Elevating Our Vision for Learning: Improving Schools for All
Our Goal: To improve our schools so **all our children** develop into

- Powerful and creative thinkers
- Responsible global citizens
- Self-confident individuals
- Effective, literate communicators

How we get there: the Chicago Public Schools needs to

- **Provide high-quality instruction** that works toward that vision of learning in every school, in every neighborhood, for all children.
- **Refocus system resources** to support high-quality instruction, accompanied by accountability and support for achieving high expectations for **all students’ learning**.
- **Expand the curriculum** to promote broader, deeper learning experiences essential to attaining that vision.
- **Strengthen the preparation and continuous development** of teachers and school leaders to support students’ learning.
- **Create a supportive climate** in every school that is respectful, safe, collaborative, and focused on learning.
- **Forge meaningful partnerships** with families, neighborhood and cultural institutions, universities, businesses, and others to support students’ learning.
- **Develop and support leadership** at all levels, from teaching teams, content leaders, and principals, to Area and Central Office leaders.
- **Extend connections** to early childhood education as a critical foundation for learning, and to post-secondary education as essential preparation for today’s economy.

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Dear Colleagues and Friends:

For Chicago to prosper and succeed in this century of global change, the city must be known for high-quality schools—not just a few, or serving only select neighborhoods, but across the city.

Quality education is of concern to everyone in Chicago, from parents searching to find the best schools, to the vast majority of teachers who are committed to educating our children, and to the wider society, including community, business and civic leaders, and public officials. Chicago Public Schools can—and must—educate all our students at the highest levels, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are just learning English or are native speakers, and whether they are gifted or have special learning needs. During our brief tenures as Interim Chief Executive Officer and Interim Chief Education Officer, we have found that ours is a school system with deep inequities in the quality of education offered from school to school.

The challenge for the Chicago Public Schools is shared by virtually every urban school district across the nation: How do we organize a school system to ensure that each and every student obtains a high-quality education that develops his or her abilities to become powerful and critical thinkers, responsible global citizens, self-confident individuals, and effective, literate communicators? To meet this challenge, we need to raise standards and elevate expectations for teaching and learning and build staff capacity to meet these standards.

While we know that there is no single solution to fixing our education system, we do know that supporting high-quality instruction needs to be at the center of our efforts.

Identifying ways for the school system to achieve high-quality education for every student in every school is the focus of this document, developed with the support of The Chicago Community Trust. We believe that our schools will benefit greatly by implementing these recommendations, which draw from the collective knowledge of local and national experts and practitioners. We are grateful for the many contributors who gave their time and expertise to develop this document.*

When Terry returns to his post as President and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust, the foundation, with leadership by its Executive Committee, will continue to advance this agenda and provide support to the new leadership of Chicago Public Schools. We are thankful for the groundswell of goodwill that supported this work these last several months and look forward to continued collaboration to improve the quality of education and close the achievement gap in our schools.

All Chicagoans have a stake in the success of this work. The future of Chicago is inextricably linked to the quality of education that our students receive. A high-quality education is the foundation for them to achieve enriched lives, develop the skills and knowledge to succeed in our rapidly changing world, and engage actively in the civic community.

It is our collective responsibility and a moral imperative to address these challenges and make the tough decisions necessary for the good of all our children.

Sincerely,

Terry Mazany  
Interim Chief Executive Officer

Charles M. Payne  
Interim Chief Education Officer

* For a complete list of the contributors to this report, see pages 36–38.
**Educating our children well is vital to developing their full potential with the tools they need to thrive throughout their lives. All Chicago children and their families need schools that provide high-quality education. Our charge and challenge is to create a school system that develops excellent schools in every neighborhood.**

With this document we build on what is working and set new and higher goals for ourselves and the entire Chicago community.

We believe that

- All children have capacities for learning that exceed our current expectations;
- All children deserve a high-quality education;
- Educators, families, and partners work together to support children’s learning;
- Every school in every neighborhood must provide a high-quality education; and
- The District must be organized to support every school in providing this level of education.

A comprehensive and high-quality education means that students acquire deep knowledge across a broad array of subject areas, interact well with others, and experience the joy of learning. This type of education is available in some communities, some private schools, and some suburbs. It is more easily accessed by families who know how to navigate the system, have high levels of education, or possess financial resources.

School districts such as Chicago Public Schools have the unique responsibility to ensure equal access to a high-quality education for every student. This means that the District must be systematic in developing and maintaining excellent schools throughout the city and on a scale to serve every single child in our city.

This blueprint to build a system of excellent schools begins with a vision for student learning and ends with recommendations for how to realize the vision.

**NOW IS THE TIME TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION**

We need a blueprint now because our children deserve more than the District currently provides. Standards for teaching and learning have been raised and a new administration will be expected to hit the ground running. The District can use this blueprint as a common ground and starting point for discussions about how we can work together to make improvements.

