU’s accomplishments have been significant. As of December 15, 2023, it has opened 2,188 cases following allegations reported by students, alumni, parents, staff, and others. Of those, it has closed a total of 1,768 cases raising concerns of adult-on-student sexual misconduct, and substantiated policy violations in 363 investigations.

While the volume of allegations and the number of substantiated cases of sexual misconduct understandably causes concern within the District and impacted school

communities, there is no indication that the frequency of these occurrences is higher within CPS than in other districts nationwide.<sup>15</sup>

The volume of complaints the SAU receives each year is due in large measure to CPS’ expansive policies governing adult interactions with students and its extensive training initiatives for staff, students, and parents, which have led to a greater number of CPS stakeholders identifying, and reporting, potential sexual misconduct. Many allegations handled by the SAU would not be considered policy violations, and likely would not be identified, reported, or investigated, in other school districts. Because of the commitment made by CPS and the SAU’s work over the last five years, CPS has become increasingly able to identify, investigate and eliminate misconduct occurring within its schools to better protect current and future students.



Although not individually summarized in this report, equally important are the almost 500 full investigations that have resulted in unsubstantiated findings since 2018, because they reflect the SAU’s commitment to investigating and accounting for those instances where sexual misconduct was not uncovered.<sup>16</sup> The SAU gives students, parents, staff, and administrators an opportunity to have their concerns heard and evidence assessed in an

impartial manner. Such investigations also frequently lead to referrals for staff to receive additional training; in FY 2023, 145 CPS teachers and other staff were referred for training following recommendations by the OIG’s SAU.

<sup>15</sup> The SAU is not only the sole centralized K–12 investigative unit in the country to handle such a broad range of allegations, it is also the only entity that issues public reports on its complaint volume and outcomes, and summarizes its substantiated findings. As such, reliable statistics from other school districts are simply not available.

<sup>16</sup> For more information on the SAU’s intake, assessment and investigation processes, see the [FY 2022 Annual Report](#) pages 34-36.

## B. Training Needed for Vendor Employees and Volunteers

*Coaches. Mentors. Cafeteria workers. Custodians. After-school program staff.*

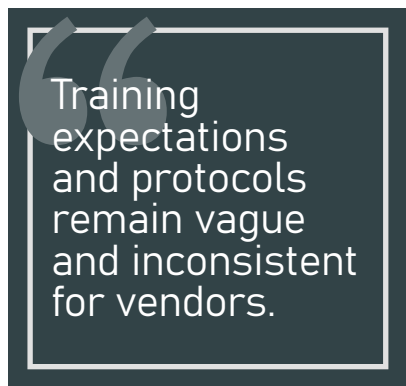
These are among the many roles school-based vendor employees<sup>17</sup> and Level I Volunteers<sup>18</sup> play in schools across CPS that may involve significant contact with CPS students, often in unsupervised settings.

Some vendor employees and volunteers are so immersed in their school communities that others may not appreciate that they are not District employees. For example:

- Volunteer athletic or academic team coaches who work alongside CPS staff;
- Vendor-employed lunchroom staff who have worked at the same school for years, and may be managed by a CPS employee; and
- Mentors or tutors who have regular schedules and dedicated office space within a school.

A vast majority of these individuals are valued members of their respective school communities whose interactions with students comport with CPS policies. However, over approximately five years, the OIG has closed 138 investigations into vendor employees and volunteers,<sup>19</sup> and identified at least 53 of those individuals who have violated

CPS policies. This includes 31 vendor employees and volunteers who were found to have engaged in some type of sexual misconduct, ranging from sexual comments made to students to sexual abuse.



<sup>17</sup> The term “vendor employee” refers to individuals who are employed by third parties with whom CPS or charter networks have contracted to provide various services (e.g., after-school programs). Vendor entities can range from sole proprietorships to larger companies and organizations, with one or many individuals carrying out their services within schools. This section focuses on those vendors and their employees who have regular contact with students.

<sup>18</sup> Level I Volunteers include adults who may have regular and significant contact with CPS students, including in unsupervised settings (e.g., coaches, student teachers, regular parent volunteers, overnight trip chaperones). In contrast, Level II volunteers have a more limited role and/or are supervised when interacting with students (e.g., field trip chaperones or special event volunteers). See Volunteer Policy (Board Report 187-0822-P04, Section 801.2) (“Volunteer Policy”).

<sup>19</sup> For the last three years, the OIG has refined its intake process so a volunteer’s status and position are clearly recorded (e.g., Volunteer-Coach). The OIG reviewed its data from before that time and updated its records accordingly, but these numbers are likely still underinclusive.



**SAU-Table 1: Vendor Employee and Volunteer Case Activity**

Association Type	Total Number of Allegations	Open Investigations	Total Closed Matters	Substantiated Sexual Misconduct <sup>20</sup>	Substantiated Other Misconduct	Total Substantiated
Vendor Staff	140	23	117	24	17	41
Volunteers	27	6	21	7	5	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>53</b>

These investigations have revealed that training for vendor employees and volunteers concerning sexual misconduct and professional boundaries has been inconsistent at best, even though the District’s policies have long required their compliance.<sup>21</sup>

In a positive development, starting in the 2023-24 school year, CPS started training Level I Volunteers on CPS’ Protecting Chicago’s Children module addressing sexual misconduct, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Mandated Reporter requirements, and other topics. This is consistent with the OIG’s recommendation made in connection with OIG Case No. 23-00276 (discussed below), issued on August 31, 2023.<sup>22</sup>

While the outlook for training of Level I Volunteers has improved, the training expectations and protocols remain vague and inconsistent for vendors and their employees. Over the last several years, the OIG has recommended training for various vendors involved in SAU investigations, both on an individual basis and for all employees of certain vendors. For example, based on an OIG recommendation, the Office of Student Protections and Title IX conducted vendor-wide training for a large after-school program in early 2023.

The OIG urges CPS to improve the vendor onboarding process to include clearly articulated expectations for mandatory CPS-created or approved trainings for those vendor employees expected to have contact with students, a centralized and searchable

<sup>20</sup> This includes sex abuse, sex acts, grooming, sexual touching that is less than abuse, in-person sexual comments, and sexual electronic communications.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., *CPS Sexual Harassment Policies*: since at least 1994, each iteration of the District’s Sexual Harassment policy has explicitly applied to contractors, consultants, and volunteers; *Staff Acceptable Use Policies*: since at least 2004, the policy that governs the use of CPS technology, networks, and electronic communications has applied to consultants, volunteers, and (as of 2009) vendors and contractors; *Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students*: since the District published the first version in 2018, staff, coaches, volunteers, and other third parties who interact with CPS students have been required to comply.

<sup>22</sup> In this case, the OIG recommended that all Level I Volunteers receive training concerning appropriate interactions with students, their reporting obligations under CPS policy and state law, and their obligations to fully cooperate with District investigators and DCFS.

database of those who have completed the training each year, and an oversight mechanism to help drive compliance.

### **Current Screening and Training Procedures for Volunteers and CPS Vendors**

Background checks are required for all Level I Volunteers and those vendor employees who have “direct, daily contact” with students.<sup>23</sup> These protections were extended to all charter schools through Background Checks and Adjudication Process Agreements (“Background Check Agreement”) between CPS and each charter network. However, the training expectations are far less clear and consistent.

#### ***Vendor Training Is Inconsistent at Best***

A sample of vendor contracts reviewed by the OIG require, at a minimum, that the vendor remain in compliance with Board policies and rules.<sup>24</sup> Some go further and require the vendor to ensure their own staff comply with CPS policies,<sup>25</sup> others call for mandatory in-person CPS-led training<sup>26</sup> or mention specific CPS policies implicated by the vendor’s role (such as the Staff Acceptable Use Policy), and more variations likely exist as well.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond the contractual expectations, the OIG has observed significant inconsistencies in vendor training based on available personnel records and statements from vendor employees. For example, 14 vendor employees interviewed in the course of SAU investigations said as follows:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> They are screened using a fingerprint-based criminal background check, along with a search of sex offender registries, CPS employment records (for pending investigations or previous Do Not Hire designations), and DCFS records of abuse or neglect findings. See Volunteer Policy; CPS Procedures Governing the Operations of the Criminal Background Committee (citing sections of the Illinois School Code and Illinois State Board of Education Guidance on Criminal History Records for school-based staff).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Master Agreement for Out of School Time and Student Health and Wellness Products and Services (Right At School, LLC), dated January 1, 2022, at Section 11.2. Available at: [https://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/pdfs/contracts/2021\\_11/21-1117-PR2-60.pdf](https://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/pdfs/contracts/2021_11/21-1117-PR2-60.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Custodial Services Agreement between CPS and Aramark Management Services, LP, dated August 1, 2021, at Section 10(E). Available at: [https://schoolinfo.cps.edu/procuredocuments/pdfs/contracts/2021\\_07/21-0728-PR14-1.pdf](https://schoolinfo.cps.edu/procuredocuments/pdfs/contracts/2021_07/21-0728-PR14-1.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., First Amendment to the Master Agreement for Safe Passage Sites and Services (Claretian Associates, Inc.), dated July 7, 2022, at Section V.E. Available at: [https://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/pdfs/contracts/2021\\_08/21-0825-PR11-9.pdf](https://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/pdfs/contracts/2021_08/21-0825-PR11-9.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Master Agreement for Out of School Time and Student Health and Wellness Products and Services (Right At School, LLC), dated January 1, 2022, at Section 15. Available at: [https://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/pdfs/contracts/2021\\_11/21-1117-PR2-60.pdf](https://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/pdfs/contracts/2021_11/21-1117-PR2-60.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> The OIG understands that vendors and volunteers can gain access to the SafeSchools platform used by for CPS staff training. A search for five vendor employees who worked for three different entities did not return any record of them completing CPS-created training.

**SAU-Table 2: CPS Vendor Employee Training**

Level of Training	Responses	Vendor Employee’s Job Duties
Trained on certain CPS policies by employer/CPS	7	Custodian, Academic Coach (2), Therapist, Community Representative, Computer Tech, Mentor
Not trained on CPS policies	7	Custodian (2), Academic Coach (2), Drama Program Manager, Photographer, Contract Substitute Teacher

Setting aside documentation in personnel files and recollections of vendor employees, when vendors that have very different areas of expertise but whose employees interact with students are each expected to train their own staff on CPS’ policies (in addition to their own), the inconsistency in content, level of detail, and frequency of training would itself be significant.

**Volunteer Training**

The District’s Volunteer Policy, updated in August 2018, requires principals to ensure their volunteers submit an application that is approved by CPS, and have completed the “mandate[d] volunteer training requirements” established by the District.<sup>29</sup> Further, the District is required to issue “guidelines” to aid in the implementation of the Policy (e.g., creating necessary forms, timelines, and protocols), which may include mandatory volunteer trainings.<sup>30</sup> However, the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) office confirmed that, historically, no training has been required for Level I Volunteers.

This recently changed. As of October 2023, Level I Volunteers must complete several mandatory trainings, including sexual misconduct training, DCFS Mandated Reporter training, Supporting Transgender Students, Suicide Prevention & Awareness, Information Security Training, and others.

This is a significant step in the right direction, but also a significant undertaking. The OIG will continue to monitor this new initiative and its effectiveness.

**Investigations Involving Volunteers and Vendors**

The SAU’s concerns about untrained vendor employees and volunteers within CPS schools stem from its experience investigating adult-on-student sexual misconduct allegations for over five years. In that time, the SAU has closed 138 investigations of vendor employees and volunteers, with another 29 still being actively investigated. These investigations resulted in findings that 31 vendor employees or volunteers engaged in sexual misconduct.

<sup>29</sup> Volunteer Policy, Section II.A.7 (Principal Responsibilities for Level I and Level II Volunteers).

<sup>30</sup> Volunteer Policy, Section VI (Guidelines).

### ***Substantiated Sexual Misconduct by Vendors and Volunteers***

The following investigations reflect some of the most serious misconduct findings against vendor employees and volunteers. In these four examples, the subjects refused to participate in an OIG interview (which is not unusual for vendor employees who have already been terminated by their employer), but there was sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegations.

The summaries below also note the available evidence about their training history, when available from interviews of the subjects and their supervisors, personnel records, and any other sources.

Beyond depicting the types of misconduct uncovered by the OIG, these cases also illustrate the level of access to students that vendors and volunteers can have and exploit:

- Case No. 19-01109: A vendor employee who provided mentorship and homework assistance sent sexually explicit messages to a 13-year-old student. The employee was indicted on several counts; he pled guilty to one count of felony Indecent Solicitation of a Child (720 ILCS 5/11-6(a-5)). The vendor provided the OIG with basic information about their employee's job duties but did not include information about training. The vendor was sentenced to 18 months' probation and is required to register as a sex offender. Their employment has been terminated; they did not participate in an OIG interview.
- Case No. 19-00022: A vendor employee who mentored high school students engaged in prohibited conduct of a sexual nature with a 16-year-old student, including several late-night phone calls, seeing the student outside of school, holding hands with the student, and taking a photo with the student in an intimate pose. The vendor terminated the employee and the employee refused to be interviewed by the OIG.
- Case No. 20-01455: A high school volunteer coach sent a student on the team sexually inappropriate messages via social media and sought the student out for in-person meetings at school that made the student uncomfortable. The coach also connected with other students via social media and socialized with male students outside of school. The volunteer did not participate in an OIG interview; he has been blocked from volunteering or working for the District.
- Case No. 19-02541: An elementary school volunteer athletic coach groomed a student for the purpose of committing sexual abuse, starting when they were 13 years old. The OIG obtained screenshots of messages showing that the coach told the student he "loved" them, encouraged them to lie to their parents, said he wanted to go to a movie with the student so he could hold their hand, and engaged in extensive phone communications with the student, often late at night. The investigation did not establish, however, that the volunteer coach sexually

abused or assaulted the student. The OIG has been in contact with the police, but to date, no criminal charges have been filed. The volunteer did not participate in an OIG interview; he has been blocked from volunteering or working for the District.

### ***Other Serious Policy Violations by Vendor Employees and Volunteers Reveal the Need for Required Training***

Beyond sexual misconduct, vendor employees and volunteers have also violated various other CPS policies:

- Case No. 20-00385: A volunteer athletic coach communicated with a student over social media and discussed very personal matters and then lied to the OIG about the extent of those communications. The volunteer told OIG investigators that he had not received training on CPS policies.
- Case No. 22-01793: An IT vendor employee watched pornography on his cell phone while in the school's computer room, plainly visible to students. This vendor employee told the OIG that they had completed the District's sexual harassment and Title IX training; information provided by a supervisor indicated that their employee was trained by the vendor on unspecified topics.
- Case No. 22-01944: On school picture day, a student reported being uncomfortable by the employee of a photography company who touched a student's neckline and told the student that their photos were "sexy as always," and asked them for a hug. The personnel records obtained by the OIG did not include information about training, but his supervisor stated that the photographer's conduct violated the photography company's own policies that the photographer was aware of. The vendor company terminated the employee who refused to sit for an OIG interview.
- Case No. 21-01141: A vendor security guard at a charter school made sexual comments to a tenth-grade student, including discussing male and female genitalia, condoms, and telling the student that they needed to be with a "grown man." The security guard's personnel records only reflect security-related training certifications. The vendor employee was terminated; they did not participate in an OIG interview.

### **Consequences of Having Untrained Volunteers and Vendor Staff**

In the course of investigating potential adult-on-student sexual misconduct, the OIG has encountered other related challenges and problems stemming from the lack of consistent training.

**First**, untrained vendor employees and volunteers have failed to report serious concerns and allegations about which they were aware:

- Case No. 21-00155: This case involved a reporting structure in which the subject of the investigation, a high school cafeteria employee, was a CPS employee who reported directly to supervisors who worked for a vendor (i.e., not CPS employees). The cafeteria employee was indicted for abusing a child who was not a CPS student under circumstances having nothing to do with his employment. Although the alleged abuse happened outside of CPS, the OIG opened an investigation to determine whether there were concerns about the employee at the school where he worked. The investigation revealed that the cafeteria employee’s supervisor and colleague (who worked for the vendor) had become so uncomfortable with how the cafeteria employee stared at students that they reassigned him to duties that would not put him in contact with students. These alarming concerns, however, were not previously reported by the vendor or its employees to CPS. The OIG recommended that CPS ensure this vendor’s employees were trained on CPS reporting policies for allegations of misconduct.
- Case No. 19-01300: A high school vendor employee (the “subject”) engaged in sexual acts with a 19-year-old student and, once the allegations were reported, instructed the student to delete all communications between them. The subject’s colleague from the same vendor was aware of certain allegations; instead of reporting them, the colleague confronted the subject, who admitted that they and the student had “expressed their feelings for one another,” but did not plan to pursue anything until the subject’s “term of service” had ended. The subject said they had received training from their employer, which included practices that conflicted with CPS policies (e.g., they were told to create a “work” Facebook account to interact with students). Per the OIG’s recommendation, the District advised the vendor to review key CPS policies with its staff. The subject’s employment was terminated, and they are ineligible for future employment with the Board.

**Second**, vendor employees and volunteers who are not familiar with CPS policies and investigations are less likely to cooperate and may even act contrary to District policies. In some instances, including the examples below, uninformed individuals can actively thwart an investigation:

#### EDUCATION

### CPS Watchdog Finds ‘Concerning’ Trends in School-Based Investigations, Vendor Background Checks

[Matt Masterson](#) | January 25, 2023 3:50 pm

WTTW Chicago

- Case No. 23-00276: A volunteer coach for an academic team sent a student two messages, through email and a handwritten note, that made the student uncomfortable. The student reported this conduct to another volunteer coach of the team, who reported the allegation to CPS but refused to identify the student complainant or send the OIG a copy of the note they had in their possession. This volunteer had no training as a CPS volunteer, did not know what DCFS was, was unfamiliar with their reporting obligations (both to DCFS and CPS), and continued to refuse cooperation even after the OIG shared and explained the District's policies. Among other things, the OIG recommended training for all Level I Volunteers across the District.
- Case No. 23-00735: A CPS staff member reported alleged misconduct involving an after-school program vendor employee and a student to their principal. When the principal contacted the vendor's employer, they learned that the allegation had been reported to the vendor a week prior, but the vendor never reported it to CPS. The vendor said it was doing its own investigation (in conflict with CPS policy) and did not intend to notify the school until the investigation had concluded. Personnel records for the subject of the investigation reflect 10 different trainings they had completed, all provided by the vendor, that appear to relate largely to programming and job duties instead of sexual harassment and related topics. This matter was referred to the Office of Student Protections and Title IX, which has since conducted vendor-wide training as recommended by the OIG.

**Third**, significant District and OIG resources are expended investigating alleged misconduct that likely could have been prevented with training:

- Case No. 20-00721: During an after-school drama program for students run by a vendor, the subject, who was also in a leadership role at the program, asked students for their phone numbers and addresses. Phone records reflected two text messages with one student. The OIG opened the investigation after students reported feeling uncomfortable with the vendor employee asking for this information and wanting to meet outside of school, among other concerns. No sexual misconduct or intent was established in the investigation and the vendor employee explained that text exchanges with the student related to videos taken during the drama program. Aside from passing a background check, the subject told the OIG that she had not completed any training prior to interacting with CPS students.
- Case No. 19-01077: A vendor employee who worked for a mentoring program exchanged extensive communications with a student, including both calls and texts, and drove the student without parental consent. The vendor tried to engage the student in conversations about their personal issues. The OIG did not identify any sexual intent or misconduct. The vendor reported being trained by her own organization, but said they had no CPS training prior to interacting with students.

According to a CPS employee who reported the initial complaint, the vendor employee told them that they knew electronic communications with students were prohibited by their employer, but thought CPS had different policies.

- Case No. 19-01911: A vendor employee admitted giving a student a pair of used (but expensive) shoes; no other sexual or other misconduct was identified. The allegation was reported by the student’s parent, who heard their child talk about the vendor frequently and became concerned when they learned about the shoes. The vendor explained that they were known to wear nice gym shoes at school and wore the same size as the student. When the student asked, the vendor agreed to give him a pair of his own gently worn shoes. The vendor said that the employee had been trained on Title IX-related policies; his personnel file reflects several trainings provided by his employer including a professionalism-related course, and others that appear to pertain to curriculum and program-specific topics, but none related to boundaries or interactions with students.
- Case No. 19-01944: A substitute teacher placed at a charter school through a vendor had a series of interactions with students that made them uncomfortable. The investigation established that the vendor gave one student drawings and touched their back in a way that made them uncomfortable, gave other students a drawing and/or poem, and tried to give them food. The substitute said he had worked for the vendor for over a year, and never had training from the vendor, CPS, or the charter network. His personnel file included a DCFS mandated reporter training certification.

### **SAU's Perspective on District-Led Training and Recommendations for the Future**

The OIG echoes and amplifies its previous recommendations that all school-based vendors and Level I Volunteers receive CPS-created training on CPS policies that govern their interactions with students. Beyond the mandatory training, the OIG also recommends that CPS track completed trainings and oversight to improve compliance.

Using CPS-created or approved materials to train all vendor employees and Level I Volunteers will promote consistent messaging about appropriate conduct with students.

#### ***CPS Training of Staff, Students, and Parents Has Been Effective***

The unfortunate reality for CPS (and every school district across the country) is that background checks and training alone cannot deter adults who have bad intentions.

Beyond deterrence, using CPS-created or approved materials to train all vendor employees and Level I Volunteers will promote consistent messaging about appropriate



and prohibited conduct for their own benefit, while expanding the universe of informed adults who are familiar with signs of potential sexual misconduct, how to approach students about these topics, and what to report (and how). Moreover, vendor employees and volunteers can be investigated and face consequences for any infractions of CPS policies, so the training they receive should be tailored to those same policies.

