# Pedro Martinez bids farewell to CPS with a legacy of equity amid budget tensions



Pedro Martinez, the CEO of Chicago Public Schools (CPS), recently reflected on his four-year tenure at the helm of the district during an eighth-grade graduation ceremony at John A. Walsh Elementary, his former school. This event marked his last public appearance before he transitions to a new role as commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on June 20. In an emotional farewell, Martinez expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Pilsen community that shaped his journey from an immigrant child to an educational leader. "I’m so grateful to you as a community. I grew up here in Pilsen. I’m a Pilsen kid, a Chicago kid," Martinez shared, encapsulating the deep connection he holds with the area that nurtured him.

Recalling his modest beginnings, Martinez used his personal narrative to inspire the students present. He recounted his experience learning English at Walsh and acknowledged the pivotal role his teachers played in his academic success, enabling him to become the first in his family of 12 to graduate from college. "When I was your age, I could never have imagined being here in front of you," he encouraged the eighth graders, urging them to discover and pursue their passions. His emphasis on perseverance resonated strongly with parents and students alike, many of whom shared their aspirations in the face of their challenges. Among the graduates was Maria Luisa Sanchez Cedeño, who expressed how Martinez's success story serves as a beacon of hope for students from smaller schools like Walsh, illustrating that greatness can emerge from humble beginnings.

During his farewell address, Martinez also highlighted the strides made by the district under his leadership. He pointed to elevated high school graduation rates and a significant increase in the number of students enrolling in college credit courses while completing their high school education. However, his tenure was not without its difficulties. Despite boasting accomplishments, Martinez's final days as CEO were marred by a persistent budget shortfall. This financial strain culminated in vocal criticism from the principals' union, which accused him of presenting budgetary options based on unreliable city and state revenue. In response, the mayor’s office labelled the budget proposal as “irresponsible and reckless.”

Even with these challenges, in his farewell message to the CPS community, Martinez took pride in the funding reforms he spearheaded. "I’m proud that the resources a CPS school receives no longer depend on its number of students," he stated, affirming his commitment to equity in education. His administration aimed to ensure that each school, regardless of size, is supported appropriately to provide essential resources for students.

As Martinez prepares to leave, the Chicago Board of Education is busily seeking his successor, having initiated community input sessions in recent weeks. The board's decision to potentially terminate his contract last December was controversial, shrouded in tension arising from disputes over budgets and union negotiations. The situation was further complicated by a Cook County ruling which affirmed Martinez's authority during these negotiations and prohibited board members from involvement without his approval. While these events have led to apprehension about the district's stability, Martinez's farewell addresses suggest a hopeful vision for the future of CPS, as he maintains that educational equity remains a crucial goal to aspire to.

In sum, as Pedro Martinez embarks on a new chapter, his mixed legacy at Chicago Public Schools invites reflection on both the progress achieved and the challenges ahead for his successors and the community they serve.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education), [[2]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education), [[3]](https://www.cps.edu/media/community-updates/2024/december/ceo-martinez/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education), [[4]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/18/cps-board-moves-to-fire-schools-ceo-pedro-martinez), [[5]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/23/cps-ceo-pedro-martinez-school-board-ctu-contract)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education), [[3]](https://www.cps.edu/media/community-updates/2024/december/ceo-martinez/), [[6]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/09/24/cps-proposes-self-imposed-ban-on-school-closings)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education), [[4]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/18/cps-board-moves-to-fire-schools-ceo-pedro-martinez)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education), [[4]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/18/cps-board-moves-to-fire-schools-ceo-pedro-martinez), [[5]](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/23/cps-ceo-pedro-martinez-school-board-ctu-contract)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/06/10/pedro-martinez-farewell-cps-education> - In June 2025, Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez attended an eighth-grade graduation at his alma mater, John A. Walsh Elementary, marking his final event before departing the district. Reflecting on his upbringing in Pilsen, Martinez expressed gratitude to the community and district that supported him. He encouraged students to pursue their passions, sharing his own journey from an immigrant child to the first in his family to graduate college. Martinez highlighted district achievements, including improved graduation rates and increased college credit courses for high school students. He is set to become commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on June 20.
3. <https://www.cps.edu/media/community-updates/2024/december/ceo-martinez/> - In December 2024, CPS CEO Pedro Martinez announced his contract would conclude in June 2025, following a decision by the Chicago Board of Education to shorten his tenure. Martinez expressed disappointment but remained committed to empowering educators, families, and students until his departure. He pledged to continue supporting the district's mission of providing every child with a rigorous, joyful, and equitable learning experience throughout the remainder of the school year.
4. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/18/cps-board-moves-to-fire-schools-ceo-pedro-martinez> - In December 2024, the Chicago Board of Education initiated steps to terminate CPS CEO Pedro Martinez's contract. The board's agenda included votes to approve a settlement and to terminate Martinez's contract. The decision followed tensions between Martinez and Mayor Brandon Johnson, as well as the Chicago Teachers Union, over contract negotiations. Martinez's contract required six months' notice for termination without cause, during which he would continue working and receive severance pay. The board's move raised concerns about potential legal challenges and the impact on district stability.
5. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/12/23/cps-ceo-pedro-martinez-school-board-ctu-contract> - In December 2024, CPS CEO Pedro Martinez sent a cease-and-desist letter to the Chicago Board of Education after members attended a union bargaining session without his approval. A Cook County judge ruled that board members cannot participate in union negotiations without Martinez's consent, affirming his authority as the sole representative of the board in negotiations. The ruling aimed to prevent interference with Martinez's role and ensure the integrity of the negotiation process.
6. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2024/09/24/cps-proposes-self-imposed-ban-on-school-closings> - In September 2024, CPS CEO Pedro Martinez announced a proposal for a self-imposed ban on school closings, aiming to provide stability and prevent disruptions in students' education. Martinez emphasized the importance of maintaining consistent learning environments and avoiding the negative impacts that school closures can have on communities. The proposal was part of broader efforts to address challenges within the district and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.
7. <https://www.cps.edu/media/community-updates/2024/november/message-ceo-martinez/> - In November 2024, CPS CEO Pedro Martinez addressed the CPS community following the first elections for the Board of Education. He acknowledged the diverse emotions among students, staff, and families due to the election results and reassured them of the district's unwavering commitment to student success. Martinez highlighted the availability of socio-emotional support resources and emphasized the district's core values of equity, student-centered decision-making, and community collaboration, regardless of the election outcomes.