

UX Research Final Report: Chicago Public Schools Website – School Search Experience

Project Title:

Improving the School Search Experience for Chicago Public Schools

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Researcher:

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1. Executive Summary

This research project focused on improving the user experience of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) website, specifically the **school search and comparison tools**. The goal was to understand how parents navigate the site when searching for schools, what factors influence their decision-making, and where they encounter pain points. Through moderated testing and interviews with CPS parents, the team uncovered key barriers in usability, language accessibility, and trust in school data. Insights from this study guided a redesigned prototype focused on clearer navigation, more intuitive filtering, and simplified school profiles.

2. Research Goals

- Understand how parents search for schools on the CPS website.
 - Identify which data points are most important to them when comparing schools.
 - Evaluate the usability of the current school search and profile tools.
 - Identify gaps in comprehension, accessibility, and trust.
 - Validate a redesigned prototype aimed at improving the overall school discovery experience.
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3. Methodology

Research Methods Used:

- **Moderated Usability Testing**

- **In-depth Parent Interviews**
- **Task-Based Evaluation**
- **Prototype Testing (Mid-Fidelity)**

Tools Used:

- Zoom for remote sessions
 - Figma for prototype testing
 - Miro for affinity diagramming
 - Google Forms for screening and pre-interview questions
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4. Participants

- **Number of Participants:** 6
 - **Demographics:** Parents/guardians of CPS students or parents considering CPS schools, diverse in income, neighborhood, and primary language.
 - **Recruitment:** Participants were recruited through school email lists, social media, and CPS parent groups.
 - **Inclusion Criteria:** Must have used or attempted to use the CPS website to find school information.
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5. Key Findings

1. Overwhelmed by Information

- Users were confused by the volume of data presented on school profile pages. Metrics lacked explanation and visual hierarchy.

2. Language & Accessibility Gaps

- Spanish-speaking parents had difficulty accessing translated content and navigating jargon-heavy pages. Some tools lacked full language support.

3. Search Tool Confusion

- Parents were unclear on how to use filters effectively or misunderstood how rankings/scores were calculated.

4. Trust Gap

- Participants questioned the accuracy or completeness of school performance data, especially when numbers were presented without context.

5. Mobile Experience Was Clunky

- On mobile, tables, graphs, and filters were difficult to interact with. Important data was buried behind confusing dropdowns.

6. Insights & Recommendations

Insight	Recommendation
Parents feel overwhelmed by raw school data.	Use progress bars, icons, and summaries to visually simplify academic and climate metrics.
Non-English speakers struggle with language support.	Prioritize full Spanish translation , including tooltips and navigation elements.
Filters and scores are misunderstood.	Add clear explanations , definitions, and visual hints (e.g. tooltips or “?” icons).
Trust in data varies.	Pair data with plain-language interpretations , links to methodology, and comparisons to city averages.
Mobile UX is frustrating.	Redesign mobile layout with expand/collapse menus , simplified filter logic, and more scannable school cards.

7. Design Impact

A redesigned prototype was tested based on these insights. Key improvements included:

- **Cleaner data visualizations** with bold, plain-language summaries
- A **multi-lingual interface** with robust Spanish support
- A **reworked filter bar** with grouped and collapsible filters
- **Mobile-optimized design** including touch-friendly buttons and stacked layouts

Participants reported the new design felt easier to understand and faster to use. One parent said, “Now I feel like I can actually compare schools without needing a translator or a spreadsheet.”

8. Next Steps

- Finalize and hand off design recommendations to the CPS digital team
- Conduct another round of testing with **Spanish-first participants**
- Collaborate with data team to improve **explanation of metrics**
- Implement revised school cards and search tool in beta
- Monitor analytics and schedule follow-up testing after release