



First Generation
Scholars Network

First Gen Symposium

Monday, March 11, 2024

Student Stories: “Nothing about us without us”

- James I. Charlton

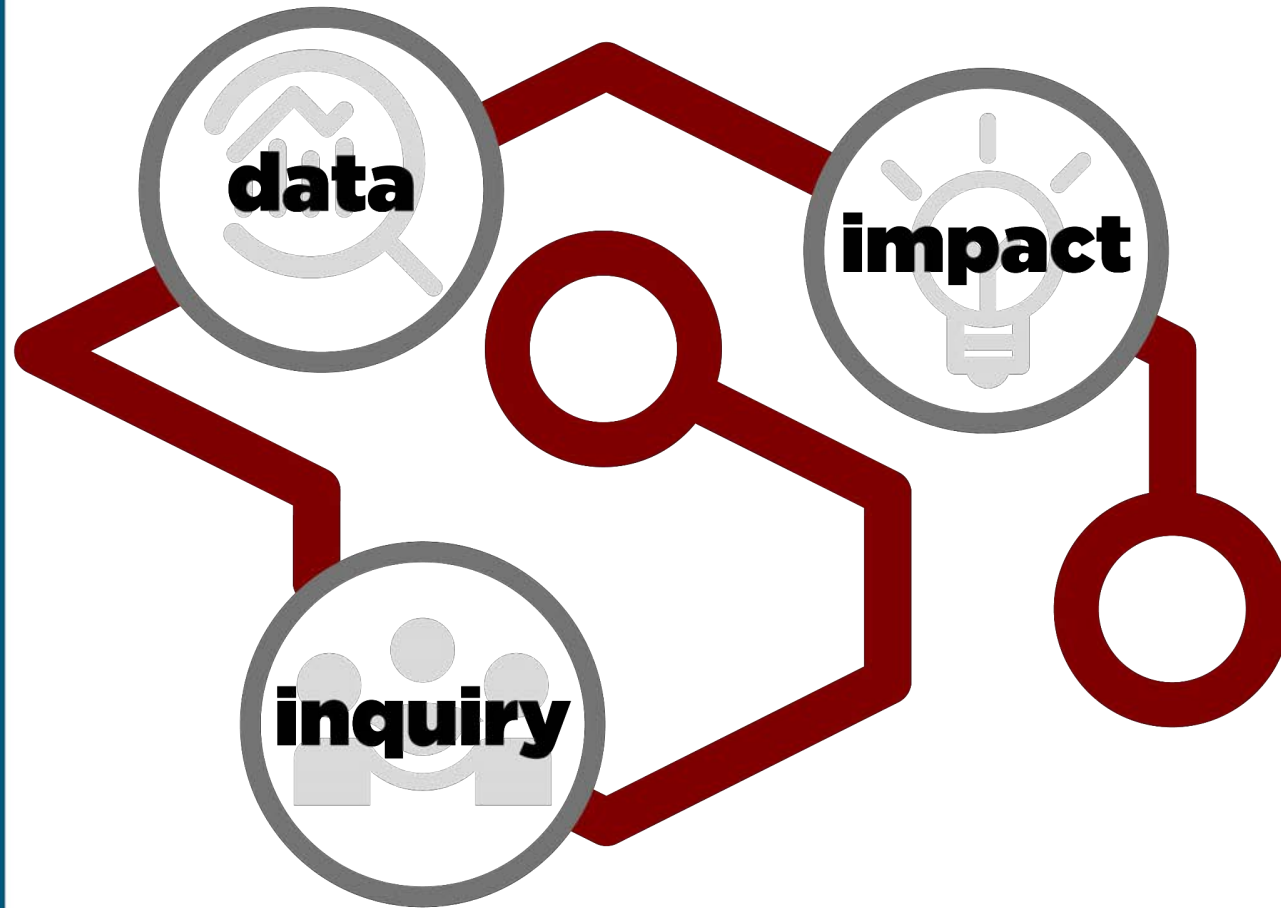
Yessica Guadalupe Vargas



**the
To&Through
project**



the To&Through project



We analyze and share **quantitative and qualitative data** on the educational journeys of Chicago Public Schools students



