



# OPEN BOTTLES BROKEN POLICIES

A REPORT CREATED BY VOICES OF YOUTH IN CHICAGO EDUCATION

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The young people, parents, and community leaders, who participated through surveys and focus groups, for making sure the voices of people most affected by underage alcohol use are at the forefront of advancing systemic changes that will create healthier learning environments in our schools.

Jim Freeman for working tirelessly to help VOYCE youth leaders learn from other efforts around ending underage alcohol use across the country.

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Dear Readers,

We are the young people of Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) and at this very moment, millions of young people across the country are part of an epidemic of underage alcohol use that is putting our lives in danger. It's time that we talk about the need to address the root causes of why young people turn to alcohol in the first place, as well as the need to steer away from punitive approaches to discipline and toward rehabilitation and healing.

During this project, we found that many young people surveyed have said that the reason why they drink is because of stress, trauma, depression, and other mental health issues. In fact, many young people have said that they use these substances to self-medicate. This means something!

We believe that suspending, expelling, and arresting young people because they suffer from an alcohol problem is wrong. Instead, these punitive approaches just push students out of school, increasing the risk of dropping out of school, being arrested, and adding to the school to prison pipeline.

We need to start creating policies that center around addressing trauma and mental health, creating healthy relationships, and providing appropriate consequences that address root causes and treat underage alcohol use as the public health issue that it is rather than relying on law enforcement. We are the young people affected by these issues and we recommend using restorative approaches and reinvesting in more proactive resources like mental and behavioral health programs that include school psychologists, counseling, alcohol and substance abuse programs, and jobs in and out of schools.

We hope that you join us in the fight to end underage alcohol use throughout Illinois. We believe that we can lead this country in making our schools are even safer and healthier learning environments for generations to come.

Sincerely,

**-VOYCE**  
*Voices of Youth  
in Chicago Education*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) is an alliance that is organizing for education and racial justice and is led by students of color from across the City of Chicago and the state of Illinois. Since its formation in 2007, VOYCE has worked to help end the school-to-prison pipeline by using youth-driven research and organizing to advance policies that support students and create safer and healthier learning environments. While there has been movement across Chicago and Illinois away from exclusionary discipline approaches to student misbehavior and toward more restorative approaches, underage alcohol use and other forms of substance abuse continue to carry a large stigma and are still by and large treated with punitive measures instead of solutions that address the root causes of the problem. This is especially true for low-income students and students of color.

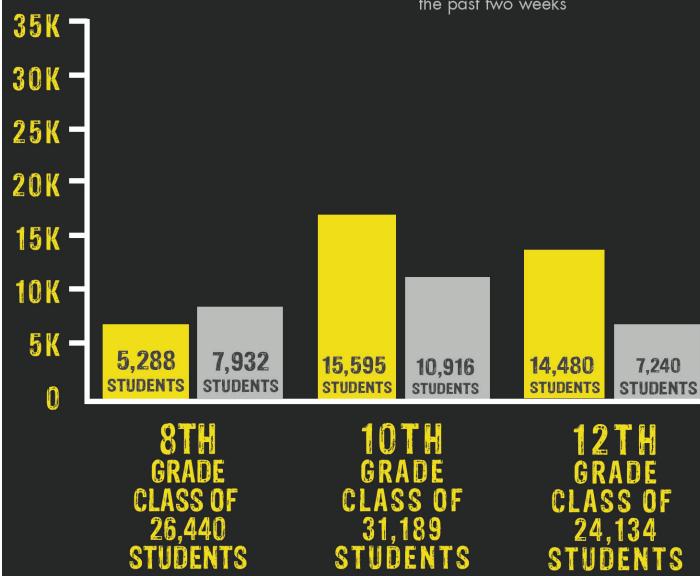
The effects of overlooking the underlying causes of underage alcohol use and continuing to rely on exclusionary discipline and law enforcement are far-reaching. The 2016 Illinois Youth Survey shows that 14,480 students out of the entire CPS 12th grade population, and more than 5,200 8th graders, reported using alcohol in the past year. Additionally, 7,240 CPS 12th grade students, and almost 8,000 8th graders, reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day in the past two weeks.<sup>1</sup>

Among Illinois high school seniors in 2016, 58% have used alcohol in the past year and 41% have used alcohol in the past 30 days. These students report that while or after drinking alcohol during the past 12 months, 15,640 students have gotten into an argument or fight, while almost 10,000 have been hurt or injured.<sup>1</sup>

With this as a backdrop, VOYCE dug deeper into these issues through a comprehensive participatory action research process. This process consisted of students developing their own research questions, which centered around why students drink alcohol, and exploring what changes to school policy need to occur to effectively address alcohol use among teenagers.

