



10-YEAR Impact Assessment

Supplemental Evaluation Report

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November 15, 2024

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Surge is a Key Component of CPS’s Talent Development Strategy	3
Confidence as Currency for Change: Fellow Impact Stories	4
Jonathan Chaparro (CHI2017)	4
Nicole “Niki” Magoto (OAK18)	5
Tanesha Peebles (CHI20)	6
Aija Simmons (OAK20)	7
Dr. Leslye Salinas (OAK21)	8
Zeyda Garcia (OAK22)	9
Elizabeth Jamison–Dunn (CHI24)	10
Sasha Villagrana–Frost (CHI24)	11
Collective Impact of Surge Leaders	12
Expanding Leadership Beyond Traditional Roles	12
Building and Scaling Community–Focused Initiatives	12
Centering Equity and Representation	12
Empowering Youth and Future Generations	13
Transforming Systems Through Policy and Practice	13
Building and Leveraging Networks	13
Fostering Healing and Well–Being	13

Introduction

Following the initial evaluation—which included a survey of past and current fellows, an internal staff survey, and focus groups, JMC Consulting Firm conducted a supplemental study to explore the impact that fellows are having in their community. Fellows from Chicago and Oakland, where Surge Institute has its longest engagement, with 10 and 5 cohorts, respectively, were invited. Additionally, representatives from partner organizations participated in a separate focus group to share their motivations for supporting fellows and the impact observed. The evaluation team collaborated with Surge to recruit participants, targeting fellows who indicated on the survey that they are working to serve more students of color and have an impact at the community level. **The final groups included one partner, four fellows from Oakland, and four from Chicago.**

Surge is a Key Component of CPS’s Talent Development Strategy

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), one of the largest districts in the nation with 646 schools and nearly 330,000 students, is one of the Surge Institute’s longstanding partners. The Talent Development Specialist participated in an interview. In her role, she oversees training and development programs for educators and school leaders across the district. She shared that developing leaders of color who reflect the diverse student body is essential to CPS and that Surge plays a key role in their development strategy.

Among CPS’s eight leadership development providers, Surge is the only one that focuses on both education and leaders of color. The other partners are singularly focused. CPS hosts an annual event called a Class Reunion for those who participated in external opportunities to share their experiences. According to the Talent Development Specialist, Surge fellows stand out in their confidence, connections, and understanding of their role in the larger system and network, which is critical given the size and reach of CPS. These fellows establish a community where they continue to collaborate and mentor each other.

“[Surge fellows] talk a lot about how powerful it is to be in a room where they’re not the minority, where they can share and reflect authentically. That experience has helped people claim their voice, empowering them to bring that confidence back into [Chicago Public School] district.”

Talent Development Specialist

A central question is whether this confidence developed through the Surge Institute translates into transformative change for young people, aligning with Surge’s mission. Based on the insights gathered, the answer is a definitive yes—though, as expected, this transformation is a gradual journey. What follows is a closer look at how Surge fellows are actively creating change in their communities. They demonstrate the profound impact that can be achieved when leaders are equipped with the confidence, skills, and networks provided by the Surge Institute.

Confidence as Currency for Change: Fellow Impact Stories

Jonathan Chaparro (CHI2017)

Executive Director of Innovation and Head of the Chicago Region

[Braven](#)

“Had I not done Surge, I don't know that I would have taken the risk at the time to launch Braven and to start the Chicago region. One, there was some work that I needed to do around my confidence. But two, there's just a lot of baggage as a professional of color that comes with the ability to take risks or not and the financial implications that come with that. Surge helped me to believe in myself.”

For Jonathan Chaparro, the Surge Institute was more than just a leadership program—it was the launchpad for a bold career move that would impact thousands of lives. At the end of his Surge fellowship, Jonathan leaped to co-found and scale Braven, a national organization that supports first-generation college students and drives upward economic mobility. Today, Braven operates in eight markets, has grown from a team of 10 to nearly 200, and has supported over 10,000 students on their paths to meaningful careers. Braven Fellows boast a 91% six-year on-time graduation rate, significantly higher than national averages. They are more likely than their peers to have career-accelerating experiences like internships. By 2032, Braven aims to serve 80,000 students nationwide.

Jonathan credits Surge with providing him the confidence and skills to take this professional risk, particularly as a leader of color. “Had I not done Surge, I don't know that I would have taken the risk at the time to launch Braven and to start the Chicago region. Surge helped me not only build my confidence but also develop the skills that made me believe in myself and made me take that risk,” he shared. The program also addressed the unique challenges professionals of color face, such as the financial and emotional barriers, that often make risk-taking difficult.

