



Forrest Claypool
Chief Executive Officer

Janice K. Jackson
Chief Education Officer

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Dear Principals and LSC members:

When we introduced a new approach for funding diverse learners earlier this year, many of you had questions about how the system would work. We're pleased to report that most of you adapted quickly to the principle that diverse learners' needs should be put first, both by scheduling their classes first and funding their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) first.

We also wanted to share more information about the thinking that informs our approach. Over the past year, we worked with subject matter experts to evaluate the success of the District's investments in special education, and where we can improve. While CPS has increased special education funding by more than \$130 million over the past four years, and added nearly 1,000 additional special education staff, academic growth for students with IEPs remains stubbornly flat – a fact that is even more frustrating given the significant gains in the achievement of general education students. Additionally, we want to guard against the disproportionate identification of racial minorities, particularly African-American and Latino males, in special education, where incorrect diagnoses could be at play.

These facts tell us that we can – and must – make changes and do better to help diverse learners live up to their potential. You can read more about the data and philosophy that guide our vision for special education at this CPS white paper, [Closing the Achievement Gap and Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities](#).

At the same time, state and federal funds for special education students fall well short of the District's special education needs. CPS is committed to fully funding all students' IEPs needs in every school – first. That's why we've used more than \$300 million a year in general education dollars funded by local property taxes – in addition to state and federal special education funding – to fund special education.

We would like to reiterate that if you are aware of an IEP that isn't being met, please contact your school's district representative immediately. Again, all schools were required to meet all the needs of Diverse Learners before spending any money on general education programming, so if this problem exists in any school, we will work to address the underlying factors that caused any student's IEP needs to go unmet. If you have additional concerns, please contact CPS' Office of Diverse Learner Supports and Services at (773) 553-1800.

Over the course of the year, IEP minutes fluctuate up and down across schools, as does spending to meet these needs. The 4 percent funding that many of you have asked about addresses these changes in minutes and students across the system. To help illustrate why this is necessary, here is one example of the changing IEP minutes over the course of the year. From 20th day in October 2015 to the end of the year, CPS added 2,878 students with special education needs. That increase is similar to the previous four years – and we expect a similar trend this school year, including similar overall spending.

Finally, we will continue to work with you as you have additional funding needs. To date, CPS has granted nearly \$2.8 million in additional funding to meet unique school communities' needs.





As school leaders, you know better than anyone how to best serve all students, and we appreciate all that you do to make sure that all students can succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Forrest Claypool".

Forrest Claypool
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Schools

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Janice K. Jackson".

Dr. Janice K. Jackson
Chief Education Officer
Chicago Public Schools