The OIG's experience investigating adult-on-student sexual misconduct investigations over the last five years supports the efficacy of comprehensive training initiatives. As the District continued to refine and expand its relevant policies, increase awareness, and expand staff/student/parent trainings, the SAU observed:

- *Consistently High Complaint Volume:* Since 2018, the SAU has received an average of 446 complaints per non-pandemic school year;
- *Allegations About a Wide Variety of Sexual and Nonsexual Conduct:* The types of conduct reported suggests that stakeholders are becoming increasingly familiar with the District's expectations for (in)appropriate adult-student interactions beyond clear allegations of sexual misconduct. Many allegations involving nonsexual conduct that raises grooming and boundary-crossing concerns would not be reported, much less investigated, in other school districts; and
- *Complaints by Victims, Witnesses, and Others:* Allegations of potential sexual misconduct are regularly reported by student complainants, along with friends, siblings, parents, and CPS-affiliated adults who learned about or witnessed potential misconduct directed at another.

All of this suggests that CPS has effectively raised awareness about the broad policies in place and the importance of reporting allegations for the benefit of the student(s) in question and the school community at large.

### ***Recommended Solutions***

The CPS-created training modules that are now required for Level I Volunteers will cover a lot of important material, but also take several hours to complete. While these requirements may deter some potential volunteers who wish to volunteer their time, it is too early to tell whether this requirement will make a marked difference on community involvement.

In addition, the OIG has uncovered several unapproved volunteers without an approved volunteer application on file. School principals are charged with oversight of the volunteer application process and CPS has taken seriously the failure to properly vet volunteers. Emphasizing the importance of the application is even more critical now that it will also trigger these mandatory trainings that volunteers otherwise would not be aware of.

Beyond volunteers, the OIG recommends CPS similarly expand the vendor onboarding process to require those interacting with students to have CPS-created or approved

training on these important topics. The OIG recognizes that this is a significant undertaking given the number of vendors performing varied services across the District, which may present different training needs based on the extent of their interactions with students.

The District has similarly expanded the CPS Background Check process to also include charter and vendor employees; the OIG suggests using the existing framework to include a certification that training has been completed, either with a CPS-created program or a CPS-approved program administered by their employer.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the OIG recommends CPS consider the feasibility of a centralized database of all vendor employees and volunteers who have completed training each school year, and those who have been blocked from CPS properties based on past misconduct. This can be used to implement oversight measures to periodically verify these non-employees' compliance with the mandated training, and enable administrators, investigators, and vendors to confirm compliance as needed.

### C. Cases Involving Sexual Acts

#### » *Elementary School Teacher Sexually Assaulted Two Children and Was Sentenced to 50 Years' Imprisonment (21-00528)*

An elementary school teacher sexually assaulted two children (who were not CPS students): a 12-year-old child in Indiana, and a child between the ages of 12 and 16 in Illinois. The OIG started its investigation after notification that the teacher was arrested in Indiana.

Following the arrest, the teacher was charged with several state criminal offenses in Indiana, including child molestation, promotion of sexual trafficking, and possession of child pornography. The teacher was also charged with federal crimes, including sexual exploitation of a child.

The teacher pled guilty to three counts of sexual exploitation of a child/attempted sexual exploitation and was sentenced in federal court to 50 years' imprisonment. The specific charges included: (1) interstate travel for the purpose of engaging in sexual conduct with a child under 13 years of age; (2) coercing the same child to create a video of the child's private body parts; and (3) sexually exploiting a second child between the ages of 12 and 16 in Illinois and using his phone to take pictures of the child's private body parts and a video of a sex act with the child.

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<sup>31</sup> If the comprehensive training being required of Level I Volunteers proves to be too onerous or unwieldy for volunteers or vendor employees, the OIG recommends CPS consider creating a truncated training program that highlights the most salient aspects of the policies, paired with a packet that has the full text of those policies and information on District resources, and a certification that verifies that the vendor or volunteer has reviewed and understood the District's policies and expectations.

The OIG reviewed the teacher's communications records and interviewed 16 students and several staff members at the CPS school where the teacher worked. None of the students or staff members raised any new allegations of sexual misconduct with current or former CPS students.

The teacher was terminated and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in his personnel file.

» *High School Security Guard Sexually Abused a 16-Year-Old Student (20-01345)*

A high school security guard sexually abused a 16-year-old student for approximately five months. In his capacity as a security guard, he pulled the student out of class to have sex in various locations in the school, such as storage rooms and janitor closets. He also sexually assaulted the student in his car and his home.

The student reported the abuse to the police three years after they graduated from high school, after the security guard attempted to connect on social media. By that point, the security guard no longer worked for CPS and had become a police officer with the Chicago Police Department. However, he had been approved as a CPS volunteer during the previous school year.

The investigation also established that multiple staff members were aware of the security guard's concerning conduct directed at female students, though the staff members did not notice him targeting any particular student.

The other staff members observed that the security guard frequently touched students and flirted with them, and they heard concerns that he was connecting with students on social media. One staff member even observed an interaction in which a female student angrily asked the security guard, "Does she know you have a wife?" (possibly indicating that the security guard was having prohibited interactions with one of the student's friends). Despite this, none of the staff members reported their observations to the school's administration. While the staff members' inaction may have violated current CPS policies, they were not required to report this conduct under the CPS policies in effect at the time.

The security guard's conduct violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Title IX, and Sexual Harassment policy.

The security guard was indicted in Cook County on multiple counts of criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse in connection with the student's allegations, and his criminal case remains pending. DCFS also investigated, and unfounded the case.

Upon receiving the allegations, CPS blocked the security guard from further employment or volunteering with CPS.

The OIG recommended placement of a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the security guard's personnel file. The OIG also recommended that CPS notify the Illinois State Board of Education about the security guard's indictment and the OIG's findings. The Board followed the recommendations.

» *High School Cafeteria Employee Was Indicted for Sexually Abusing a Child, Stared at CPS Students in an Inappropriate Manner (21-00155)*

The OIG investigated a high school cafeteria employee after learning that the police were investigating him for sexually abusing an eight-year-old child. The alleged abuse of the child (who was not a CPS student) occurred when the cafeteria employee was renting a room in the home of the child's grandparent.

The OIG investigated whether the cafeteria employee's conduct with CPS students raised any concerns involving CPS students and found no evidence that it did. However, interviews with the cafeteria employee's colleagues, who worked for a CPS vendor, and the school's principal revealed a pattern of the cafeteria employee staring at female students in a manner that the colleagues and principal found inappropriate. One of the colleagues told the OIG that both students and staff members expressed discomfort with the cafeteria employee's staring.

In fact, staff members were so concerned by the cafeteria employee's behavior that they changed his duties at work so that he would not interact with students. Still, the vendor never notified CPS about any of these concerns about the cafeteria employee's conduct around female students.

CPS pulled the cafeteria employee from active duty after learning of CPD's investigation. The cafeteria employee was terminated by CPS that same month, and a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation was placed in his personnel file.

DCFS investigated the sexual abuse allegation and found that there was credible evidence of abuse.

Following CPD's investigation, the cafeteria employee was indicted on two counts of predatory criminal sexual assault with a victim under age 13, three counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse with a victim under age 13, and one count of exploitation of a child under age 13. The criminal proceedings remain pending.

If the cafeteria employee is found guilty of criminal sexual abuse or any other "enumerated offense" under the Illinois School Code, he will be barred from any future employment by CPS. Further, the cafeteria employee's history of staring at female students violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy and CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The OIG recommended that a permanent Do Not Hire designation be placed in the cafeteria employee's file and that CPS prevent him from working for or volunteering in the District in the future. The Board placed a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the cafeteria employee's personnel file.

This investigation was especially concerning because it involved a CPS employee who was directly supervised by a vendor. In cases where CPS employees work under the direction of third-party supervisors, it is critical that those employees are trained and held to the conduct standards of other CPS employees. Therefore, the OIG referred to CPS the matter of making certain that these employees are appropriately trained and supervised in this regard.

The OIG further recommended that CPS consider additional training for the school's principal on CPS reporting requirements. CPS informed the OIG that the matter is still pending.

» ***Vendor Employee of Outreach Program Sexually Abused an Eighth-Grade Student (20-00580)***

A vendor employee of an outreach program (who was also a CPS volunteer) had sexual intercourse with an eighth-grade student and communicated with them on social media and by cell phone. The student disclosed the sexual activity to classmates, who reported it to the administration. When interviewed by the OIG, the student and vendor employee each denied the allegation. However, the student later told police that the abuse did occur, explaining that they knew it would be discovered after family members threatened to search their phone.

Records of the student's and vendor employee's cell phone communications showed numerous brief phone calls late at night, which were consistent with the student's statement that they met late at night to have sex (these seconds-long phone calls were likely made to facilitate the meetups). Further, the student's sister stated that the vendor employee admitted to kissing the student and meeting with them late at night. The student's sister also said that the vendor employee tried to discourage the family from cooperating with the OIG's investigation.

The student's classmate accused a school staff member of failing to report the abuse, but there was insufficient evidence to support that claim.

The vendor employee's conduct in having sexual intercourse with an eighth-grade student violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy, which prohibits all CPS volunteers and vendor employees from engaging in "child sex abuse."

The vendor employee's cell phone and social media communications with the student violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy.

DCFS declined to open an investigation on jurisdictional grounds: the student's involvement with the vendor employee did not have any apparent connection to school activities and the vendor employee was not otherwise in a position of trust or authority with respect to the student. CPD investigated and referred the case to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office for criminal sexual assault charges. The Cook County State's Attorney's Office rejected the charges and CPD closed its case.

The OIG recommended that the vendor employee be blocked from working within the District pending the investigation, but the recommendation was not adopted at the time because the student and their family initially denied the allegations. However, the vendor employee's employment with the outreach program was discontinued pending the outcome of the investigation.

The OIG recommended that CPS permanently debar the vendor employee or take any other appropriate steps to prevent the vendor employee from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board subsequently placed the vendor employee on an internal Do Not Hire list.

The vendor was subsequently debarred in part because of this investigation.

» *High School Teacher Groomed and Sexually Abused a 17-Year-Old Student in 2005 (21-00326)*

A high school teacher and coach groomed a student by talking and texting with them outside of school, including late at night, learning about their difficult home life, and building an emotional connection with them for the purpose of sexual abuse. He then sexually abused the student from 2005 to 2006, when the student was 17 years old. CPS pulled the teacher from active duty at the initiation of the investigation.

The teacher's conduct violated CPS' Policy Against Sexual Harassment and Procedures for Employee Student Complaints, and his actions leading up to the abuse also constituted grooming. Moreover, if proven at trial, the teacher's conduct would have constituted criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse.

The teacher also engaged in other boundary-crossing interactions with students, such as making sexual jokes and giving students rides in his vehicle for non-educational purposes. Such conduct would have constituted a violation of the Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students, and the Student Travel Policy, had those policies been in effect at the time of this conduct.

DCFS also investigated, and unfounded the case after it concluded that the student could not produce evidence to support the allegation.

The OIG recommended termination of the teacher's employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in the teacher's personnel file. The OIG additionally recommended

that CPS notify the Illinois State Board of Education of the OIG's findings. The Board followed each of the OIG's recommendations, and dismissal proceedings against the teacher remain pending.

» ***Vendor Employee of After-School Program Sexually Assaulted a Charter Elementary School Student on Multiple Occasions Between 2014 and 2017 (21-00346)***

An employee of a vendor after-school program sexually assaulted a charter elementary school student at the student's school on multiple occasions between 2014 and 2017, when the student was seven to ten years old. The student disclosed three separate incidents: one in which the vendor employee touched and rubbed the student's genitals under their clothes, and two in which the vendor employee touched and rubbed the student's buttocks under their clothes. The abuse took place in the school's gym and cafeteria.

DCFS investigated, but unfounded the case. CPD also investigated and referred the case to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office for criminal sexual assault charges, but the Cook County State's Attorney's Office rejected the charges.

The vendor employee had worked for CPS after his employment with the after-school program ended, but he was terminated (for unrelated reasons) before the student made the allegations against him. CPS added a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation to the vendor employee's personnel file after receiving the allegations.

The OIG recommended that CPS place a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the vendor employee's personnel file. The OIG also recommended that CPS notify the Illinois State Board of Education of the OIG's findings in the event the vendor employee seeks to renew his expired paraprofessional educator license. CPS subsequently added a permanent Do Not Hire designation to the vendor employee's personnel file and notified the Illinois State Board of Education.

» ***Intoxicated High School Teacher Groped an Eleventh-Grade Student on the Buttocks at Graduation (20-01530)***

In 2016, a high school teacher entered the school's graduation ceremony intoxicated. While attending the ceremony, the teacher groped an eleventh-grade student twice on the buttocks.

The Law Department was responsible for investigating sexual misconduct complaints in 2016 (the OIG and the Office of Student Protections and Title IX were not formed until 2018). The student disclosed the teacher's conduct to a staff member, who notified DCFS and the school's then-principal. However, the principal failed to notify the Law Department of the allegations as required by the version of CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Title IX, Sexual Harassment, and Retaliation Policy in effect at the time.

See CPS Policy Manual, Section 102.8(IV)(E), Board Report 16-0525-P01 (May 25, 2016).

The OIG received the allegation in 2020, after a staff member told the school's new principal about the teacher's previous sexual advances towards the student.

The teacher also transported that same student and another student in his car without written principal or parental permission as required by CPS' Student Travel Policy.

The teacher's conduct at graduation constituted sexual harassment under CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Title IX, Sexual Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. The teacher also violated CPS' Student Travel Policy by transporting students in his car without the required written permissions.

As discussed above, the principal's failure to report the teacher's conduct to the Law Department violated the reporting obligations in CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Title IX, Sexual Harassment, and Retaliation Policy in effect at the time.

DCFS and CPD also investigated the teacher's conduct at graduation. DCFS closed the case as unfounded, and CPD closed the case after the student (who had turned 18 years old by the time she spoke with police) chose not to pursue charges.

CPS pulled the teacher from active duty after the OIG reported the allegations under investigation. The principal had since retired from CPS.

The OIG recommended termination of the teacher's employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The Board followed the OIG's recommendations.

The OIG further recommended that CPS flag the former principal's personnel file and take this investigation into account, as well as require that she participate in an interview with the OIG, should she ever again apply for a CPS position or otherwise undergo a CPS background check. The final disposition of the case is still pending.

» ***High School Teacher Disclosed That She Engaged in Sexual Touching and Various Boundary-Crossing Behaviors with a 15-Year-Old Student at a Non-CPS School (21-01132)***

A high school teacher engaged in a prohibited relationship with a 15-year-old student while teaching in another state.

The OIG began its investigation upon notification that DCFS was investigating allegations against the teacher based upon information provided from a mandated reporter.

According to the information reported to DCFS, the teacher disclosed that, while she was employed at a school district in another state, she had sexual contact with a 15-year-old student, drove the student in her vehicle, and had electronic communications with the student.



The OIG obtained evidence that partially corroborated the allegations. Prior to the teacher's employment with CPS, the non-CPS school issued the teacher a letter of reprimand, which stated that the teacher crossed boundaries with a minor by giving them rides, taking them to dinner, going to their house, friending them on Facebook, and texting them without parental knowledge. However, the letter did not reference any alleged sexual contact with the minor.

Out of an abundance of caution, the OIG also investigated whether there were any concerns about potential sexual misconduct during the teacher's tenure as a CPS employee. The OIG interviewed staff members and several students at the CPS school where the teacher was working. Each denied seeing or hearing about any concerning conduct between the teacher and any CPS student.

During the investigation and while still employed by CPS, the teacher refused to participate in an interview after being presented with a Notice of Administrative Rights. This refusal violated CPS Board Rule 4-4(m), which requires CPS employees to cooperate in OIG investigations and may constitute a standalone basis for discipline or termination.

DCFS ultimately closed its investigation as unfounded for the jurisdictional reason that there were no reports from students in Illinois, and there was no criminal history or DCFS history for the teacher in either Illinois or the nearby state where she previously worked.

CPS pulled the teacher from active duty upon receiving the allegations. The teacher resigned during the investigation, resulting in a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation being placed in her personnel file.

The OIG recommended that CPS place a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the teacher's personnel file. The OIG further recommended that CPS notify the Illinois State Board of Education about the allegations from out-of-state. The Board followed each of the OIG's recommendations.

## **D. Cases Involving Other Sexual Misconduct**

### *» Charter High School Coach Sent Hundreds of Text Messages to a Student, Including Sexually Explicit Messages and a Video of His Genitals (19-02019)*

A charter high school coach sent 757 text messages to an eleventh-grade student over a two-month period, and he sent more than one-third of these messages between midnight and 4:00 a.m. Many of the messages were sexually explicit. For example, the coach told the student that they owed him "head" for making him wait for them. On another occasion, he told the student that he would sell them "like a pimp."

The coach also sent the student a video of his penis and asked for images of the student. The student's mother found one of the coach's text messages on the student's phone and reported it to the charter school and the police.

The investigation also established that the coach texted and called another student, though there was no evidence that these communications were sexually explicit. The coach also drove students in his personal vehicle.

If the coach were a CPS employee, his sexually explicit text messages to the first student would have constituted sexual misconduct under CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Title IX, Sexual Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. Further, his cell phone communications with both students would have violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy. The coach also violated the charter school's transportation policy by transporting students in his personal vehicle, which would have violated CPS' Student Travel Policy as well.

### What Is Sexual Misconduct?

A form of sex or gender-based discrimination or harassment that includes any conduct that is sex or gender-based or of a sexual nature that is unwelcome or inappropriate and unreasonably interferes with, limits, or denies an individual's educational or employment access, benefits, or opportunities.

Under CPS policy, **any** sexual or romantic conduct between a staff member and student is considered sexual misconduct.

The coach was arrested for child pornography and sexual exploitation of a child, but the Cook County State's Attorney's Office rejected the charges. The criminal investigation was suspended.

DCFS also investigated the case and determined that there was credible evidence of sexual exploitation by the coach.

The charter school placed the coach on indefinite leave after it received the allegation.

The OIG recommended that the charter school and CPS take steps to prevent the coach from working for, or volunteering in, the District, and that they notify the Illinois State Board of Education of the OIG's findings. The Board subsequently placed the coach on an internal Do Not Hire list, and the charter school notified the Illinois State Board of Education of the OIG's findings.

#### » *Elementary School Lunchroom Employee Sent a Picture of His Penis to a CPS High School Student on Facebook Messenger (20-01232)*

An elementary school lunchroom employee sent a picture of his penis to a CPS high school student on Facebook Messenger. The employee met the student outside of his employment with CPS, and the OIG did not identify any evidence that the employee engaged in sexual misconduct or otherwise inappropriate conduct with students while acting within the scope of his CPS duties.

The employee was arrested and pled guilty to manufacturing harmful material and was sentenced to 24 months of probation for sex offenders.

DCFS also investigated, and they found that the evidence substantiated the allegation against the employee.

The employee resigned shortly after his arrest, and a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation was added to his personnel file.

The OIG recommended that CPS add a permanent Do Not Hire designation to the employee's personnel file and take any additional appropriate steps to prevent him from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board subsequently placed a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the employee's personnel file.

» *Elementary School Substitute Teacher Repeatedly Touched His Groin Area While Moaning During Class, Prompting Student Complaints (21-01150)*

A substitute teacher at an elementary school repeatedly touched and/or rubbed his groin area over his clothes in full view of sixth-grade students during class. He made moaning sounds as he touched himself, and some of the student witnesses noticed that he had an erection under his clothes.

The substitute teacher was arrested and charged with three counts of sexual exploitation of a child due to his conduct. He pled not guilty, and the criminal proceedings are pending.

The substitute teacher's conduct constituted sexual misconduct, as defined by CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy. It also violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

CPS blocked the substitute teacher from CPS properties upon receiving the allegation.

The OIG recommended termination of the substitute teacher's CPS employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The OIG also recommended that CPS forward the OIG's report to the Illinois State Board of Education. The Board followed each of the recommendations.

» *Vendor Employee Sent Sexually Explicit Facebook Messages to a 13-Year-Old Student (19-01109)*

An employee of a CPS vendor program connected with a 13-year-old student on Facebook and sent sexually explicit messages, saying that he had dreamt about the student "sucking" on him and kissing him. The vendor employee participated in coaching students in sports activities as part of the vendor's programs at the school.

An unidentified staff member at the victim's school heard the victim talking about the vendor employee's conduct and brought the victim to the school counselor. The victim's mother contacted the police, and the principal of the student's school notified DCFS and the OIG at around the same time. The police arrested the vendor employee, and he was indicted on two counts of indecent solicitation of a child and one count of grooming.

The vendor employee pled guilty to one count of felony indecent solicitation of a child and was sentenced to 18 months' probation and ordered to register as a sex offender.

DCFS also investigated the case and determined that the evidence substantiated the allegation against the vendor employee.

In addition to the criminal offenses, the vendor employee's conduct constituted sexual misconduct under CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination Title IX and Sexual Harassment Policy. The conduct also violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy and CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff and Student Boundaries.

The vendor terminated the vendor employee upon receiving the allegation.

The OIG recommended that CPS place a Do Not Hire designation in the vendor employee's personnel file and take any other appropriate steps to prevent him from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board followed the recommendations.

