

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITY REPORT

OIG 17-00326

WEDNESDAY, MAY 23, 2018

CPS URGED TO END MONTESSORI PRE-K PERK AT LINCOLN PARK'S OSCAR MAYER

Children living in the most affluent attendance area in CPS are receiving special priority access to two years of free, full-day Montessori pre-kindergarten, worth \$30,000 on average in the private market, a performance review by the Office of the CPS Inspector General has found.

CPS usually awards free pre-K based on an applicant's need. Only children residing within the boundary of Oscar Mayer Magnet, at 2250 N. Clifton in Lincoln Park, are given a unique preference in accessing free Montessori pre-K based solely on their attendance area, the OIG's Performance Analysis Unit has determined.

This is a result of CPS's 2008 decision to allow Mayer to keep its attendance boundary when Mayer converted to a magnet school with new Montessori and International Baccalaureate programming. Currently, siblings and attendance area three-year-olds get first dibs on Mayer's free pre-K. In the last five school years, they have left room for a total of only four non-neighborhood three-year-olds.

Mayer's attendance boundary contains the highest average median family income by census tract of any attendance area in CPS, an OIG analysis found. In addition, the entire attendance area is considered "Tier 4" — the most affluent of the four socioeconomic tiers used during most magnet entry-level selection processes to promote socioeconomic diversity.

The OIG found it unjustifiable that residents of the wealthiest attendance area in CPS should receive a unique priority access to free CPS pre-K, let alone to two years of free, full-day Montessori pre-K.

In a report issued to CPS officials and School Board members on April 17, the OIG recommended that CPS stop funding this perk as soon as possible and organize input from the Mayer community on other options for the school. The OIG's reasoning and detailed recommendations follow.

AN EXCLUSIVE PERK FOR CPS'S MOST AFFLUENT ATTENDANCE AREA

The Chicago School Board approved Oscar Mayer's conversion from a neighborhood school to a magnet school with an attendance boundary in 2008.

With help from a federal magnet grant, CPS stocked the school with a Montessori program in pre-K to 5th grade and a Middle Years International Baccalaureate

Table 1

Top 10 Attendance Areas by Income

Rank	School	Average Median Family Income*
1	Mayer	\$177,947.25
2	Burr	\$173,324.33
3	Agassiz	\$172,254.33
4	Prescott	\$169,824.00
5	Burley	\$160,113.75
6	Lincoln	\$156,671.29
7	Hamilton	\$147,532.50
8	Kellogg	\$145,604.00
9	Ogden	\$144,556.00
10	Blaine	\$138,322.00

*Reflects the average of the median family incomes of census tracts whose center lies within a school's attendance boundary.

Source: OIG analysis of CPS census tract income data used to create tier levels for 2017-18 admissions.

Programme in grades 6 to 8 in an attempt to boost enrollment and attract greater white buy-in from the surrounding area, CPS's magnet grant application indicates.

However, Mayer's status as a magnet school with an attendance boundary¹ currently gives free Montessori pre-K admissions preference to an attendance area comprised entirely of the most affluent socioeconomic tier in CPS — Tier 4.

Significantly, as shown in **Table 1**, Mayer's boundary also contains the highest average median family income by census tract of any attendance area in CPS, the OIG's Performance Analysis Unit found.

Montessori pre-K is a highly-coveted commodity to many parents. A decade ago, when some residents were told CPS was planning free Montessori pre-K at Mayer, their

reaction was "Wow," one former CPS official said.

Although CPS's magnet grant application envisioned the school as a citywide magnet, vocal area residents fearful of losing a citywide magnet lottery convinced CPS officials to let Mayer keep its boundary, the OIG was told. CPS officials agreed, apparently believing at the time that Mayer had more than enough empty seats to accommodate both neighborhood students as well as non-attendance area ones via lottery.

