

# Mikva Challenge IL



# State of Chicago Youth 2021

Mikva Challenge is a non-partisan, not for profit founded on the premise that youth voice and participation matter, and that our civic and political life will be stronger when youth participate and help shape their own destinies.

### **Mission**

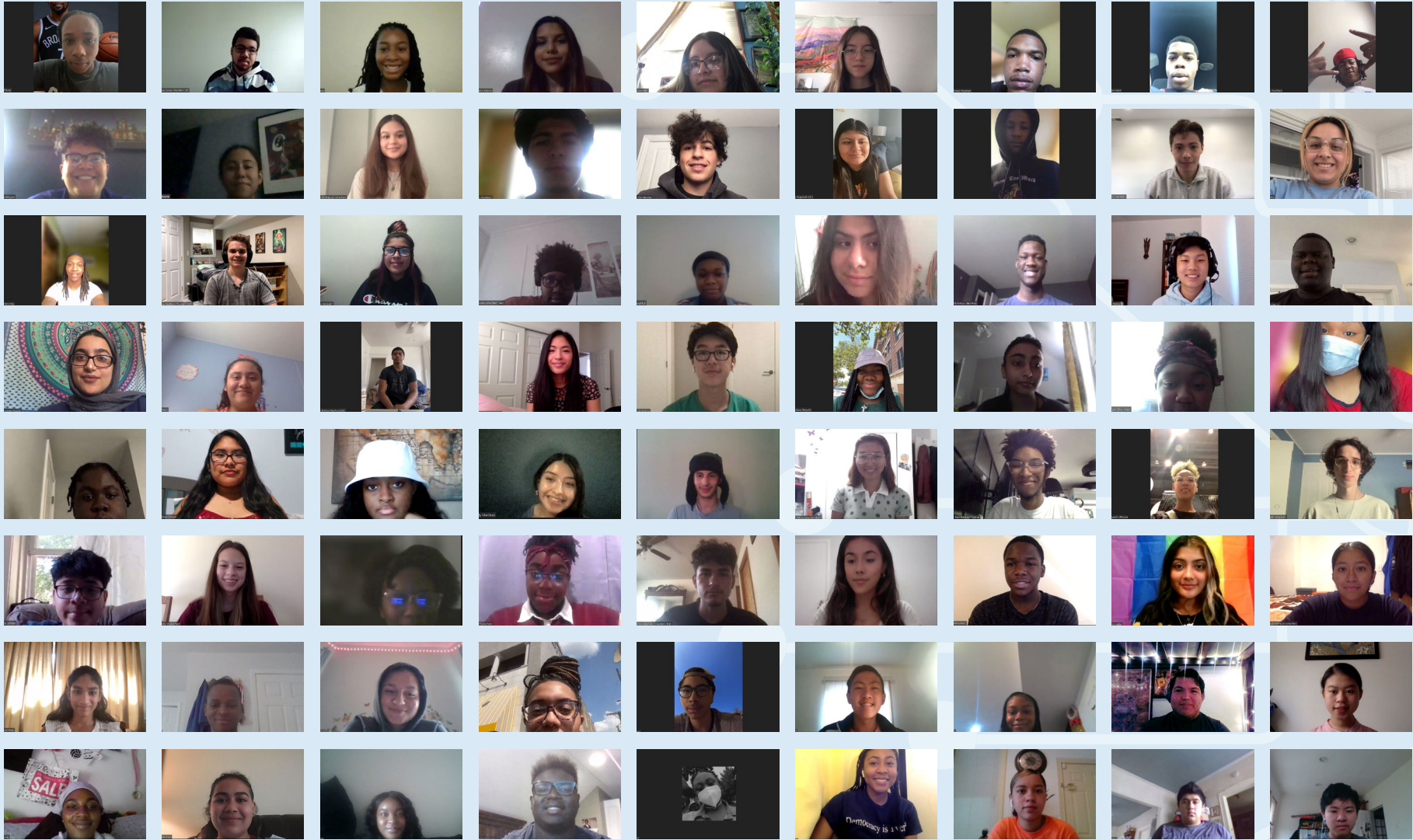
To develop youth to be empowered, informed, and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society.

### **Values**

- By intentionally reaching out to under-resourced communities and schools, we create opportunities for youth to elevate the issues that are important to them and their community.
- Policymakers make better decisions when youth voice is included in decision-making.
- Community involvement is an essential experience for young people to have a voice in their future.
- By remaining non-partisan, we make space for young people to form their own opinions and choose the candidates and issues they want to support.

Visit us at [mikvachallenge.org](https://mikvachallenge.org).

# 72 Council Members



# Mikva Challenge Citywide and Neighborhood Councils

**The councils strengthen youth participation** in the formation, implementation and evaluation of public policy in city government and in local decision-making in their communities through the creation of issue-based and neighborhood-based youth councils.

**Councils serve as a mechanism** for a broader base of Chicago youth to have input on key city and community policy and public safety decisions that significantly impact youth.

