

**OPENING REMARKS OF IG NICHOLAS SCHULER**

to the Chicago Board of Education, February 26, 2020

Over the past year, the OIG's Performance Analysis Unit conducted a review of CPS's high-stakes test for third through eighth graders, focusing on the Spring 2018 test. Last fall, the OIG submitted a written report on the results of the review, including numerous recommendations, to the Board of Education and CPS leadership. Since then, the OIG and CPS administration have discussed CPS's response to our report, and CPS has agreed to take action on all OIG recommendations.

In short, the OIG found a concerning level of unusually long test durations, high counts of test pauses and other irregularities during CPS's Spring 2018 administration of this untimed, adaptive test. This occurred in a minority of cases, but enough to be worrisome and to warrant action.

Specifically, we found that tens of thousands of CPS students are taking at least twice the national average duration to complete their tests, and some are taking three, four and five times. The test vendor has warned that excessive durations can make it difficult to accurately compare CPS results to national norms. As it stands now, CPS's average durations have been above national norms since at least 2016 and increased even more in each grade and subject in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

The OIG also is concerned that a small number of tests — about 4% — had at least five pauses each. Some were paused 10, 20 and even more times. Some of these pauses could reflect attempts to game the test, which could compromise the results.

Excessive durations and pauses can occur for benign reasons. Importantly, even if benign, such irregularities risk making CPS results less meaningful. This is a major concern, given the many ways CPS uses these results.

However, in untimed tests that carry stakes for students, teachers, principals and schools, high durations and pauses also could be indicative of improper attempts to win higher scores or gains. OIG interviews with a small sample of 20 students and 10 teachers suggested this might be the case in certain instances. To be sure, data alone cannot say whether high durations and pause counts are due to improper motives. The OIG also has not sustained here any individual cheating cases. The OIG does not have — and perhaps no office has — the resources to do a deep individual

dive into a significant number of unusual 2018 tests. Accordingly, the OIG has taken the approach that improving the administration procedures and general security of the test going forward is the far better solution from a cost-benefit standpoint.

During its performance review, the OIG had extensive exchanges with the test vendor and in the wake of the OIG's review, the vendor has published clearer guidance on some of the duration and pause concerns raised by the OIG. This further reinforces the need for swift action.

It is worth noting that many of the issues discussed in this report may well have arisen because this untimed, adaptive test may not have been designed with CPS's multiple high-stakes pressures in mind. It's possible that some unknown level of gaming or cheating sits in the mix of potential reasons for the high durations and pause counts. The recommendations the OIG has made — and which CPS is acting on — are intended to ensure that this test can be used effectively for CPS's current purposes. At some point, CPS might want to consider whether this test is the right test for its multiple high-stakes needs.