

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Paul Vallas

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Education is Key - General Interest Oral History project

Interview # EG-A-L-2015-054

Paul Vallas, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Education is Key—General Interest Oral History project*.

Interview dates & location:

Sess. 1&2: Nov 23 & 24, 2015	Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Sess. 3: Mar 24, 2016	Location: Palos Heights Public Library
Sess. 4: May 26, 2016	Location: Chicago History Museum
Sess. 5: Feb 1, 2017	Location: Athena Restaurant in Greektown, Chicago
Sess. 6: Jun 24, 2017	Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Sess. 7: Jun 12, 2018	Location: Jean Voss home on north side of Chicago
Sess. 8: Jul 6, 2020	Location: Telephonic interview, with Paul in Palos Heights
Sess. 9: Jul 16, 2020	Location: Telephonic interview, Paul in Orland Park
Sess. 10: Aug 6, 2020	Location: Telephonic interview

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:00(1) + 1:26(2) + 2:48(3) + 1:58(4) + 2:12(5) + 2:42(6) + 1:48(7) + 2:03(8) + 2:08(9) + 2:05(10) / 2.0(1) + 1.43(2) + 2.8(3) + 1.97(4) + 2.2(5) + 2.7(6) + 1.8(7) + 2.05(8) + 2.13(9) + 2.08(10) = 21.16 hrs

Session 1: Early years, education, and early college years

Session 2: Western IL University, ROTC and IL Senate Revenue Committee

Session 3: Experience in the Illinois Legislature and as Chicago Revenue Director

Session 4: Experiences as Chicago's budget director during Richard M. Daley tenure

Session 5: Early years as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, 1995-1996

Session 6: Experiences as CEO of Chicago Public Schools, 1996-June 2001

Session 7: Democratic primary race for governor in 2002 and loss to Blagojevich

Session 8: Experiences as Chief Executive Officer for Philadelphia schools and rebuilding the New Orleans schools following Hurricane Katrina

Session 9: Bridgeport CT Superintendent and post-earthquake work in Chile and Haiti

Session 10: Educational planning for Bureau of Indian Education and U.S. Bureau of Prisons, & reflections on impact on education & Chicago politics due to COVID-19

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on (3/15/2021).

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Paul Vallas, *Education is Key*, EG-A-L-2015-054

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Paul G. Vallas was born in Chicago on June 10, 1953 and graduated from Carl Sandburg High School in Orland Park in 1970. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Western Illinois University in 1976 and an M.S. degree in 1980. He also received a commission as an officer in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1980. That same year he began working for the Illinois state legislature as a policy advisor, and in 1983 he became the senior policy advisor for the Illinois State Senate. In 1990 he became the revenue director for the city of Chicago, and in 1993 Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed him as his budget director. Vallas quickly turned around the city's financial status, and on the strength of that, Mayor Daley appointed him as the city's first Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools in 1995, at a time when the mayor assumed more direct control over the schools.

Over the next six years Vallas was the public face for a series of school reforms that transformed the struggling school district and propelled him to national attention. He balanced the school's budget, built new schools, opened many new charter schools, and implemented a series of reforms that inspired formerly reluctant parents to enroll their children in the city's schools. He resigned in 2001 and began a political campaign for governor, losing in the Democratic primary by a narrow margin to Rod Blagojevich. From 2002 to 2007 Vallas served as the CEO for the Philadelphia School District, achieving the same kind of success he had achieved in Chicago. In 2007 he became the Superintendent of the New Orleans School District, which had been decimated by Hurricane Katrina. In that role, Paul headed up the Recovery School District, and planned, developed and implemented the rebuilding of the city's schools. During this period, Vallas also did consulting work on rebuilding the school systems in both Chile and Haiti, two countries devastated by earthquakes.

With the completion of rebuilding New Orleans system in 2011, Vallas took the reins of the Bridgeport, Connecticut School District. Despite achieving the same kind of successes there as

he had in Chicago and Philadelphia, opponents to some of reforms challenged Vallas educational credentials. He left in 2014 to run as Governor Pat Quinn's Lieutenant Governor candidate. Quinn lost his bid for reelection, and subsequently Vallas did consulting work, in particular for the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education and the U.S. Bureau of Prison's Education Program. By this time, he was less in demand due to his support for charter schools. In 2019 he made an unsuccessful bid for mayor of Chicago, losing in a crowded election to Lori Lightfoot. He ended the interview with a discussion on education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Chicago's response to protests and riots following the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Mayor Richard M. Daley; Chief Executive Officer, Chicago Public Schools; Philadelphia Public School District; Bridgeport Public Schools; Recovery School District of Louisiana; earthquake recovery in Haiti; earthquake recovery in Chili; Rod Blagojevich; Gov. Pat Quinn; Senator Phil Rock; U.S. Bureau of Indian Education; U.S. Bureau of Prison's Education; protests and riots in Chicago following George Floyd death;

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