The free, full-day Montessori pre-K that Mayer students now enjoy averages more

¹ Only eight of 38 CPS elementary magnet schools, including Mayer, have attendance boundaries.

than \$30,000 over two years in the private market, an OIG survey of nine Montessori pre-Ks within three miles of Mayer found. That's excluding additional fees that at one private school ran as high as \$2,850 for a family's first enrollee.

This school year, the salaries and benefits alone of the teachers and teacher assistants in Mayer's pre-K program for three- and four-year-olds cost CPS just over \$700,000, the OIG calculated.

Taxpayers are footing this bill for some children who later go on to leave CPS. Of the 68 three-year-olds who joined Mayer's pre-K in 2014-15, nearly a third had left CPS by this school year, when they should have been in first grade. Some went on to pricey private schools or some Catholic schools in the area. Others left for suburban Northfield, Washington, D.C., and even the United Kingdom, student records show.

According to Early Childhood officials, only three other CPS schools provide free pre-K that is not need-based: Drummond and Suder Magnets, which offer two years of free Montessori pre-K, and Inter-American Magnet, which features one year of dual-language pre-K. All three are citywide magnets that use four socioeconomic tiers to select entry-level pre-K students who are guaranteed seats through eighth grade. This process gives applicants across the city a level playing field of access to these free programs.

This is not the case at Oscar Mayer Magnet.

Instead, because Mayer's attendance-area three-year-olds enjoy an admissions preference, it has become increasingly rare for children who live outside Mayer's attendance area to win pre-K seats. This past fall, all of Mayer's seats for three-year-olds were filled by neighborhood children or siblings of existing students.

In fact, in the last five school years, only four three-year-olds living outside Mayer's boundary with no siblings at the school have been admitted to Mayer's pre-K from socioeconomic status (SES) tier waitlist, as indicated in **Appendix A**.

There clearly is outsider demand for Mayer's free Montessori pre-K. This school year alone, 686 three-year-olds from outside Mayer's attendance boundary were sitting on socioeconomic tier waitlists, unable to gain entry to Mayer, as indicated in **Appendix B**.

Thus, Tier 4 parents in the CPS attendance area with the system's highest average median family income are receiving a unique admissions priority to free pre-K, worth at least \$30,000 over two years in the private market.

Meanwhile, hundreds of parents residing outside Mayer's boundary who would like their children to attend Mayer's free Montessori pre-K are battling an annual

admissions process that is stacked against them in a way not encountered by applicants to Suder's or Drummond's free citywide Montessori magnet pre-K.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

Mayer's conversion to a magnet school with an attendance boundary was intended to attract white students to a school that was underutilized and heavily attended by African American students from outside the neighborhood, according to CPS's successful 2007 federal magnet grant application and other records.

