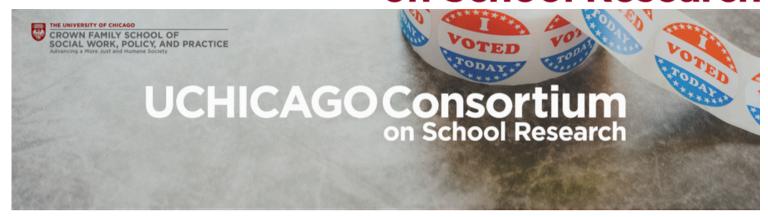# A message from Elaine Allensworth

Dear friends and colleagues,

Chicagoans just selected our first 10 elected board of education members, who will take office in January alongside 11 mayoral appointees.

As we begin this major transition for our city, let's take the opportunity to recognize the tremendous progress that Chicago Public Schools has made—while also re-committing to the work that remains to ensure **all students** districtwide have everything they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

I imagine that you share the hope that our new board of education embraces and builds upon the evidence and insights about schools, teaching, and learning that Chicago has built over the course of decades.

Chicagoans have built a data-informed culture throughout the education ecosystem in our city. Not every community has this culture or this evidence base, and it's something we can celebrate and be proud of—and work to keep strong—together.

We've gathered a handful of the most timely insights from our 34 years of Consortium partnership with educators and school communities to put some evidence at your fingertips.

As our local board leadership shifts amidst major changes in our national context, educators and school staff continue showing up for students day after day. Thank you for the work you do.

Best wishes,

Elaine M. Allensworth
Lewis-Sebring Director

Key Consortium evidence & insights about schools, teaching, and learning:

- **If we want to improve student learning and outcomes, we need to understand how students experience school—and make adjustments accordingly.**
  - In schools where students have trusting relationships with adults, feel like respected and valued partners in their education and teachers provide challenging work and foster supportive relationships...
    - ... students have better attendance, course grades, test scores, college outcomes, and overall well-being.
  - The Cultivate survey data and framework is a great starting point for school teams to work with students to improve their experiences, learning, and development.
  - Parents and families can learn about and support school climate, too.

- **Supporting students holistically is a better strategy than narrowly focusing on academic content.**
  - Students' engagement in their classes affects how much and what they learn--and teachers' practices and the classroom environments they create affect student engagement. Put briefly: relationships and culture matter.
  - Course grades and the Freshman OnTrack metric are also much better predictors of later student success than test scores, as a large body of evidence, and multiple Consortium studies, confirm.

- **Some of the best data on what's working (and what isn't) in schools comes from what students and teachers report.**
  - Students' and teachers' responses on the *5Essentials* Survey in the spring are strongly predictive of school improvement in the following year on an array of outcomes—including GPA, attendance, and test scores—across different school types.
    - This is true despite valid concerns around the survey's inclusion in SQRP accountability metrics.

- **Principals are most effective when they develop systems to support and empower teacher leaders.**
  - Successful principals develop systems for supporting teachers to support students, using student data to guide their efforts and monitor their effects.
  - Supporting collaboration between schools and families includes strengthening goals, systems, practices, and resources for communicating and building relationships with families.

- **District supports cannot be one size fits all.**
  - School and district leaders could use student grades data to [prioritize support for students and schools](#) who most need pandemic recovery efforts. In Spring 2020, for example, schools serving similar students had very different rates of no-credit grades (F or incomplete) in 2020--from 1% to 38%.
  - District resources [for training, tools, and time](#) can empower principals and teachers to learn and adapt according to their students' needs and exercise autonomy and professional judgment for their students' success.

- **There aren't quick fixes.**
  - Every policy and best practice is only as good as its implementation, which takes time and a little patience for results.
    - For example, one Common Core implementation study showed that by supporting [teacher learning in their own school contexts around high-quality instructional practices](#), Chicago became one of the only districts with documented improvements after taking up the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics.

Curious about data for your school, community, or Board of Education district?

Check out the [To&Through data tool](#) to explore attendance, GPA, school enrollment, Freshman OnTrack rates, and more.

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.