## THE 2016 ILLINOIS YOUTH SURVEY SHOWS THAT

- Chicago Public School students who reported using alcohol in the past year
- Chicago Public School students who reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day in the past two weeks



Students received Institutional Review Board training administered by Lurie Children's Hospital, and developed a research process that included a literature review, surveys, and focus groups. As a final step, youth researchers also crafted solutions based on the research and data analysis.

The beauty of participatory action research is that it involves the people who are most affected by an issue, both in the research and in crafting the solution – in this case, that underage drinking is a glaring signal that the young person is in need of healing and not punishment.

Following are a few highlights of key findings and solutions that emerged from this youth-driven participatory research process. Please see the Key Findings and Solutions sections of this report for additional detail.

- Alcohol use is normalized in the lives of young people through mass media and widespread exposure
- A majority of students surveyed stated that they use alcohol to cope with underlying issues of trauma, mental health, and stress
- Students state that positive relationships are key to making healthy choices
- It is commonplace for schools to use harsh disciplinary action such as immediate suspension, expulsion, and police involvement—including arrests—to address students who bring alcohol to school, or students coming to school under the influence of alcohol
- A majority of the students surveyed believe that 1) there should be counseling, therapy, and other solutions that help break the cycle of underage alcohol use, and 2) that using suspension, expulsion or referrals to law enforcement do not address the core issue and students will return with the same behavior
- There is a need for systemic policy change to effectively address the use of alcohol among youth including further revisions to the Chicago Public Schools Student Code of Conduct, the Illinois School Code, the Illinois Criminal Code, and increased resources so that students can be referred to appropriate mental and behavioral health supports to address the problems underlying underage alcohol use

# WHAT IS VOYCE?

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) is an alliance that is organizing for education and racial justice and is led by low-income students of color from across Chicago and Illinois. Since its formation in 2007, VOYCE has worked to help end the school-to-prison pipeline by using youth-driven research and organizing to advance policies that support students, and create safer and healthier learning environments.

VOYCE's work is driven by the belief that young people who are most directly affected by educational inequity are in the best position to develop meaningful, long-lasting solutions. VOYCE's strength and vision has always come from its courageous youth leaders. Every year, VOYCE engages over 250 youth leaders from across the City of Chicago in its transformative and trauma-informed leadership development model, building a multi-racial, citywide cohort of youth leaders who have the skills and knowledge they need to be lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and agents of change. Through their campaigns and the policy changes they have created, these young people have positively impacted millions more youth across Illinois who attend publicly-funded schools.

In addition to creating systemic change, VOYCE also prepares students for college and beyond. Almost all VOYCE leaders have gone on to college, many becoming first-generation college students. They have majored in subjects like education, political science and psychology at institutions such as University of Illinois-Chicago, DePaul University, Northeastern Illinois University, Beloit College, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

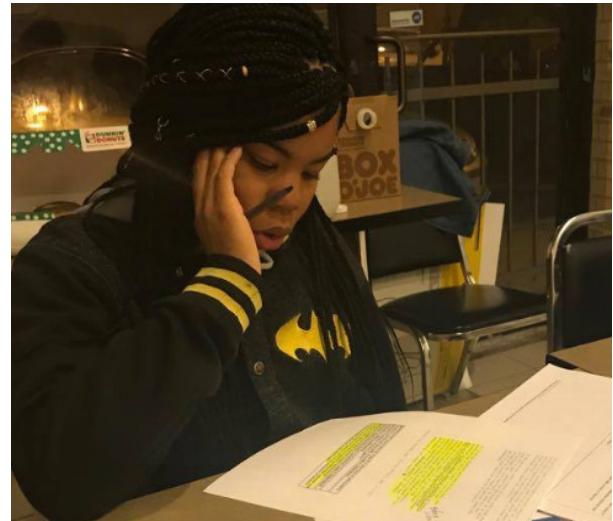


VOYCE youth researchers participating in their first youth-led discussion on underage alcohol use.

# VOYCE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR) MODEL

**What is PAR?** Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research approach centered on the philosophy that the people most affected by an issue should be a part of the solution. It is a process through which community members critically examine the problems that affect their lives and craft solutions based on the qualitative and quantitative data they collect.

