



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 25, 2025

Chicago Schools Spent Millions on Travel While Students Floundered

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) spent millions of dollars on lavish trips for employees and students while failing to educate pupils, according to a report from [CPS' Office of Inspector General \(OIG\)](#).

Roamin', Roomin', and Reimbursin'

"Fueled in part by federal pandemic relief money, CPS travel expenditures ... more than doubled between Fiscal Year 2019 (the last full pre-Covid school year) and Fiscal Year 2024 (the most recent post-pandemic school year analyzed by the CPS OIG)," reads the report.



Kseferovic/Wikimedia Commons
Lincoln Park High School in Chicago

Fiscal years 2023 and 2024 featured a combined \$14.5 million in such expenditures, "mostly for out-of-town employee professional development seminars or overnight student outings," wrote OIG.

"Over and over," the watchdog discovered,

CPS employees booked trips using CPS funds without required pre-approvals, exceeded CPS spending limits on hotel rooms and airfare, and enjoyed out-of-town activities of dubious necessity or value to students — all as CPS drew closer and closer to a budget crisis.

During this same period, CPS utterly failed to teach students anything of value, reported [Fox News](#). In the spring of 2024, only 30.5 percent of students in grades three through eight were proficient in reading, and a mere 18.3 percent were proficient in math. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores showed 11th graders were equally poor at math and even worse at reading.

Some individual schools performed even more dismally. Corey Brooks, senior pastor of New Beginnings Church of Chicago, told Fox News that the reading-proficiency rate in his neighborhood is a paltry six percent.

"It is a sad commentary on just how far our city has fallen and how bad the leadership is," said Brooks. "These individuals believe that spending money on themselves benefits our educational system more so than spending it on the children who so rightfully deserve it."

Blowing the Windy City

According to the OIG report, eight CPS schools spent over \$142,000 on

15 staff trips to Finland, Estonia, Egypt and South Africa for professional development and school visits. These tours also featured numerous scheduled as well as optional tourist activities of debatable value, including a visit to a South African game park, a hot air balloon



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ride, camel rides and a visit to a bazaar. Thirteen of the 15 trips were never pre-approved, as required.

In a conversation with OIG, a top CPS official asked, “Why can’t this be done in the United States?” Yet CPS’ domestic travel expenditures have been just as outrageous.

One school principal made multiple taxpayer-funded jaunts to Las Vegas ostensibly to attend professional-development conferences. “In one case,” noted OIG, “he booked an unapproved suite at a Las Vegas hotel for himself and his wife that cost CPS more than \$400 a night, even though the conference was at a different hotel, started two days after their arrival date, and ended after their six-day visit concluded.”

Indeed, such conferences in Sin City and other far-flung locations proved extremely popular with CPS staff. “More than 600 employees from 140 schools or departments spent more than \$1.5 million in taxpayer funds on these particular seminars between calendar years 2022 and 2024,” says the report. “Notably,” observed OIG, “when this conference was held in Chicago, few CPS employees attended.”

Pushing Papers, Not Pinching Pennies

This “questionable, excessive and even exorbitant” spending was enabled by “lax, vague, inadequate and unenforced written CPS travel rules, training and procedures,” OIG found.

In typical bureaucratic fashion, CPS compliance staff majored in the minors, claims the report:

The OIG learned that, when it came to travel expenses, CPS had its eye on the wrong ball. It had a team of employees scouring small reimbursement receipts for such items as meals and Ubers, but paid far less attention to the cost of CPS payments directly to travel vendors for far larger ticket items like airfare and hotel rooms that totaled nearly 29 times more, according to one sample analyzed by the OIG. Questions about travel requests *focused more on whether the proper paperwork was filed and not whether a trip was worth the cost.* [Emphasis added.]

In addition, no one was checking if travel agencies were charging CPS fair rates. Said one top CPS official: “I don’t think there’s any way the system is set up today that we can do that.”

CPS administrators and teachers weren’t alone in taking advantage of the situation. OIG found that, in fiscal year 2024, “nine of the 10 most expensive travel purchase orders involved student travel,” including a trip to South Africa for 20 students that cost an average of \$5,274 per person. “For that amount of money, this school could have funded the salary and benefits of two teachers with four years['] teaching experience each for a year,” OIG pointed out.

Reform School?

In response to the report, CPS has instituted a temporary freeze on “nearly all employee travel,” a spokesperson told Fox News. The district has also made some procedural changes to address problems OIG found and is convening a committee to consider OIG’s recommendations, which include establishing stricter controls and enforcing cost-saving rules.

But, since it’s not their money, are CPS officials likely to be any more careful with it in the future?



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“Chicago Public Schools spend about \$30,000 per student and most of the kids still can’t read on grade level,” Educational Freedom Institute executive director Corey DeAngelis told Fox News. “The government school system is a bottomless pit, lighting taxpayer money on fire, while constantly asking for more.”



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