Participation is open to all Chicago students in **9th-12th grade for Citywide Councils** and students in **7th-9th grade** in the respective neighborhoods for **Neighborhood Councils**.

*\*Also includes inter-council Chicago Youth Response Team (CYRT).*

## Neighborhood Leadership Initiative Action Summer

This year, the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative completed its first ever six-week Action Summer focused on youth-led safety strategies to curb the violence within their communities. Youth across all three of our councils — Gage Park, New City/Back of the Yards, North Lawndale — came together this summer despite an ongoing pandemic and spikes in violence to take action, build community with one another, explore their identities within their communities, and engaged in different strategies for community change. Throughout the summer, youth from NLI's south and west side neighborhood councils unpacked the amplified violence that they saw going on in their communities and developed youth-led safety strategies for navigating within their respective communities. Youth were also equipped with Restorative Justice training and developed their own conflict resolution strategies in order to be able to navigate conflicts that they may experience. Council members then presented to local elected officials and District Coordinating Officers their Collective Vision of Safety and Top 10 Tips for Navigating your Community as anti-violence community resources.

## City Wide Action Councils Think Tank Summer

The Citywide Youth Councils engaged in their annual six-week Think Tank summer that focuses on removing barriers to help youth participate in the formation, implementation, and evaluation of public policy in city government. Our youth councils serve as policy experts and advocates, helping the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, the Cook County Board President, City Commissioners, and other city leaders make public policy decisions that significantly impact youth citywide. Youth gather for six weeks with their individual councils to conduct research, interview experts in the field, build community with one another, and build up their advocacy skills throughout the process. Their policy recommendations are then presented to their respective Decision Makers and stakeholders in order to collaboratively include youth voice in future policy decisions.