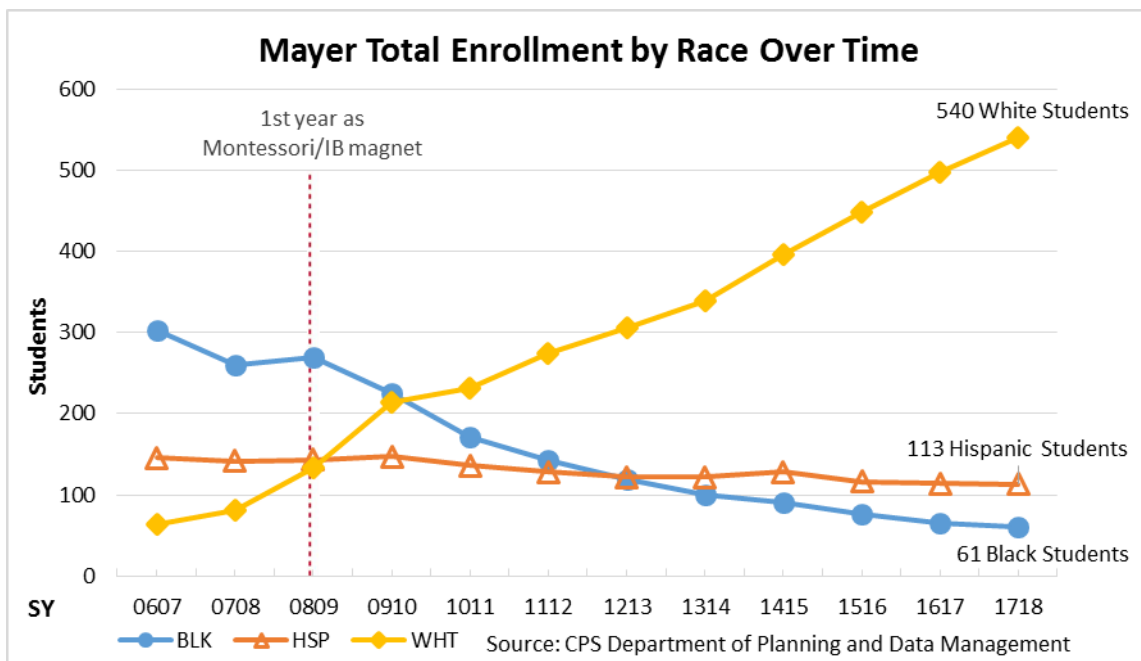
A top goal of CPS's grant application involving Mayer and four other proposed magnet schools was to "eliminate, reduce or prevent minority group isolation" and to "attract non-minority students into neighborhoods and schools that traditionally they have been reluctant to enter."

At the time, Mayer had a capacity of 948 but held only 525 students — 89.5 percent of whom were minority, the application stated.

By the end of the three-year grant, as predicted, Mayer was more evenly diverse, due largely to white student increases and black student decreases. However, CPS's grant application envisioned that Mayer's white student body would increase six percentage points over the life of the grant. Instead, as shown in **Appendix C**, it jumped 23 percentage points — nearly four times more than predicted.

Longer haul, over 10 years, Mayer's racial composition has changed even more dramatically — from 16 percent white to 71 percent white and from 52 percent black to 8 percent black. **Chart 1** shows this by the number of students per race.

Chart 1



Also over the last decade, the number of in-boundary white students soared more than 1,700 percent, as shown in **Appendix D**. At the same time, Mayer’s enrollment rose from 497 to 760 this school year. Its utilization status is now “efficient.”

A few years after CPS filed its 2007 magnet grant application, a judge vacated CPS’s desegregation consent decree and CPS switched from a race-based to a socioeconomic-based magnet admissions process. Diversity in socioeconomic status became a goal of the [magnet admission policy](#), along with maintaining, “to the extent permitted by law,” the diversity achieved under the consent decree.

Since then, Mayer’s students have increasingly come from the most affluent of four socioeconomic tiers — Tier 4. The earliest tier data available indicates that since 2011, the percent of 3-year-olds attending Mayer from Tier 4 has risen from 74 percent to 98 percent this school year. This is detailed in **Table 2** below.

Table 2
Mayer Three-Year-Old Students by Socioeconomic Tier to Date

SY	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Total	% Tier 4
2011-12	5	10	3	51	69	74%
2012-13	0	2	3	48	53	91%
2013-14	1	1	6	47	55	85%
2014-15	1	2	0	65	68	96%
2015-16	3	1	5	62	71	87%
2016-17	1	3	4	50	58	86%
2017-18	0	0	1	63	64	98%
# Change from 2011-12	-5	-10	-2	+12		+24%
% Change from 2011-12	-100%	-100%	-67%	+24%		

Source: CPS Department of Planning and Data Management

Mayer’s current schoolwide composition of 85 percent Tier 4 students should rise even more after the current eighth graders — the sole pre-magnet class in the building — graduate. This year’s eighth-grade class holds the smallest percent of Tier 4 students and the most African Americans of any grade in the building.