» *Charter High School Guest Speaker Encouraged Students to Contact Him on Instagram and Subsequently Initiated Sexual Conversations with Students (20-00400)*

A guest speaker at a charter high school provided his Instagram username to students and encouraged them to contact him. He subsequently communicated with students by Instagram and cell phone, and the conversations quickly became sexual and inappropriate.

During a two-and-a-half-hour phone call with a 15-year-old student, the guest speaker asked the student whether they'd ever had sex and whether the student talked about sex with friends. He also told the student about his own sexual relationships and told the student to ask him "sexy" questions.

If the guest speaker had been a CPS employee or had worked within the school, his conduct would have constituted sexual misconduct and likely would have constituted sexual harassment under CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. The guest speaker's conduct also would have violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries. Further, the guest speaker's Instagram and cell phone communications with students would have violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The guest speaker was blocked from CPS during the OIG's investigation.

The OIG recommended that CPS prevent the guest speaker from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board subsequently placed the guest speaker on an internal Do Not Hire list. The OIG further recommended that the charter school network train its staff on proper procedures for vetting and approving individuals who will interact with students.

The charter school network subsequently added the guest speaker to its "No Hire" list, which will prevent the guest speaker from working or volunteering anywhere in the network. Further, the charter school network said that it will train its administrators every fiscal year on the procedures for vetting and approving individuals as established by CPS' Protecting Chicago's Children Plan of Action.

» *Elementary School Volunteer Coach Groomed Eighth-Grade Student for Sexual Abuse, Texting Them Late at Night and Encouraging the Student to Lie to Their Parents Regarding Their Relationship (19-02541)*

A volunteer coach at an elementary school groomed an eighth-grade student for the purpose of committing sexual abuse. While there is no evidence that any physical abuse took place, the coach engaged in various grooming efforts. The coach and student communicated on Instagram and by cell phone. Phone records showed that they exchanged more than 800 text messages, often late at night, and had one 82-minute phone call.

Screenshot evidence showed that the coach told the student that he "loved" them, told them that they were the only person who could understand him, asked them to lie to their parents and go to a movie with him so they could hold hands, and told them that he had saved photos of the student at the beach that they had posted on social media.

The coach also asked the student if their mother suspected anything about the two of them and told the student they weren't truly a teenager until they lied to their parents. The coach used the heart, kiss, and blushing emojis in his messages to the student.

The evidence demonstrated that the coach was also in the early stages of grooming other students through electronic communication and inappropriate physical contact. He communicated with students by cell phone, followed them on social media and sent flirtatious messages, hugged them, and kissed them on the cheek or forehead.

The coach ordered a Lyft ride and had the driver take him and a student to an athletic practice without written parental or administrative consent, and he offered rides to another student. He also invited students to his home for team gatherings without seeking parental or administrative consent.

The coach's behavior towards the first student demonstrated that he was grooming them for the purpose of sexual abuse. Further, the coach's conduct towards other students created a hostile learning environment, constituting sexual harassment as defined by CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Title IX, Sexual Harassment, and Retaliation Policy.

The coach's electronic communications with students also violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy.

The coach's conduct in giving rides to students violated CPS' Student Travel policy, which requires that all such transportation be authorized in writing by the school's principal and the student's parent or guardian.

The coach also violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries by inviting students to his home and engaging in various other inappropriate interactions with students as described above.

CPS blocked the coach after receiving the allegations. DCFS also investigated and closed its investigation as unfounded.

The OIG recommended that CPS take any necessary steps to permanently prevent the coach from further volunteering in, or working for, the District. The Board subsequently placed the coach on an internal Do Not Hire list.

Because the coach also instructs children's athletic teams in a non-CPS athletic league, the OIG recommended that CPS notify the league of these findings. The OIG also recommended that CPS notify the Illinois High School Association, if the coach seeks volunteer coaching positions with other schools or sports organizations. The Law Department informed the OIG that this matter is still pending.

The OIG also referred this matter directly to CPD because the coach's conduct may also have constituted criminal grooming under 720 ILCS 5/11-25.

» *Elementary School Teacher Persistently Touched Female Students on Various Parts of Their Bodies (20-00234)*

An elementary school teacher made persistent physical contact with exclusively female students. He frequently touched their earlobes, necks, and shoulders. On several occasions, he placed his hand on a student's thigh. He also attempted to put his hand in a student's blouse to fix a strap.

The teacher also repeatedly used an affectionate (and potentially flirtatious) term of endearment when addressing female students.

The teacher's conduct constituted sexual harassment and sex/gender-based harassment in violation of the CPS Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. The teacher's conduct also violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

DCFS also investigated and unfounded the case.

At the outset of the investigation, the OIG notified CPS about the allegations and CPS pulled the teacher from active duty.

The OIG recommended termination of the teacher's employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The OIG also recommended consideration of whether the District should notify the Illinois State Board of Education about the OIG's findings.

The Board subsequently filed dismissal charges and notified the OIG that termination hearings are pending with the Illinois State Board of Education.

- » *Charter High School Staff Member Groomed a 16-Year-Old Student and Exchanged Tens of Thousands of Electronic Messages with the Student (Including Romantic Messages) and Purchased the Student Cell Phones So They Could Communicate (22-00287)*

A staff member at a charter high school exchanged over 14,000 phone communications with a 16-year-old student during a 10-day period, and over 3,000 of these messages were sent between 9:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. The charter staff member also messaged the student on Instagram and Google Chat.

The charter staff member admitted to buying the student two cell phones so that they had a way of communicating with each other. She also lent the student her car on at least one occasion.

The communications included a fire emoji after the student posted a picture of themselves flexing in a mirror. The charter staff member also said "Love you" and "kisses" to the student and used flirtatious emojis. The student said that they were "in love" with the staff member, and she replied, "Come visit me." The charter staff member and student also had a falling out after the staff member texted an adult man.

Despite the content of the electronic communications, there was no evidence to clearly establish that the charter staff member and student engaged in sex. However, the student said that the staff member tried several times to kiss them on the cheek, and they believed the staff member wanted to have sex.

If the charter staff member were a CPS employee, her conduct would have constituted prohibited sexual misconduct and grooming as defined by CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Retaliation Policy. Her conduct also would have violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy, CPS' Travel Policy, and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

The charter school terminated the staff member's employment after receiving the allegations.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended that CPS take appropriate steps to ensure that the charter staff member is permanently prevented from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board subsequently placed the charter staff member on an internal Do Not Hire list.

The OIG additionally recommended that CPS forward the OIG's report to the Illinois State Board of Education in support of revoking the charter staff member's paraprofessional and teaching licenses. CPS' Office of Innovation and Incubation subsequently notified the OIG that the charter school was responsible for making this notification. When the OIG followed up with the charter school, it stated that it had not notified the Illinois State Board of Education. CPS' Office of Innovation and Incubation subsequently reminded the charter school of its responsibility to notify the Illinois State Board of Education.

» *High School Security Officer Made Sexual Comments to Female Students (20-00377)*

A high school security officer's comments to female students prompted complaints. Among the complaints from students, he asked one female student whether her "booty" ever "rest[ed]." He told a second female student that he wanted to call her. He asked a female student wearing a "PlayStation" shirt if he could "play" her.

The students also described occasions when the security officer looked them up and down or stared at a student's buttocks.

The security guard failed to appear for his scheduled interview but claimed in a written statement that students were retaliating against him for an unrelated issue. However, the students were consistent in their recollections, one of the students witnessed a comment the security guard made to a different student, and each of the comments had a similar tone.

The security officer's conduct constituted sexual harassment, as defined by CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. His conduct also violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

CPS pulled the security officer from active duty upon receiving the allegations. He was terminated during the investigation, and a Do Not Hire designation was added to his personnel file.

The OIG recommended that CPS maintain the Do Not Hire designation in the security officer's personnel file. Given that the security officer also volunteered at CPS schools, the OIG further recommended that CPS take appropriate steps to prevent the security



officer from being a CPS employee or a volunteer. The Board subsequently placed a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the security officer's personnel file.

» *Intoxicated Charter High School Vendor Employee Made Sexual Advances Towards a Student at Prom, Never Went Through a Background Check That Likely Would Have Flagged His Long Criminal History (22-01106)*

A charter high school hired a photo booth company to provide services at the school prom. While working at the prom, the photo booth operator hired by the company told a twelfth-grade student that they looked "sexy," adjusted the student's clothing, and tried to exchange phone numbers with the student. The employee also made sexual comments to a staff member, who eventually confronted him for being intoxicated.

The investigation also established that the vendor employee was hired to work at the charter school's prom without going through a background check.

A criminal background check would have revealed that the vendor employee had been convicted of major crimes. Two of his criminal convictions, a class X aggravated kidnapping conviction and a recent Class 4 felony drug conviction, would disqualify him from vendor employment under the charter school's background check agreement with the District.

The investigation also revealed that the charter school had an arbitrary "policy" for running criminal background checks of the employees who worked for vendors: the charter school administration told the OIG that it ran those checks only if a vendor worked for the school on "at least three occasions." The explanation continued that the photo booth company was a one-off hire and therefore no background checks were initiated per this "policy" of the charter school.

While the charter school administration didn't expressly claim that the expense of background checks or the time required to run them were reasons that no check was performed on the photo booth operator who was the subject of this investigation, these considerations likely factored into the ineffectual "policy" they mentioned.

The charter school told the OIG that it would not use the vendor again. If the vendor employee were a vendor employee of a district school, the OIG would have recommended that CPS permanently debar both the vendor and the vendor employee from vendor employment. The OIG recommended that CPS take appropriate steps to prevent the vendor employee from working or volunteering anywhere in the District. The Board subsequently placed the vendor employee on an internal Do Not Hire list.

The OIG further recommended that CPS' Office of Innovation and Incubation review the charter school's "three occasions" policy for performing background checks on vendors to ensure that it complies with applicable policies and the charter school's background check agreement with the District.

» *Charter High School Substitute Teacher Engaged in Sexual Text Message and Snapchat Conversations with a Student, Was Hired Without a Background Check (21-01257)*

A substitute teacher at a charter high school engaged in sexual conversations with a 17-year-old student on Snapchat and by text message. The substitute teacher asked the student if they “suck dick” and told them that he was “really horny.” The substitute teacher knew that the student was still 17 and emphasized that their communications needed to be kept secret.

Although the charter substitute teacher pursued the student for physical sex, the investigation did not reveal evidence that physical sex occurred.

The investigation also established that the charter substitute teacher was hired to work at the charter school without undergoing a CPS criminal background check. The background check agreement between CPS and charter networks

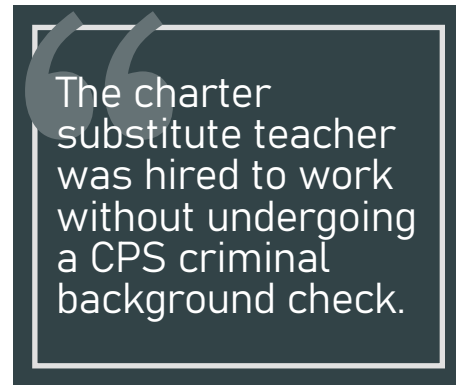
requires all charter school staff members and volunteers who are expected to have contact with students to complete a CPS background check. Under the agreement, the charter school must ensure that a prospective staff member or volunteer clears a background check before they have contact with students.

According to the charter school’s operations director, the charter school’s normal procedure aligned with the background check agreement: a prospective employee was not permitted to begin working until their background check was complete. The operations director told the OIG that the charter substitute teacher was provided with a background check form when he was hired. However, when the charter school reviewed the charter substitute teacher’s personnel file at the OIG’s request, there was no evidence that he had completed a background check with CPS or any other entity. CPS confirmed that the charter school never performed a background check on this employee.

DCFS and CPD investigated the charter substitute teacher’s conduct. DCFS closed the case as unfounded and CPD suspended its investigation.

The charter substitute teacher was placed on the District’s Do Not Hire list pending the investigation.

The OIG recommended that the Do Not Hire designation remain in the charter substitute teacher’s file, and the Board followed the recommendation. The OIG also recommended that CPS and the charter school notify the Illinois State Board of Education of the OIG’s findings. The response from CPS, however, was that the charter school was responsible for making this notification.



The charter substitute teacher was hired to work without undergoing a CPS criminal background check.

After the investigation, when the OIG followed up with the charter school to determine the outcome of its recommendation, the charter school stated that it had not informed the Illinois State Board of Education of the OIG's findings and requested guidance on how to do so. CPS' Office of Innovation and Incubation subsequently consulted with the charter school to ensure that the Illinois State Board of Education was notified and that the charter school was aware of its obligations going forward.

The OIG further recommended that CPS' Office of Innovation and Incubation review the charter school's background check practices to ensure that they comply with the charter's school background check agreement with the District. CPS' Office of Innovation and Incubation subsequently consulted with the charter school about its background check practices as recommended by the OIG.

» *Volunteer Coach Sent Flirtatious Social Media Messages to a Student, Connected with Other Students on Social Media, and Socialized with a Student Outside of School; the Principal Failed to Vet Him as a Volunteer (20-01455)*

A volunteer high school coach connected with a student on Facebook and sent them flirtatious messages, addressing them as "love" and calling them "cute" (the coach was not the student's coach). The coach also followed the student's social media accounts and gave "likes" to the student's posts of themselves in their swimsuit or underwear. He also frequently sought the student out for in-person conversations in the school.

The coach socialized with at least one student-athlete outside of school, taking the student out to eat and to an unknown person's house. He also connected with multiple other students on Facebook.

The investigation also established that the coach was permitted to interact with students even though at least one of the school's athletic directors was aware that the coach was not an approved volunteer. The coach submitted a Level I volunteer application prior to interacting with students, but his application was put on hold pending his completion of certain courses and exams for his coaching certification. It is unclear whether the coach completed these tasks, but regardless, his application was never approved.

The coach's conduct towards the first student constituted sexual misconduct in violation of CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy. Additionally, the coach's conduct towards that student and other students violated CPS' Acceptable Use policy and CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The principal violated the CPS Volunteer Policy by failing to ensure that the coach was properly vetted and approved. One of the school's athletic directors handled the coach's application, and there was no evidence that the principal was aware of the coach's status or had any involvement in the process. Regardless, the Volunteer Policy states

that school principals are responsible for making sure that all volunteers are vetted and approved prior to performing any services.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

CPS blocked the coach as a volunteer after receiving the allegations.

The OIG recommended that CPS prohibit the coach from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board subsequently placed the coach on an internal Do Not Hire list.

The OIG also recommended appropriate discipline for the principal and that the current administration receive training on the Volunteer Policy. The OIG additionally recommended that the school's athletic staff and volunteers receive training on the Volunteer Policy, the Staff Acceptable Use Policy, and the Student Travel Policy. The Law Department informed the OIG that disciplinary proceedings are ongoing, and the matter is still pending.

» *High School Teacher Commented on a Student's "Thick" Body and Another Student's "Big Butt" (21-00492)*

A high school teacher sent a Facebook message to a student after 11:00 p.m. and commented on how their body had looked that day, saying, "Ooooooweee, I mean, you actually looked thick!" The teacher also told another student that they had a "big butt" on several occasions. The students reported that these comments made them uncomfortable.

The teacher also drove students in his personal vehicle to school, sporting events, and a theme park on multiple occasions. While the students' parents were notified in advance for at least some of the rides and trips, the rides and trips were not authorized by the school's principal as required by CPS rules.

The teacher's comments about the students' bodies violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

The teacher's electronic communications with students violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy. The teacher violated CPS' Student Travel policy by giving students rides in his personal vehicle without the required written consent from the principal and the students' parents.

DCFS declined to open an investigation because the student who received the Facebook message was over 18 years old at the time. CPS pulled the teacher from active duty upon receiving the allegations.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher, up to and including termination. The Board subsequently filed dismissal charges against the teacher, and termination proceedings are pending.

» *High School Teacher Made Romantic Overtures to a Student, Emphasized That He Was Single (20-00542)*

A high school teacher communicated with a twelfth-grade student on Snapchat and told the student that he had “always had the biggest crush” on them. The teacher also sent the student an image of his hand with the caption “No ring lol,” calling attention to the fact that he wasn’t married. Later that night, he sent the student more messages on Facebook Messenger in which he apologized and appeared to blame his conduct on drinking, saying that he was “99% into a bottle on a Friday night.”

The teacher messaged another student on Snapchat, but their communications were about school matters and were not sexual in nature.

There were also allegations that the teacher sent nude photos to school alumni at around the same time that he sent the messages to the current students. A school administrator told the OIG that when he confronted the teacher about this allegation, the teacher acknowledged his conduct and blamed it on medications and alcohol use.

The teacher’s messages to the first student constituted sexual harassment under CPS’ Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. The teacher’s messages to both students violated CPS’ Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries and CPS’ Staff Acceptable Use policy.

DCFS also investigated and closed its investigation as unfounded. CPS pulled the teacher from active duty upon receiving the allegation that he messaged a student and told them that he had a crush on them.

The OIG recommended termination of the teacher’s CPS employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The OIG further recommended that the Illinois State Board of Education be notified about the results of the OIG’s investigation.

The teacher resigned and the Board placed a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The Board notified the Illinois State Board of Education.

» *Charter School Vendor Security Officer Made Sexual Comments to a Tenth-Grade Student and Said They Needed to Be with a “Grown Man”; the Charter Network Failed to Report a Previous Allegation Against the Security Officer (21-01141)*

A vendor security officer at a charter high school joined a conversation that a tenth-grade student was having with some classmates about sex, told the student that they needed to be with a “grown man,” and talked to the student about sex in very explicit terms.

If the security officer were a CPS employee or vendor, his conduct would have violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students.

The OIG obtained several internal incident reports from the charter network showing that students from a different school in the network had accused the security officer

A charter network failed to report a sexual allegation in violation of its reporting requirements.

of similar misconduct. While most of these internal incident reports were vague, one of them contained an allegation that the security officer asked a student for their age and told them he would take them out on a date if they were 18 years old.

The charter network was not required to report that previous allegation to DCFS because the student was 18 years old at the time. However, the charter network's failure to report this allegation to the OIG violated an agreement between the charter network and CPS. The agreement also required the charter network to follow

CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy. The charter network's failure to report the previous allegation violated the reporting requirements of that policy.

CPS blocked the security officer and added him to a Do Not Hire list pending the investigation, and the charter network terminated the security officer.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended that CPS permanently debar the security officer or take other appropriate steps to prevent him from working or volunteering anywhere in the District. The Board subsequently placed the security officer on an internal Do Not Hire list.

The OIG also recommended that the CPS Office of Student Protections and Title IX conduct additional training for the charter network's staff on CPS' reporting policies. The OIG was subsequently notified that there would be school-wide training.

» *Vendor Employee Sent Sexual Text Messages to High School Students and Subsequently Threatened Them by Text While They Were with Police (22-00424)*

An employee of a CPS vendor sent sexual text messages to two eleventh-grade students, contacting the first student 53 times in two months and contacting the second student eight times during that same period. The students attended a charter school that shares a campus with the District school where the vendor employee worked.

The vendor employee told the first student that he wanted to “fuck” one of the students on the basketball team, calling some students “thick” and others “skinny.” He also told the student that “out of respect” for them, he would use a condom when he had sex with other students.

After the two students reported the vendor employee’s conduct, he followed them and made violent threats against them. On one occasion, the students asked a law enforcement officer to drive them home because they were afraid of the vendor employee. While they were in the police car, the vendor employee sent one of them a text message that said, “I’m right behind the police bitch.” He also said that he would “beat” the students.

The vendor employee’s text messages to the students violated CPS’ Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy, CPS’ Staff Acceptable Use Policy, and CPS’ Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students.

The vendor employee’s retaliatory conduct towards the students further violated the Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy, which prohibits intimidation or threats against any person who has made a complaint of sexual misconduct.

The vendor employee resigned after the allegations were reported.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended that CPS ensure that the vendor employee is permanently prevented from working for, or volunteering in, the District. The Board subsequently placed the vendor employee on an internal Do Not Hire list.

» *High School Teacher Sent Sexually Suggestive Messages to a Student and Engaged in Extensive Electronic Communications with Another Student (20-00289)*

A high school teacher sent a text message to a tenth-grade student asking if they would “do him,” after the student had said that they would have sex with a different teacher at the school. The teacher also sent other sexually suggestive messages to the student, though the OIG was unable to substantiate any specific comment due to the lack of screenshot evidence.

The teacher also engaged in extensive electronic communications with another tenth-grade student, including video calls, text messages, and playing iMessage games together. They occasionally communicated at night, with at least one exchange taking place after midnight.

The screenshots demonstrated that the teacher and second student had an overly familiar relationship per CPS' guidelines on staff-student interactions: the student saved the teacher's contact information in their phone with a heart after his name, the teacher used crude language with the student, the teacher agreed to pick up food for the student, the teacher gave the student confidential information about another student's disciplinary issue, and the student admitted to the teacher that they were high on drugs while at school. However, the messages did not contain any sexually explicit content, and there was no evidence of sexual misconduct.

The teacher's conduct toward the first student violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy. The teacher's conduct toward both students violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy and CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The teacher resigned during the investigation, and a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation was added to his personnel file.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended that CPS place a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the teacher's personnel file. The OIG further recommended that CPS notify the Illinois State Board of Education of the findings of this investigation. The Board followed each of the recommendations.

» *High School Security Guard Watched Pornography on His Phone in the Cafeteria (22-00211)*

A high school security guard watched pornography on his cell phone in the school cafeteria during school hours, in full view of students. Students noticed what he was doing and recorded it on video. The security guard watched the video in an area where he should have known that students could see what he was viewing.