# Neighborhood Leadership Initiative

## Gage Park Council

Jessica Ballesteros  
John Hancock High School

Xitlali Colotl  
Curie High School

Ana Djingarov  
Nightingale Elementary School

Matthew Djingarov  
Roosevelt High School

Hugo Garcia  
Nightingale Elementary School

Alberto Hernandez  
Tamayo Acero School

Jesus Martinez  
Lane Tech College Prep

MaKhyla Marzette  
Francis M. McKay Elementary

Alexis Ortega  
Hernandez Middle School

Angel Rodriguez  
Muchin College Prep

Lizette Solano  
Nightingale Elementary School

Ricardo Tirado  
Acero Garcia High School

Stephanie Tirado  
Acero Tamayo Elementary

Kayla Torres  
Acero Tamayo Elementary

Domitila Vargas  
Acero Garcia High School

DeAngelo Zermeno  
Noble Mansueto High School

Yelitza Zermeno  
Acero Tamayo Elementary

## North Lawndale

Ifeoma Chizea-Aninyei  
Frazier Magnet Elementary School

Re'Yonna less  
KIPP Academy

Layla NDiaye  
Frazier International Magnet School

Taisja Luckey  
Multicultural HS

Frederick Milner  
Curie Metropolitan High School

Faezuan Milner  
Crown Community Academy

Travis Washington  
Legacy Charter School

Amya Anderson  
Frazier International

Londyn Robison  
A.N. Pritzker Elementary School

D'niya Fobbs  
Chalmers Elementary

Hailey Wiley  
Laura Ward STEM School

Krislyn Milner  
Dwight D. Eisenhower High School

## New City/Back of the Yards

Carlos Alanis  
Hamline Elementary School

TiMarje Amos  
Sherman School of Excellence

Saidrick Berry  
Kenwood Academy

Robyn Burson  
Daley Elementary

Layla Chacha  
Phoenix Military Academy

Ta'Mela Collins  
Richard J. Daley Elementary

Rosalinda Garcia  
Whitney M. Young High School

Naivi Gomez  
Augustin Lara Academy

Michelle Hernandez  
Whitney M. Young High School

Johanna Ramirez  
Agustin Lara academy

Sahirah Shields  
Daley Elementary

William Stokes  
Dewey School of Excellence

Martrell Wardell  
Dewey School of Excellence

# Citywide Youth Councils

## CPS Student Advisory Council (SAC)

**Meredith Joncha**

Lindblom Math and Science Academy

**Cillian Halbleib**

The Chicago High School for the Arts

**Ta'Jai Johnson**

Fenger Academy High School

**Destiny Vasquez**

George Washington High School

**Greatful Nwokocha**

Hubbard High School

**Ezzard Dennis**

Chicago Military High School

**Janet Gomez**

Benito Juarez Community Academy

**Favour Mamudu**

Sullivan High School

**Omolara Atoyebi**

Wendell Phillips Academy

**Sofia Fatima**

Amundsen High School

**Lucero Hernandez**

Carver Military Academy

**Isabella Kelly**

Ogden International High School

**Jonah McArthur**

Jones College Prep

**Justin Meng**

Northside College Prep

**Layan Nazzari**

Taft High School

**Aaron Hardman**

South Shore International

**Yacqueline Chimal**

Schurz High School

**Tommy Hawkins**

Englewood STEM High School

**Tajiuna Cooper**

Michele Clark High School

**Lynn Britton Jr.**

Curie High School

**Juviel St.Clair Jr.**

Lincoln Park High School

**Micah Kohng**

Whitney M. Young Magnet High School

## Teen Health Council (THC)

**Sebastian Alvarado**

George Washington High School

**Trinity Colón**

George Washington High School

**Freddie Foster**

Simeon Career Academy High School

**Stephanie Granobles**

Whitney M. Young High School

**A'Niaya Hall**

Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts

**Emanuel Hernandez**

Whitney M. Young High School

**Teniola Idriss**

Stephen Tyng Mather High School

**Luis Jimbo**

Noble Street College Prep

**Zara Khan**

Whitney M. Young High School

**Ely Martinez**

Victoria Soto Acero High School

**Maximilian Matthes**

Albert G. Lane Technical High School

**Gremarianne Mosquera**

Northside College Prep

**Neveah Murff**

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Acero High School

**Madeline Oktem**

Lakeview High School

**Olivia Sepich**

St. Ignatius College Preparatory

**Myesha Skipper**

George School of Newtown, PA

**Kazi Stanton-Thomas**

Latin School of Chicago

**Yotzin Tzintzun**

Benito Juarez Community Academy

**Leyoni Williamson**

William J. Bogan Computer Technical High School

## Juvenile Justice Council (JJC)

**Ahmad Herron**

Brooks College Prep

**Analise Juju Duarte**

Ogden High School

**Christopher Carter**

Morgan Park High School

**Christyana Arrington**

UIC

**Cristina Solano**

Kelly High School

**Daniela Perez**

Back of the Yards College Prep

**Fatima Mendoza**

Hancock High School

**Ja'Shawn Rozman**

Simeon High School

**Jalen Hunt**

North Lawndale College Prep

**Janiya Lanier**

Westinghouse High School

**Jesus Bakr**

Mendota

**Josue Rodriguez**

North Grand High School

**Layla Rodriguez**

Lake View High School

**Leo Smolensky**

Lake View High School

**Leonardo Jimenez**

De La Salle Institute

**Melony Esquivel**

Lindblom High School

**Micah Johnson**

YCCS - Innovations

**Octavio Montesdeoca**

UIC

**Samantha Parra**

Roosevelt High School

**Shaniya Williams**

North-Grand High School

**Xavieon Anderson**

Morton West High School

## Youth Safety Advisory Council (YSAC)

**Ali Ngabo**

Sullivan High School

**Aysia James**

Westinghouse High School

**Baraa Mohammad**

Roosevelt High School

**Chance Stegall**

Kenwood High School

**Cristian Moreno**

Chicago Academy High School

**Daniel Zhang**

Whitney Young High School

**Destiny Phillips**

Holy Trinity High School

**Eric Garcia**

Lane Tech High School

**Erica Yang**

Kelly High School

**Jaida Morris**

Kenwood High School

**Jalen Grimes**

Jones College Prep

**Jayla Knighten**

Westinghouse College Prep

**Joshua Larrieux**

Urban Prep - Bronzeville

**LaNya Rivers**

Gage Park High School

**Morgan New**

Chicago High School for the Arts

**Nina Pacheco**

North-Grand High School

**Rhomello Wellington**

Noble - DRW

**Ricardo Ramos**

World Language High School

**Shantell Knighten**

Simeon Career Academy

**Shelia Murphy**

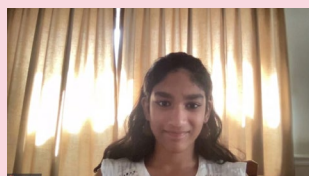
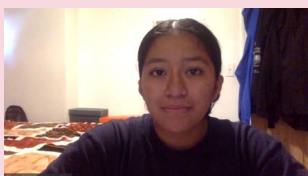
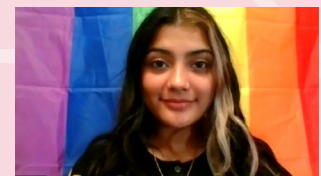
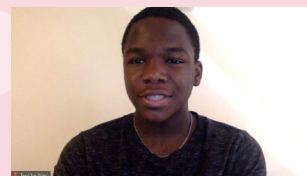
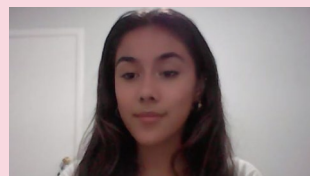
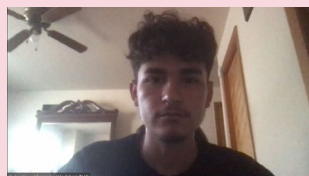
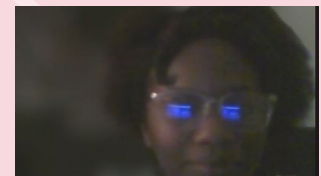
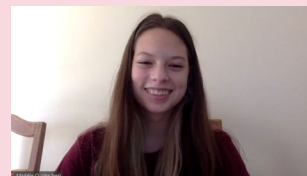
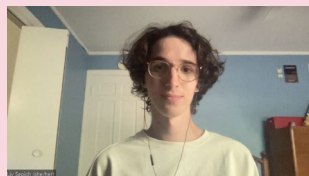
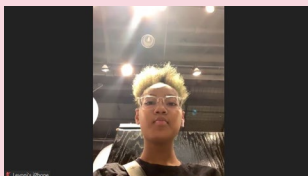
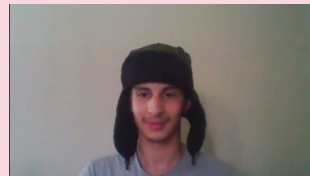
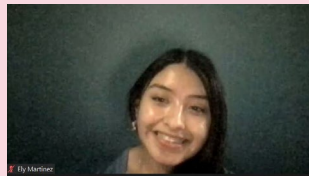
Holy Trinity High School