We work **alongside education stakeholders** from across the system **to make meaning of data** in ways that support and shift practice



We help realize **equitable learning experiences, pathways, and outcomes** for CPS students from the middle grades through college graduation



Street Data

A NEXT-GENERATION MODEL FOR
Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation

SHANE SAFIR | JAMILA DUGAN

Foreword by Christopher Emdin



RESEARCH REPORT MAY 2021

Navigating the Maze

Understanding CPS Graduates' Paths Through College

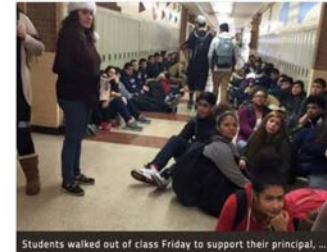
SOUTH CHICAGO & EAST SIDE Education

Washington High Students Stage Sit-in To Fight Ouster of Beloved Principal

By Joe Ward and Alex Nitkin | December 18, 2015
1:20pm | Updated on December 18, 2015 7:01pm

EAST SIDE — Angry over their principal being ousted, George Washington High School students on Friday staged a sit-in to protest his contract non-renewal at the hands of the Local School Council.

Students left class at around 10:30 a.m. Friday at Washington, 3535 E. 114th St., and sat in the hallways, refusing to go back to class, students and parents said.



Students walked out of class Friday to support their principal. ...
View Full Caption submitted photo

More than 300 of the school's 1,500 students walked out of class Friday, said Jessica



SVC

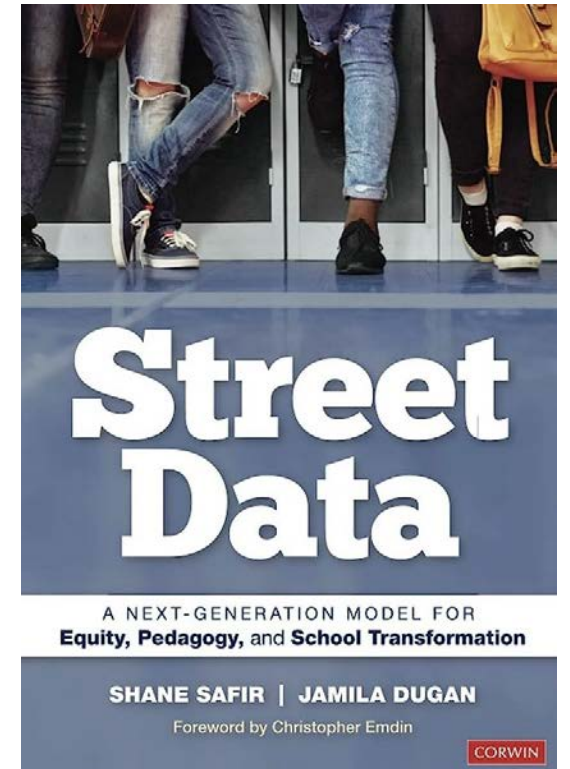
LSC



Why Stories?

“With a qualitative approach to data that prioritizes deep listening and centers the stories and real lived experiences of students and educators, we believe that ‘Data can be humanizing, Data can be liberatory, Data can be healing’”

- Shane Safir & Jamila Dugan



Student Stories are
real accounts from
real students

Values

Embrace
Complexities

Honor Triumphs &
Struggles

Elevate their voice
+ ideas

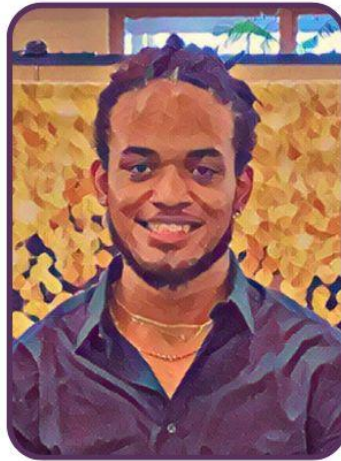
The series so far...