Through PAR, researchers bring their own experience to the table as they conduct inquiry into their communities and lives. The youth researchers develop questions and answer them through a process of designing data collection instruments and then using these instruments to gather data. The youth researchers are then involved at every step of the research and data analysis, including identifying themes to code the data, mapping the data across different sources and other data collection methods. The transformative process has many positive impacts on the participants as they conduct this inquiry, and serves as a tool for creating meaningful social change.



Kestarra Brown, VOYCE youth researcher, helping draft recommended solutions on underage alcohol use.

## VOYCE'S RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



In July 2017, 35 VOYCE youth leaders, ages 12 to 20, launched a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project to further understand the cause of underage drinking. Within a short timeline, the youth researchers took action, developing research questions aimed at understanding the issue of underage alcohol use, its relationship to school policies, and how to effectively end underage alcohol use inside their school communities.

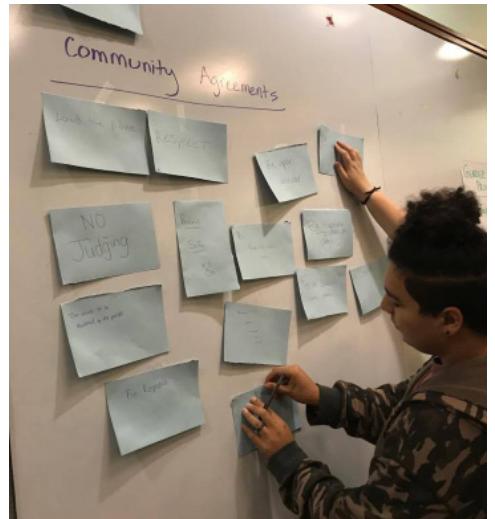
VOYCE youth researchers engaging each other on the progress of their survey collection throughout the city.

Youth researchers also received Institutional Review Board (IRB) training administered by Lurie Children's Hospital to better understand how research can impact those involved. After the IRB training, youth spent some time learning about different types of research methods including:

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Community mapping
- Ethnographic observations
- Site visits
- Literature reviews
- Qualitative analysis

By the end of July, youth researchers chose to use surveys, focus groups, and a literature review to collect data. As part of the research method, youth researchers crafted their own survey questions, identified the audience that they would survey, crafted focus group questionnaires, and were trained as facilitators for the focus groups. After a month of diligent data collection, youth researchers were able to collect over 500 surveys and hold 5 citywide focus groups totaling 50 participants between the ages of 12 to 20.

The group then entered the second phase of the research process, data interpretation. A small group of the youth researchers entered all the data and prepared for a two-day retreat that would engage the entire cohort of 35 youth researchers. During the two-day retreat, youth researchers coded themes, developed conclusions from the data, and engaged in a process to develop recommendations and solutions based on the research.



Juan Padilla, Co-Project Manager, helping to facilitate an activity to build safe space through community agreements. Community agreements are elements that young people identify that make them feel safe such as open-mindedness, respecting each other's voices, etc.

"When my uncle got out of the military he was diagnosed with PTSD and because of this, he was suffering from alcohol abuse. In 2016, he passed away because his liver stopped working because of his drinking. It was the first time I saw my grandmother cry. I don't blame him for drinking, but what happened to him showed me that drinking can literally kill you. When I was doing the PAR project and we asked students why they think people drank, they mostly said because of trauma and stress. This project was a constant reminder of what happened to my own family and why it's so important for us to not dismiss the issue of underage drinking as just young people wanting to 'party,' but it is something that young people sometimes do in order to heal, and we need to address that."

-Kestarra Brown  
18 years old

## IMPACT OF THE PAR PROCESS ON YOUTH RESEARCHERS

Through the PAR process, youth researchers were simultaneously building skills and developing social consciousness through in-depth discussions on the effects of underage alcohol use and mental and behavioral health. Moreover, youth researchers were engaged in dialogue around the critical role of young people in developing healthy learning environments both in and outside of school by being part of processes like this PAR project. Some of the benefits that youth researchers gained through this process include:

- Better communication skills in formal as well as informal settings
- The ability to reflect on personal and professional achievements and opportunities to grow
- The ability to craft survey questions, research findings, and focus group questionnaires
- The skills to conduct surveys, focus groups, and literature reviews
- Critical thinking
- Data analysis skills and interpretation skills
- Team building
- Facilitation of effective discussions
- How to conduct a successful event
- How to create and implement a “safe space”

“I have family members who suffer from alcohol abuse and they don’t get the treatment they need. It’s an issue that I have to face everyday and it’s not like I can take a break from it because alcohol abuse is a problem that will never end unless you address it. I may not be able to help my family member the way I want to, but through this project, it made me feel like I am making a difference in that issue. This is why it was so important to me to be a part of it.”