The security guard's conduct violated the Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students, which specifically prohibit staff members from showing pornography to students.

CPS pulled the security guard from active duty upon receiving the allegations. The security guard resigned during the investigation, resulting in a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation being placed in his personnel file.

The OIG recommended placement of a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the security guard's personnel file. The Board followed the recommendation.



» *High School Staff Member Engaged in Sexual Communications with a Student on Facebook Messenger and Exchanged 23 Phone Calls with the Student (22-00766)*

A high school staff member exchanged communications with an eleventh-grade student on Facebook Messenger, some of which were sexual in nature. The staff member and student also exchanged 23 phone calls over the course of three months.

The OIG initiated its investigation after the staff member's colleague saw concerning messages and images on the staff member's phone, took screenshots of what was on the phone, and provided the screenshots to the school's administration.

The screenshots showed that the student sent the staff member an image of themselves dancing in a bodysuit. In one exchange, the staff member said, "I'm no[t] dry and you[?]" and mentioned making his own videos for the student. The screenshots also showed unidentified male and female genitalia, though it was unclear whether these images were actually exchanged between the staff member and the student.

The staff member also refused to cooperate with the OIG's investigation, which is a standalone basis for discipline or termination.

The staff member's conduct violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

CPD opened a case but suspended its investigation. DCFS declined to open an investigation.

CPS pulled the staff member from active duty upon receiving the allegations of sexual electronic communications. The staff member was later terminated, and a Do Not Hire Pending Investigation designation was added to his personnel file.

The OIG recommended that a permanent Do Not Hire designation be added to the staff member's personnel file. The Board subsequently placed a permanent Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file.

» *High School Staff Member Posted Sexual Jokes on a Student's Facebook Page (21-01161)*

A high school staff member connected with a CPS student on Facebook and replied to one of the student's posts with an explicit joke about oral sex.

The staff member's conduct violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students and CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy.

The staff member was terminated during the investigation and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in her personnel file.

The OIG recommended that the Do Not Hire designation remain in the staff member's personnel file in the event she seeks Board employment in the future. The Board subsequently placed a permanent Do Not Hire designation in the staff member's personnel file.

» *Athletic Coach Asked a Student for a Kiss While Driving Them Home and Touched Student-Athletes Gratuitously (21-00320)*

A high school athletic coach pulled a student toward him by the back of the student's head and tried to kiss the student while driving them home from an event. The coach also engaged in inappropriate conduct with other students on the team, including slapping their buttocks, rubbing their legs, and otherwise touching them gratuitously under the guise of athletic instruction. The coach bought food for students and gave them rides without written consent from their parents or school administrators.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

CPS pulled the coach from active duty upon receiving the allegations.

The OIG investigated this case under Title IX regulations and sent a report of its findings to the Title IX decision-maker.

The decision-maker found that the coach sexually harassed the student in violation of Title IX. The decision-maker further determined that the coach's conduct with student-athletes (touching them inappropriately, purchasing food for them) constituted grooming as defined by CPS' Policy on the Reporting of Child Abuse, Neglect and Inappropriate Relations Between Adults and Students. The decision-maker also determined that the coach violated CPS' Student Travel Policy by giving rides to students without written consent from their parents and the school's principal.

The decision-maker recommended that CPS terminate the coach's employment and add a Do Not Hire designation to his personnel file. The final disposition remains pending.

» *High School Teacher Made Inappropriate Physical Contact with Female Students and Commented on Their Physical Appearance (22-01135)*

A high school teacher intentionally touched a student's thigh, then held the student's hand, while sitting with the student in the gym. The teacher later told the student that the contact might have looked inappropriate.

The teacher also touched female students' hair and made physical contact with female students by intentionally sitting or falling on them.

The teacher also engaged in a pattern of making comments about the physical appearance of female students for wearing short dresses or wearing makeup. He called one student a “pretty little thing.” Other female students reported feeling uncomfortable by gestures he made (like he was grabbing someone’s buttocks) or feeling “scoped out” by him.

CPS pulled the teacher from active duty upon receiving the allegations.

The OIG investigated this case under Title IX regulations and sent a report of its findings to the Title IX decision-maker.

The decision-maker found that while the teacher’s interaction with the student in the gym was not sufficiently pervasive to constitute sexual harassment, the teacher’s comments to female students about their bodies and appearance did constitute sexual harassment in violation of Title IX.

The decision-maker recommended that CPS give the teacher corrective training and a Level Three Performance Improvement Plan. The final disposition remains pending.

## **E. Cases Involving Non-Sexual Policy and Guidelines Violations**

The substantiated policy violations in the following OIG SAU investigations do not include findings of sexual misconduct. Instead, they identify violations of other adjacent policies that have been enacted or expanded by the District over the last several years to provide guidance for maintaining professional boundaries and to deter behavior that may lead to more serious misconduct. These include the following policies (and the predecessor policies):

- The **Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students** (formerly known as the Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries) define appropriate and reasonable boundaries between staff members and students.
- The **Staff Acceptable Use Policy** concerns the proper use of CPS resources and the permitted scope of electronic communications with students. [CPS Policy Manual, Section 604.1, Board Report 19-0828-PO3 (August 28, 2019)]
- The **Student Travel Policy** prohibits a staff member from driving a student in their personal vehicle without advance written consent from the principal and the student’s parent/guardian. [CPS Policy Manual, Section 604.3, Board Report 21-0922-PO2 (September 22, 2021)]
- The **Reporting of Child Abuse, Neglect, and Inappropriate Relations Between Adults and Students Policy** governs the proper reporting of suspected abuse and neglect, as well as potential grooming behaviors. The Policy also requires staff members to keep such allegations confidential and to cooperate with OIG

investigations. [CPS Policy Manual, Section 511.1, Board Report 22-0622-PO2 (June 22, 2022)]

The SAU received these complaints after students, colleagues, parents, or other witnesses were made uncomfortable by the staff member’s conduct or found it concerning enough to report. In some instances, the initial complaint received by the SAU articulated a clear allegation of sexual misconduct that was not ultimately substantiated, but the investigation determined that the staff member violated one of these adjacent policies. In other instances, the initial allegation on its face may have presented concerns of grooming or other concerning misconduct, such that further investigation was appropriate.

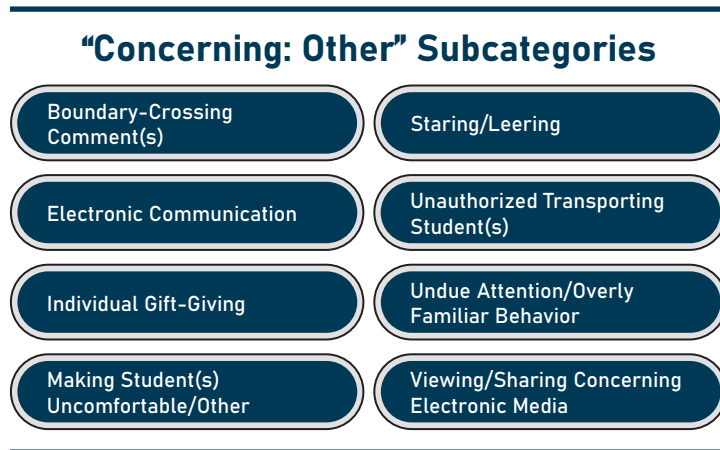
Potential grooming behaviors do not automatically constitute a violation of CPS policies. In fact, one of the reasons grooming for sexual abuse is so insidious is that the conduct in question

may resemble the genuine concern that staff members have for the development of their students. However, as demonstrated by many of the substantiated findings summarized below, the conduct may violate other CPS policies, such as the Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students, the Staff Acceptable Use Policy, and/or the Student Travel Policy.

Finally, the substantiated findings summarized below also reflect SAU findings pertaining to staff members who fail to report suspected sexual misconduct in violation of their mandated reporter obligations and/or CPS policy. Staff members also occasionally violate the Board Rules by failing to cooperate with an OIG investigation. The SAU investigates and recommends consequences for these policy violations in order to deter such behavior and keep students safe.

» *SECA Engaged in More Than 6,000 Phone Communications with a High School Senior, Allowed the Student to Drive Her Car, and Transferred Money to the Student (20-01325)*

Over a 14-month period, a high school Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA) and a twelfth-grade student texted each other 5,795 times and exchanged 828 phone calls. Many of these communications took place between midnight and 6:00 a.m., and four of the phone calls lasted for three hours or more.



The SECA also drove the student in her personal vehicle - and even allowed the student to drive her car—without written permission from the principal and the student’s parents as required by CPS rules.

The SECA also transferred small amounts of money to the student on at least two occasions.

Despite their extensive communication and suspicious circumstances surrounding their interactions, there was insufficient evidence to establish that the SECA and student engaged in sex or that the student was the father of the SECA’s infant child, as had been reported to the OIG.

The SECA’s conduct violated CPS’ Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/ Student Boundaries, CPS’ Acceptable Use Policy, and CPS’ Student Travel Policy.

CPS pulled the SECA from active duty upon receiving the allegation that the SECA had engaged in sex with the student.

DCFS also investigated and closed its investigation as unfounded.

The OIG recommended that the SECA’s employment be terminated. The Board subsequently filed dismissal charges against the SECA, and termination proceedings are ongoing.

» *Elementary School SECA Communicated with a Student by Cell Phone, Sent Pictures of Herself, Called Him “Son,” and Gave Him \$40 as a Birthday Gift (21-00996)*

An elementary school SECA engaged in text message and phone conversations with a student starting when the student was 10 years old and continuing until he was 13 years old, when the student’s mother reported the conduct. One of their phone calls lasted for 20 minutes. The SECA included fully clothed photos of herself in some of the text messages, prompting the student to respond with comments about her appearance. Screenshots provided to the OIG by the student’s mother also showed that the SECA and the student called each other “Ma” and “Son.”

The investigation also established that the SECA handed the student \$40 for his birthday.

The SECA’s conduct violated CPS’ Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/ Student Boundaries and CPS’ Staff Acceptable Use Policy.

While the SECA’s conduct raised potential grooming concerns, there was insufficient evidence that her communications with the student and the gift of \$40 were for the purpose of sexual abuse.

DCFS investigated, but unfounded its case because there was no proof of sexual intent.

After conducting initial interviews, the OIG notified CPS about the allegations, and CPS promptly pulled the SECA from active duty approximately two weeks after the OIG received the complaint.

The OIG recommended termination of the SECA's employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. The Board pursued termination by filing dismissal charges, and the SECA subsequently resigned. The Board placed a Do Not Hire designation in the SECA's personnel file.

» *High School Teacher Engaged in Over 1,400 Electronic Communications with a Tenth-Grade Student During a Six-Week Period (21-00485)*

A high school teacher engaged in more than 1,400 electronic communications with a tenth-grade student over a six-week period while the student was attending school remotely. Approximately 350 of the messages were sent between 9:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m.

All of the communications took place on CPS-approved applications, and none of the reviewed communications contained sexual language. However, the frequency, timing, persistence, and volume of the messages clearly violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

A review of the communications between the teacher and the student showed that while the student usually messaged the teacher about school-related matters, the teacher often redirected the conversations away from school and used an overly personal tone. The student also reported that the teacher once messaged her around midnight and asked if she was awake, and on a different occasion, he sent her a message saying that he missed her.

Other students reported receiving non-school-related messages from the teacher, but a review of those records did not reveal communications of a sexual nature.

Although the investigation did not establish that the teacher's electronic communications with students were for the purpose of sexual abuse, they clearly violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy. His conduct also violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

CPS reported the allegations to DCFS.

The student's parents filed a police report regarding the teacher's extensive communications with the student, but CPD ultimately suspended its investigation.

The OIG recommended that the teacher receive appropriate discipline and/or training. The teacher resigned during the disciplinary proceedings, and the Board placed a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file.

» *Volunteer High School Athletic Coach Messaged Students on Facebook and Discussed His Marital Issues, Asked Another Student to Delete Their Communications (20-00385)*

A volunteer high school athletic coach communicated with multiple students on Facebook Messenger. While there was insufficient evidence that the coach discussed anything sexual with the students, he discussed topics with a particular student that were overly personal and inappropriate, including his marital problems, financial concerns, and health issues.

The coach lied to the OIG about communicating with that student on Facebook altogether, until he was confronted with screenshots. He subsequently admitted to asking at least one other student to delete their Facebook communications.

The coach also transported students in his personal vehicle without permission as required by CPS rules.

The OIG was unable to substantiate other concerning allegations about the coach's interactions with the same student he talked to about his personal problems.

The coach's conduct violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy, CPS' Student Travel Policy, and CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The investigation also established that the high school had failed to re-approve the coach as a volunteer for the past several years. The CPS Law Department had already addressed this violation of CPS' Volunteer Policy with a Memorandum of Understanding that directed the high school to take remedial action.

Upon receiving the allegations, CPS blocked the coach from volunteering for CPS.

DCFS investigated and found that there was credible evidence that the coach engaged in child exploitation by exposing a student to explicit language, which included jokingly asking for videos of sexual acts between two other students and making comments about having sex on wrestling mats.

CPD investigated the allegations but suspended its case.

The OIG recommended that CPS take appropriate steps to prevent the coach from working for, or volunteering in, the District in the future. The Board subsequently placed the coach on an internal Do Not Hire list.

The OIG further recommended that CPS audit current volunteers at the high school to ensure compliance with the Memorandum of Understanding regarding CPS' volunteer policies. CPS informed the OIG that this matter remains pending.

» *Elementary School Staff Member Called and Messaged a Seventh-Grade Student Late at Night (21-00381)*

An elementary school staff member engaged in cell phone and social media communications with a seventh-grade student. The staff member called the student between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and midnight on several occasions, with one of their phone calls lasting for 26 minutes. He also messaged the student on Snapchat and video chatted with her.

During their conversations, the staff member sent the student pictures of his girlfriend and called his girlfriend “sexy asf.” He also offered the student unsolicited dating advice and told her to delete a photo that she had posted of herself with another male.

The teacher’s conduct violated CPS’ Staff Acceptable Use Policy and CPS’ Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

While concerning, there was insufficient evidence that the staff member’s conduct constituted grooming as defined by CPS policy. Specifically, none of the communications revealed any attempt by the staff member to meet the student outside of school, engage in physical contact, or establish a flirtatious or romantic rapport.

CPS pulled the staff member from active duty upon receiving the allegations about the electronic communications with the student.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the staff member, up to and including termination of his CPS employment and placement of a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The Board subsequently terminated the staff member and added a Do Not Hire Designation to his personnel file.

» *High School Teacher Exchanged Hundreds of Text Messages with One Student, Exchanged Non-School-Related Messages with Students on a CPS App; the Administration Failed to Report an Allegation Against the Teacher (20-01434)*

A high school teacher communicated with a student by cell phone, exchanging 174 text messages and three short voice calls with the student over an 11-week period.

Additionally, during the remote learning period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the teacher frequently used a CPS-sanctioned app to discuss non-school-related topics with students, sometimes after school hours and late at night. The messages did not include any sexual content, and it did not appear that the teacher targeted specific students. However, many of the teacher’s messages were inappropriate and unprofessional under the Guidelines and included discussion of a student’s dating life and a request for a student to send him pictures of her hair – electronic communications that the Guidelines prohibit employees from engaging in with students. Reports that the teacher hugged students in a manner



that was non-sexual but nevertheless violated the Guidelines were also substantiated. And the investigation also revealed that the teacher had previously been admonished by the school's administration about hugging students.

There was insufficient evidence to substantiate other allegations against the teacher for boundary-crossing misconduct. The investigation also established that three members of the school's administration failed to report a staff member's complaint about the teacher hugging students, but there were mitigating factors related to the impending suspension of in-person learning in March of 2020.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher, including additional training on maintaining appropriate boundaries with students. The Board subsequently gave the teacher a Level Two Performance Improvement Plan. Certain unsubstantiated allegations at the initiation of this investigation caused CPS to pull the teacher from active duty during the investigation. The teacher was later reinstated and received training regarding maintaining appropriate boundaries with students.

The OIG further recommended that the three school administrators receive additional training on reporting requirements. Two of the three school administration members received additional training as recommended. With respect to the third administration member, the Law Department informed the OIG that the matter is still open and pending further investigation.

» *Charter School Teacher Communicated with a Seventh-Grade Student Via Snapchat and Cell Phone and Stored the Student's Phone Number Under a False Name (18-01645)*

A charter school teacher admittedly engaged in Snapchat communications with a seventh-grade student. CPD also determined during its investigation that the charter teacher sent at least one text message to the student, but the message was not sexual in nature.

Additionally, the charter teacher stored the student's personal cell phone number in his phone under a false name, identifying her as the mother of a different student.

There was insufficient evidence to support other allegations that the charter teacher sexually abused the student (by grabbing her buttocks and crotch) or propositioned her for sex.

Were the charter teacher a CPS employee, his communications with the student would have violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy and CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

CPD and DCFS investigated the allegations that the charter teacher grabbed the student's buttocks and crotch and propositioned her for sex. The Cook County State's

Attorney's Office declined to pursue charges for criminal sexual abuse, and DCFS unfounded the allegations.

The charter school terminated the charter teacher's employment during the investigation.

The OIG recommended that the charter teacher's file be flagged for review and consideration of this case if he applies for a position with CPS or is otherwise subject to a CPS background check. The Board subsequently placed the charter teacher on an internal Do Not Hire list.

» *Charter High School SECA Exchanged Dozens of Calls and Text Messages with a Student (21-00160)*

A charter high school SECA exchanged dozens of calls and text messages with a student over a 14-month period.

Were the charter SECA a CPS employee, her cell phone communications with a student would have violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy.

The OIG notified CPS about the allegations and the charter SECA was pulled from active duty.

DCFS also investigated the charter SECA because it determined that there was a substantial risk of sexual abuse based on the circumstances, but found that there was no credible evidence of sexual abuse.

The charter school terminated the charter SECA's employment during the investigation. If the charter SECA were a CPS employee, the OIG would have recommended appropriate discipline. The OIG recommended that CPS consider the OIG's findings and recommendations in the event the charter SECA is considered for a position with CPS or is otherwise subject to a CPS background check. The Board subsequently placed the charter SECA on an internal Do Not Hire list.

» *High School Staff Member Made Comments About a Student's Appearance and Clothing (21-00670)*

A high school staff member told an eleventh-grade student that the way she was dressed made him and others uncomfortable. He described her boots as "sexy" and more appropriate for a nightclub than for school. Very oddly, he also told her that people who saw them talking together would assume that he was trying to "get with" her.

The staff member's misconduct violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students, which require staff members to maintain professional relationships with students.

While the staff member's conduct violated the Standards, there was insufficient evidence that he acted with a sexual motive or purpose. Therefore, the staff member's conduct did not constitute sexual harassment under CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination Title IX and Sexual Harassment Policy.

The OIG notified CPS about the allegations, and CPS pulled the staff member from active duty. During the investigation, however, the OIG recommended that the staff member be reinstated to his position and receive appropriate discipline. The Board subsequently referred the staff member for termination. The staff member was terminated and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in his personnel file.

» *High School Teacher Stared at Students and Made Comments About Their Appearance, Touched Students on the Shoulder (19-02517)*

A high school teacher stared at students in a manner that they reported made them feel uncomfortable. The teacher also frequently made comments to students about their appearance, such as telling a student that he didn't recognize her because she was "in shape" and telling another student that her eyelashes made her look "too grown."

The teacher also touched at least two students on the shoulder, which they reported made them uncomfortable.

The teacher's conduct violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students. However, the investigation did not establish that the teacher acted with a sexual motive or purpose, and his conduct was not targeted exclusively at female students. Therefore, the teacher's conduct did not constitute sexual harassment or gender harassment of students under CPS' Non-Discrimination Title IX and Sexual Harassment Policy.

During the investigation, multiple students and staff members raised concerns about the teacher's classroom management. Staff members also raised concerns about the teacher's interactions with female co-workers. The OIG referred these concerns to CPS and the Equal Opportunity Compliance Office.

The teacher was not pulled from active duty based on the initial allegations of inappropriate staring. However, CPS pulled the teacher during the investigation after staff members said they felt uncomfortable with his behavior and reported that he had played a sexually explicit song for students.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher. The Board subsequently referred the matter to the Equal Opportunity Compliance Office for additional investigation, and the matter remains pending.

» *Male Elementary School Substitute Teacher Entered Girls' Restroom Knowing That Female Students Were Inside (19-01288)*

A male elementary school substitute teacher entered the girls' restroom and told female students to exit the restroom and return to class. The OIG learned about the incident from a security guard because the school's principal failed to file an incident report.

The substitute teacher's conduct violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The OIG notified CPS about the allegations and the substitute teacher was blocked from receiving new substitute assignments.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the substitute teacher, including a determination of whether reinstatement was appropriate. The Board subsequently reinstated the substitute teacher and gave him a Level One Performance Improvement Plan.

» *Elementary School Teacher Touched Students' Shoulders, Backs, and Legs to Get Their Attention (20-00321)*

An elementary school teacher frequently touched students on their shoulders and backs in a manner that the students reported made them feel uncomfortable. He also occasionally and briefly touched students on their legs. The OIG interviewed 10 female students, and they all said that the teacher touched them in some manner at some point. Some of them said that the teacher touched male students in the same manner.

Most of the students said that the teacher touched or rubbed their backs when they fell asleep in class in order to wake them up. Other students said that he touched their backs to redirect them or get their attention. Some students said that the teacher briefly touched their legs, and one student said that he rubbed her mid-thigh for a few seconds, but she was not concerned by it at the time. The teacher admitted that he may have briefly touched students' arms, backs, or legs to get their attention, and the evidence did not establish that he did so in a way that targeted certain students.