**Vinh Huynh**

Intrinsic High School

# Teen Health Council

In partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Office of Student Health and Wellness (OSHW), the Teen Health Council advises policies that affect the state of health and healthcare for teens across Chicago. With special attention to sexual health policy in CPS, mental health resources, and COVID-19 safety, the Teen Health Council strives to create a more equitable health environment for teens across Chicago by addressing disparities in policy.






## Summer Snapshot

The Teen Health Council (THC) is a group of Chicago youth (ages 16-18) that conducts research and creates action plans to improve the physical, mental, and sexual health of the city's youth. Through discussions with the Chicago Public Schools Office of Student Health and Wellness' (Departments of Whole Child & Health Policy and LGBTQ+ & Sexual Health Program), as well as with researchers from the University of Chicago's Crown Family School of Social Work, the THC developed policy recommendations to both the Chicago Department of Public Health and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Additionally, given the myriad of events occurring, both nationally and locally, the THC emphasized the significance of racial and gender inequities and their impact on public health. Thus, the THC's recommendations are constructed through a lens of social justice and equity for all demographics of youth in Chicago.

## Framing Question

**How can youth inform and improve COVID-19, sexual and mental health policy, priorities and resources that impact young people in the city of Chicago?**

An abstract graphic consisting of white lines and circles of varying sizes, resembling a network or circuit board, set against a light pink background. The lines and circles are scattered across the page, with some forming a more complex structure on the right side.

*“It is so wonderful to see such smart young people in Chicago interested and really thinking about how to talk about health differently. To hear you talk about vaccine access and how to have mental health be part of health, and sexual health be part of health [...] I hope that this experience in the Teen Health Council has gotten some of you interested in health for the long term. We need folks just like you; folks that want to think about making systems better. Public health is about all of the things I am hearing you all care about. I love that you are raising your voices in terms of things that really matter for you and your peers’ health.”*

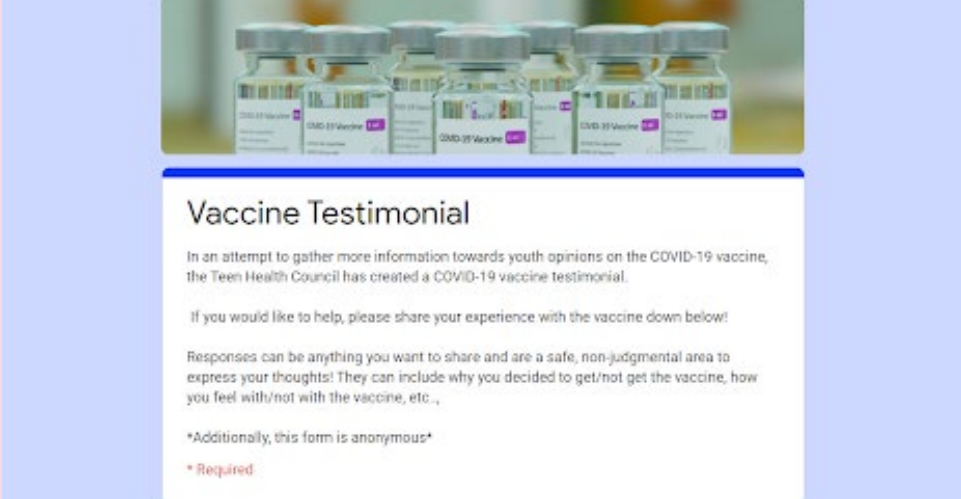
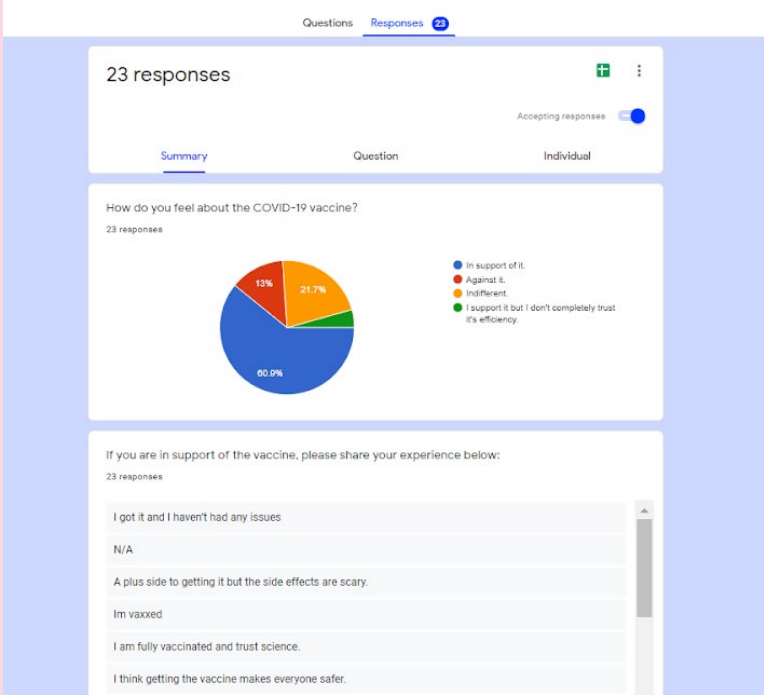
—Dr. Allison Arwady, MD, MPH, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)