-Frank Cabrera  
16 years old



From the left, Jamara McGarry, Kaden Abrigunda, Nancy Ramirez, and Anthony Angeles showcasing the egg they protected during a team building activity known as “the egg drop.”

# KEY FINDINGS THAT EMERGED FROM THE RESEARCH

## FINDING #1: YOUNG PEOPLE STATE THAT ALCOHOL USE AMONG TEENAGERS IS MAINLY TO COPE WITH ISSUES OF MENTAL HEALTH, TRAUMA, AND SCHOOL STRESS

According to our data, alcohol use plays a significant role in young people's lives and is used as a way to cope with trauma. 64% of students said they or someone they know has drank alcohol in the past 30 days. Additionally, 64% of young people stated that they or someone they know drinks because of problems at home, or to deal with stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, and other mental health issues. Additionally, over 40% of young people stated that they or someone they know use alcohol to deal with the stress of school.

Some examples of how students answered the question "Why do you think people drink alcohol?" in their own words are as follows:

"TO FORGET THINGS/DEPRESSION"

"TO ESCAPE PROBLEMS/ SOCIALIZE"

"BECAUSE IT FEELS GOOD, GETS RID OF STRESS"

"MANY REASONS, STUFF AT HOME GOING ON, PERSONAL ISSUES, OR THEY JUST WANT TO CURE PAIN"

## FINDING #2: YOUNG PEOPLE STATE THAT ALCOHOL USE IS NORMALIZED IN THEIR LIVES THROUGH MASS MEDIA AND WIDESPREAD EXPOSURE THROUGH PEOPLE THEY KNOW

Young people are actively looking at and engaging in several forms of media. According to youth, it has an effect on how they think and behave. According to VOYCE's research, almost 60% of youth surveyed stated that media has influenced young people to drink alcohol more.

ALMOST  
60% OF STUDENTS STATED THAT  
MEDIA HAS INFLUENCED  
YOUNG PEOPLE TO DRINK MORE ALCOHOL

## KEY FINDINGS THAT EMERGED FROM THE RESEARCH

Young people state mass media including commercials, music, movies and ads create a culture that glorifies drinking alcohol. Over 40% of young people surveyed see a number of alcohol-related advertisements in their communities and believe that their communities are specifically targeted for alcohol-related marketing.

Additionally, there is widespread exposure to alcohol use through family and social networks. According to the data, almost 50% of young people know one or more people who need an alcoholic drink to get through the day. According to our survey, 61% of young people know someone or have a parent/guardian who is aware that they drink alcohol, which in many cases further normalizes the behavior as it is condoned or ignored.

**OVER 40% OF YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEYED SEE A NUMBER OF ALCOHOL RELATED ADVERTISEMENTS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.**



ALMOST  
**50% OF YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW AT LEAST ONE PERSON WHO NEEDS AN ALCOHOLIC DRINK TO GET THROUGH THE DAY**

### FINDING #3: YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY TO MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

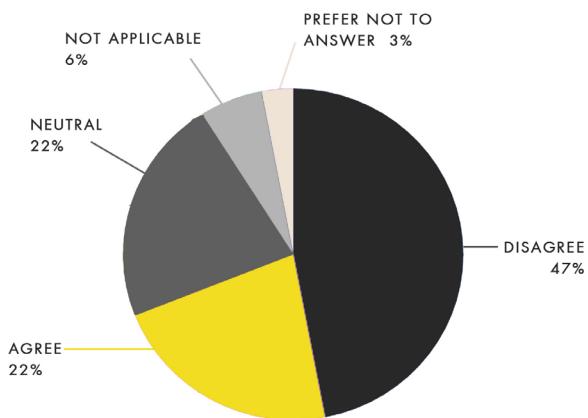
Through the PAR process, youth researchers identified that relationships heavily impact young people's decision to drink or abstain from alcohol. Relationships also have a large impact on whether or not they receive the help and support that they need to battle underage alcohol use.

According to the survey, 61% of young people surveyed know someone or have a parent/guardian who is aware that they drink alcohol. However, young people also noted in their analysis that oftentimes while a parent/guardian may know, the alcohol use by teenagers is condoned or ignored. The analysis also revealed that when there are discussions about the dangers of underage alcohol use, they often do not lead to changed behavior because of underlying issues that youth are coping with which remain unaddressed. Therefore, the relationships need to be deep enough to be able to understand and address these underlying causes, instead of just focusing on the issue of alcohol use at face value.