Through his experience at Surge, Jonathan gained a valuable network of peers and alums who continue to support him. Surge alums have joined his team, provided funding and resources, and reinforced his commitment to creating systems change. This sense of community has inspired him to think differently about moving capital and resources to support communities of color. “Surge influenced how I think about systems change—not just in education but in engaging other key players who need to be part of the solution.” The organization has redefined how employers support Black and Brown talent, helping companies restructure programs to improve experiences for underrepresented employees while continuing to scale its impact.

Reflecting on his journey, Jonathan envisions a future where a new generation of leaders of color emerges—confident leaders equipped with fewer traumas and poised to create systemic change.

Nicole “Niki” Magoto (OAK18)

Senior Project Manager

School Crisis Recovery and Renewal Project

“The pandemic said this system is not going to support you, or that in my final year there, I had to grapple with a lot of ambiguity that I don't think I would have been able to handle without Surge in terms of my role was changing, and I knew it was time to exit. What surge provided me was confidence, authenticity, like bravery, to do the work of finishing a job that I cared deeply about.”

For Niki, the Surge Institute was a transformative experience that reshaped her understanding of leadership and empowered her to navigate personal and professional challenges. Before joining Surge, Niki yearned for leaders who mirrored her identity and experiences, especially as a woman of color working within bureaucratic systems. Surge filled this gap, providing her with mentors and role models who helped her see herself as a leader.

During her fellowship, Niki grappled with significant transitions. The pandemic disrupted her role in public education, and she faced the profound personal loss of her mother—a teacher who had been part of the same system. Despite the ambiguity and change, Surge gave her the confidence, authenticity, and bravery to push for equity within her department. She advocated for her department to conduct an equity audit of culturally responsive practices. Further, she ensured that protocols used with students and families were rooted in collaboration rather than imposition. This work became a legacy of meaningful change that she credits to the courage Surge instilled in her.

When Niki transitioned out of education, she chose an unconventional path, taking a year to focus on her well-being. She acknowledges that this might seem like an “anti-Surge” story—she didn’t launch a business or take a traditional leadership position—but the impact of Surge on her life was undeniable. It helped her dream big and embrace her role in helping others find their identity, just as Surge helped her see her own.

Today, Niki works with the School Crisis Recovery and Renewal Project, supporting schools and communities in the aftermath of crises. She sees this work as deeply aligned with the values and vision she gained through Surge, particularly her commitment to helping educators and others heal from trauma and see their potential.

Niki also advocates for creating spaces where diverse groups, including colleagues who identify as Asian American Pacific Islanders, Black, and Latino peers, can build coalitions and connections—a need she views as vital for systemic change. Her journey reflects the lasting impact of Surge, demonstrating how leadership can take many forms, all of which are rooted in authenticity, resilience, and a commitment to uplifting others.

Tanesha Peeples (CHI20)
Chief Executive Director
[Roots Initiative](#)

“Surge is transformative for me because it provided a space where I could finally see who I am. I could start to unpack things that were barriers to my own personal leadership, start to unlearn some things and start to learn a lot of things. And with that, it helped shape the vision, vision for what my organization needed to be for Black youth.”

For Tanesha Peeples, the Surge Institute was nothing short of life-changing. It gave her the space to unpack personal barriers, unlearn limiting beliefs, and develop a bold vision for her organization, the Roots Initiative. This initiative, born from her Surge Freedom Dreams project, empowers Black youth to see their potential, build confidence, and lead transformative change in their communities. As Tanesha puts it, “Surge gave me the confidence to bet on myself.”

The Roots Initiative is deeply personal for Tanesha. Drawing on her own experiences and the challenges Black youth face growing up in underserved neighborhoods, she designed the program to be a “Surge for young Black youth.” It provides them with the tools and support to overcome obstacles, embrace their power, and lead with purpose. While currently focused in Chicago, Tanesha is considering expanding to nearby areas to reach even more young people.

Tanesha’s advocacy extends beyond her organization. Through the Surge network, she has pushed for systemic changes, including the creation of an office for Black student success within her district. The strength of the Surge community remains central to her work; she has three Surge siblings on her board and has hired others as consultants. “The network is strong, and the brilliance is even stronger,” she says.

Recognized as one of the “40 Game Changers Under 40,” Tanesha remains unapologetic in her advocacy for Black communities. Her vision for the future is bold: she dreams of building communities that blend the prosperity of Black Wall Street with the cultural renaissance of Harlem, where Black people thrive, feel self-determined, and lead with power and purpose. With youth at the forefront of this movement, Tanesha is working to inspire the next generation of leaders who will build and sustain these communities for years to come.