Thus, without any Board action, Mayer’s socioeconomic and racial diversity will almost certainly continue to move in exactly the opposite direction from that promoted in CPS’s magnet admissions policy, even though Mayer is a “magnet” school and receives funding for extra positions as such. This school year alone,

Mayer's Montessori and IB positions across all grades totaled \$1.8 million, or \$2,480 per pupil.

A PROPHETIC CONCERN

The March 2008 Board Report that changed Mayer's designation to a magnet school with a boundary contained a special caveat as "a compromise" to the fact that Mayer was not becoming a citywide magnet, a former CPS official told the OIG. This caveat required that an annual demographic assessment be done to determine if Mayer should stay a magnet school with a boundary or instead become a citywide magnet.

However, during that 2008 Board meeting, then-CPS Board President Rufus Williams raised repeated questions about CPS's plans for the school.

A Lincoln Park resident at the time, Williams knew that a large number of African-American students from outside Mayer's boundary attended Mayer. He predicted that "There may very well be a day when the neighborhood has adopted this school and everyone from the neighborhood is going to this school," according to **Attachment A**, which contains relevant portions of that meeting's transcript.

Williams worried that "after we've created this wonderful school," black students would no longer have access to it. He proposed setting aside a certain percentage of seats to ensure diversity "into posterity."

CPS officials assured Williams that Mayer's heavy minority population would keep it diverse for a while. CPS could not predict how quickly the neighborhood would embrace the school, but would monitor it in the meantime, officials said.

Williams wanted attention to Mayer's diversity somehow "encapsulated" in the Board Report so that "eight, 10 years from now, the institutional memory isn't gone." Said Williams: "[W]e may not be here eight years from now. Some of us may change."

As a result, then-CEO Arne Duncan and then-General Counsel Patrick Rocks added specifics to the Board Report about who would be responsible for the demographic report, who would receive it and when it was due. Rocks also inserted a reference to the desegregation consent decree to address Williams' diversity concerns.

By the time the Board approved [08-0326-EX5](#), the highlighted portions below had been added to it:

Attendance Boundaries: Mayer's current attendance boundaries will be maintained. Each year thereafter, a demographic assessment will be conducted to determine whether Oscar Mayer will maintain its designation as a magnet school with attendance boundaries or will be categorized as a magnet school with no attendance boundaries. The Chief Executive Officer or his designee shall submit a written report of this assessment to the Secretary of the Board on or before September 1st of each school year. This report will include an analysis of the school's compliance with the goals in the Second Amended Consent Decree in *United States v. Board of Education*, 80 C 5124.

Despite public promises from the very top and the on-the-spot insertions to the Board Report, in 10 years, no demographic assessment has ever been filed.

The Mayer Board Report was updated [in 2010](#) after the consent decree was vacated, but the special caveat requiring an annual demographic assessment was left intact at that time.

As Williams prophesized, Williams, Duncan and Rocks are no longer with CPS. None of the current and former CPS officials questioned by the OIG knew for sure, or could agree on, who was responsible for filing the annual demographic assessment. The vagueness of the language in the Board Report created an accountability vacuum.

Also as Williams predicted, in the past decade, white neighborhood students have embraced Mayer, with their numbers soaring by more than 1,700 percent, while the number of out-of-boundary as well as in-boundary black students has plummeted. This is indicated in **Appendix D**.

Williams has since told the OIG that he believes the Board Report's language was "purposefully obfuscatory." He said he would be "extremely annoyed" if he were Board President today and learned that an annual report promised by top CPS officials had not been conducted in 10 years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the OIG's demographic assessment of Oscar Mayer Magnet and other findings, the OIG recommended the following to CPS in an April 17 report:

Recommendation 1: CPS should stop funding a free, two-year pre-K program at Oscar Mayer that uses an admissions process skewed to favor the children in Mayer's attendance area — the most affluent in CPS. The more than \$700,000 a year in salaries and benefits CPS spends on a Montessori pre-K program that favors children from the wealthiest attendance area in CPS constitutes an unjustifiable expenditure of taxpayer funds given the massive number of needy children in the system and the limited nature of CPS's resources. As a result, the OIG recommends that CPS stop using attendance area preferences to assign free pre-K at Mayer *as soon as possible*. Ideally, if not too disruptive, that means by admissions for SY 2018-19. If the CEO decides to continue Mayer's current admissions practices, she should provide a written explanation of her reasoning to the OIG and the Board, as well as file annual demographic assessments about Mayer, starting this September 1.