In addition to the ideas and solutions to address underage alcohol use, young people identified that they would like to work together with parents to collectively craft solutions that involve building healthier relationships with adults in and outside of their homes.

## FINDING #4: YOUNG PEOPLE GENERALLY DO NOT FEEL CURRENT SCHOOL POLICIES ARE EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE AND THAT COUNSELING, THERAPY AND OTHER SOLUTIONS WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE

"I THINK MY SCHOOL'S POLICY TOWARD UNDERAGE DRINKING IS **EFFECTIVE**"



45% of young people say that their schools use harsh disciplinary action (such as immediate suspension, expulsion, and police involvement, including arrests) to address students who are bringing alcohol to school. Additionally, 47% percent of young people say their schools use the same disciplinary actions when it comes to students coming to school drunk/buzzed. When asked if they thought their school's policy towards underage drinking was effective, 47% of students surveyed disagreed, but only 22% agreed.

According to the surveys, when students use alcohol on school premises or attend class under the influence of alcohol, a majority of students feel that their schools do not address the root cause of the problem and instead simply suspend or expel students, or even rely on law enforcement to address the infraction.

Students believe that by failing to address the core issue, these approaches do little to stop students from returning to the same behavior. A majority of the students surveyed believe that there should be counseling and therapy offered to students to actually break the cycle of underage alcohol use, as well as other alternatives such as community service, parent conferences, and restorative approaches.

## FINDING #5: STUDENTS IDENTIFY A CONNECTION BETWEEN ALCOHOL & DRUG USE

Almost 60% of young people agree that there is a connection between the use of drugs and alcohol. Over 50% of young people agree that they know friends/people who drink that also use drugs. The responses suggest that there is an underlying connection between alcohol and other substances as alternatives to cope with stress. While the focus of this report is on alcohol use, students believe that the types of solutions they are recommending to address the root causes of underage alcohol use should be considered for other forms of substance abuse as well.

OVER

**50% OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGREE THAT THEY KNOW**

FRIENDS/ PEOPLE WHO **DRINK THAT ALSO USE DRUGS**

# VOYCE'S YOUTH-LED SOLUTIONS TO ENDING UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE IN SCHOOLS

In the struggle to address underage alcohol use, VOYCE recognizes that the legal age to drink is 21 years old in the State of Illinois. However, VOYCE believes that our current approach to addressing alcohol use among young people relies too heavily on punishment instead of addressing the root causes of why young people turn to alcohol to begin with, and too often fails to work towards rehabilitation for young people caught up in the cycle of underage alcohol use.

VOYCE believes that in order to really break the cycle of underage alcohol use, we need to look at the root causes, including but not limited to depression, trauma, lack of programs and jobs, mental health needs, etc. This is why VOYCE recommends the following set of solutions to help create safe and healthy learning environments in all schools across Illinois:

## VOYCE RECOMMENDS:

1. Revising the CPS Student Code of Conduct to remove exclusionary discipline approaches such as out-of-school suspensions, expulsion, and referrals to law enforcement as a consequence for alcohol use, and instead utilizing a reflection assessment, meetings with parents/guardians, referrals to mental and behavioral health resources, community service, and programs that address alcohol use among teenagers.
2. Addressing the over-criminalization of Illinois students through revisions of the Illinois School Code and the Illinois Criminal Code specifically prohibiting the use of school-based arrests of students for low-level offenses, including for mental and behavioral health issues such as alcohol use and possession.
3. Calling for the Illinois General Assembly to invest more resources in mental and behavioral and health programs like school counselors, school nurses, psychologists, restorative practices, and jobs in our communities and schools.

FOLLOWING ARE MORE DETAILS ON THESE RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS.

## SOLUTIONS FOR CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CPS)

### RECOMMENDATION #1: FORM A COMMITTEE MADE OF YOUTH, PARENTS, AND CPS' OFFICE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING THAT WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- Each of these creating a Student Reflection Assessment that will focus on alcohol and substance abuse.
- Create a document that will help guide a weekly reflection between the student and school staff that will cover checking in on their emotional, social, and academic health process and goals, whether or not they have made contact with an outside resource for mental/behavioral/substance support system, etc.
- Create a CPS-wide educational program that includes learning about the effects of underage alcohol use and substance abuse, the importance of self-reflection and how to conduct it, a focus on helping students write their resume, learning how to find a job, and connecting students to substance rehabilitation programs and other mental health and behavioral health focused services, etc.
- Create a protocol for ensuring the safety of a student who is under the influence of alcohol at school, which should include monitoring by a school nurse or other school staff member, prioritizing parent/guardian notification, but which shall not include out-of-school suspension. The protocol should also be inclusive of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), students without any parent/guardian, students with different language needs such as Spanish, Mandarin, Sign Language, etc.