Navigating the Maze

Written by Adayan Munsuarrietta

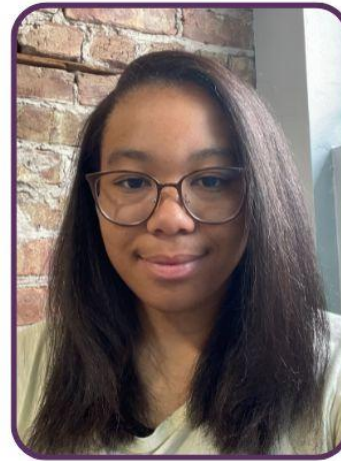
Led by: May Malone
2021
(5 Stories)



Life Beyond High School

Written by Arturo Ballesteros & Ashley Fung

Led by: May Malone
2022
(9 Stories)



Growing Pains & Gain from Middle Grades

Written by Yessica Guadalupe Vargas

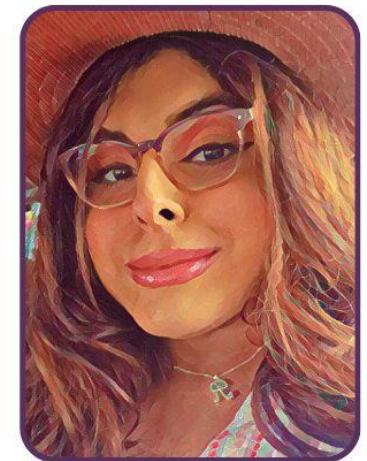
2023
(4 stories)



Connecting & Guiding Alumni towards Graduation

Written by Noor Myran

2023
(3 stories)



Class of '?' Graduating in four (or more) years

Written by Yessica Guadalupe Vargas

2023
(6 stories)

The series so far...

CPS graduates who have either taken time off of school or have attended multiple colleges reflect on their non-linear pathway towards their

Navigating the Maze

Written by Adayan Munsuarrietta
Led by: May Malone
2021
(5 Stories)

CPS graduates who pursued various of post secondary tracks share insights into the relationships & supports crucial to their growth and success during and after high school

Life Beyond High School

Written by Arturo Ballesteros & Ashley Fung
Led by: May Malone
2022
(9 Stories)

CPS graduates either currently enrolled or recently graduated from college reflect on how their middle grades experience shaped their journey to & through college

Growing Pains & Gain from Middle Grades

Written by Yessica Guadalupe Vargas
2023
(4 stories)

Transitional Youth Leaders (TYLs) share their experience as mentors to CPS alumni and reflect on the common challenges they support students on.

Connecting & Guiding Alumni towards Graduation

Written by Noor Myran
2023
(3 stories)

CPS graduates share their experiences and hopes for how colleges can adapt to support students to graduate on their own 4 or 4+ year timeline.

Class of '?' Graduating in four (or more) years

Written by Yessica Guadalupe Vargas
2023
(6 stories)

What can we learn from
students on how to better
support their educational
journey?



First Gen Symposium



Soft Qualitative Analysis

- Synthesized all 27 Stories focusing on **two sections:**

What worked for students & their aspirations for the field

- Noted patterns and themes that tied stories together
- Highlighted direct recommendations from students



What helped students succeed...

1 Adults who students could go to for guidance

- Helping students through logistical challenges (Ex. FASFA/transferring)
- Mentors that collaborated with students to recognize their strengths, passions and honored their dreams
- Folks who offered encouragement and celebrate them throughout their journey

“The work of mentorship is going to be even more important now, because yes we have more people being funneled into college, but we also need more people willing to help guide young people through these processes” - **Yvette**

“A lot of [my teachers] were mentors to me. Even after graduating they’ll still hold my hand through the [college] process. I graduated roughly five years ago, and to know that I still got’em to lean on, it’s definitely big for me.”-**Jarfaire**



What helped students succeed...