Even though students reported that they were uncomfortable with how the teacher touched them, many of them also said that they liked him as a teacher.

The teacher's conduct violated the Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries. However, there was no evidence that the teacher acted with a sexual motive or purpose. Therefore, his conduct did not constitute sexual harassment or gender harassment under CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination Title IX and Sexual Harassment Policy.

The initial report included an allegation that the teacher touched a student's thigh and made her feel unsafe. This touching allegation prompted a DCFS investigation, which

was closed as unfounded. The OIG notified CPS about the touching allegations, and CPS pulled the teacher from active duty.

The teacher was later reinstated after completing training.

Because the teacher received additional training on maintaining appropriate staff-student boundaries prior to being reinstated, the OIG did not recommend further discipline. The teacher subsequently resigned, and the Board flagged his personnel file for discipline if he is rehired.

» *High School SECA Told Student That She Looked Like a Model and Asked Her Age (21-01142)*

A high school SECA's comment to a twelfth-grade student that she looked like a model as well as asking for her age violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students. The student said that the SECA's comment made her feel like she was being "cat-called" on the street.

During the investigation, four female staff members told the OIG about the SECA looking them up and down and/or making sexualized comments to them as well. Some of those comments were reported to the Equal Opportunity Compliance Office.

The OIG notified CPS about the allegations, and CPS pulled the SECA from active duty.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline and training for the SECA. The OIG further recommended that the SECA's larger pattern of sexualized comments and prohibited behavior be considered. The Board subsequently terminated the SECA and placed a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file.

» *Elementary School Teacher Recommended for Training After Students Reported Being Uncomfortable by His Touching Them on the Backs and Shoulders (21-00898)*

An elementary school teacher frequently touched seventh-grade students on their shoulders and backs to give them encouragement or get their attention, and some students reported feeling uncomfortable by it. The investigation did not substantiate other (more severe) allegations students made against the teacher that resulted in his being pulled from active duty pending the investigation.

There was no evidence that the teacher's conduct was sexual in nature or violated any CPS policy. The teacher resigned from CPS during the investigation and the OIG recommended that the teacher receive training if he sought employment with CPS in the future. The Board subsequently flagged the teacher's personnel file for discipline in the event he is rehired.

» *High School Security Guard Reprimanded for Commenting About a Student's Body (19-02330)*

A high school security guard admitted to making a comment about the way a student's legs looked at the homecoming dance, prompting a report initiating an OIG investigation. The security guard said that his comment related to the student's dance moves, and he denied that the comment had any sexual connotation.

The security guard's conduct violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the security guard, and additional training on maintaining appropriate boundaries with students. The Board subsequently issued a written reprimand to the security guard.

» *High School Teacher Followed a CPS Student on Social Media, Sent Her Messages on Instagram, and "Liked" Her Pictures (21-00141)*

A high school teacher followed a twelfth-grade student from a different CPS school on social media, messaged the student on Instagram, and "liked" a picture of the student in her swimsuit and a picture of the student's manicure. The teacher and student had met during the teacher's previous employment at a non-CPS school that the student attended before high school. The teacher's messages to the student were infrequent and did not contain any overtly sexual comments.

The OIG initiated its investigation after the student told another CPS staff member that the teacher had been interacting with her on social media. That CPS staff member (who worked at a different school and had never met the teacher) informed CPS of the allegation.

The teacher's communications with the student violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher, including additional training on CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students. The Board subsequently gave the teacher a Level Two Performance Improvement Plan.

» *High School Security Officer Pursued a Student on Social Media (22-00758)*

A high school security officer asked an eleventh-grade student whether she was on social media, and he subsequently followed her on Instagram and sent her a friend request on Snapchat.

The student reported the security officer's conduct to her mother, who notified the school's administration. Though the security officer told the OIG that he was unaware of CPS' social media policy, the student said that the security officer denied following her on Instagram when she asked him about it in the presence of another student, which suggests that he knew his conduct was inappropriate.

The security officer's communications with the student violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy and CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline and/or training for the security officer. The Board terminated the security officer and added a Do Not Hire designation to his personnel file.

» *High School Teacher Texted with Students and Self-Reported Her Conduct After a Student Sent Her a Picture of a Penis (21-00484)*

A high school teacher gave her phone number to an eleventh-grade student after the student asked her if he could speak to her about a personal matter. The teacher and student exchanged several text messages in the span of just over 10 minutes.

Just over a week later, however, the student texted the teacher a photo of a penis and the teacher promptly reported the student's message to the administration. There was no evidence that the teacher did anything to encourage or could have expected the student to send her that photo.

The teacher also admitted to texting three other students about scholarships and academic matters.

The teacher gave her phone number to the student and exchanged the messages out of a genuine concern for his well-being. However, the teacher's communications with students in this manner clearly violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline and/or training for the teacher. The Board subsequently gave the teacher a Level One Performance Improvement Plan.

» *Charter High School Teacher Texted with a Student Over a Six-Month Period, Referred to Herself as a "Third Parent" to the Student (19-01383)*

A charter high school teacher texted with a twelfth-grade student over a six-month period, sometimes multiple times per week. In most of these messages, the teacher encouraged the student to attend school, told him that she hoped he was safe, and otherwise demonstrated her support for him. However, on one occasion, the teacher texted the student late at night, and in another text, she said "Love u" to the student. She also offered to bring him food from a fast-food restaurant.

The OIG received the case after a staff member at the charter school overheard the student telling one of his classmates about the text messages. When the staff member approached the student about it, the student said that the messages were “not a big deal.”

There was no evidence that any of the messages were sexual in nature or part of a grooming pattern. Still, the teacher’s interactions with the student crossed boundaries, to the point that she described herself as a “third parent” to the student during her interview with the OIG.

If the teacher were a CPS employee, her conduct would have violated CPS’ Staff Acceptable Use Policy and CPS’ Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

The charter school pulled the teacher from active duty upon receiving the allegations about electronic communications.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the charter teacher, including training on the relevant policies. The charter school subsequently informed the OIG that the teacher resigned before the OIG issued its recommendation.

» ***Substitute Teacher Crossed Boundaries by Texting with a Student About the Student’s Dating Life (22-01126)***

An elementary school substitute teacher texted with a seventh-grade student about the student’s dating life and gave the student advice about dating. The student reported the teacher’s conduct to another staff member after a few months of communication. The investigation did not reveal evidence that these communications were sexual in nature.

The substitute teacher’s conduct violated CPS’ Staff Acceptable Use policy and CPS’ Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

CPS blocked the substitute teacher because of the allegations of electronic communications with a student.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the substitute teacher. The Board subsequently terminated the substitute teacher and placed a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file.

» ***Elementary School Teacher Repeatedly Lied to Investigators About His Dating Relationship with a Former Student (22-01588)***

An elementary school teacher contacted a former student on Instagram on the day of the former student’s high school graduation and subsequently formed a personal relationship with her. Within weeks of the former student’s graduation, the teacher and



former student went on a date and engaged in sexual activity at the teacher's home. The OIG received the case after the former student complained to CPS about her interactions with the teacher.

However, there was insufficient evidence that the teacher groomed the former student or otherwise engaged in prohibited contact with the former student at any time *while* she was a CPS student.

While the teacher did not violate any of CPS' sexual misconduct policies, the former student's screenshots of their Instagram and text message conversations demonstrated that the teacher repeatedly lied to the OIG about whether he initiated contact with the former student on social media, whether he went on a date with her, and whether she had ever been to his home. By knowingly providing false information to the OIG during an investigation, the teacher violated the Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy.

The former student also sent the OIG video from the teacher's YouTube channel because she believed that the video was about her. In the video, the teacher criticized women and, while he never mentioned the former student by name, the content and timing of the video closely matched what he was saying to the former student in his text messages to her.

At another point in the video, the teacher mocked an unidentified former coworker for having a mental illness. He also advised his viewers that women are inherently dishonest and attention-seeking. Other videos on the YouTube channel appeared to contain similarly offensive and misogynistic content.

The OIG referred the potential misconduct on the basis that it may have violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy, which prohibits staff members from engaging in social media behavior that (1) disparages or demeans any school community member (including other staff members or alumni) or (2) is offensive or discriminatory based on various characteristics, including gender.

CPS pulled the teacher from active duty upon receiving the allegation from the former student.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended that the teacher receive appropriate discipline for lying during a CPS OIG investigation, up to and including termination of his employment. The Board pursued termination by filing dismissal charges and the teacher subsequently resigned. The Board placed a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file.

» *Staff Member Took a Four-Year-Old Student to a Coffee Shop During School Hours and Told Her Not to Tell Anyone (22-02149)*

An elementary school staff member was tasked with taking a four-year-old pre-kindergarten student on a walk around the school building. Instead, the staff member walked with the student to an off-campus coffee shop, bought the student a snack, and told her not to tell anyone where they had gone. The staff member did not notify any other staff member of the trip or obtain permission from the student's parents and school administrators.

The staff member violated the Student Travel Policy, which permits only "educational travel" and requires a signed parent or guardian permission slip. The staff member also violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students, which prohibit a staff member from asking a student to keep a secret.

Although the staff member's conduct was irresponsible, there was no evidence that she engaged in any sexual misconduct with the student.

CPS terminated the staff member's employment because of the allegations and placed a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file.

» *Charter Elementary School Teacher Stared at Female Students' Chests and Buttocks (20-00803)*

A charter elementary school teacher stared at the breasts and buttocks of female students, prompting several students to complain to the administration. The charter students' complaints were consistent with prior complaints from female students at a CPS school where he previously worked. Students from both schools complained that the teacher would wink, smile, or smirk while he stared at them.

If the charter teacher were a CPS employee, his conduct toward the charter school students would have violated the Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students.

The investigation also established that the former principal and assistant principal of the CPS school where the charter teacher previously worked were aware of and failed to create incident reports in response to the students' previous staring allegations, as required by the Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries.

If the charter teacher were a CPS employee, the OIG would have recommended appropriate discipline, including additional training on the Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

The OIG recommended that CPS flag the charter teacher's personnel file for review and consideration of this matter in the event he applies for a position with CPS or a different charter school or is otherwise subject to a CPS background check. The Board subsequently flagged the charter teacher's personnel file so that he will receive training in the event he returns to CPS.

Additionally, the OIG recommended that CPS flag the personnel file of the CPS school's former assistant principal for consideration of this matter in the event she applies for a position with CPS or a charter school or is otherwise subject to a CPS background check. The Board subsequently added a Do Not Hire designation to the former assistant principal's personnel file.

The CPS school's former principal already had a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file due to an unrelated matter.

» ***Charter High School Teacher Violated Boundaries by Having a Student at Her Home (22-00952)***

A charter high school teacher who had previously worked for CPS invited and allowed a tenth-grade student to come to her home and style her hair. The student's mother gave the student permission to visit the charter teacher's home.

There was insufficient evidence to substantiate other allegations that the charter teacher asked the student about another staff member's sex life during this visit, or that the charter teacher intentionally bumped into the student as an act of retaliation after the student reported these allegations.

If the charter teacher had been a CPS employee, inviting the student to her house would have violated the Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students.

The charter school terminated the teacher's contract during the investigation. The OIG recommended that the charter teacher's personnel file be flagged for review and consideration of this matter if she applies for a position with CPS or a charter school or is otherwise subject to a CPS background check. The Board subsequently flagged the charter teacher's personnel file so that she will receive training in the event she returns to CPS.

» ***High School Teacher Made an Ambiguous, Potentially Sexual Joke and Engaged in Various Other Boundary-Crossing Behaviors with Female Students (21-01153)***

A high school teacher engaged in a pattern of conduct that some female students reported made them uncomfortable. He made an ambiguous remark to a female student about what she might be doing while holding a cell phone on her lap. During

the investigation, female students also told investigators about instances of the teacher touching them briefly on their arms, the back of one student's neck, and another student's back. The student interviews also revealed several reports of female students feeling uncomfortable with how the teacher stared at them.

The teacher's conduct violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students. However, his conduct was not severe enough to constitute sexual harassment or sexual misconduct under CPS policy.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher, as well as training on maintaining appropriate staff-student boundaries and appropriate classroom interactions with students. The Board subsequently gave the teacher a Level Two Performance Improvement Plan.

» *High School Teacher/Coach's Comments to Students and Boundary-Crossing Misconduct Violated the CPS Guidelines (21-00702)*

A high school teacher engaged in boundary-crossing behaviors with members of the athletic team that he coached. He texted with members of the team on their personal cell phones and sometimes asked them about non-school-related matters, such as their vacations.

The investigation confirmed allegations that the teacher singled out one of the team members for personal friendship. He texted and talked with her more frequently than the other students, offered her rides to team events, took a walk with her alone during a team trip, invited her to come to his home to drop off a gift for his child, and told her that he loved her (although he told other students that he loved them too). However, there was no evidence that the teacher interacted with the student in a sexual manner. He also made a joke that students interpreted as being about boys looking at the chest areas of female students while they ran.

The teacher's conduct violated CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students. The teacher also violated CPS' Staff Acceptable Use Policy by communicating with students on their personal cell phones. These communications, however, did not have indicators that would raise concerns about grooming.

The investigation did not reveal evidence that the teacher's misconduct violated CPS' Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy, which requires a finding that the misconduct is severe and pervasive.

CPS pulled the teacher from active duty after interviews with the students revealed that the teacher had targeted one student for a personal relationship and told her that he loved her.

DCFS declined to open an investigation.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher. The OIG also recommended that if reinstated, the teacher receive additional training on maintaining appropriate boundaries with students, including training on CPS' Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students, CPS' Staff Acceptable Use policy, and CPS' Student Travel policy.

The Board reinstated the teacher and gave him a Level Two Performance Improvement Plan. The teacher also completed corrective training.

» ***Charter Elementary School Substitute Teacher Touched Students' Arms and Shoulders, Making Them Uncomfortable (22-01685)***

A charter elementary school substitute teacher (who was employed by a third-party vendor of the charter school) touched students on the arm and shoulder, and several students reported that the touching from the teacher made them uncomfortable.

The investigation revealed that some of the contact was incidental but other touching was intentional, such as when the charter substitute teacher touched a student's shoulder for an extended period or moved his hand from the top of a student's shoulder to the student's hand. However, the evidence did not support a finding that the charter substitute teacher touched the students in a sexual manner or for a sexual purpose.

Female students also reported feeling uncomfortable with how the charter substitute teacher looked at them and that he talked about sex during class, but there was insufficient evidence to raise additional concerns or make additional findings. CPS blocked the charter substitute teacher upon receiving the allegations, as the reports of inappropriate touching prompted serious concerns. A report was made to DCFS as CPS policy requires.

The OIG recommended training the vendor employee of the charter school on maintaining appropriate boundaries with students before being allowed to return to work at the school. The charter school notified the OIG that the charter substitute teacher refused to complete the training and is no longer employed by the vendor.

» ***Charter School Staff Members Failed to Properly Report Sexual Misconduct Allegations Against an Employee Who Was Eventually Criminally Charged for the Conduct (18-01673)***

Four charter school staff members (including two administrators) failed to properly report sexual misconduct complaints from students about one of the school's employees working under the title of "dean."

First, one of the charter administrators failed to document allegations from multiple female students that the dean had been staring at female students' buttocks. If the

charter administrator had been a CPS employee, her failure to document the staring allegations would have violated CPS' Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries, which required her to create an incident report of any complaint that a staff member may have violated the Guidelines.

Then, approximately two months later, all four charter staff members received an allegation from a student that the dean was exchanging sexually explicit text message conversations with a tenth-grade student. The student who reported the conduct stated that she had personally seen the text messages between the dean and the victim, and she believed that they had engaged in sex.

Some of the charter staff members started asking students about the allegations and determined among themselves that the allegations were not credible, possibly because the victim initially denied that the abuse occurred. The staff members disregarded written statements from students who said they saw the text messages or described their own concerning experiences with the dean.

One of the charter staff members who heard the students' allegations contacted the OIG and CPS while she was directing the informal investigation. No one at the school contacted DCFS.

Approximately three weeks later, the victim told her mother that the dean had sexually assaulted her and another student. The victim's mother contacted the administration, and at this point, two of the charter staff members finally called DCFS.

The separate OIG investigation of the dean's underlying sexual misconduct established that the dean had, in fact, sexually assaulted two students. He was charged with five counts of criminal sexual assault and two counts of aggravated criminal sexual assault based on his conduct. (See [OIG 2020 Annual Report](#) at 31-32, discussion of 18-01545.)

As mandatory reporters, the charter staff members were required to immediately report to DCFS the sexual assault allegation because they had "reasonable cause to believe that a child known to them in their professional or official capacities may be an abused child or a neglected child." 325 ILCS 5/4(a).

The charter staff members all resigned from the charter school during the investigation. The OIG recommended that their files be flagged for review in the event they apply for a CPS position or otherwise undergo a CPS background check for the purpose of administering additional training. The OIG further recommended that the current charter school staff receive additional training.

The Board subsequently flagged three charter staff members' files as recommended, and CPS informed the OIG that the fourth charter staff member began working at CPS following the investigation and would receive additional training. The Law Department also informed the OIG that current staff members at the charter school received additional training as recommended.

» *High School Security Officer Crossed CPS Boundaries with Students During Conversations with Them (21-00480)*

On two occasions in the lunchroom, a high school security officer asked a student if they were going to sit with their “boyfriend,” while gesturing toward a student who was not their boyfriend. The student complained about the security officer’s comments.

The security officer also repeatedly told female students to watch their calories as they were ordering pizza during a field trip.

The security officer’s conduct violated CPS’ Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the security officer, including training regarding appropriate staff member/student interactions. The Board issued the security officer a two-day suspension and referred him for additional training.

» *High School Teacher Engaged in a Pattern of Making Unprofessional Comments to Students; His Comments Particularly Harassed Female Students (21-01168)*

An investigation substantiated student complaints that a high school teacher engaged in a pattern of making inappropriate comments in class that targeted female students for their appearance. He commented on female students’ hair, makeup, and attire, and asked one female student about where she bought her underwear. He also claimed that menstruation is not painful and said that women are too dramatic.

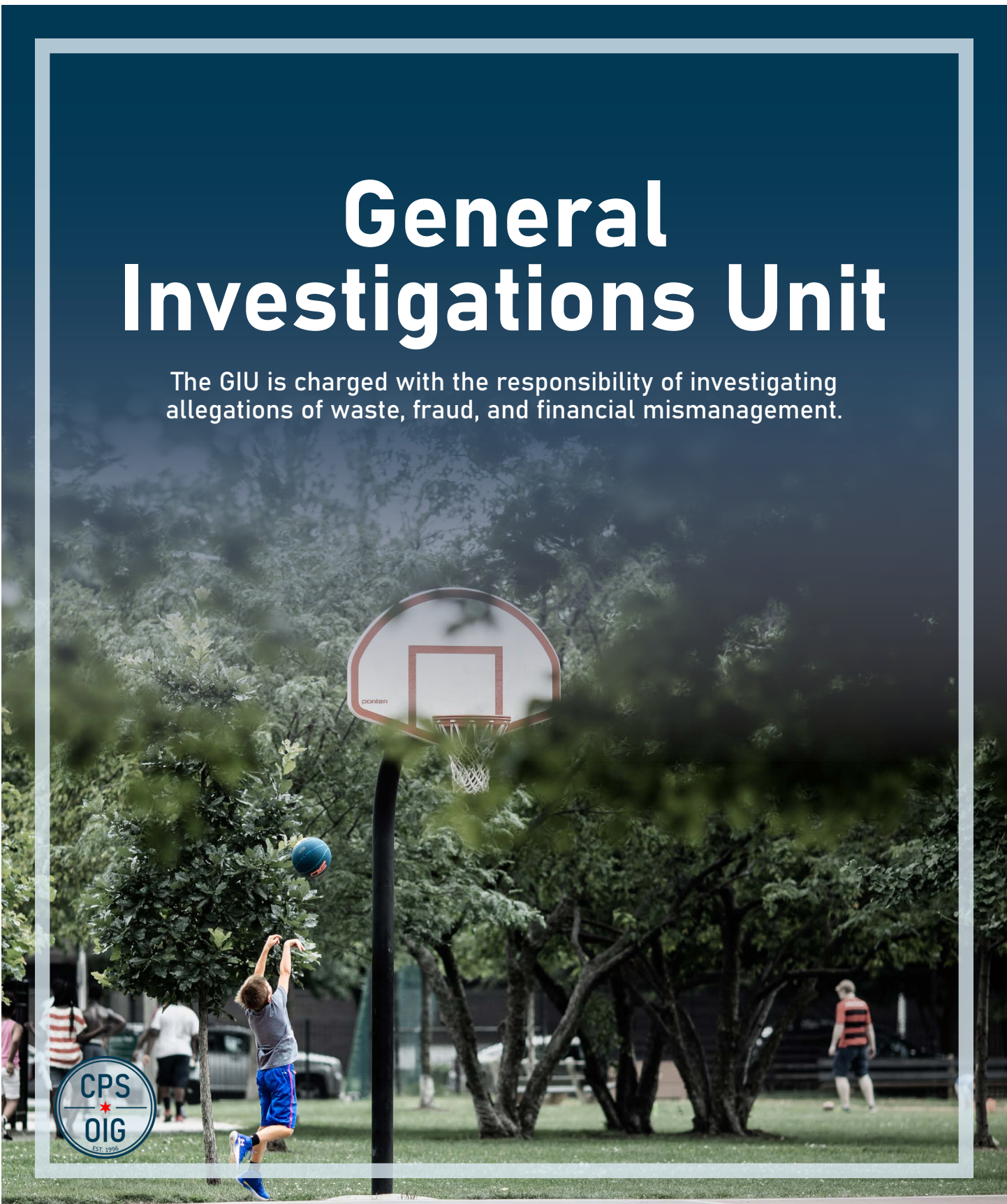
The teacher engaged in other unprofessional conduct in front of the whole class that resulted in substantiated findings for violating CPS’ Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students. The teacher’s offensive and unwanted comments were largely directed at females (both generally and at specific students) and constituted gender-based harassment towards female students in violation of CPS’ Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy.