"If schools had a safer environment or taught students about coping mechanisms, then they could help reduce how much students drink. This project gave me a sense of understanding of what everyone has to go through, and gave me more motivation to help find solutions that can really help our young people."

-DeAnna Shores  
16 years old

## RECOMMENDATIONS # 2: CHANGES TO CPS' STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

# INFRACTION

**FOR FIRST TIME VIOLATION OF USING OR POSSESSING ALCOHOL INDICATED AS  
INFRACTION GROUP 4-14 ON CPS' STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT<sup>2</sup>**

## ALL STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:

- School official shall attempt to meet with a parent/guardian within a 7 day period of the infraction. The school must make a phone call, then a home visit, if needed. If the student is 18 years old or older and/or does not have a legal parent/guardian, these meetings will still occur but it will be between the student and the school staff.
- Fill out the Student Reflection Assessment of why they use alcohol and/or substance within 24 hours of the infraction. After writing the reflection, the student must meet with a school counselor within 48-hours. If the student fails to comply, they will be subjected to up to 2 days of skill building in school suspension where they can write their Student Reflection Assessment. If the student does not comply, they will need to attend an alcohol and substance abuse program. If the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), school administration must follow their plan. In the case where the student has a disability or needs other special accommodations, the student must have access to necessary resources including but not limited to a sign language interpreter, verbal reflective assessment, and the reflective assessment in other languages such as Spanish, Mandarin, etc.
- 10 additional community service hours to be completed within 90 calendar days. If the infraction is committed with less than 90 school calendar days left in that calendar year, they will need to speak to school administration to create an agreed-upon time to turn in their hours.
- No immediate skill building in-school suspension
- No out of school suspension
- No expulsions
- No transfers to other schools
- If the student happens to transfer to any other CPS school, the consequences of the infractions shall follow the student as it will be in their student record via Verify and other systems for keeping student records.

# **INFRACTION**

## **FOR SECOND TIME VIOLATION OF USE OR POSSESSION ALCOHOL INDICATED AS INFRACTION GROUP 5-18 ON CPS' STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT<sup>2</sup>**

### **ALL STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:**

- School official shall attempt to meet with a parent/guardian within 2 weeks of the infraction, and follow-up meetings every 2 weeks thereafter for a total of 2 meetings. The school must make a phone call, then a home visit, if needed. If the student is 18 years old or older and/or does not have a legal parent/guardian, these meetings will still occur but it will be between the student and the school staff.
- Meet with a school staff once a week for 4 consecutive weeks for a weekly reflection and check-in using the guidelines that will be set by The Committee. Students will attend a mandatory alcohol and substance abuse program designed by The Committee.
- Fill out the Student Reflection Assessment of why they use alcohol and/or substance within 24 hours of the infraction. After writing the reflection, the student must meet with a school counselor within 48-hours. If the student fails to comply, they will be subjected to up to 2 days of skill building in school suspension where they can write their Student Reflection Assessment. If the student does not comply, they will need to attend an alcohol and substance abuse program. If the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), school administration must follow their plan. In the case where the student has a disability or needs other special accommodations, the student must have access to necessary resources including but not limited to a sign language interpreter, verbal reflective assessment, and the reflective assessment in other languages such as Spanish, Mandarin, etc.
- 20 additional community service hours to be completed within 120 calendar days. If the infraction is committed with less than 120 school calendar days left in that school year, they will need to speak to school administration to create an agreed-upon time to turn in their hours.
- No immediate skill building in-school suspension
- No out of school suspension
- No expulsions
- No transfers to other schools
- If the student happens to transfer to any other CPS school, the consequences of the infractions shall follow the student as it will be in their student record via Verify and other systems for keeping student records.