Recommendation 2: CPS, the School Board and the Mayer community should consider other options, including converting Mayer to a citywide pre-K to 8 magnet. Mayer has undergone demographic changes dramatic enough to consider conversion to a citywide magnet, as the 2008 Board Report suggests. Other avenues could include the format at Clissold Elementary, a neighborhood "magnet cluster" school with a K-5 Montessori program and a Grade 6 to 8 IB Middle Years Programme. Additional

approaches may be possible but none should give CPS's most affluent attendance area the inside track to two years of free pre-K. For reference, **Appendix E** shows the utilization rates of nearby schools.

Recommendation 3: The CEO should work with the Board Secretary to create a joint process for future Board reports that will record "designees" charged with producing information for the Board and will track the production of such information. The answer might be as simple as recording "designees" and their required reports on a joint Google calendar. Such a system would help ensure that the CEO and other CPS officials follow through on promises they make to the Board and to the public.

CPS RESPONSE

On May 18, the OIG received a written response from CPS indicating the district will conduct a 10-year demographic assessment of Oscar Mayer by no later than August 1, and that such a demographic report will be filed annually, beginning September 1.

"Upon completion of the assessment, a determination will be made regarding the continued funding of the pre-K program," CPS told the OIG. Any changes would be implemented in the 2019-20 school year as it would be "too disruptive" to do so in 2018-19.

In addition, according to CPS, "should the 10-year demographic assessment show a need to consider changes to Oscar Mayer's current attendance boundaries," a community engagement process would be instituted "to consider all viable options." If needed, a "community engagement plan" would be developed by no later than September 1, 2018. It would be implemented from that September through January of 2019. According to CPS, "before dissolving Mayer's attendance boundaries and converting it into a citywide magnet school, all relevant stakeholders, including the Board and Mayer's community, must be provided an opportunity to provide input into the decision." Any proposed recommendations would be made at the February 2019 Board meeting.

Finally, CPS agreed to collaborate with the Board Secretary in creating a formalized process for recording future "designees" charged with producing information for the Board and for tracking their required reports to the Board.

Appendix A

Waitlist Sources of Mayer Entry-Level Pre-K Admissions in the Past Five SYs

Waitlist	SY 2013-14	SY 2014-15	SY 2015-16	SY 2016-17	SY 2017-18	All SYs
Sibling	26	32	42	17	24	141
Attendance Area (all Tier 4)	27	36	29	39	40	170
SES Tier 1	0	0	0	1	0	1
SES Tier 2	0	0	0	1	0	1
SES Tier 3	2	0	0	0	0	2
SES Tier 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	55	68	71	58	64	316

All numbers reflect three-year-old pre-K students enrolled in Mayer on the 20th day of the school year.