The investigation did not conclude that any of the teacher’s misconduct was intended for a sexual purpose. Based on the initial allegations, CPS pulled the teacher from active duty. He was later approved for reinstatement to his position, subject to additional training. However, there was no record that the training occurred prior to the teacher’s reinstatement.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the teacher, including training on maintaining professional boundaries with students. The Board subsequently gave the teacher a Level Three Performance Improvement Plan.

# General Investigations Unit

The GIU is charged with the responsibility of investigating allegations of waste, fraud, and financial mismanagement.





## **A. Indictment of Assistant Principal for Stealing Nearly \$275,000**

### **Indictment of Assistant Principal Who Stole Nearly \$175,000 of School Fee and Tuition Payments and Stole Another \$20,000 by Forging Her School's Checks (19-02527)**

In its 2021 Annual Report, the OIG reported its findings in an investigation involving financial crimes by an assistant principal at an elementary school. The OIG found that the assistant principal stole over \$195,000 in school funds over the course of two years by embezzling parent payments for an after-school program and by issuing fraudulent checks to herself and her family members.

During the course of the investigation, the OIG also recovered and returned to CPS an additional \$77,436 of parent fee payments that the assistant principal had diverted to an online bank account that she created and controlled. Separately, the OIG found that the school's administration had lost track of \$51,000 of parent payments that were also recovered during the OIG's investigation.

The OIG referred this matter to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office and assisted with its criminal investigation. On July 3, 2023, a Cook County grand jury returned a 17-count indictment against the assistant principal charging her with three counts of theft of over \$100,000 from a school, nine counts of forgery, and five counts of committing a continuing financial crimes enterprise. The indictment contains detailed allegations that the assistant principal committed financial crimes by using a computer to fraudulently access online bank accounts, steal school funds, and conceal the theft.

The indictment alleges that the assistant principal stole a total of \$273,364 — including the funds that the OIG recovered during the investigation.

On July 31, 2023, the assistant principal was arraigned and entered a plea of not guilty to all charges. The case is currently pending in the Circuit Court of Cook County.

The assistant principal resigned during the OIG's investigation, and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in her personnel file.

## **B. Joint Federal Investigation Involving OT and Procurement Fraud**

### **Federal Criminal Matter Involving a Principal Who Engaged in an Overtime Fraud Scheme with Her Staff and a Procurement Fraud Scheme with a Vendor (18-00622)**

In 2018, the OIG began an investigation into financial misconduct at Brennemann Elementary School, which subsequently developed into a joint investigation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of

Illinois. The investigation led to the indictment of four CPS employees and two employees of a CPS vendor.

From 2012 to 2019, multiple CPS employees at Brennemann participated in two separate schemes to defraud CPS of over \$250,000.

In the first scheme, involving bogus overtime payments, the Brennemann principal Sarah Abedelal directed school employees to accept unearned overtime payments and later deliver the proceeds to Abedelal or the assistant principal, Jennifer McBride. The proceeds were either in the form of cash that the employees had to withdraw from their personal bank accounts or gift cards that they had to purchase. Although some employees were told these funds would be used for the school, in fact, Abedelal used them to pay her personal expenses.

In the second scheme, a CPS vendor engaged in product-substitution fraud with Brennemann and other schools. More specifically, employees of the vendor sent invoices to Brennemann and other schools for the delivery of legitimate school supplies that were never actually delivered. Instead, based on a mutual understanding, the vendor sent thousands of dollars in gift cards and electronic devices for the personal use of the CPS employees who ensured that the fake invoices were processed and paid for by CPS.

On July 13, 2021, a federal grand jury in the Northern District of Illinois returned a 10-count wire fraud indictment against Abedelal based on her involvement in the overtime scheme discussed above. On July 14, 2021, she was arrested and pleaded not guilty to all charges.

On February 15, 2022, a superseding indictment charged Abedelal with one additional count of wire fraud related to her involvement in the product-substitution scheme. On June 30, 2022, Abedelal pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud. Her case remains pending until sentencing.

Additionally, on February 15, 2022, McBride was indicted on four counts of wire fraud based on her involvement in the overtime scheme, and she was arrested the following day. On January 19, 2023, McBride and the U.S. Attorney's Office entered into an Agreement to Defer Prosecution, where McBride admitted to her involvement with fraudulent overtime pay and the falsification of time sheets at Brennemann for Abedelal's personal benefit.

On February 15, 2022, the former Brennemann business manager, William Jackson, also was indicted on five counts of wire fraud and one count of mail fraud based on his involvement in the overtime and product-substitution schemes. Jackson pleaded not guilty to all charges, and his trial date is set for September 9, 2024.

On March 14, 2022, a sales representative of the CPS vendor involved in the product-substitution scheme, Debra Bannack, was indicted on three counts of wire fraud and one

count of mail fraud based on her involvement in the product-substitution scheme. She pleaded not guilty on all charges, and her criminal proceedings are ongoing.

On June 13, 2022, a customer service representative of the vendor, Anthony Rasmussen, was indicted on three counts of wire fraud and one count of mail fraud based on his involvement in the product-substitution scheme. He pleaded not guilty to all charges, and his criminal proceedings are ongoing.

Also on June 13, 2022, a former clerk at a different CPS school, Ashley Beard, was indicted on two counts of wire fraud based on her involvement in the product-substitution scheme. She pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud on October 13, 2022. Her case remains pending until sentencing.

## **C. Sentencing of Former CPS Chief of Staff to CEO**

### **Former CPS Chief of Staff to the CEO Sentenced for Sharing Confidential Information on a \$1B Contract Bid**

In the 2020 Annual Report, the OIG reported that it assisted the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in an investigation involving Pedro Soto, who was chief of staff to CPS' CEO.

As previously reported, the U.S. Attorney's Office charged Soto with lying to the FBI about his interaction with a lobbyist's colleague regarding the award of a \$1 billion CPS custodial-services contract. Soto had been a member of the CPS evaluation committee tasked with reviewing the prospective companies and recommending which company should win the contract.

In his plea agreement, Soto admitted that he provided non-public information to the lobbyist's colleague who was assisting one of the prospective companies and that Soto had done so, in part, because the lobbyist's colleague had promised Soto various benefits. He also admitted that he intentionally made false statements to the FBI when he denied having provided inside information to the lobbyist's colleague.

On September 11, 2020, Soto pleaded guilty to one count of making a false statement to an agency of the United States — a charge punishable by a maximum sentence of five years in federal prison.

On March 16, 2023, Soto was sentenced to 18 months of probation, along with a \$3,000 fine and 100 hours of community service.

Soto resigned from his position with CPS in 2020, just before being charged in this matter, and CPS placed a DNH designation in his personnel file.

## D. Changes Following OIG's Report on Miscoding Truant Students

### Update on CPS' Response to OIG's Report About Schools That Miscode Truant Students as Transferred or "Lost" (20-00752)

The accuracy of student transfer and dropout data has been a persistent issue at CPS that has resulted in five separate OIG investigations since 2009 involving school administrators deliberately miscoding truant or lost students.

In the 2022 Annual Report, the OIG reported on another example of intentional miscoding of lost and truant students at an elementary school, as well as a District-wide OIG investigation that found that schools were submitting increasing amounts of questionable transfer and lost child data to CPS. The OIG's District-wide findings called into question the reliability of transfer and dropout data that CPS uses in calculating key school performance metrics.

The OIG found that schools throughout the District were regularly disregarding CPS guidelines that require schools to document student transfers and lost children, even though CPS had recently overhauled its process for schools to report this information. The OIG also found that there was little, if any, oversight from CPS to ensure that schools were following the required reporting procedures.

As reported in the 2022 Annual Report, the OIG recommended that CPS commit to ensuring that student transfer and lost child data is accurate going forward. The OIG specifically recommended that CPS designate a department to be responsible for leave code data integrity, conduct planned audits of transfer verification data, and institute a process for holding schools that report false transfer or lost child data accountable.

CPS has responded to the OIG's recommendations by reconstituting its Office of Student Support and Engagement to add staff members who are specifically tasked with overseeing issues related to students who leave the District, including transfers and lost children. CPS also revamped the way that schools collect data on truant and lost students. Beginning with the 2023-24 school year, school staff must now log outreach to truant and missing students in CPS' centralized student record system, and this data is now shared and visible to Network and Central Office staff.

In another encouraging development, CPS' internal audit department also confirmed to the OIG that school level audits of transfer and lost child verification data are restarting in December 2023, after being paused since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the school level, CPS has expanded its training on student leave codes to include more staff members, including clerks. The OIG will monitor the results of the upcoming school audits and continue to review District-wide data to ensure that CPS leave code data is accurate.

## E. Theft of \$150,000 Through Payroll Fraud and Cash Embezzlement

### School Clerk Stole More than \$150,000 in CPS Funds Through a Combination of Payroll Fraud and Cash Embezzlement (22-00318)

An OIG investigation found that a school clerk stole over \$150,000 of CPS funds through two separate fraud schemes. In one of the schemes, the clerk engaged in payroll fraud by submitting false pay requests over the course of five school years for at least \$68,000 for work that she did not do.

In the other fraudulent scheme, the clerk embezzled nearly \$90,000 of school funds by skimming from cash collected by the school that she was responsible for depositing in the school's bank account.

The clerk's payroll fraud scheme involved misuse of CPS' flawed Supplemental Payment System (SPS), which was the subject of the OIG performance review discussed in Section 4.B above. The OIG found that the clerk abused her position of trust to submit fraudulent requests for extra pay<sup>32</sup> to her supervisors for hours that she did not work. Multiple administrators at two elementary schools where she worked then failed to attempt to verify her extra pay requests and allowed her to collect the unearned payments.

The OIG also found that in addition to the at least \$68,000 in payroll funds that the clerk stole for herself, she also directed at least \$15,000 in unearned extra pay to a fellow clerk, who accepted the stolen funds.

During the investigation, the OIG also identified suspicious cash deposits by the first clerk and found evidence that she took advantage of her cash-handling responsibilities to skim nearly \$90,000 of school funds. She denied stealing any school funds; however, she was unable to explain the questionable deposits and instead provided a false narrative that was easily disproven. Moreover, nearly all the school's financial records relating to cash collection and deposits were missing. As in the payroll fraud scheme, the first clerk's embezzlement of school funds was enabled by administrators' failure to have any controls in place for cash management.

The two theft schemes are discussed in more detail below. Because this investigation involved two clerks, they are referred to below as "Clerk One" and "Clerk Two."

### Payroll Fraud

Clerk One's payroll fraud scheme took place over at least five school years at two elementary schools where she was assigned between 2017 and 2021. As the clerk at

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<sup>32</sup> Here "extra pay" refers to payment for hourly extra work paid through CPS' Supplemental Payment System (SPS). This type of pay is commonly referred to as "overtime" by CPS employees but is different from true overtime pay.

each of the two schools, she was responsible for collecting and processing employee requests for extra pay.

In 2021, when Clerk One was assigned to the second elementary school, the school's new principal became suspicious of the large volume of extra work that Clerk One was claiming to have performed.

The OIG reviewed Clerk One's timekeeping and payroll records, which showed that she had received an exceptionally large amount of extra pay, totaling \$99,041 over five school years, including nearly \$30,000 during the 2018-19 school year and nearly \$25,000 in just the first four months of the 2021-22 school year.

Further analysis showed that she received extra pay on numerous days where she took sick time, as well as on staff holidays including Christmas and Thanksgiving. On at least 21 dates, Clerk One received 14 or more hours of extra pay in a single day.

The OIG interviewed Clerk One's longtime coworker, Clerk Two, who told the OIG that Clerk One was engaging in payroll fraud and admitted to her own role in the scheme. Clerk Two explained that Clerk One rarely worked during the summer months, even though she usually received eight hours of extra pay on each workday during those months and even claimed as many as 14 or 16 hours on several summer days.

Clerk Two told the OIG that she first noticed in 2017 that Clerk One was receiving unusually high amounts of extra pay. After Clerk Two complained about this to Clerk One, Clerk One began submitting extra pay requests for unearned pay for Clerk Two as well. Clerk Two said that she believed that Clerk One may have been adding hours of extra pay to her paychecks "just to keep her quiet."

The OIG reviewed Clerk Two's timekeeping records and concluded that, based on the records and her admissions, she likely received at least \$15,000 in unearned extra pay, and potentially much more.

The OIG determined that Clerk One and Clerk Two were able to carry out their payroll fraud because their supervisors did not check to see whether they earned the extra pay they were claiming.

One of the administrators responsible for approving Clerk One's extra pay requests expressed shock at how much extra pay that Clerk One received and insisted that she never intended to award that much extra pay to her. A second administrator stated that, after reviewing records showing how much extra pay Clerk One received, it was apparent that Clerk One had defrauded the school. That administrator also told the OIG that she would never have approved Clerk One's extra pay requests if she really knew what was going on.

A third administrator, however, said that she thought both Clerk One and Clerk Two worked a substantial amount of overtime and was skeptical that the extra pay they were paid was unearned.

Interviews revealed that neither schools had a practice of verifying that employees actually worked the hours they claimed.

Speaking of this administrator, Clerk Two stated that “she just trusted [Clerk One]” and had no checks and balances in place to detect the fraudulent extra pay scheme. In fact, despite her skepticism that Clerk One or Clerk Two submitted fraudulent entries, this administrator nevertheless admitted that her role in approving extra pay was limited to “just clicking approve” on the computer.

Interviews with these administrators revealed that neither of the schools where Clerk One used the extra pay system to commit payroll fraud had a practice of verifying that employees requesting extra pay actually worked the hours that they claimed.

Many of the deficiencies in the extra pay processes at the two schools examined by the OIG in this case reflect the systemic problems identified in the OIG’s Performance Review of Extra Pay Rules and Procedures, issued in 2022 and discussed in the OIG’s Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report and also above in Section 4.B. Among other findings, the OIG’s report discussed how CPS did not provide schools with adequate guidance or training on verifying extra pay requests.

### **Cash Embezzlement and Missing Cash Collection Records**

A review of Clerk One’s personal bank records showed that she regularly deposited large amounts of cash into her personal bank accounts at the same time and bank branch (near the school) where she made deposits for the school in its account at the same bank.

The discovery of the cash deposits in Clerk One’s personal bank accounts instantly revealed concerns in this investigation. First, the investigation showed that Clerk One had extensive access and almost sole control over the school’s cash deposits without any oversight. And when the school suspended in-person instruction during the pandemic, Clerk One’s cash deposits into her own bank account also abruptly stopped.

Clerk One denied stealing any cash from the school but could not provide a reasonable explanation for the nearly \$90,000 in cash deposits at the bank.

Clerk One eventually told the OIG that the cash that she deposited into her personal bank accounts was collected from her mother and two brothers to pay their mortgage and other bills. This story quickly fell apart, and Clerk One admitted that her family members did not actually give her any cash to pay towards their mortgage. Further, she

could not account for why the deposits abruptly stopped in March 2020 when the school suspended in-person instruction. Lastly, interviews with Clerk One's family members contradicted her claims that they regularly gave her cash to cover bills and other expenses.

In summary, the investigation concluded that Clerk One likely stole at least \$88,000 in cash from her school.

As with Clerk One's scheme in which she paid herself for unearned extra pay, her theft of cash from the school was made possible because of the school's failure to comply with CPS' guidelines for implementing internal financial controls to detect and prevent fraud. Specifically, administrators tasked Clerk One with both receipting and depositing cash in violation of CPS' requirement that schools implement segregation of duties regarding handling school cash. Instead, Clerk Two told the OIG that school administrators simply trusted Clerk One to handle deposits.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the employment of Clerk One and Clerk Two and enter Do Not Hire Designations in their personnel files. The Board initiated disciplinary proceedings against both clerks. Clerk One subsequently resigned, and the Board placed a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. Clerk Two's proceedings remain pending.

The OIG would have recommended discipline for one of Clerk One's principals who mismanaged the school's extra pay and allowed Clerk One's embezzlement on her watch; however, she has since left CPS employment. The OIG would have recommended training for a second principal of Clerk One who did not adequately manage the school's use of the extra pay system; however, she too has left CPS employment.

The OIG referred this matter to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office for prosecution.

## **F. Employee and Student Residency Matters**

Board policy requires employees to live within the City of Chicago absent approved exemptions. Per the Board's residency policy, an employee who lies about his or her address in conjunction with a residency violation is subject to immediate dismissal. See Board Report 18-0627-P04.

The OIG also investigates cases where families living outside of Chicago send their children to CPS schools through fraudulent means. Not only are suburban students subject to disenrollment, but their families also owe CPS tuition for the years the students attended CPS schools as non-residents. The statutory non-residency tuition rate varies slightly from year to year. For the 2022-23 year, the annual tuition rate was \$18,954.



### **Principal and Several Other Residency Violators at an Elementary School**

An OIG investigation found that the principal and three other employees at an elementary school were living in the suburbs in violation of the CPS residency policy. These residency violations were investigated in conjunction with a broad timekeeping misconduct investigation at the school. The timekeeping misconduct (21-00460) is discussed separately below in Section 6.H.

In this residency investigation, property records, utility records, and records from the Illinois Secretary of State confirmed that each of the four individuals were living in the suburbs. In each instance, the employee had misrepresented their true residence by providing CPS with a false Chicago address-of-record. Two of the employees had also enrolled their children at the school in violation of the student residency policy.

#### ***Principal Living in Lansing Also Obtained Fraudulent PPP Loan (21-00174)***

The OIG found that the principal had been living in Lansing, Illinois, in violation of the employee residency policy since at least 2016 and that she had misrepresented her residency to CPS to evade the policy. She resigned during the investigation, and the Board subsequently placed a DNH designation in her personnel file at the recommendation of the OIG. During the course of the investigation, the OIG determined that the principal also received a fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, as discussed in Section 3.B above.

#### ***Senior Security Officer Living in Lynwood (22-01707)***

The OIG found that a senior security officer at the school had been living in Lynwood, Illinois, in violation of the residency policy since at least 2014 and that she misrepresented her residency to CPS to evade the policy. The OIG recommended that the Board terminate her employment and place a DNH designation in her personnel file. She resigned in the wake of the OIG's investigation, and the Board placed a DNH designation in her file.

#### ***Clerk Assistant Living in Midlothian (22-02264)***

The school clerk assistant had been living in Midlothian, Illinois, in violation of the employee residency policy since at least 2018. The OIG also found that she misrepresented her residency to CPS to evade the policy. Further, she not only violated the employee residency policy, but also violated the student residency policy by fraudulently enrolling two of her children at the CPS school where she worked using a false Chicago address. One child was improperly enrolled at the school for seven years, and the other was improperly enrolled at the school for three years while they were living in Midlothian. As a result, the OIG found that the clerk assistant owed CPS \$161,146 in non-resident tuition for those years.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the clerk assistant's employment, place a DNH designation in her personnel file, disenroll her two children from CPS, and attempt to recoup the non-resident tuition owed.

She later resigned, and the Board placed a DNH designation in her file. The Board also advised the OIG that the students will be disenrolled from CPS and that the Board is attempting to collect the non-resident tuition owed.

### ***SECA Living in Homewood (23-00027)***

A SECA at the school had been living in Homewood, Illinois, in violation of the employee residency policy since at least 2021. The OIG also found that he misrepresented his residency to CPS to evade the policy. Although the SECA lived with his daughter in Homewood, he enrolled her at the CPS school where he worked for approximately one year using a false Chicago address. Because she was improperly enrolled as a non-resident for about a year, the OIG found that the SECA owed CPS approximately \$16,541 in non-resident tuition.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the SECA's employment, place a DNH designation in his personnel file, and attempt to recoup non-resident tuition from him. The OIG would have recommended that his daughter be disenrolled from CPS, but she transferred out of the District during the investigation.

The SECA later resigned from CPS, and the Board placed a DNH designation in his personnel file. CPS has advised that it is currently pursuing the recovery of non-resident tuition from the parents.

### **Students Attended Highly Selective CPS Schools While Living in Lincolnwood (19-00449)**

An OIG investigation found that two CPS students attended a selective enrollment elementary school while living in Lincolnwood, Illinois. The family eventually moved to Chicago; however, the family falsely claimed to live in a poorer neighborhood to boost their chances that their children would be admitted to another selective enrollment school.

From May 2014 until August 2020, the parents violated CPS' student residency requirements by enrolling their children at Decatur Classical Elementary School while living in Lincolnwood, Illinois. The investigation showed that the family owned numerous residential properties in Chicago through their real estate company and used these Chicago addresses in CPS enrollment materials to lie about where they actually lived.

During the investigation, the parents denied living in Lincolnwood and gave inconsistent statements that undermined their credibility. They initially stated that the Lincolnwood property was used as an office for their real estate company, despite the evidence

showing that the real estate company had an established office elsewhere. In a later interview, they contradicted themselves by stating that their elderly relatives lived in the Lincolnwood home.