# **INFRACTION**

## **FOR INTENT TO DISTRIBUTE ALCOHOL INDICATED AS INFRACTION GROUP 6-6 ON CPS' STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT<sup>2</sup>**

### **ALL STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:**

- School official shall attempt to meet with a parent/guardian within 2 weeks of the infraction, and follow-up meetings every 2 weeks thereafter for a total of 4 meetings. The school must make a phone call, then a home visit, if needed. If the student is 18 years old or older and/or does not have a legal parent/guardian, these meetings will still occur but it will be between the student and the school staff.
- One weekly meeting with a school staff for 8 consecutive weeks for a reflection and check-in using the guidelines that will be set by The Committee.
- Students will attend a mandatory alcohol and substance abuse program designed by The Committee.
- Fill out the Student Reflection Assessment of why they use alcohol and/or substance within 24 hours of the infraction. After writing the reflection, the student must meet with a school counselor within 48-hours. If the student fails to comply, they will be subjected to up to 2 additional days of skill building in school suspension where they can write their Student Reflection Assessment. If the student does not comply, they will need to attend an alcohol and substance abuse program. If the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), school administration must follow their plan. In the case where the student has a disability or needs other special accommodations, the student must have access to necessary resources including but not limited to a sign language interpreter, verbal reflective assessment, and the reflective assessment in other languages such as Spanish, Mandarin, etc.
- 30 additional community service hours to be completed within 120 calendar days. If the infraction is committed with less than 120 school calendar days left in that school year, they will need to speak to school administration to create an agreed-upon time to turn in their hours.
- Up to 3 days of skill building in-school suspension. VOYCE believes that the current implementation of in school suspension is not used as effectively as it could be in building skills and supporting students. This is why VOYCE would recommend either no 'skill building' in school suspensions, but to the most serious offense- would allow the use of the 'skill building' in school suspensions only if the school would ensure it to be effective in supporting student's time to reflect on the situation as well as building the students skill as CPS intended.
- No out of school suspension
- No expulsions

# **INFRACTION**

## **FOR INTENT TO SELL ALCOHOL INDICATED AS INFRACTION GROUP 6-6 ON CPS' STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT<sup>2</sup>**

### **ALL STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:**

- School official shall attempt to meet with a parent/guardian within 2 weeks of the infraction, and follow-up meetings every 2 weeks thereafter for a total of 6 meetings. The school must make a phone call, then a home visit, if needed. If the student is 18 years old or older and/or does not have a legal parent/guardian, these meetings will still occur but it will be between the student and the school staff.
- One weekly meeting with a school staff for 12 consecutive weeks for a reflection and check-in using the guidelines that will be set by The Committee.
- Students will attend a mandatory alcohol and substance abuse program designed by The Committee.
- Fill out the Student Reflection Assessment of why they use alcohol and/or substance within 24 hours of the infraction. After writing the reflection, the student must meet with a school counselor within 48-hours. If the student fails to comply, they will be subjected to up to 2 additional days of skill building in school suspension where they can write their Student Reflection Assessment. If the student does not comply, they will need to attend an alcohol and substance abuse program. If the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), school administration must follow their plan. In the case where the student has a disability or needs other special accommodations, the student must have access to necessary resources including but not limited to a sign language interpreter, verbal reflective assessment, and the reflective assessment in other languages such as Spanish, Mandarin, etc.
- 40 additional community service hours to be completed within 120 calendar days. If the infraction is committed with less than 120 school calendar days left in that calendar year, they will need to speak to school administration to create an agreed-upon time to turn in their hours.
- Up to 3 days of skill building in-school suspension. VOYCE believes that the current implementation of in school suspension is not used as effectively as it could be in building skills and supporting students. This is why VOYCE would recommend either no 'skill building' in school suspensions, but to the most serious offense- would allow the use of the 'skill building' in school suspensions only if the school would ensure it to be effective in supporting student's time to reflect on the situation as well as building the students skill as CPS intended.
- No out of school suspension
- No expulsions

## STATEWIDE SOLUTIONS IN ILLINOIS

In addition to the CPS policy changes, the Illinois General Assembly must address the over-criminalization of K-12 students. We as a state need to allow for schools to use restorative and public health approaches in dealing with mental health and behavioral health issues that are often underlying underage alcohol and substance use as well as overall treatment. VOYCE believes that the following recommendations to the Illinois Criminal Code, the Illinois School Code, and the Illinois General Assembly are necessary for schools across the state to succeed in ending underage alcohol use in schools.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: CHANGE THE ILLINOIS CRIMINAL CODE AND ILLINOIS SCHOOL CODE TO ADDRESS THE OVER-CRIMINALIZATION OF ILLINOIS STUDENTS BY PROHIBITING SCHOOL-BASED ARRESTS OF STUDENTS FOR LOW-LEVEL OFFENSES, INCLUDING MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES SUCH AS ALCOHOL USE AND POSSESSION.**