1 Adults who students could go to for guidance

“I could go to any of [my advisors/professors] to ask a question. If I had a theory, I could go pitch it to them and they’d tell me, ‘we can make it work.’” -

Allan

“The work of mentorship is going to be even more important now, because yes we have more people being funneled into college, but we also need more people willing to help guide young people through these processes” - **Yvette**

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What helped students succeed...

2 Having a sense of community with other students

Students sharing about their experiences
with their student community

"[My peers and I] were always helping each other with class work, and if somebody missed class on a day its like 'here is the notes for this class.' We would help each other. And that's honestly how we all passed, basically helping each other." -

Zayquan

"When I moved from India I was so scared to make friends, but when I came here it was a whole different story. I made friends easily and I have these two good friends... they're some of the best things I got from high school." - **Syed**



What helped students succeed...

2 Having a sense of community with other students

Students experiencing the lack of a student community

“I kind of felt pretty much alone, and that kind of took a toll on me as the school year progressed...Because I also had to work, I couldn’t really do any activities that I wanted to do there.”- **Nancy**

“Most of my life, I was surrounded by students who were like me or looked like me in terms of ethnicity, in terms of socioeconomic background, [but] going to university definitely changed that... Being Latino I became the minority, and it was very obvious that I was a minority. In every classroom there [were] probably two, maybe one, other students that looked like me. That was definitely a little scary, and I had to get used to that.”- **Sergio**



What helped students succeed...

3 Adults seeing students as people and caring about their holistic well-being

- Students need to feel that an adult cares about their holistic well being including their emotional well-being

“That guardian angel, even if it’s a teacher... the janitor, anybody really who has a love or care for you.” - **Sean**

“[My mentor] was very kind. They were the first to say, ‘it’s okay to not have everything together. It’s okay not to know what you wanna do. You don’t have to have all the answers.’ That for me was like a super validating cause in my household; we never talked about mental health. We didn’t talk about changing what you wanna do... **They were the first person to actually number one validate my identity first of all, and then to also validate the fact that, ‘it’s okay to fuck up. It’s okay to mess up.’**” - **Nicole**



Grow-Spots for High Schools

Students **wished** they had more...



1 Honest conversations and information about all their options

- Students want to know the details on post-secondary options easily and earlier on
- Students found talking to older alumni helpful (student panels, relatives, peer mentors)

“I was able to ask [Sergeant Major] anything... the ins, the outs, the bads, the goods, and I think that’s what pushed me out there. Knowing that someone was being honest and straightforward with me... I thought it would set me up to go further than what I’d ever seen for myself.” - **Jarfaire**

Kenia’s support team helped her see how “there’s still so many opportunities to grow” beyond pursuing a college degree.

Students wished they had more...



2

Opportunities to explore their passions and career interests

“I’ve heard of engineers my whole life, but genuinely I did not know what an engineer did...So it’s important to really show students what they can do.”

- **Marshai**

“Young people need to understand that you’re not supposed to always know what you’re going to do and that’s part of the experience.”- **Karla**

“If it wasn’t for me hearing about college back in grammar school, I don’t think I would have gone.”- **Zayquan**

“I want to see more programs that help kids recognize their abilities, be proud of themselves... I want to show them [the programs are] fun, and they pay you to get work experience.”- **Jarfaire**

Students **wished** they had more...



2 Opportunities to explore their passions and career interests

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- **Marshai**

“If it wasn’t for me hearing about college back in grammar school, I don’t think I would have gone.”- **Zayquan**

- Opportunities to explore who they are and have spaces to discover joy
- Summer internships & college visits
- Validation that they don’t have to figure out their plan immediately



Students **wished** they had more...

3 Support in developing other social, professional and soft skills

How to manage coursework

Where to look for resources on campus

Resume/Cover letter support

Budgeting

Time management

How to do research in postsecondary options

Email etiquette

Active listening

“We need to address the cultural impact that people experience when they go to college. It’s an unspoken deterrence to persistence — it affects the path that students decide to take. So, don’t ignore the non-academic aspects to the success of a young adult that graduated from CPS.”- **Yvette**



Grow-Spots for Colleges



Students **wished** they had more...

