

1. **Title:** Chicago Community Schools Initiative
2. **Location and Dates of Operation:** Chicago, IL. 2002 – present.
3. **Abstract:** The Chicago Community Schools Initiative includes 120 public schools in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district. The program began in 2002 and quickly scaled up to about a fourth of the schools in the district. Financial and program support from partner organizations, programs tailored to each school's needs, and institutional support helped make this program a success. However, funding challenges have required it to scale back from its goal of turning every school in the district into a community school.

Keywords: community schools, public schools, district-wide approach, partnerships, resource coordinator

4. **Type of Case:** Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools defines a community schools as “a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.”

As seen in the discussion of mission and programs below, the community schools in Chicago's initiative embody many elements of this definition. They involve partnerships between the school and community resources, and focus on both academics and broader elements of student, family, and community well-being.

5. **Mission and Goals:** According to the CPS website, the mission of the initiative is to “improve student learning through achieving three operational objectives.” These objectives are 1) expanding the services, resources, and developmental opportunities available to student in ways that promote student well-being, attachment to school, academic success, and positive development; 2) addressing the needs of parents and families and strengthening the parent-school relationship; and 3) linking classrooms and teachers to community resources in ways that support student learning.

6. **Context**

Origins: The Chicago Community Schools Initiative grew out of an earlier initiative by the Polk Bros. Foundation, which launched a “Full Service Schools Initiative” (FSSI) in three Chicago elementary schools in 1996. Three years later, the University of Chicago conducted a study of the program and found that FSSI schools had lower student mobility, increased academic

performance, higher rates of attendance and lower rates of truancy than the CPS average. This report gained the attention of local funders as well as Arne Duncan, then CEO of CPS. In 2001 Duncan, with support from the mayor, agreed to expand the FSSI model across the district.

In 2002, the Chicago Campaign to Expand Community Schools launched between the school district and local philanthropic and corporate leaders. It had a goal of raising the money to fund 100 community schools within five years. This goal was reached in 2005, two years ahead of schedule.

Organization: Each community school in the program has a lead partner agency that is responsible for providing all of the non-academic services in the school, as well as a full-time resource coordinator who is responsible for managing the day-to-day aspects of these programs and engaging parents and the community. CPS selects a number of potential lead partner agencies, but the school itself, led by the principal, can choose which one it wants in its school. Lead partner agencies that CPS is currently working with include neighborhood groups, universities, and local and national non-profits. The lead partner agency often brings in other partners to provide various services in the school.

Operation: CPS operates 500 schools, oversees 130 charter schools, and serves nearly 400,000 students. Most non-charter CPS schools are neighborhood schools, serving students within a certain geographical boundary. Approximately 120 Chicago schools operate as community schools today, down from nearly 200 at the initiative's peak in 2009. Much of the initial funds for the program came from the Campaign to Expand Community schools. Today the initiative is financed through a number of sources, including the school district, grants, state funding and other partner organizations. Due to funding challenges, CPS has had to scale back its plans to convert every school in the district to a community school, and even de-fund several existing community schools. Some of these de-funded schools continue to operate as community schools, either by obtaining other funding sources or because the teachers and principals operate the schools as community schools with no additional funding.

7. **Programs:** The specific programs offered vary by schools, but each school has programs in the following categories:

- Academic supports for students
- Health and wellness access for students and families
- Social/emotional health services and referrals for students and families
- Social and cultural enrichment as well as recreational activities
- Adult education and family/community engagement programming

An example of an adult education and community engagement program is the Parent Engagement Centers program. Through funding from Microsoft and the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, these centers have been established in 31 schools. The centers include computers and printers that are used for computer training courses and adult education, as well as for parents and community members to access.

A program focused on supporting students is the Becoming a Man Initiative (BAM). This program operates in 40 Chicago Public schools, including some community schools. It has a goal of reducing dropout and violence among male students through programming inside and outside of school.



President Obama visits a Becoming a Man Initiative program.

<http://www.youth-guidance.org/our-programs/b-a-m-becoming-a-man/>



Parent Engagement Center at Libby School.

<http://chicagodefender.com/2012/11/20/chicago-public-schools-microsoft-united-way-team-up-to-provide-digital-literacy/>

8. Assessment

Strengths

- Program was scaled up to nearly a third of the schools in the district
- Programs and partners tailored to each schools' needs and desires
- Leverages public and private funds
- Uses partner organizations and resource coordinators in the schools to reduce the load for teachers and principals and draw on expertise of partners

Weaknesses

- Does not seem to incorporate place-based education, environmental literacy, or service learning
- Focuses on bringing community resources into the school, but not on how the students themselves can solve community problems

Opportunities

- National attention could attract funding and resources
- Potential for scaling up even further, reviving the goal of turning every school into a community school

Threats

- Subject to budget cuts and changing economic climate
- Change in leadership in the school district could make community schools less of a priority

9. Lessons for Philadelphia

The organizational structure of the Chicago Community Schools Initiative could provide a model that Philadelphia could follow. Not only does the program rely on partner organizations for funding and resources in the schools, the use of lead partner agencies and resource coordinators reduces the need for principals and teachers to take on too much extra work after the conversion of a school to a community school. It also allows the schools to bring in partners that are experts in areas outside of the schools' core missions, such as healthcare or job training for adults.

In addition, this program shows how much easier it is to scale up a program if there is support from the school district's leadership. The support for community schools from the CPS CEO and the mayor helped the program start up and get the momentum to expand to many schools.

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