Aija Simmons (OAK20)

Director

21st Century California School Leadership Academy

“So I’m gonna attribute all of the actual corporate hierarchical, authentic leadership maneuvers to stuff that I got from Surge and my grandma.”

“Surge really set me up to lead the team I have now, which now I have six direct reports, two campuses, and a team of 12.”

For Aija, the Surge Institute was a transformative turning point in her leadership journey. As a participant in the COVID-era cohort, She joined the program during a time of upheaval, navigating district leadership roles that came with responsibility but lacked authority or professional support. Surge changed the trajectory of her career, equipping her with the tools, confidence, and self-awareness to step into her full potential as a leader.

Through leadership assessments, 360-degree feedback, and authentic leadership through storytelling, Aija gained the skills to manage teams and influence change effectively. She attributes much of her success in her current role to these experiences, noting that her leadership style draws equally from Surge and her grandmother’s practical wisdom. “I’m going to attribute all of the actual corporate hierarchical, authentic leadership maneuvers to stuff I got from Surge and my grandma,” she shared.

Today, as the Director of the 21st Century California School Leadership Academy, Aija leads statewide efforts to disrupt the preschool-to-prison pipeline. Her work focuses on providing equity-centered professional development for leaders implementing universal transitional kindergarten, including county office staff, principals, and teacher leaders. Under her leadership, her team has served over 570 leaders across California, developed eight equity-focused training modules, and certified 58 trainers through six regional training events. Aija also leads a diverse team of 12 across two campuses, including six direct reports, a responsibility she feels well-prepared for thanks to her Surge experience.

Beyond the technical skills, Surge gave Aija the confidence to dream big and step into leadership roles that align with her passion for systemic change. Reflecting on her journey, she acknowledges the profound influence of the Surge community—a collective of leaders of color—on her sense of belonging and purpose. The lessons and values she gained from Surge continue to guide her work.

Aija’s impact is evident in the shifts she’s driving in early learning policy and practice, advancing equitable, high-quality education for California’s youngest learners. Her journey exemplifies the transformative power of Surge in shaping leaders who challenge systems and create lasting change.

Dr. Leslye Salinas (OAK21)
Community School Manager
Oakland Unified School District
Founder and CEO
[La Casa de Jenny](#)

"My executive coach as a fellow was actually really supportive and influential to how I navigated going through a merger. There was a point in time when I was a fellow, and I was going through this merger that just felt like it was impossible, where my coach was able to give me tools to like, use to like, not lose faith, because I was like, Look, girl, I'm going to find a new job. Like, and she's like, No, like, you could do this, right?"

Dr. Leslye Salinas is driving transformative change through her work as a community school manager and the founder/CEO of La Casa de Jenny. Since its launch in July 2024, the nonprofit has supported over 40 newcomer adults with services such as job search assistance and credential transfer processes. By alleviating the stress these families face, Leslye is not only helping parents achieve self-sufficiency but also creating a foundation for their children's academic success.

La Casa de Jenny, originally developed as Leslye's Surge capstone project and dissertation topic, was born from a commitment to debunk myths about immigrant families and provide them with the tools to thrive. Her vision extends beyond Oakland as she looks to scale the nonprofit's reach across the greater Bay Area. She is actively building partnerships and securing funding, such as the Cal New grant, to expand her impact and provide critical resources to more families.

In her role as a community school manager, Leslye has also demonstrated the power of inclusive leadership. When a charter school where she had worked for six years lost its license, she led a successful merger with a district school, keeping families' voices central to the process. Thanks to her leadership, the redesigned school, now in its fourth year, reflects the community's needs and priorities despite economic challenges.

Leslye credits the Surge Institute with equipping her to lead during these pivotal moments. With guidance from her executive coach, she developed the resilience and strategic mindset to navigate challenges, even in moments of doubt. Surge empowered her to think boldly, act authentically, and remain committed to creating systemic change.

Through La Casa de Jenny and her work in schools, she is building a brighter future for newcomer families. Her efforts exemplify how thoughtful leadership and community-centered solutions can create lasting impact, setting the stage for thriving families and successful students in Oakland and, eventually, across the Bay Area.

Zeyda Garcia (OAK22)

Mental Health Consultant
Mental Health Counselor
Oakland Unified School District

"Surge really supported me in looking at what expanding my impact could look like. I'm going into my second year of business as a consultant. My business started off as my capstone. I started off with just imagining what would bring me joy, but also be able to support others, or other counselors, essentially, or and other mental health providers working within a school setting in developing as community responsive counselors."

