

Prepared Statement

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Roundtable: “NCLB Reauthorization: Strategies that Promote School Improvement”

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1. What specific strategies, programs or polices have been effective in addressing your process of school improvement?

Strategy

The Chicago Public Schools have employed a variety of school improvement strategies over the past ten years. Efforts have ranged from curricular reform and increased professional development to full scale turnarounds. The Illinois General Assembly 60 charter schools for the state. 30 were given to Chicago, 29 have been used, and there is only 1 left.

The student achievement, increased demand, and strong parent satisfaction in charter schools set the stage for the Renaissance 2010 initiative, announced in June 2004. Renaissance 2010 calls for 100 new school by 2010. This bold plan closes chronically under-performing schools and sets up a competitive, community-based selection process to determine the best school operator for each site. These schools are held accountable for performance through 5-year contracts while being given autonomy to create innovative learning environments using one of the following governance structures: charter, contract, or performance. The vision of Renaissance 2010 is to:

- Provide diverse education options for parents and students
- Serve chronically underserved communities throughout Chicago
- Act as a catalyst for new education strategies in the district

2. What outcomes or progress have been made as a result of these strategies?

Outcomes & Performance

Starting fresh has been a way for CPS to successfully turnaround schools. We are fortunate in Chicago to have Office of New Schools that has nurtured and partnered with a number of local education management organizations with proven ability to run schools. Such partner organizations have the ability to leverage outside resources and foster innovations that as a large district, it is hard for us to do.

Case Study

In 2002, the Chicago Public Schools took the unfathomable step of actually closing chronically failing schools. That year three schools were closed and a year later, two new schools opened under brand new

management with renovated faculties. The two schools, Dodge and Williams, are models of what our system has done right.

	Reading 2002	Reading 2006	Math 2002	Math 2006
Dodge	23.6	57	28.3	67.2
Williams	14.6	63.8	15.9	69.5

**Although the 2002 and 2006 tests were different, the scores have been equated.*

Indicators

There are indicators that new and charter schools are accelerating academic achievement. The Office of New Schools currently manages 83 new schools which include 24 pre-Renaissance 2010 charter schools, 54 Renaissance 2010 schools, and 5 professional development schools (professional development portion only). Below are a few highlights of new schools:

- Over 1,700 Renaissance 2010 students are new to CPS (kindergarteners were not included)
- 19 school leaders are alumni of New Leaders for New Schools
- Nearly 300 community members have served on Transition Advisory Councils (TACs)
- Over 800 individuals subscribe to the Renaissance 2010 Report
- 89% of Renaissance 2010 students reside in primary or surrounding community of the school they attend
- Students are transferring out of Renaissance 2010 schools at nearly half the rate of the district (7.7% vs. 14.1%)
- New schools have a higher graduation rate than the district (89.9% vs. 73.4%)
- Charter school students have a higher attendance rate (Elementary schools: 94.6% vs. 94.4% and High school: 93.1% vs. 86.0%)
- Charter schools are making upward progress in ISAT composite scores and closing the achievement gap across students that meet state standards
- Teachers in new schools feel like they have more collective responsibility, innovation, and program coherence in their schools
- High school students tend to feel more supported, safer, and have higher expectations in new schools
- Over four years, high schools students experienced an 8 percentage point gain in PSAE scores compared to 4 points made by the district
- New schools rank top 5 in all but one category for the CPS High School Score Card

3. What challenges did you encounter in your improvement efforts and how did you address those challenges?

Public Perception

School closings and investment in new schools creates push back from the community. There is a history of distrust that creates a barrier with the community and many feel new school development is part a larger plan of gentrification. There is also a belief that the students being served are not from the community and the schools are handpicking the best students. However we have found that 89% of Renaissance 2010 students in formerly closed schools reside in the primary or surrounding community.

Transition Advisory Councils (TACs) were created to serve as liaisons between Chicago Public Schools and communities. Representing the voice of the community, a TAC works to ensure that new schools offer high quality educational options that reflect the community's needs and interests. Through TACs, some of our most vocal opponents have become our most vocal supporters. TACs collaborate with CPS in the following ways:

- Meet regularly to discuss and determine the community needs in the new school
- Conduct community outreach activities and collect citizen input
- Network and host public forums with community leaders, groups and organizations
- Make recommendations to CPS about the new school proposals

Charter Cap

CPS welcomes opportunities to provide students and parents with educational choices, including charter schools. CPS has had significant success with charter schools and generally supports efforts to expand the number of charters available to the district. We believe that Illinois should ideally raise the charter cap on its own. In the meantime, however, no one's child should be "trapped" in a failing school. If the State will not raise the cap, we welcome the federal government's willingness to "step up" on behalf of the children and support parental choice. We support charters for chronically underperforming schools and legislation that gives the district the broadest range of options to meet our restructuring needs. We also note and support this provision of the reauthorization of the NCLB Act.

Student Displacement

The drawback to closing and re-opening schools is the displacement of students. Acknowledging that student mobility can disrupt academic performance in some situations, we found a way around it by closing Sherman Elementary School in June 2006 and re-opening it the following fall. We call it our NCLB Turnaround School because it had not made AYP in five years. The school is a collaboration of the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), the Joyce Foundation, and the Chicago Public Education Fund. The students stayed and a new team of adults came in to lead the school. CPS asked that AUSL to recruit one quarter National Board Certified or Golden Apple-award winning teachers. In this way, CPS has delivered the most effective teachers to the students who need them the most. Students were not displaced and the parents are pleased with the new education program and improved school environment. Enrollment has increased from 425 to over 600.