# Recommendation #1: COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign, By Teens, For Teens

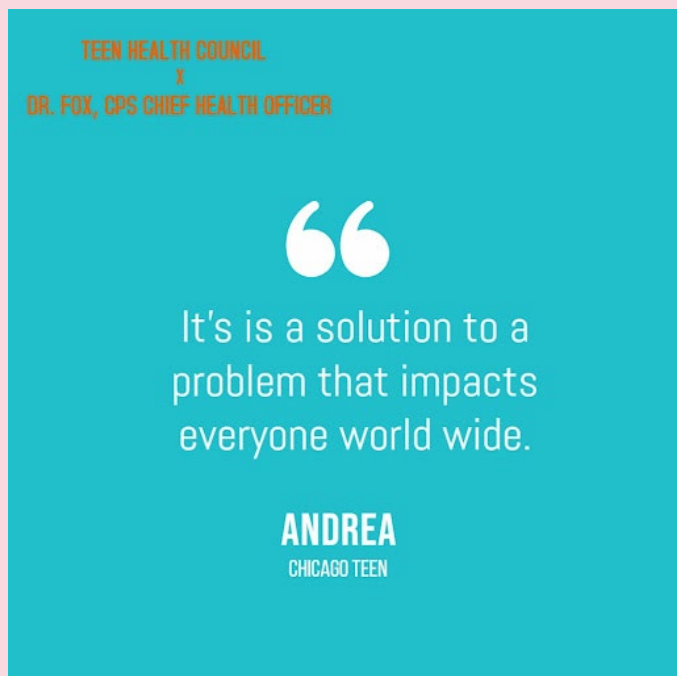
The Teen Health Council believes that the Chicago Department of Public Health, in partnership with Chicago youth, should use their social media platforms (i.e., Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to post more information to help encourage and promote Chicago youth to get their vaccinations. For a successful outreach campaign on social media, the Teen Health Council recommends that the CDPH post youth guided content that includes Vaccine Testimonials, Guides on how to Register for a Vaccine (or where to find one), and lastly, make all information accessible to all Chicagoans by also including translated versions.

Additionally, it is recommended that testimonials from youth be used as tools to generate trust in vaccinations, and to learn more of the reasons for not getting vaccinated. Together with the testimonials, guides (posted online or distributed by mail) describing how to register for vaccines, the medical effects of the COVID-19 vaccines and research supporting their safety, and general contact information would be highly beneficial to encourage more people to get out and get their vaccines, especially by reaching people who do not have access to social media and internet.

**Figure 1: Example responses from the vaccine testimonials survey**



**Figure 2:** An example of a potential Instagram post featuring testimonials from teens.



It is also crucial that content be posted in various languages, including Spanish, Mandarin, and Polish on all social media platforms, which would broaden the scope of youth reached by the campaign. In addition to the multilingual nature of the social media posts, it is recommended that the aforementioned social media campaign be run by a group of students, such as members of the Teen Health Council, with a potential adult supervisor if needed.