After the family eventually moved to a relatively affluent part of Chicago, the parents boosted their children's chances of being admitted to a selective enrollment school by lying about where they lived in the city.

Under CPS admissions policies, students are awarded seats at selective enrollment schools based on their academic performance, represented by a composite score, and their socioeconomic status, represented by one of four tiers based on location. At most selective enrollment schools, higher tiers, which represent more economically disadvantaged parts of the city, have significantly lower minimum composite score requirements.

When the family moved to Chicago, they moved into a Tier 4 neighborhood, but falsely reported to CPS that they lived in a Tier 1 neighborhood. Because of this misrepresentation, their older child was admitted to Whitney Young Academic Center despite having a composite score below the minimum threshold for students living at a Tier 4 address. Thus, the student not only gained admission to a school she was unqualified for, but also took away a seat at the school reserved for a student residing in a Tier 1 part of Chicago.

Even after the OIG interviewed the parents, they continued to lie about their address on their children's selective enrollment applications. In March 2022, the older child was admitted to Northside College Prep despite scoring below the threshold for students living at a Tier 4 address.

The OIG recommended that the students be disenrolled before the start of the 2023-24 school year and permanently banned from all CPS selective enrollment schools and programs. The OIG also recommended that CPS attempt to recoup \$138,962 from the parents, the total non-resident tuition owed for the students' time at Decatur while the family lived in Lincolnwood. Accordingly, both students were disenrolled in August 2023 and banned from CPS selective enrollment programs and schools.

CPS has also advised the OIG that it has entered into a settlement agreement with the family to pay back an agreed-upon amount of non-resident tuition.

### **Student Living in Lincolnwood Attended Highly Selective CPS Schools (22-00349)**

The parents of a CPS student violated the District's enrollment rules and policies by living in suburban Lincolnwood, Illinois, with their son while he attended Edison Regional Gifted Center and, later, Whitney Young Academic Center. The parents also falsified the student's selective enrollment applications by listing a Chicago address despite the student's residence in Lincolnwood.

In a similar vein to the investigation discussed above involving a different Lincolnwood family, the OIG found that the parents owned or managed numerous properties throughout the Chicagoland area, and they falsely claimed residency at a Chicago property that they owned but where they did not live. Property, vehicle, and utility records as well as numerous surveillances established that the student and his parents in fact lived in Lincolnwood for much of a seven-year period while the student attended CPS schools.

The investigation also established that the student's parents used a false address in a higher tier to improve their son's chances at being admitted to a selective enrollment Academic Center. In November 2021, the student's address with CPS was changed from a Tier 4 address to a Tier 3 address. In January 2022, the student sat for the Regional Gifted Exam and received a composite score high enough that he would have gained admission to Whitney Young at any tier. However, the evidence shows that the student's parents changed his address with CPS to help him gain admission into a selective enrollment school.

In April 2022, the student was offered and accepted a seat at Whitney Young Academic Center for the 2022-23 school year. On the student's enrollment form, signed by his father, the fraudulent Tier 3 address was used, even though the student was living in Lincolnwood.

The OIG recommended that the student be disenrolled from Whitney Young and permanently banned from CPS selective enrollment schools and programs. The OIG also recommended that the Board attempt to recoup non-resident tuition from the student's parents. The Board determined that the family owed \$33,317 in non-resident tuition for the student's attendance in CPS schools while living in Lincolnwood and is seeking to recoup that amount. The student was also disenrolled and permanently banned from selective enrollment schools.

### **Two Senior Administrators Violated Residency Policy, Resided in Burr Ridge (21-00721)**

An OIG investigation found that two senior administrators, married to each other, were living in Burr Ridge, Illinois, in violation of the CPS residency policy. The investigation also showed that both individuals lied on their respective financial interest statements for 2021 and 2022. Each employee resigned shortly after the OIG confronted them about their residency.

Several records established that the individuals were living in Burr Ridge since at least 2021. The records also showed that the Chicago address they listed as their CPS address-of-record belonged to a family member but there was no evidence showing that the employees lived there.

One of the employees claimed that although she and her husband owned the home in Burr Ridge, her brother was the one living there. The evidence, however, showed that this was not true. The other employee refused to sit for an interview and resigned shortly thereafter.

The OIG recommended that both individuals receive Do Not Hire designations in their personnel files and would have recommended their termination had they not already resigned. The Board subsequently placed DNH designations in their personnel files.

### **Elementary School Assistant Principal Lived in the Suburbs, Lied About Her Residency (21-00427)**

An elementary school assistant principal violated the CPS residency requirement by living in Oak Lawn, Illinois, from at least October 2020 until her resignation in August 2022. The assistant principal also lied about her residency on her 2021 and 2022 financial interest statements.

The assistant principal listed a friend's Chicago address as her address-of-record to conceal the fact that she violated the District's residency requirement.

In her interview with OIG investigators, the assistant principal admitted to living in Oak Lawn. She told the investigators that she believed she was allowed to live in Oak Lawn because she began her career with CPS as a special education teacher, which is a residency waiver-eligible position. However, employees seeking a residency waiver must live in the suburbs at the time they begin working for CPS and must affirmatively obtain such a waiver. In this case, the assistant principal lived in Chicago when she began working for CPS and never attempted to obtain a residency waiver. All the while, the assistant principal listed a Chicago address where she did not live as her address-of-record at CPS.

The OIG recommended that the assistant principal receive a Do Not Hire designation and would have recommended her termination had she not already resigned. Accordingly, a Do Not Hire Designation was placed in the assistant principal's personnel file.

### **Elementary School Assistant Principal Lived in Streamwood for Eight Years as a CPS Employee (19-00252)**

A former elementary school assistant principal violated CPS' residency requirement by residing in Streamwood, Illinois, from 2014 until her resignation under inquiry in September 2022.

The assistant principal told OIG investigators that after joining CPS in 2002, she lived in several different condominiums in Chicago. However, the OIG acquired evidence showing that the assistant principal had owned a house in Streamwood since 2006 and had lived there since 2014 (and possibly before). The investigation also determined that the

Chicago condominiums the assistant principal had claimed as her CPS address-of-record were actually investment rental properties.

The assistant principal admitted that she only stayed at her Chicago condominium one day a week and primarily resided at the Streamwood residence. She told the investigators that she believed the CPS residency policy did not require her to actually live at her address-of-record, even though she had submitted residency documents to CPS in which she affirmed that she understood that she had to be an “actual resident” of the City of Chicago as a condition of her employment.

The OIG recommended that the assistant principal receive a Do Not Hire designation and would have recommended her termination had she not already resigned under inquiry. Accordingly, a Do Not Hire designation was placed in her personnel file.

### **High School Teacher Admitted to Living in Elmhurst (21-00379)**

A high school teacher violated CPS’ residency requirement by living in Elmhurst, Illinois, since 2012 while falsely reporting to CPS that he lived in Chicago.

The teacher admitted to the OIG that he and his family lived in Elmhurst and that he knowingly violated the residency requirement. The OIG found that the teacher falsely listed a Chicago condominium he owned as his CPS address-of-record. The teacher also used his Chicago address when registering for a driver’s license and registering to vote in furtherance of his efforts to evade the residency requirement.

The OIG recommended that the teacher receive a Do Not Hire designation and would have recommended his termination had he not already resigned. As a result, a Do Not Hire designation was placed in the teacher’s personnel file.

### **High School Teacher Lived in Des Plaines Since 2015 (21-00352)**

An OIG investigation found that a high school teacher lived in Des Plaines, Illinois, in violation of the CPS residency policy. The teacher falsely reported multiple Chicago addresses to CPS to conceal the fact that he lived outside of Chicago.

The OIG obtained records showing that the teacher was living in Des Plaines, including property tax and vehicle registration records. The OIG’s surveillance further confirmed that the teacher was in fact living in Des Plaines. In his interview with the OIG, the teacher admitted to living in Des Plaines since 2015 and acknowledged that he was in violation of the residency policy.

The OIG recommended that the teacher be immediately terminated and that a Do Not Hire designation be placed in his personnel file. The teacher has since resigned from CPS and a Do Not Hire designation has been placed in his personnel file.

### **Elementary School Social Worker Resided in Norridge Engaged in Unapproved Secondary Employment (22-00373)**

A social worker at an elementary school had been living in the suburb of Norridge, Illinois, since September 2019, in violation of the CPS residency policy. During this time, she represented to CPS that she was living at her parents' home in Chicago.

When interviewed by the OIG, the social worker stated that she lived at her parents' home in Chicago but admitted to spending between two and four days each week at the Norridge residence. The OIG found that she had been living in Norridge since she purchased the home in 2019, contrary to her statement. The social worker also claimed that she rented out the Norridge house to relatives, but the OIG found no evidence of any other individuals living there.

The OIG's investigation also found that since April 2022, the social worker had worked a secondary job as a therapist without obtaining prior approval from CPS. In her interview with the OIG, the social worker claimed that she was not aware she needed to complete such a form if her secondary work did not overlap with her CPS work.

The OIG recommended that the Board immediately terminate her employment and place a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. The Board initiated dismissal proceedings against the social worker, which are currently pending.

### **School Support Employee Resided in Country Club Hills, Fraudulently Enrolled His Daughter in Selective Enrollment High School, Fraudulently Obtained a PPP Loan (22-00054)**

An OIG investigation found that an elementary school support employee lived in suburban Country Club Hills with his family in violation of the employee residency policy. The employee also enrolled his daughter at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, a CPS selective enrollment high school, using a false address in violation of CPS' enrollment and student residency policies. As discussed in Section 3.B earlier in this report, the OIG also found that the employee fraudulently obtained a PPP loan of more than \$20,000.

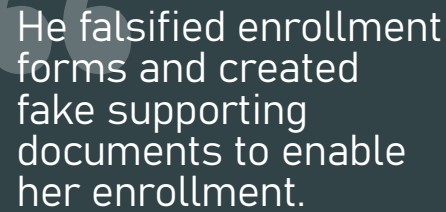
In August 2020, and prior to his CPS employment, the employee used a Chicago address to enroll his daughter at Brooks. The employee was then hired by CPS in September 2021, and he used the same Chicago address as his CPS address-of-record. However, public records indicated that the employee was living in Country Club Hills in a home that his wife had owned since 2003.

The OIG's investigation confirmed that the employee and his daughter were living in Country Club Hills. During his OIG interview, the employee eventually admitted that he has lived in Country Club Hills since 2003 and has never lived at the Chicago address.

He also admitted that his daughter lived with him in Country Club Hills throughout her time at Brooks and that he falsified her enrollment forms and created fake supporting documents to enable her enrollment.

As previously noted, the OIG recommended that the employee be terminated and receive a Do Not Hire designation, and he subsequently resigned (and received a Do Not Hire designation) after the Board commenced disciplinary action against him. With regard to his daughter's fraudulent enrollment at Brooks, the OIG also recommended that CPS disenroll

her and attempt to recoup non-resident tuition in the amount of \$33,317 plus a pro rata share of tuition for the 2022-23 school year. CPS has advised that the subject's daughter has been disenrolled from Brooks and permanently banned from selective enrollment schools and that it is pursuing recovery of the non-resident tuition owed.



He falsified enrollment forms and created fake supporting documents to enable her enrollment.

### **Elementary School Teacher Resided in Lansing Fraudulently Enrolled Her Three Children in CPS Schools, Fraudulently Obtained PPP Loan (18-00462)**

An OIG investigation found that an elementary school teacher lived in suburban Lansing, Illinois, for over 15 years in violation of the employee residency policy. While living outside of Chicago, the teacher also fraudulently enrolled her three children at CPS schools, including two at a CPS selective enrollment school, in violation of the student residency policy. The OIG also found that the teacher obtained a fraudulent PPP loan, which was discussed in Section 3.B, above, and engaged in a third form of misconduct, discussed in Section 6.G, below.

With regard to the teacher's residency, the OIG obtained records indicating that she had been residing in the suburbs for years in violation of CPS policy and was living with two dependent children who attended CPS' Lindblom Academy. OIG surveillance at the teacher's Lansing address both before and after CPS' Covid-19 remote learning period observed that the teacher and two of her daughters were living at the residence.

A review of the teacher's personnel file and other CPS records further showed that the teacher's third daughter had attended the CPS school where the teacher worked for three years.

During the teacher's OIG interview, she admitted to listing multiple false Chicago addresses as her CPS address-of-record and using false Chicago addresses to enroll her three children in CPS schools. The teacher said that she had lived in the suburbs with her children since she was hired by CPS in 2004 except for a brief period in 2014 when she lived in Chicago.



As previously noted, the OIG recommended that the Board terminate the teacher's employment and place a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. The Board initiated dismissal proceedings against the teacher, which are currently pending.

Regarding the children's CPS enrollment, the OIG also recommended that CPS attempt to recoup non-resident tuition from the teacher and her ex-husband jointly in the amount of \$320,909 for the two daughters at Lindblom and an additional \$28,032 from the teacher individually for the third daughter at the teacher's school. CPS has advised that it is currently pursuing recovery of the non-resident tuition owed.

## **G. Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility Fraud**

Each year, CPS families are asked to report their household size and income on Family Income Information Forms (FIIFs). Historically, CPS used these forms to determine which students were eligible for Free- and Reduced-Priced Meals (FRM) under the federal National School Lunch Program. Based on the information reported on the forms, students were marked FRM-eligible or -ineligible according to federal income requirements. A student's FRM status was in turn also used to determine if their school fees would be waived, while the total number of FRM-eligible students at individual schools and throughout the District were factors in determining District and school funding.

Over the last decade, changes to the federal school lunch program now allow all CPS students to receive free meals regardless of their household income. CPS, however, still collects FIIFs from families every year, and still uses student FRM eligibility data to determine how it allocates critical funding streams to individual schools. This includes CPS' distribution of federal Title 1 funds, Illinois state Evidence-Based Funding (which CPS refers to as "Supplemental Aid"), and certain other school-based operational and capital funds. CPS also continues to use information reported on FIIFs – which are still paper-based, though CPS claims to be working on an electronic version – to determine whether individual students are eligible for school fee waivers.

FIIFs thus continue to play a key role in factoring school budgets even though the forms, which are still colloquially called "school lunch forms," are no longer necessary for determining whether students receive free meals.

This year, the OIG is again reporting on CPS employees whose children were fraudulently designated as FRM-eligible. Like last year's report, these cases include both employees who intentionally falsified their FIIFs and who fraudulently obtained public benefits like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (i.e., "food stamps") and/or health care benefits. Because CPS students may be automatically designated as FRM eligible if their household receives certain public benefits, CPS employees who fraudulently obtain benefits cause their children to be improperly designated FRM-eligible as well. The OIG

continues to investigate both types of cases because of the continued significance of FRM eligibility for determining school funding throughout CPS.

### **Assistant Principal Falsified Income, Fraudulently Obtained Free/Reduced Meal Eligibility for Her Child (20-00836)**

A former assistant principal falsified her household income on her high school-aged daughter's 2017-18 FIIF. As a result, her child was incorrectly designated as eligible for free and reduced-price meals. On the form obtained by the OIG, the assistant principal misrepresented her income by reporting that she only earned \$1,000 per month (or \$12,000 annually). She also failed to report her husband's income, despite evidence that she and her husband were residing at the same address.

The assistant principal acknowledged during the investigation that her income on the form was inaccurate and that she was earning about \$69,000 (not \$12,000) per year.

She also said that she was separated from her husband and that he only lived with her for some of the time.

The OIG also reviewed an FIIF for 2019-20. The form only listed the assistant principal and her teen daughter as household members and listed the daughter's \$775 biweekly pay as the household's only income. At the time, the assistant principal was earning over \$100,000 per year. The assistant principal's daughter was once again designated as FRM-eligible. The form, however, appeared to have been signed by the daughter, not the assistant principal. The OIG obtained insufficient evidence to determine who in fact signed the form and/or whether the assistant principal was aware of the inaccurate information reported on the form.

The OIG would have recommended appropriate discipline for the assistant principal had she not already left CPS. Accordingly, the assistant principal's personnel file was flagged for issuance of discipline if she returns to CPS.

### **School Counselor Fraudulently Obtained Public Benefits from the State of Illinois and Free/Reduced Meal Eligibility for Her Children (20-00852)**

An OIG investigation found that a school counselor earning a salary of more than \$100,000 fraudulently received SNAP benefits from 2014 to 2019 and Medicaid benefits from 2014 until at least 2022 for herself and her three children. As a result, the school counselor's children were improperly designated as eligible for free/reduced meal status and school fee waivers in at least the 2018-19 and 2019-20 CPS school years.

The OIG initiated this investigation after observing that the school counselor's children were FRM- and fee waiver-eligible despite her annual salary, which was over \$100,000 as of July 2022 and had been over \$80,000 since 2014. Student records show that her

children received their FRM-eligible designation automatically because of their receipt of SNAP benefits.

Accordingly, the OIG referred this case to the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services Office of Inspector General, which determined that the school counselor fraudulently obtained SNAP and Medicaid for herself and her children. She did so by reporting that she received no income during the summer, despite federal regulations and Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) policy requiring school employees to annualize their wages over 12 months regardless of when they are paid.

In her interview with the OIG, the school counselor admitted that she obtained SNAP and Medicaid during the summer by waiting 30 days after her last CPS paycheck to apply and then reporting that she had no monthly income.

The evidence obtained by the OIG showed that the school counselor submitted false information to IDHS by failing to report both that she was employed and that she had health insurance through an employer.

The evidence further showed that the school counselor withheld her and her children's IDHS case numbers from CPS when she completed FIIFs. This suggests that she failed to report this information because she knew that her and her family's receipt of these benefits was improper and did not want to make CPS aware of her benefits fraud.

The OIG recommended that the school counselor be terminated and given a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. Accordingly, the Board initiated dismissal proceedings against her, which are currently pending.

### **Elementary School Teacher Falsified Three Family Income Information Forms by Failing to Disclose CPS Salary (18-00462)**

An OIG investigation found that an elementary school teacher whose fraudulent PPP loan and violation of CPS' employee and student residency policies were previously discussed in Sections 3.B and 6.F, above, also falsified three FIIFs for her daughters. The teacher listed a false Chicago address on the forms and failed to disclose her CPS income of over \$90,000 per year. As a result, on at least three occasions, her children were incorrectly designated as FRM-eligible.

During her OIG interview, the teacher admitted that she falsified her children's FIIFs to make them appear impoverished so that the school would receive more funding and so she could avoid paying school fees.

As previously noted, the OIG recommended that the Board terminate the teacher and place a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. The Board subsequently initiated dismissal proceedings, which are pending.

## H. Timekeeping Fraud, Ethical Violations and Other Matters

The cases discussed below cover a variety of policy violations, most of which involve timekeeping fraud or ethical violations, including violations relating to nepotism, improper political activity, and improper secondary employment. With respect to timekeeping fraud, the OIG focuses its investigations on matters in which the timekeeping misconduct is extensive, such as the first case discussed below involving a football coach who received excessive supplemental pay, in part, due to misrepresentations in his timesheets and, in part, due to poor oversight at the school.

The OIG investigates ethical violations of employees and contractors every year to preserve the public trust of residents and taxpayers. One notable case discussed below that highlights these ethics concerns involves a school counselor who used her position with CPS to recruit students for counseling services with the private therapy providers where she worked. In doing so, she breached her fiduciary duty to CPS by acting in the interests of her private employers rather than her students. She also misused confidential student information and CPS resources for her personal financial gain with her private employers.

### High School Athletic Coach Engaged in Extra Pay Time Fraud (20-00821)

A high school athletic coach misrepresented his hours when submitting timesheets requesting pay for extra work outside of regular school hours on at least two dozen occasions. In each instance, the coach submitted a timesheet stating that he had done extra work such as after-school security at the same time he was responsible for coaching duties, thereby claiming that he was in two places at once. The coach also requested and received extra pay for extra work on at least nine occasions when he apparently was not at the high school during the time when he claimed to be working.

This investigation arose out of the OIG's District-wide review of the Supplemental Pay System (SPS), which is used to pay employees extra pay. During this review, the OIG found that from the beginning of the 2016-17 school year through the 2019-20 school year, the coach was paid over \$100,000 in supplemental pay for performing nearly 3,000 hours of extra work, as well as nearly \$40,000 in stipends for various coaching duties.

Further investigation revealed concerns that the coach was leaving the high school while swiped in at work. Records from two local casinos indicated that on seven occasions, the coach was at a casino during time periods when he was swiped in and for which he had requested and received extra pay. The OIG also found evidence that the coach received extra pay on two days when he was on vacation out-of-town.

In his interview with the OIG, the coach said that he may have made mistakes when requesting extra pay but did not admit to intentionally requesting fraudulent pay. When

asked whether he had requested extra pay at times that he was not at the high school, the coach acknowledged that it was a possibility.

Separately, the OIG determined that the high school's supplemental pay policies and procedures were not sufficient to ensure that employees submitted accurate timesheets.

Administrators at the school told the OIG that, prior to approval, they compared an employee's supplemental pay timesheets with the timekeeping records at the school showing the time period when the employee was clocked in. However, the OIG's investigation found that, despite the coach routinely failing to clock in or out for work, his supplemental pay requests were continuously approved. When asked about the school's process for verifying employee supplemental pay requests, a school administrator said that she had to trust her employees to report accurate information.

Notably, the OIG has observed these types of problems managing extra pay more broadly across the District and addressed them in detail in the OIG's Performance Review of Extra Pay Rules and Procedures, which is discussed in the OIG's Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report and above in Section 4.B.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the coach, up to and including termination. The Board initiated dismissal proceedings against the coach and he resigned his CPS employment. The Board subsequently placed a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file.