1 Robust Equitable financial supports tailored towards first generation college students



Financial aid:

That increases if tuition increases -Arthur

For food/housing insecurity- Marshai

In case students have to take extra time- Allan

For Books- Ilyas

For emergencies- Kenia

Dedicated for DACA/undocumented students- Moises & Sergio

“I went to go visit and while at the visit, they saw I didn’t qualify for FAFSA. While I was on the tour, I came back and one of the counselors had called the financial aid office and they gave me a free grant for like \$2,000. So right then and there, being there and getting to know the counselors and seeing how much they were invested in me, they just made the decision very easy.” - **Moises**



Students **wished** they had more...

2

resources for students **HOLISTIC** well-being

- **Ensuring campus offers resources explicitly tailored for embracing students identities, especially Students of Color**

“The last thing I’m trying to do is to be fighting with an institution that doesn’t want to support me when they say that they want me there, so that’s why I left... It’s not about if I could or couldn’t [handle it]. I just didn’t feel like I needed to put myself through any kind of traumatic experiences in the name of trying to get a college degree.” **Kristian**

“I was really struggling in a lot of my courses. I was struggling with my mental health [between] going to work, paying for school and then actually going to school. Being a full-time student and having a full-time job was a lot.”- **Nicole**

- **More Mental Health resources**
- **Ensuring resources are available to ALL students (Commuter/Working etc)**

Students' Recommendations on how to better support young people



STUDENT VOICE

Students' Recommendations

Having a sense of community with other students

“I feel like they could have [done] more to mix [us] together,” Arthur explained, “so that way we would feel comfortable talking to each other.” - **Arthur**

“I need people to understand that the experiences for queer people are different. People of color, Black women, Black trans women, trans women in general. We suffer a lot of different things mentally. We suffer a lot of different things physically. it's not always a safe environment for people....I'm not asking for diversity training, but I'm asking for an understanding as to who we are as people.” -

Roxanne



STUDENT VOICE

Students' Recommendations

Honest conversations and information about all their options

“Students definitely need a lot of truth and honesty when it comes to the things that the schools and institutions and higher ups want for the students so bad. How do you want that for them so bad, but you can’t even begin to help prepare them for the things that you say that they should have?... It ain’t no butterflies and sugar cups out here.”- **Kristian**



STUDENT VOICE

Students' Recommendations

Adults seeing students as people and caring about their holistic well being

“Don't try to force [students] to pick one option, 'cause there are so many options... Listen to what they are saying and what their interests are and just, you know, help them with what they want to do, not what you think they want to do.”- **Drea**

“Instead of adults telling what you should be doing, it should be like 'I'm giving you this information, do you want to know this?' Everybody isn't willing to take information that someone's giving them. Especially when they are talking to you like a child. I wouldn't want to listen to it. I'm going to just turn the information down because why would I want to hear you talking at me instead of talking with me like we're equal.”- **Marshai**



Universities need to restructure their financial and academic structures, centering accessibility for first-generation college students of color

Financial aid and academic major requirements can be too restrictive and inaccessible for first-generation college students or students of color who are new to navigating academia.



Snippet of Roxanne's Journey

Explore Student Stories!

- Read the full student stories via <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/resources/cps-student-stories>
- Explore the series accompanying lesson plans and facilitators guides!
- Interested in checking out practitioners stories? Check out Learning Cases! <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/learning-cases>

Chicago Student Opportunity



the To&Through project

CALLING CPS ALUMNI!

Sign up if you would like to share your story & receive a **\$50** gift card after your 45min zoom interview!!

WHAT? the To&Through project is working on documenting student experiences in Chicago Public Schools

WHO? CPS alumni who graduated from High school anytime in 2013-2023

HOW? Sign up for an interview using the QRCode above OR bit.ly/SSPA11

Questions? Comments? Reflections?

Thank you/ Gracias!



First Gen Symposium