For Zeyda, the Surge Institute was a transformative experience that expanded her leadership vision and catalyzed her journey from direct service to entrepreneurial impact. As the lead mental health counselor at a K-12 charter school in Oakland, Zeyda was deeply committed to supporting young people therapeutically. However, her Surge fellowship challenged her to think beyond one-on-one counseling and explore how to address mental health on a broader scale. This vision inspired Zeyda to launch a mental health consulting business focused on community-responsive counseling.

Now in its second year, her business started as her Surge capstone project. With the guidance of her Surge executive coach, Zeyda navigated the complexities of establishing her LLC, setting up financial systems, and building confidence in her ability to lead a business. Within its first year, she partnered with Oakland Unified School District to deliver professional development for school counselors, benefiting approximately 130 educators. Her work includes designing and implementing a social-emotional curriculum for a local charter school promoting mental health awareness and reducing stigma among young people.

Surge also connected Zeyda to the Surge Angels program in 2023, where she secured a \$40,000 investment to grow her business. Through Surge Angels, she honed her skills in pitching her ideas, enabling her to attract partnerships and expand her reach. These opportunities empowered Zeyda to transition her expertise from the counseling room to the broader educational landscape, ensuring her impact resonates throughout the community.

Zeyda attributes much of her success to the mentorship, resources, and confidence she gained through Surge. The program not only encouraged her to dream bigger but also provided the tools to turn those dreams into a sustainable reality. Her work continues to focus on empowering young people and educators, fostering a culture where mental health is normalized and prioritized. As she scales her consulting business, Zeyda remains committed to ensuring that her work creates long-lasting, systemic change.

Elizabeth Jamison-Dunn (CHI24)

Principal

Catalyst Circle Rock Charter School

“When I joined Surge, it really is because I feel like I'm at this impetus in my career where I am trying to figure out what's next for me. And while I love being a principal... I have been really interested in system leadership and working with school leaders. I feel very confident in my role as principal, but the idea of leading other leaders is something that has given me pause. But I think working with Surge, we get an [executive] coach. She's been working with me around what the next step looks like.”

For the principal of Catalyst Circle Rock Charter School, the Surge Institute came at a pivotal moment in her career. While confident in her role as a principal, she was grappling with what came next—specifically, the idea of leading other school leaders and expanding her impact. Through her Surge fellowship, she has gained clarity and confidence in her next steps, supported by an executive coach who meets with her biweekly to guide her transition.

Surge has inspired her to think beyond her current role and embrace an entrepreneurial mindset. With her superintendent's endorsement, she has begun offering professional development to teachers while mentoring aspiring leaders. The program has also pushed her to reevaluate her traditionalist tendencies—shaped by 18 years at the same school—and encouraged her to engage with diverse perspectives and challenge her thinking.

One of her most significant personal transformations has been shifting from an achievement-driven mindset to a deeper exploration of her identity and purpose. Initially focused on accomplishments and accolades, Surge encouraged her to reflect on who she is beyond her roles and titles. This introspection has not only influenced her leadership style but also set her on a journey of personal growth.

As she continues her PhD studies, she envisions future work at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), where she can combine her passion for education and leadership development to uplift others. Thanks to Surge, she is stepping boldly into this next chapter, ready to expand her reach and mentor the next generation of leaders.

Sasha Villagrana–Frost (CHI24)

Associate Dean

National Louis University

And so, being more confident asking for [access and resources for my students to engage in their wellness] and going to, for example, an organization, and saying, like, Is this possible? Can we do this? Can we put this event on? I'm proud of myself for being more confident in doing those things, ...that's definitely because of Surge."

For Sasha Villagrana–Frost, the Surge Institute was a transformative experience that empowered her to step into leadership roles authentically and confidently. As the newly appointed Associate Dean of Educator Preparation at National Louis University, she now oversees programming that impacts over 1,400 students annually across Chicago and beyond. In her role, she champions culturally responsive education while promoting the well-being of faculty and staff preparing future educators.

Surge not only shaped Sasha's professional trajectory but also bolstered her leadership in community spaces. As a member of a Latino–run club founded in 1981 to increase representation in sports, she has taken on key leadership roles, working with others to donate over 70 pairs of shoes to Chicago Public Schools students for their cross–country season. Her experiences as a coach and advocate for student wellness have been central to her work. Surge gave her the confidence to secure resources and rally support for initiatives she deeply cares about.

Her Surge journey also ignited a passion for creating wellness–focused spaces for students and educators. She regularly collaborates with fellow Surge alumni to envision healing and wellness initiatives for Chicago youth and is extending this vision to educators in the field. Her doctoral research also reflects these interests, which delves into the intersection of education and wellness.