## Why it's Important

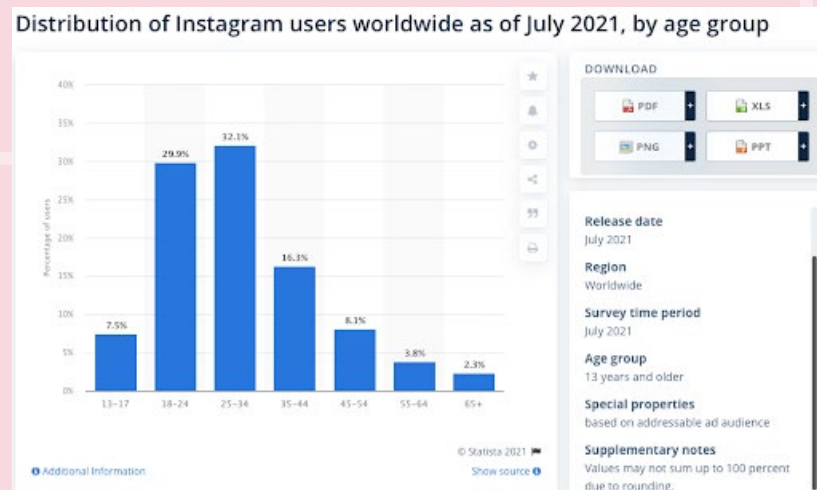
Through the use of testimonials, especially those coming from youth, it will increase youth-led encouragement between people of their age. Furthermore, a study from BigCommerce on testimonials found that 72% of consumers say positive testimonials and reviews generate more trust with the business. Testimonials will provide a sense of legitimacy between the youth of the city. In many situations, like that of vaccinations, many people refrain from an action due to not knowing enough about it or its outcome, and these testimonials would serve as a tool to combat that issue and to gain further personal knowledge on why people aren't getting vaccinated.

Along with testimonials, Vaccination Informational Guides are important in their ability to aid in debunking common myths, answer frequently asked questions, and provide information on how to register for a vaccine, which many find confusion in. The distribution of these by mail would also be highly beneficial in closing the digital divide, by giving access to those who do not have internet access.

As for the variation in language translation of social media posts, Chicago is well known for its great diversity. As such, creating translations would work to provide equitable accessibility and understanding of reliable, factual information. The mentioned languages should be provided due to them being the top three non-english languages spoken in Chicago.

With Chicago's great cultural diversity also comes diversity in ages, with one of the greatest unvaccinated populations of Chicago being found in youth, with 61.5% of 12-17 year old individuals having received both doses of the shot. Having a youth led campaign would create a unique and understanding perspective. Additionally, the youth of the COVID-19 campaign have gained credibility in becoming vaccine ambassadors.

Figure 2: Instagram users by age group



## Action Steps

Being that our target audience is Chicago teens, the THC recommends using Instagram, as it provides a great platform to reach our audience (37.4% of Instagram users are between the ages of 13-25). Instagram also gives access to many collaborations due to being a platform with many societal advancing accounts. Accounts we could collaborate with: [@advancingjusticechicago](#) | [@city\\_bureau](#) | [@stustrikeback](#) | [@mikva\\_ysac](#) | [@mikvajjc](#) | [@chipublichealth](#) | [@esperanzahealthcenters](#) | [@scy\\_chicago](#) among others.

## Potential Partnerships

To ensure that this recommendation is seen through, the THC is open to further collaboration with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) to allow for youth to “take over” CDPH social media accounts, thus creating content for teens, by teens.

## Recommendation #2: Feedback for CPS' Suicide Prevention Policy Draft

The Teen Health Council recommends that the CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness adopt these recommendations into the new Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy. With the sensitive topics that this policy includes, the THC proposes changes to aspects of the new Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy to make the policy more inclusive, equitable, and well-rounded to help those in need.

The addition of a beforehand-prevention protocol to allow for lowered risk factors in students by regularly assessing all students for risk-factors, which would allow for quicker intervention from CPS mental health providers. The addition of hotlines/helplines and other resources specifically made for the LGBTQ+ community, and resources specifically made for Black, Indigenous, & People of Color would provide for a more equitable proposal.

Additionally, it is important that CPS recognize the low percentage of Asian Americans who utilize mental health services, thus deeming it necessary to create a safe environment for all with added efforts to reach AAPI students with hot/helplines and other resources specifically made for Asian Americans. Lastly, it is important for CPS to provide safe and trustworthy alternatives to calling 911 for individuals who desire such alternatives, and a separate hotline for students who identify as women.

### Why it's Important

While the policy has a strong plan for success targeting the aftercare of a suicide attempt, there are no beforehand tactics used to ensure a positive and safe environment. To lower the chances of depression and suicide ideation, schools can implement mindfulness training. Mindfulness training has been shown to help relieve stress, treat heart disease, lower blood pressure, reduce chronic pain, improve sleep, and alleviate gastrointestinal difficulties. Mindfulness improves mental health. Harvard found that mindfulness education lessons on techniques to calm the mind and body — can reduce the negative effects of stress and increase students' ability to stay engaged, helping them stay on track academically and avoid behavior problems. Training can be provided by the CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness and other SEL training centers outside of CPS include CASEL, Columbia Lighthouse Project, As for regular assessments and screenings, they should be administered to all students, as earlier identification leads to earlier intervention. The National

Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) states that "Approximately 50% of lifetime mental health conditions begin by age 14 and 75% begin by age 24." These statistics led to the encouragement of early mental health screening in a primary care doctor's office or in a school. Mental health screenings in schools allow for faculty to identify mental health conditions early and connect students with help. School staff should be able to recognize early warning signs. The THC recommends that teachers be trained to work with the community mental health system and discuss mental health concerns with the families of students. The Council wants teachers to be trained responsibly and for them to take this seriously. They should know certain things about the student that is suffering.