**RECOMMENDATION #4: VOYCE CALLS FOR THE ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO INVEST MORE RESOURCES IN MENTAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAMS LIKE SCHOOL COUNSELORS, SCHOOL NURSES, PSYCHOLOGISTS, RESTORATIVE PRACTICES, JOBS, ETC. IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND IN OUR SCHOOLS.**

"I was born in the Philippines and came from a family that has a lot of heavy drinkers, including my grandfather, who I admired so much. My family once told that he drank a lot to help cope with his emotions or reduce stress, and it was very unhealthy. In 2009, my grandfather got sick because his liver stopped working. I remember being so mad at myself because I felt like I could have done more—but I didn't. Doing this project, it reminded me of this time, but it also gave me the encouragement that maybe I can find another way to help young people really heal instead of using alcohol to cope with their emotions or deal with stress."

-Kaden Mandrique  
17 years old

# CONCLUSION



*VOYCE youth researchers led a circle of 50 youth participants during the youth-led city-wide focus group in a powerful closing activity where participants recited a quote by Assata Shakur.*

The findings in this report show that there is a serious need for more investment in mental health and behavioral health resources to address the root causes of the issue of underage alcohol use, and likewise, a divestment from punitive, reactionary approaches in schools across Illinois. The experiences of young people and data collected throughout this process suggest that reinvestment in proven restorative and public health approaches will provide better support systems to young people that can help end underage alcohol use, while making an impact on the school-to-prison pipeline. VOYCE is calling on both Chicago Public Schools and the Illinois General Assembly to make this shift in our policies and budgets, and in the way we approach issues that stem from mental and behavioral health. A shift in these areas will help ensure safer and healthier learning environments in schools across Illinois. This will position our state as a leader and example for the nation on advancing meaningful change that heals young people in need.

# VOYCE ALLIANCE MEMBERS



**COMMUNITIES UNITED (CU)** is a grassroots social justice organization that builds power by developing local leadership and empowering communities to identify and address the root causes of inequity at the neighborhood, city, state and national levels. CU believes that community members hold the solutions to the challenges they face. Through a community organizing approach, Communities United develops institutions and community residents as leaders, convenes broad-based coalitions, and unites people across age, race, ethnicity, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities and religion to advance structural change that concretely improves people's' lives.



**SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT (SWOP)** is a broad-based organization of Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith institutions, public and private schools and other institutions in Southwest Chicago, which enables families to exercise common values, determine their own future and connect with each other to improve life in their neighborhoods. To this end, leaders of SWOP have dedicated themselves to building relationships across racial, ethnic, generational and faith differences and to bringing the common concerns of their institutions into the public life of the community as they develop the capacity to act collectively and "stand for the whole."



**WESTSIDE HEALTH AUTHORITY (WHA)** is an organization serving the Austin neighborhood and the greater Westside of Chicago since 1988. With local residents making up their base of engaged and committed coalition of stakeholders; they are the authority on the needs of their own community and provide the directives on how the organization can be most impactful. Using public and private resources, WHA provides the services and support needed to help neighbors and families build a better community. WHA's mission is to use the capacity of local residents to improve the health and well-being of the community. For WHA, health is defined broadly to include the social and physical environment which contributes to the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of a person. It also includes relationships with family, friends and neighbors, and the ability to find stable employment.



**YOUTH OPPOSED TO VIOLENCE EVERYWHERE (YOVE)** is a branch of the Mothers Opposed to Violence Everywhere (MOVE), a grass root organization that works to stop violence increase public safety and a quality education for all schools. MOVE strives to create both community and in-home programs that will decrease the growing violence in the North Lawndale community. MOVE organizes both adults and youth of all ages whose families are victimized by gun violence and some who were victims of gun or domestic violence themselves.

# END NOTES

1 "Illinois Youth Survey." Illinois Youth Survey, Center for Prevention Research and Development, [iys.cprd.illinois.edu](http://iys.cprd.illinois.edu).

2 "CPS: Student Code of Conduct." CPS: Student Code of Conduct, pp. 18–30, [cps.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/SCC\\_StudentCodeConduct\\_English.pdf](http://cps.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/SCC_StudentCodeConduct_English.pdf).

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For more information on VOYCE and how to support us, please visit  
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