Understanding COVID-19

How COVID-19 Spreads
COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new type of coronavirus, SARS-Cov-2. It spreads very easily, making the disease COVID-19 highly contagious. COVID-19 spreads primarily through respiratory droplets. When a person who has the virus breathes, talks, coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets are released into the air. These droplets, containing the virus, may be breathed into or land in the nose, mouth or eyes of a person nearby. People without any symptoms may be carrying the virus in their droplets. These droplets can stay in the air for minutes or longer. The virus may also spread if a person touches an infected droplet on a surface and then touches their own nose, mouth or eyes.

Understanding Community Spread
Community spread refers to how many people have been infected with the virus in a specific geographic area. Community spread is high in areas across the U.S., including most neighborhoods in Chicago. Because of these factors, new public health guidance recommends that schools focus on rates of in-school transmission and metrics for the quality of infection control in determining whether to remain open. CPS is using a new metric to look at community spread that is based on the number of COVID-19 cases doubling in the city. This metric is untested. Data collection and tracking by CPS used to inform school reopenings are very much a work in progress.

CPS is sharing data about COVID-19 cases to keep families, students, and staff informed about in-school transmission in a public spreadsheet and on its school re-opening website. While the CPS website provides a summary of data on the number of COVID-19 cases by schools by week, the information per individual school only shows information about the number of cases per quarter. Case counts are updated Monday through Friday (excluding holidays) after impacted individuals are notified. As schools reopen, it will be important for schools to continuously update in-school transmission information every week.

Your Rights
While there is no guarantee that in-person school will not introduce a risk of COVID-19 into your household, you have the right to hold the district and your school accountable for maintaining the highest level of safety in the school building.

Each district-run Chicago public school has a Local School Council (LSC) that serves as the policy-making body of the school and makes important decisions such as developing and monitoring the school’s academic plan, approving the school budget and selecting and evaluating the school’s principal. While most LSCs are elected, some are appointed and have more limited powers. Since Chicago remains the only school district in Illinois without an elected school board, LSCs are an important oversight and decision-making body that parents and caregivers can leverage to hold education leaders accountable and create space for dialogue and engagement. You can find out who is on your school’s LSC by visiting the CPS website. In the case of the current pandemic, several LSCs have shared their concerns about reopening schools with school and district leaders.

CPS is led by CEO Dr. Janice Jackson and CPS Board President Miguel del Valle, both of whom were appointed by Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Parents and caregivers have the right to reach out to the school district, school board and city leaders if they cannot get the answers they need from their local schools.