The addition of specific resources for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC (hot/helplines, groups, etc.,) would greatly improve the lives of those students. The Trevor Project states that "Over one-quarter of LGBTQ youth who did not have at least one accepting adult in their life reported attempting suicide in the past year

compared to 17% of those with at least one accepting adult.” Seeing a decrease in the number of attempted suicides correlates to accepting adults having a hotline filled with people who are not only accepting, but can provide LGBTQ+ specific resources, care and understanding. This would exponentially decrease suicide attempts in LGBTQ+ youth. As for BIPOC folks, it has been shown by The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health that the second leading cause of death for African Americans ages 15-24 was suicide. In 2019 it was shown that Black females, grades 9-12, are 60% more likely to attempt suicide compared to non-Hispanic white females of the same age.

Similarly, data collected by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health from 2008 to 2012 shows that Asian Americans are the least likely demographic to use mental health services, prescription medications, or outpatient/inpatient services. However, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, suicide is the leading cause of death or AAPI folks from ages 12 to 19. Additionally, according to Koko Nishi from The George Washington University, data collected from National Latino and Asian American Study indicates that Asian Americans have a 17.30 percent overall lifetime rate of psychiatric disorders, and a 9.19 percent 12 month rate. Mental health issues are prevalent in the Asian American community, but Asian American folks are less likely to seek out mental health services than white folks, largely due to stigma in the community and low awareness about available resources. Therefore, Asian American students should be made aware of resources available to them.

Additionally, students who identify as women have been provided a separate hotline. A lot of students use social media to express how they are and what they believe in. Expressing oneself can be difficult, and cyberbullying can occur because students who identify as women can get bullied or targeted. This would increase suicide rates and make folks feel unsafe. The THC has provided a separate hotline for women because if they were ever suicidal, they can call and just express how they feel.

The Teen Health Council also recommends that alternatives to Calling 911

be shared with students. According to Henry J. Steadman (Ph.D.) and David Morrisette (Ph.D., L.C.S.W.), folks in an emotional crisis formed 25% of police shootings resulting in fatalities nationwide during 2015. However, 1000 communities had CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training at the same time, a record number, which demonstrates that the presence of CITs does not necessarily mean a decrease in violence by police against those with mental health issues. As a solution, Ron Bruno, a police officer for 25 years and the executive director of Crisis Intervention Team International, told NPR that a crisis response system from the community without law enforcement in certain situations is essential. As a result, the THC has provided alternatives to calling 911 to be utilized as necessary.

## Action Steps

The Teen Health Council has gathered and compiled a list of hotlines and helplines that serve marginalized students, specifically Black and Indigenous students of color, students who identify as LGBTQIA+, and students who are Asian American and Pacific Islander. As mentioned earlier, these students have been found to have the most risk factors for mental illness and suicidal ideation, and as such require additional support. By having these hotlines posted in public areas of the school as well as having them be shared directly with students, they will have access to help when in need. In partnership with the OSHW, the Teen Health Council would like to determine the best course of action to inform students of these resources that are available to them.

Additionally, the Teen Health Council has put together a list of alternatives to calling the authorities for mental health crises, and would like to work with CPS OSHW to determine the best way to share this information to staff and students alike. The goal of this partnership is to ensure an equitable dissemination of information to all students in Chicago public schools. This can be accomplished through the use of social media accounts, mail home to students and their families, and ensuring the information is accessible to all students in school buildings.

## Recommendation #3: Feedback for CPS' Sexual Health Education Policy

The Teen Health Council (THC) recommends that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launch a student-led campaign, #KnowYourSexualHealthRights, that informs youth about their sexual health rights. The campaign would be spread around CPS' social media accounts and featured in all schools with posters, banners, signs, etc. The campaign would also include information on what students should do if they get an STI, the options are for accidental pregnancies, and more. Also, including local organizations, such as ICANI, in the process of building the campaign would help increase available resources, knowledge, and experience. In doing so, the campaign will emphasize the significance of understanding one's sexual health, curbing the spread of misinformation and mistreatment.

Additionally, in understanding the school district's goal to provide students with medically accurate, age appropriate, and comprehensive Sex ED curricula, THC recommends that CPS introduce a gradual focus on pleasure-based sexual education, as opposed to the teachings of abstinence, to ensure sex is non-coercive and safe for all parties. With this, students will be better prepared to handle relationships, develop healthy communication skills, and have more confidence when addressing sexual health. THC also suggests that students are taught safe forms of masturbation and not to shame themselves for any natural behaviors. The council would like to reach out to local organizations, such as Sexexpectations Chicago, that focus on pleasure-based sex ed to use their resources and include them in the curriculum.