Source: OIG Analysis of CPS Data

Appendix B

How Entry-Level CPS Montessori Students Were Selected in 2017-18

Mayer	PE Students Enrolled 20th Day of 2017-18	Applicants by Waitlist
Sibling Waitlist	24 (Five Out-of-Zone)	30
Attendance Area Waitlist	40	70
Tier 1-4 Waitlists	0	686
Total	64	786
Drummond	PE Students Enrolled 20th day of 2017-18	Applicants by Waitlist
Sibling Waitlist	16	18
Proximity Waitlist	8	189
Tier 1 Waitlist	2	54
Tier 2 Waitlist	3	106
Tier 3 Waitlist	3	172
Tier 4 Waitlist	3	195
Total	35	734
Suder	PE Students Enrolled 20th Day 2017-18	Applicants by Waitlist
Sibling Waitlist	17	17
Proximity Waitlist	9	70
Tier 1 Waitlist	2	51
Tier 2 Waitlist	4	88
Tier 3 Waitlist	3	134
Tier 4 Waitlist	2	185
Total	37	545
Clissold	K Students Enrolled 20th Day of 2017-18	Applicants by Waitlist
Zoned to Clissold	35	Application not Required
Sibling Waitlist	1	1
General Waitlist	17	156
Total	53	157

Source: OIG Analysis of 2017-18 CPS Data

Appendix C
Mayer Students by Race to Date

School Year	Black		Hispanic		White		Total*
2006-07	303	58%	146	28%	63	12%	524
2007-08	260	52%	142	29%	81	16%	497
Mayer converted to Montessori/IB magnet under three-year USDOE magnet grant							
2008-09	270	48%	143	25%	133	24%	565
2009-10	226	37%	147	24%	214	35%	603
2010-11	172	29%	136	23%	232	39%	595
Mayer's three-year USDOE magnet grant ends							
Change From 2007-08	-88	-23%	-6	-6%	+151	+23%	+98
2011-12	143	24%	128	22%	274	46%	595
2012-13	119	20%	122	20%	306	51%	599
2013-14	100	16%	122	20%	340	55%	614
2014-15	91	14%	128	19%	397	60%	664
2015-16	77	11%	116	17%	448	66%	683
2016-17	66	9%	114	16%	498	68%	730
2017-18	61	8%	113	15%	540	71%	760
Change From 2007-08	-199	-44%	-29	-14%	+459	+55%	+163

*Includes students whose race is "Asian" or "Other"

Source: CPS Department of Planning and Data Management

Appendix D

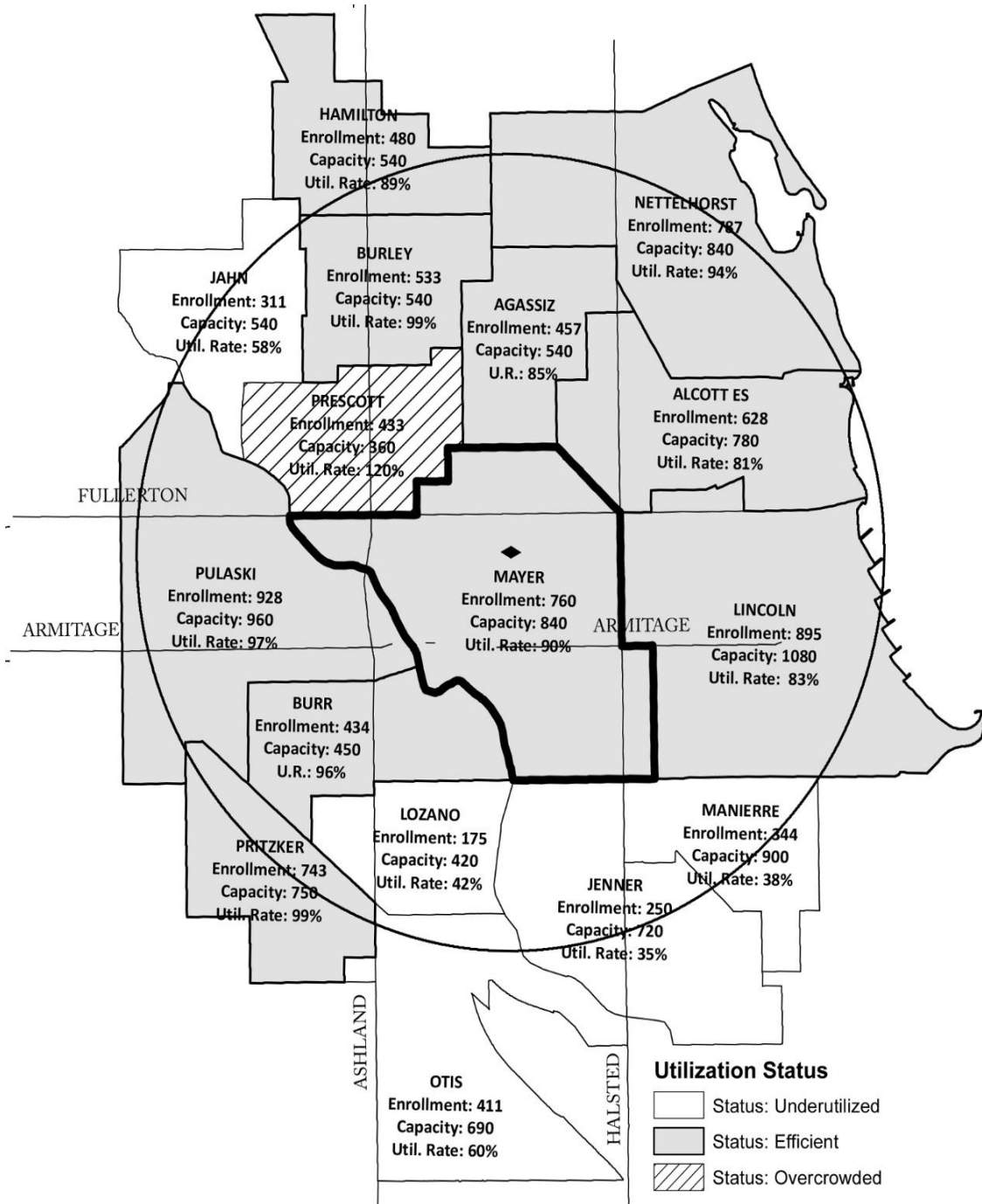
Mayer White and Black Students by Attendance Zone to Date

