

Capacity-Building Case Study Chicago Community Schools Initiative

Schools should be anchors of their communities, providing educational resources for the entire family. These are the guiding principles behind our Community Schools Initiative, which turns neighborhood schools into community learning centers that are open well into the evening hours—so they can provide educational and social-service programs, not just to the students, but also to their parents and other family members.

Mayor Richard M. Daley, January 28, 2003

Brief History

The Children's Aid Society's National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools (NTACCS) has provided technical assistance and training to the Chicago Community Schools Initiative throughout its seven-year history, from its inception in 2002 to the present day. At the outset, NTACCS was invited to help district, civic and philanthropic leaders learn about the community school approach and think about ways to take community schools to scale rapidly. Children's Aid Society board member Judith K. Dimon, who was a key champion of the Society's community schools work in New York City, gave civic leadership to a public-private partnership in Chicago that initiated and supported the community schools efforts.

Capacity-Building Activities

Key steps in the technical assistance process included the following:

- NTACCS staff consulted with public and private leaders, including Chicago schools CEO Arne Duncan, about key elements needed in the design of the initiative;
- NTACCS hosted a high-level study visit to our New York City community schools from a delegation of Chicago's public and private leaders that was hosted by Ms. Dimon and that included Arne Duncan;
- NTACCS staff provided on-site training and consultation to the initial cohort of community school principals and directors;
- Subsequently, NTACCS secured funding from private foundations to provide intensive technical assistance to selected non-profit partners involved in the Chicago Community Schools Initiative, including the Children's Home Society of Illinois and Centers for New Horizons;
- Periodically throughout the initiative, NTACCS staff provided training and consultation on selected topics, at the request of the Chicago Public Schools. Most recently, four members of the NTACCS team provided on-site training for all community school sites on strategies to increase parent engagement;
- NTACCS staff convened a focus group of community school directors at the request of Edward Lawlor, then Dean of the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration, as he developed the first Master's-level program to prepare social workers for practice in a community school. Since its inception in 2004, this program has benefited from ongoing NTACCS consultation;
- Children's Aid has helped raise visibility for the Chicago Community Schools Initiative—for example, by inviting Elizabeth Swanson, then director of the

initiative, to write an article on Chicago's community schools that was published in a special issue *New Directions for Youth Development*, a national peer-reviewed journal, entitled *Community Schools: A Strategy for Integrating Youth Development and School Reform* (Fall 2005);

- The Chicago Community Schools Initiative has regularly sent representatives to The Children's Aid Society's biannual Community Schools Practicum conference. In addition, NTACCS staff have served as ongoing "thinking partners" with initiative leaders, providing regular consultation through in-person contacts and telephone and e-mail exchanges.

Results to Date

The Chicago Community Schools Initiative is the largest such effort in the country, with over 150 community schools as of 2009. Several factors have contributed to the rapid growth, proven results and sustainability of the Initiative, including top-level leadership (particularly Mayor Daley and Schools CEO Arne Duncan), persistent philanthropic support, a clear program model that build on national knowledge and best practices, principal leadership and competent services provided by over 45 non-profit partners. The Chicago Community Schools Initiative drew on important lessons from the Full Service Schools Initiative pilot program funded by the Polk Bros Foundation from 1996 to 2000. This effort produced important results including: increased access to programs and services; reduced mobility; reduced truancy; and increased test scores. From its inception, the Chicago Community Schools initiative commissioned external evaluations and produced similar results.

Lessons Learned

Collaboration: The Chicago Community Schools Initiative was successful in involving a large number of committed partners from both the public and private sectors. A unifying vision (as articulated regularly by the mayor and schools superintendent) helped to mobilize key players, including school principals, private foundations, non-profit organizations, universities, parents and students.

Comprehensiveness: The model involves using a school-based needs assessment to drive decisions about which services and supports to bring into the school. Financial constraints have kept some sites from achieving comprehensiveness, although overall the initiative has done an exemplary job of leveraging community resources around a school-based service plan.

Coordination/Integration: A key decision in the design of the Chicago Community Schools Initiative was the hiring of a school-based Resource Coordinator at each site. These Resource Coordinators are often community residents with strong local knowledge and good community connections. Another design element is the requirement that all out-of-school time programs relate to and support the school's academic programs.

Commitment: All of the lead partners—the city, the Chicago Public Schools, the University of Chicago, private funders, and non-profit organizations—continue to be involved in the Initiative as it grows and serves as a national model.