Although CPS includes support in the CPS Policy Manual for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning Intersex Plus (LGBTQI+) students, as stated within II.C of the manual 4, adjustments can still be incorporated within the curriculum to create a more affirming environment for trans, non-binary, and

intersex students. One adjustment can be to change wording from "male" and "female" bodies to AMAB (assigned male at birth) and AFAB (assigned female at birth). Not all students that are male or female are AMAB or AFAB, notably transgender, non-binary or intersex students. Using AMAB or AFAB in addition to Intersex can be more affirming as it dissociates biological parts from the general "male", "female" terms. During reproductive system education, students should learn about different intersex reproductive systems and primary/secondary sex characteristics. Sexual orientation should also be introduced at the same time, along with the explanation of the spectrum of the libido which normalizes the lack of desire for sexual activity. In addition, THC believes that the lesson "HIV Now- Testing and Treatment" in the grade 12 lesson plan should not be optional. Lessons pertaining to HIV only exist within the curriculum for grades 5 and 8. One way that CPS can support its trans and non-binary students is to inform them of how they can get access to hormone replacement therapy and gender-affirming care. They can tell them about hospitals like Northwestern/Lurie's or organizations that do informed consent like Howard Brown/Planned Parenthood.

Contrary to the CPS Sex ED policy that states the curriculum, "provide strategies to support all students that are inclusive of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, race, and disability", the curricula only teaches students about these topics without providing any support to validate their identities outside of the Sex ED classroom 4. THC recommends the inclusion of more transgender/GNC representation in CPS, IDs with pronouns included, mandated gender-neutral bathrooms, the desegregation of classrooms based upon gender in Sex ED, trans-inclusive social workers, available information on where to receive gender affirming



care, and trans-inclusion in all classroom settings. As sexual health evolves throughout time, all education policies need to continue being as inclusive and aware as possible, including the new sexual health policy, to ensure schools are growing and improving. CPS can accomplish this by acknowledging that the lessons outlined within the curriculum will need to be reflected within the resources to create a safer, more equitable school district for all.

## Why It's Important

According to multiple members of the Global Advisory Board of Sexual Health and Wellness (GAB) in 2018, "Advocacy is needed to: support policy and legal change; demand equal opportunities, rights and conditions for all; promote investment in local and national rights-based sexual health services that address pleasure; demand quality of care and comprehensive sexuality education; and hold relevant stakeholders accountable." Due to the stigma surrounding sex and sexual education, students often feel uncomfortable speaking on these topics, especially with adults/teachers. Spreading awareness on their rights promotes safety, destigmatizes sex, and helps youth become more comfortable discussing their sexual health.

In terms of catering to youth curiosity, a survey of youth in Toronto by the Toronto Teen Survey Research Team found that sexual pleasure was "one of the top three topics they wanted to learn more about". Moreover, professors at the Department of Psychology in Jackston State University, divided a group of students up into three sections; each getting a different intervention - one was abstinence based sex ed, apone was comprehensive sex ed, and one as created by the professors. Afterwards, these students were asked about topics like sexual behavior, attitude toward sex and attitude toward condoms. The professors found that abstinence-only education led to "reduced favorable attitudes toward condom use" and "adolescents who receive abstinence-only education are at greater risk of engaging in unprotected sex".

According to the Center of Disease Control (CDC), Illinois falls into the 0%-24% range of schools that implement HIV, other STD, and pregnancy prevention strategies that meet the needs of LGBTQI youth. If CPS switches HIV teaching to be mandatory instead of optional, students will be educated on the virus which helps destigmatize it, creating a safer environment for everyone. If HIV education stays optional and a school opts out, students will have had no experience with HIV teaching throughout their schooling. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) found that only 33.5% of Illinois secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8. The Human Rights Campaign has found that 85% of parents support the discussion of sexual orientation during sex ed in high school.

## Action Steps

The Teen Health Council would like to work closely with the Office of Student Health and Wellness' Sexual Health Program team to implement the aforementioned recommendations. Seeing as these recommendations and related programs directly affect youth, it is important to have youth voice be a central part of the revision process, especially considering that the Teen Health Council has already established a close working relationship with the Sexual Health Program team. This partnership will ensure a smoother revision process and will maximize input of youth voice in the revisions.

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# Thank you!

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Mikva Challenge is grateful to institutions for giving youth a seat at the decision-making table. Our youth have advised various government agencies across Chicago including the Office of the Cook County Board President, Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Police Department's Independent Monitoring Team, the Chicago Department of Public Health, the Chicago Police Department's 9th District Coordinating Officers, 16th Ward Alderman Stephanie Coleman, and 24th Ward Alderman Michael Scott, Jr..

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