Sasha attributes her ability to show up authentically in leadership to the Surge experience, which encouraged her to embrace her personal story and background. Now, as she continues to diversify the teacher pipeline and advocate for culturally responsive teaching practices, she remains committed to building a future where education is a source of healing, empowerment, and transformation.

Collective Impact of Surge Leaders

Expanding Leadership Beyond Traditional Roles

Surge equips participants to transcend conventional roles, enabling them to lead with broader influence. Zeyda transitioned from a school mental health counselor to founding a consulting business that trains over 130 educators in mental health practices. Her work fosters supportive school environments by normalizing mental health conversations. Similarly, Aija moved from district leadership to her current role as Director of the 21st Century California School Leadership Academy. She leads equity-centered professional development for over 570 early childhood leaders across California. Her efforts include developing eight professional learning modules and certifying 58 trainers, reshaping early education practices. Both leaders reflect how Surge fosters the confidence and capacity to embrace more expansive roles that address systemic challenges.

Building and Scaling Community-Focused Initiatives

Participants like **Leslye** and **Zeyda** illustrate how Surge inspires leaders to translate vision into action. Leslye's nonprofit, La Casa de Jenny, supports newcomer families by providing job search assistance and credential transfer services, reducing stress for parents while creating stability for their children's academic success. Since its launch in July 2024, she has supported over 40 families and is actively seeking to expand its reach across the Bay Area. Zeyda, through her consulting business, partners with Oakland Unified School District to deliver professional development for counselors and has designed a social-emotional curriculum for local schools. These initiatives demonstrate how Surge empowers leaders to identify community needs and develop innovative solutions.

Centering Equity and Representation

Jonathan and Niki center equity and representation in their work, applying tools gained through Surge to address systemic inequities. Jonathan's organization, Braven, redefines career pathways for first-generation college students by ensuring equitable access to opportunities and success. Braven has significantly improved participants' graduation rates and internship placements. They collaborate with employers to redesign talent pipelines that better support Black and Brown students. Niki's work in crisis recovery emphasizes creating equity-centered practices that assist educators and communities in healing from trauma. Niki's work in crisis recovery emphasizes creating equity-centered practices that assist educators and communities in healing from trauma. Niki's work in crisis recovery emphasizes creating equity-centered practices that assist educators and communities in healing from trauma.

Empowering Youth and Future Generations

Empowering youth is a priority for leaders like Tanesha and Leslye. Tanesha’s nonprofit, *The Roots Initiative*, fosters confidence and agency by providing Black youth with leadership development opportunities. The program equips young people to overcome systemic barriers and make meaningful contributions to their communities. She describes it as “Surge for Black youth.” Leslye’s work through La Casa de Jenny supports newcomer families, creating the conditions for their children to succeed academically and personally. By addressing barriers that disproportionately affect young people of color, these leaders are paving the way for future generations to thrive.

Transforming Systems Through Policy and Practice

Several participants are influencing systemic change through policy and institutional reform. Aija’s work focuses on disrupting the preschool-to-prison pipeline by providing equity-centered professional development for early learning leaders across California. She ensures that training emphasizes high-quality, inclusive practices for the youngest learners. Jonathan’s collaborations with employers have led to redesigned internship and hiring programs that prioritize equity and better support underrepresented talent. While in public education, Niki implemented equity audits to assess whether school protocols were culturally responsive and inclusive. Tanesha mentioned that she and other Surge alumni were instrumental in creating an office of Black student success within the Chicago Public School District. Participants expressed a strong desire to use their voices and influence to address broader inequities. These efforts underscore how Surge participants use their skills to challenge and transform existing systems.

Building and Leveraging Networks

The power of the Surge network is evident in how participants leverage these connections to amplify their work. Tanesha’s board and consulting network include Surge alumni who contribute to her advocacy and organizational efforts. Jonathan credits Surge’s network for helping him secure resources and partnerships to scale Braven’s impact across multiple cities. This collaboration underscores the importance of the Surge ecosystem’s community in supporting participants to achieve collective impact. Both the Chicago and Oakland cohorts noted the presence of Surge leaders. Chicago participants remarked that “*Surge alums are everywhere,*” forming a network of transformative leaders.

Fostering Healing and Well-Being

Leaders like Sasha and Niki prioritize healing and well-being as essential components of their leadership. Sasha prioritizes wellness-focused environments for educators and students, integrating this into her professional development programs. Through her crisis recovery work, Niki supports schools and communities in addressing trauma to foster long-term healing and resilience. Both leaders reflect Surge’s commitment to holistic leadership that prioritizes emotional health and well-being alongside systemic change.



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