The OIG also recommended that the Board provide training on supplemental pay for all staff members at the high school involved in the review and approval of supplemental pay, including the principal.

CPS informed the OIG that the school's current principal was issued a non-disciplinary memorandum of understanding and received additional training on the supplemental pay system. The clerk who was primarily responsible for handling the payments at issue was laid off, and her personnel file was flagged so that she receives additional training on this payment system if she returns to CPS.

### **Widespread Timekeeping Misconduct at an Elementary School (21-00460)**

An OIG investigation found widespread timekeeping misconduct at an elementary school involving at least 12 employees. This timekeeping investigation was conducted in conjunction with the investigation of several residency violations by employees at the school. Those residency violations are discussed separately above in Section 6.F.

Over a period of 24 workdays reviewed by the OIG, school employees clocked in and out for one another on 84 occasions. On one occasion, OIG surveillance revealed that a staff member was clocked in by another individual approximately 40 minutes before arriving at the school. Further, a number of employees admitted that they would ask to be

clocked in if they were running late, while others admitted that they asked to be clocked in to avoid having their pay docked for being late. Several employees, however, insisted that they were only clocked in by others if they were already on school grounds.

Significantly, the OIG found that the school clerk and clerk assistant were highly involved in the timekeeping misconduct at the school. During the time period reviewed by the OIG, the OIG found that the clerk improperly clocked in other employees 13 times and the clerk assistant improperly clocked in other employees 36 times. Additionally, the clerk assistant was clocked in by others seven times during this period.

The conduct of the clerk and clerk assistant was particularly concerning because their job responsibilities included maintaining accurate time and attendance records. When the OIG confronted the clerk assistant, she admitted that she had been clocking other employees in and out every week for several years. The clerk also admitted that employees had engaged in this practice of clocking in and out for one another for years. In fact, she said that several of these employees used a group chat to ask others to clock them in for their workday.

In an interview with the assistant principal, she said that she and the principal became aware of allegations of time fraud at the school a couple years ago. She said she implemented a sign-in sheet to correct the problem, but it appeared to have a minimal effect in deterring the timekeeping misconduct. She also said she asked the principal for access to the employees’ time records in the CPS timekeeping system, but her request was never approved.

The OIG made multiple attempts to interview the principal given the poor management of timekeeping during her tenure at the school, but she resigned from CPS during the investigation without ever appearing for an interview. Because the OIG found that she was violating the CPS residency policy (as discussed separately above), the OIG recommended that the Board place a DNH designation in her personnel file, and the Board subsequently placed a DNH in her file.

The information below lists the employees involved in the timekeeping misconduct at the school, the OIG’s findings and recommendations, and the Board’s response.

Employee	Finding	Recommendation	Outcome
Clerk	Improperly clocked in others at least 13 times.	Termination.	Resigned following the OIG’s investigation and a DNH designation was placed in her personnel file.
Clerk Assistant	Improperly clocked in others at least 36 times; was improperly clocked in by others seven times.	Termination.	Resigned following the OIG’s investigation and a DNH designation was placed in her personnel file.

Employee	Finding	Recommendation	Outcome
Senior Security Officer	Was improperly clocked in by others 17 times.	Termination (for residency violation).	Resigned following the OIG's investigation and a DNH designation was placed in her personnel file.
SECA	Was improperly clocked in by others nine times; improperly clocked in others eight times.	Appropriate discipline.	Resigned following the OIG's investigation and a DNH designation was placed in her personnel file.
Hourly Employee	Was improperly clocked in by others five times; improperly clocked in others 11 times.	Appropriate discipline.	Employment terminated and a DNH designation placed in personnel file.
SECA	Was improperly clocked in by others seven times; improperly clocked in others six times.	Termination (for residency violation).	Resigned following the OIG's investigation and a DNH designation was placed in her personnel file.
Student Special Services Advocate	Was improperly clocked in by others five times; improperly clocked in others three times.	Appropriate discipline.	Dismissal proceedings pending.
SECA	Was improperly clocked in by others seven times.	Appropriate discipline.	Dismissal proceedings pending.
School Security Officer	Improperly clocked in others six times.	Appropriate discipline.	Resigned following the OIG's investigation and a DNH designation was placed in personnel file.
SECA	Was improperly clocked in by others two times; improperly clocked in others two times.	Appropriate discipline.	Dismissal proceedings pending.
SECA	Was improperly clocked in by others four times.	Appropriate discipline.	Resigned following the OIG's investigation and a DNH designation was placed in personnel file.
Special Education Teacher	Was improperly clocked in by others one time; improperly clocked in others one time.	Appropriate discipline.	Disciplinary proceedings pending.

### **High School Staff Members Engaged in Time Fraud, Teacher Violated Residency Policy (20-00980)**

An OIG investigation found that a high school teacher violated the CPS residency policy by living in Indiana from as early as July 2007. Additionally, the investigation found that the teacher and a military instructor at the school swiped in and out for each other dozens of times between 2017 and 2020.

During another OIG investigation, a review of the teacher's emails prompted concerns about her residency and timekeeping practices. In her interview with the OIG, the teacher admitted to moving to Indiana in 2007. Thereafter, she intentionally misrepresented her residence to CPS by reporting that she lived at a false Chicago address as recently as 2011.

The OIG also obtained employee time records for the teacher and the military instructor for the 2017-18 through 2020-21 school years. The records showed that on 89 dates they swiped in and/or out at the same time or within a minute of each other.

During her OIG interview, the teacher initially said she couldn't remember ever swiping for the military instructor before later admitting that they had swiped for each other. In his interview, the military instructor maintained that he and the teacher never swiped for each other. The evidence obtained by the OIG, including messages between the two in which they shared employee ID numbers and explicitly discussed swiping for each other, plainly showed that the teacher and the military instructor engaged in time fraud.

The OIG recommended that the teacher be terminated and that the Board place a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. The teacher subsequently resigned after CPS initiated dismissal proceedings and received a Do Not Hire designation. The OIG also recommended that the military instructor receive appropriate discipline. The instructor was subsequently terminated and received a Do Not Hire designation.

### **SECA and Security Officer Participated in Time Fraud Scheme (21-00941)**

An OIG investigation found that a SECA falsified her time records over a period of at least three school years by repeatedly having a school security officer swipe in for her prior to her shift while she was not present.

CPS timekeeping records show that the SECA and security officer had identical swipe times on 133 occasions between 2018 and 2022. School security camera footage also showed the security officer swiping in for the SECA without her present. The security officer also admitted to the OIG that on each occasion when they had identical swipe times, he had swiped the SECA in at her request.



In an interview with the SECA, she did not dispute that the security officer had swiped in for her in the past, but nevertheless questioned whether it had occurred as frequently as what the OIG had found.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the SECA and the security officer, up to and including termination of their employment. The Board subsequently initiated dismissal proceedings against both employees, and they both resigned. Do Not Hire designations have been placed in both employees' personnel files.

### **Principal Violated CPS Guidelines on Staff Travel, Misused Sick Time (21-00592)**

An OIG investigation found that a high school principal failed to adhere to CPS' travel approval requirements when he organized and attended a CPS-funded trip to an educational conference in Las Vegas without securing approval from his network chief. In planning the trip, the principal also approved purchase orders to pay for hotel stays at a nightly rate that significantly exceeded the maximum amount allowed under CPS' staff travel policy.

In his interview with the OIG, the principal acknowledged that his network chief was unaware of the Las Vegas trip but claimed that this was because his clerk failed to inform the network chief. However, the principal was the one responsible for obtaining approval of the trip, not the clerk. The principal also claimed that he believed his trip was approved by CPS because the purchase orders relating to the trip were approved, but the OIG's investigation showed that, in fact, the purchase orders used for this trip were both generated and approved by the principal himself.

The principal also claimed that his clerk was the one who submitted the purchase orders – not him. The clerk said that the principal gave her permission to approve the purchase orders and gave her his login credentials to approve them under his name. The evidence showed that the cost of the hotel and airfare for the principal and three teachers was over \$8,000. The investigation also established that the per night lodging cost paid for the trip was more than double CPS' allowable rate of \$150 per night.

The investigation found that the principal also attempted to misuse paid time off by submitting a request to use sick time for two days when he was in Las Vegas attending the conference. The principal admitted that he was not sick on these days but instead in Las Vegas on the unapproved trip. He stated that he intentionally submitted the false sick time request because “no one at CPS investigates the misuse of sick time.”

The unapproved trip also violated CPS' Covid-19-related travel restrictions in place at the time. Prior to the trip, CPS had repeatedly communicated to principals that all student and staff travel was “on hold” until further notice because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the travel restrictions were lifted while the principal was in Las Vegas, they were

in effect at the time that he approved the travel purchase orders and on the day when he left for the trip.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for the principal. CPS informed the OIG that this matter is still under review.

### **School Counselor Recruited CPS Students to Her Secondary Jobs, Misused CPS Resources (20-01493)**

A school counselor used her position to recruit CPS students to become clients of her secondary employers, two private therapy practices. In doing so, she created serious conflicts of interest and violated her fiduciary duties to her students and CPS. The school counselor also misused CPS resources and improperly used and disclosed confidential student information in violation of the CPS Code of Ethics and Staff Acceptable Use Policy.

The investigation found that in late 2020, the school counselor began encouraging students she was counseling at school to sign up for additional counseling services from one of her secondary employers, a private therapy provider.

The investigation revealed that the school counselor attempted to enroll at least six students into private therapy services by emailing and calling students and their parents and also by enlisting other school employees to encourage the students to use her secondary employer's therapy services. The school counselor admitted to the OIG that she used private student and parent information from CPS' student information database in her recruiting efforts.

In addition to her recruitment of students, the school counselor also used her CPS email address to send at least 30 unsolicited emails to CPS administrators and other staff members advertising the private counseling services of her secondary employers.

The OIG recommended that the Board terminate the school counselor's employment and place a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file. The OIG also recommended that CPS refer this matter to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) to determine whether the school counselor's conduct warrants disciplinary action. The Board terminated her employment, placed a Do Not Hire designation in her personnel file and reported the matter to the IDFPR.

### **Elementary School Staff Violated Ethics Rules on Nepotism (22-00198)**

An OIG investigation has found that two staff members at an elementary school violated the nepotism provisions of CPS' Code of Ethics to try and obtain employment for their family members.

The school's interim principal violated the nepotism rules when she was an assistant principal by recommending her niece for hire at the school. The school's previous principal told OIG investigators that she decided to hire the interim principal's niece based on a recommendation from the interim principal. Once the interim principal's niece was hired, the interim principal continued to violate CPS' nepotism rules by supervising her niece and failing to disclose their familial relationship. In her interview with the OIG, the interim principal admitted that the only person who knew of their familial relationship was the former principal.

The investigation also established that a security officer at the school violated CPS nepotism rules by forwarding her daughter's resume to the interim principal for employment as a SECA. Although the investigation found no evidence that the interim principal's decision to hire the daughter was improper, it did determine that the security officer acted improperly by forwarding her daughter's resume and failing to inform the interim principal of their familial relationship.

In addition, both the security officer and her daughter made false statements during the investigation about the nature of the daughter's hiring. Their statements contradicted the email evidence that the OIG reviewed.

During the investigation, the OIG at one point sought to review certain student files and discovered that they were missing. The OIG therefore recommended that the school complete an audit of its student files, determine what, if any, are missing, and work to identify and locate them. CPS has advised the OIG that the school's Network Chief is going to work with the school to complete an audit.

The OIG also recommended that the interim principal receive appropriate discipline, up to and including permanent removal from the CPS principal eligibility pool. The OIG also recommended appropriate discipline for both the security officer and her daughter, the SECA. CPS advised the OIG that the interim principal received a five-day suspension, the security officer received a one-day suspension, and the SECA received a written reprimand.

### **CPS Employees Violated Ethics Rules on Political Activity (22-00273, 22-01408)**

An OIG investigation found that two CPS employees violated the political activity provisions of the CPS Code of Ethics by soliciting nominating petition signatures for political candidates while at work.

A Central Office employee violated the ethical rules by soliciting and obtaining nominating petition signatures for a candidate seeking to run in a 2022 Illinois primary election. In an interview with the OIG, the employee admitted that she collected the petition signatures at Central Office during work time. She claimed that she didn't know her

actions were “political activity,” but the Code of Ethics clearly states that CPS employees are prohibited from circulating nominating petitions during work time.

The OIG also found that the Central Office employee violated the Code of Ethics in two additional ways. First, CPS email records showed that the employee, during her CPS workday, messaged a colleague via CPS’ Google Chat and asked her to sign a nominating petition. This violated the CPS Acceptable Use Policy, which bars employees from using CPS resources for political activity. Second, the employee advocated for one of the candidates on the nominating petition while at work. The employee admitted to the OIG that when someone she personally knew passed by her desk at Central Office, she’d ask them if they wanted to sign the petition and briefly discussed the candidate’s merits. This violated the ethics provision that prohibits employees from campaigning for elective office during work time.

The investigation identified an additional nominating petition that contained the signatures of nine CPS employees at a CPS elementary school. The OIG determined that an employee at the school was responsible for circulating the petition and collecting signatures.

In an interview with the employee, he admitted that he collected the signatures at his wife’s behest. The employee said that he only collected signatures during lunch or after school. The rule on political activity, however, does not include any exception for workplace political activity performed during lunch, breaks, or after the end of the school day, so long as the employee is still on the clock. Furthermore, the employee acknowledged that he didn’t know if the employees he solicited were on the clock when he asked for their signatures.

The OIG recommended appropriate discipline for both employees, that both receive additional mandatory training on the Code of Ethics’ political activity rules, and that CPS take whatever additional corrective measures it determines are appropriate with respect to them. Accordingly, the central office employee was issued a written reprimand, and the school employee was issued a Level 1 Performance Improvement Plan.

It was also concerning that a substantial number of CPS employees, including several relatively high-ranking CPS employees, appear to have signed the nominating petitions without raising concerns about the impropriety of the two employees’ actions or telling them to stop.

The OIG recommended that employees at Central Office and the elementary school in question, many of whom signed the petitions, receive additional mandatory training on the Code of Ethics’ political activity rules. Further, to the extent that the Code of Ethics’ political activity rules are not specifically discussed in District-wide employee training modules, the OIG recommended that such training be added, including the rules regarding signing and circulating nominating petitions while at work.

The CPS Ethics Advisor advised that CPS' mandatory annual ethics training for all District employees includes a section on prohibited political activity, including soliciting nominating petition signatures while on Board time. The Ethics Advisor also noted that CPS employees received political activity guidance reminders in 2022 and 2023 that discussed prohibited political activities.

### **SECA Falsified Documents to Fraudulently Enroll His Child in School (21-00656)**

An OIG investigation found that a SECA used a fake apartment lease and utility bills to fraudulently enroll his daughter at the school where he worked.

The investigation established that, in the summer of 2021, the SECA asked his school's administration to grant his daughter employee preference and admit her from the school's enrollment waiting list. When the administration denied his request, he submitted fake documents showing that his daughter "lived" at an apartment within the school's attendance boundaries. The apartment listed on those documents, however, was a federally subsidized property reserved for elderly renters.

The investigation clearly showed that the SECA and his children lived outside of the school boundaries in a building the SECA listed as his address-of-record with CPS. Moreover, the property manager for the subsidized apartment confirmed that the lease the SECA provided to the school was fake.

In an interview with the OIG, the SECA freely admitted that his daughter did not actually live at the apartment listed on her enrollment documents and that he only used the address to get her into the school. The SECA initially lied to investigators, claiming that his current wife came up with the plan and provided him with the fake documents. However, the SECA later admitted that he created the fake utility bills after speaking with a relative of the elderly woman who actually lived there.

The OIG recommended that the SECA receive a Do Not Hire designation and would have recommended appropriate discipline up to and including discharge had he not already resigned from CPS. Pursuant to the CPS enrollment policy, the OIG also recommended that the SECA's daughter be immediately transferred to her correct neighborhood high school. The SECA — who had since been rehired by CPS — was terminated and a Do Not Hire designation was placed in his personnel file. Additionally, CPS advised the OIG that the network office for the SECA's former school had contacted the SECA to discuss his daughter's enrollment.

### **Elementary School Published Images of Students Without Release Forms from Parents (22-01074)**

A CPS elementary school's administration posted on its school website the images and names of several students even though nearly all the students shown lacked current

media release forms. The images showed the students participating in class during the remote learning period, many of whom were logged on to class in their bedrooms.

In an interview with the school principal, he told the OIG that he knew the images were being posted and that the school had difficulty collecting updated media release forms from families as the school returned to in-person learning. The principal said the school posted the photos to showcase its remote learning efforts.

A review of student files for the students identified in the website images found that the school had older, outdated consent forms on file for many students. Most of these students' parents provided consent, but the parents of five students declined consent while the parents of two students left the consent section blank.

The evidence did not show that staff at the elementary school posted the images with any intent other than to showcase the school's remote learning efforts. Moreover, the information posted – student names and images – may constitute “directory information” that generally can be distributed without affirmative parental consent (provided certain notice and record keeping procedures are followed). Finally, the principal promptly removed the images after the OIG alerted him to the issue.

In lieu of discipline, the OIG recommended that staff at the elementary school receive training on CPS' policies and procedures regarding student information, media release forms, and posting student information and work online. Accordingly, CPS conducted training with the principal, assistant principal, and clerk. The principal and assistant principal completed an acknowledgment form for this training.

### **Elementary School Teacher Worked as a Fitness Instructor While on a Paid, Health-Related Leave of Absence from CPS (21-01206)**

An OIG investigation found that an elementary school teacher worked as a fitness instructor at a commercial gym throughout her October 2021 to June 2022, health-related leave of absence from CPS. During her leave, the teacher received short-term disability pay from CPS at 100% of her salary until mid-February 2022, when her disability benefits and accrued benefit time were exhausted.

Board rules prohibited the teacher from engaging in any secondary employment during her leave. Nevertheless, the gym's personnel records, OIG surveillance, and the teacher's public-facing social media activity all confirmed that she was actively working for the gym for as many as 20 hours per pay period.

The investigation also showed that the teacher had worked for the gym since April 2004 without ever reporting it to, or obtaining prior approval from, CPS. Her gym personnel file showed that she had been continuously employed except for a short break at the start of the pandemic, and her school principal and CPS' Ethics Advisor confirmed she had never reported or obtained approval for the job.

The OIG also investigated allegations that the teacher attempted to raise money for herself online by falsely claiming that her leave from CPS was unpaid. According to the teacher's principal, the teacher contracted Covid-19 in the weeks before her leave began, and the teacher also reported that her mother caught Covid-19 and was hospitalized. The principal provided Facebook posts the teacher published which described her and her mother's illness.

In two of the posts, the teacher incorrectly stated that her leave was unpaid but did not explicitly ask for donations. In other posts (which did not mention whether her leave was paid), the teacher did expressly appeal for donations but stated that she was raising money for her mother's medical expenses and not for herself.

Records for a GoFundMe campaign established for the teacher and her mother showed that one of the mother's co-workers — not the teacher — set up the fundraiser. The campaign webpage described the mother's Covid-19 illness and hospitalization, noted that the mother and the teacher had been off work, but did not say that the teacher's leave was unpaid.

Additionally, the GoFundMe campaign was linked to a bank account jointly held by the teacher and her mother for decades. Records for the account showed transfers of donations from the GoFundMe campaign as well as several payments to a Chicago hospital, partially corroborating the fact that the mother had been hospitalized. Ultimately, although the teacher did incorrectly describe her CPS leave as unpaid on Facebook, the OIG did not obtain evidence sufficient to show that she attempted to defraud Facebook users and/or GoFundMe donors.

The teacher resigned from CPS during the investigation. Accordingly, the OIG recommended that the teacher receive a Do Not Hire designation and would have recommended appropriate discipline up to and including termination had she not already resigned. Accordingly, a Do Not Hire designation was placed in her CPS personnel file.

## **I. Cases Involving Arrests or Criminal-Background Issues**

The OIG monitors the outcome of cases in which Board employees or vendors are arrested and charged with criminal offenses. The OIG reports on these matters so that the Board can determine whether administrative discipline or other action is warranted based on the resolution of the criminal case.

Matters that the OIG reported to the Board in Fiscal Year 2023 are summarized below.

### **School Aide Charged with Felonies Relating to Home Invasion (22-00749)**

A school aide was arrested and charged with Home Invasion with a Firearm, a Class X felony. CPS was notified of his arrest, and he was immediately suspended without pay.

The investigation found that the school aide told police that he accompanied a friend to a home to retrieve property that belonged to his friend's mother, and that after entering the home, his friend brandished a gun and demanded property from the individuals in the home.

In his interview with the OIG, the school aide admitted that he and his friend entered the home uninvited while wearing ski masks and that he knew his friend had brought a gun with him. The school aide nevertheless maintained that he never possessed a gun during the incident and did not intend to rob anyone.

The school aide has been charged in the Circuit Court of Cook County with seven felony counts, including Home Invasion with a Dangerous Weapon (720 ILCS 5/19-6(a)(1)) and Home Invasion with a Firearm (720 ILCS 5/19-6(a)(3)), both Class X felonies. Based on the school aide's statements, the OIG has found that he is likely liable for those offenses based on accomplice liability.

If the school aide is convicted of either of these Class X felonies, which are enumerated offenses under the Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 34-18.5(c), he would be disqualified from CPS employment. However, CPS has advised the OIG that it has terminated his employment and entered a Do Not Hire designation in his personnel file. The school aide's criminal case is still pending.