	All Mayer Students			Black Mayer Students		White Mayer Students		All CPS Students Residing in Mayer Zone		
School Year	Total	In Zone	Out of Zone	In Zone	Out of Zone	In Zone	Out of Zone	Total	Black	White
2006-07	524	83	441	47	256	18	45	233	65	108
2007-08	497	89	408	44	216	23	58	248	65	120
Mayer converted to Montessori Magnet Program under three-year USDOE magnet grant										
2008-09	565	115	450	43	227	48	85	259	60	129
2009-10	603	196	407	42	184	124	90	337	58	202
2010-11	595	221	374	35	137	135	97	361	46	214
Mayer's three-year USDOE magnet grant ends										
# Change from 07-08	+98	+132	-34	-9	-79	+112	+39	+113	-19	+94
% Change from 07-08	+20%	+148%	-8%	-20%	-37%	+487%	+67%	+46%	-29%	+78%
Mayer's post-grant years begin										
2011-12	595	255	340	40	103	159	115	374	49	230
2012-13	599	286	313	40	79	186	120	395	46	250
2013-14	614	325	289	39	61	218	122	428	48	280
2014-15	664	371	293	38	53	261	136	476	53	320
2015-16	683	410	273	35	42	313	135	515	51	372
2016-17	730	458	272	28	38	361	137	558	45	414
2017-18	760	523	237	32	29	415	125	632	55	474
# Change from 07-08	+263	+434	-171	-12	-187	+392	+67	+384	-10	+354
% Change from 07-08	+53%	+488%	-42%	-27%	-87%	+1704%	+116%	+55%	-15%	+195%

Source: CPS Department of Planning and Data Management

Appendix E

Utilization Rates of Schools Within a 1.5-Mile Proximity Radius of Mayer



Source: CPS 2017-18 20th Day Space Utilization Data. These Adjusted Utilization Rates adjust for both temporary classroom space and Special Education Cluster Programs.