It is an opportune moment because the nation and the District have developed higher academic standards.

- In fall 2011, Illinois will adopt the National Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. The state has also agreed to use the assessment system aligned to these standards that is being developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Consortium.
- In addition, in the 2009–10 school year, Chicago Public Schools designed instructional frameworks for social science and arts from prekindergarten to 12th grade that provide coherent, rigorous, and developmental goals for learning in those subject areas.

The vision for learning described in this blueprint aligns with these goals. The recommendations included are essential to ensuring broad and effective implementation.

To achieve these standards, the District must rethink its priorities, including what teachers teach, how it is taught, and how the system can support teachers and schools in a significant way. International models show how focusing on these priorities can improve entire school systems for all students. We can learn from what has been put in place in...
nations whose improvement of schools and teaching outpaces our own by far. Finland, Canada, and Australia, in particular, provide rich lessons.

Chicago, like other school systems, needs to

> Raise standards for learning commensurate with international standards;
> Strengthen the capacity of educators, schools, and the system to deliver on these higher goals and accelerate the rate of improvement;
> Ensure that every child receives the necessary support to achieve these higher goals; and
> Support the development of high-quality schools in every neighborhood that accept every child residing in that neighborhood.

This blueprint provides a framework and recommendations to build schools and a school district that educate children to achieve higher levels of knowledge and skills. It recognizes that the responsibility for creating a detailed strategic plan belongs to the new leadership of the city and the District, in close partnership with families and communities.

EDUCATION EXPERTS FROM CHICAGO AND AROUND THE COUNTRY DEVELOPED THE BLUEPRINT

In 2010, Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed Terry Mazany as Interim Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools. Mazany, President and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust, having worked with the leadership of the District since 2001, convened an external advisory board comprised of local and national education leaders as well as three workgroups of District and local experts to develop this blueprint. The workgroups included major stakeholders as well as those with particular expertise in educational practice: teachers, principals, Central Office and Area leaders, community partners, university professors, and parents representing preschools, elementary schools, and high schools from across the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS ARE BASED ON EVIDENCE OF WHAT WORKS ACROSS THE NATION AND THE WORLD

These recommendations are built upon local, national, and international research about what it takes to have effective and improving schools as well as a district that supports these schools in every community. It also builds on prior work and proven practices within Chicago Public Schools.

THIS DOCUMENT PROVIDES A PLATFORM

This document provides a platform for joint work across the city and in each of our schools for how to achieve this vision for all children. The strategies and recommendations included in this document are not prescriptive nor do they advocate for specific programs. Rather, they are guidelines based on what high-performing schools and systems do to improve.

Models for School System Improvement

By Rebecca Lowenhaupt, Ph.D., Northwestern University

In recent years, several researchers have looked to other countries for compelling models for school change. What those researchers found to be true of successful improvement efforts around the globe are strikingly similar to recommendations for reform contained within this education blueprint for Chicago Public Schools. In general, the efforts employed two primary strategies: first, these school districts strengthened consistent and high-quality instruction in classrooms throughout the system; and second, they focused on continuous professional development of teachers and other staff at all levels of the system.

Researchers have found that a sustained focus on these strategies has resulted in systemwide improvement in all students’ performance. As Richard Elmore writes in a report of system reform in Victoria, Australia, “Systematic strategies work to the degree that they change not only the visible features of the system, but also the values, beliefs, and expectations of the people who work in the system and their daily practice.” The reforms are not owned by a single leader or administration but are deeply rooted in everyone’s work, improving instruction. These systems stay the course regardless of changes in administration.

Several common characteristics unify the design of these efforts for system improvement.

> First, the district transforms from a top-down bureaucratic structure to one in which accountability is coupled with the support necessary for success. This support focuses on building both individual and organizational capacity. In addition to professional development, these systems work to institute processes that facilitate continuous learning and improvement.
> Second, these systems revere school teachers and leaders as part of a strategy to build capacity.
> Third, they work to balance systemwide standards with local autonomy and leadership development at the school level.
> Finally, there is evidence among these models that system efforts at improvement engage multiple stakeholders in leadership roles within schools and across the system, distributing leadership among various individuals, roles, and schools.

Lessons from these systems can be applied to Chicago.

The work has just begun. Schools must take stock and measure where they stand in relation to this vision, essential components of school improvement, and corresponding recommendations. The District must also examine where it stands in relation to the ideas in this blueprint and organize its work to support its schools. Improving teaching and learning in schools must be done in collaboration with families and school partners.
Effective education is key to developing each person’s full potential and to maintaining a thriving society. Our children are our greatest responsibility. They are the future of our city and our nation. If we educate our children well, they will have the tools they need to thrive throughout their lives. They will become well-developed human beings with a high quality of life, productive workers, and engaged in the life of the community.

Although Chicago has recently emerged as a leading global city, not all of our students are offered a world-class education. The demands of the 21st century require that we elevate our aspirations and rethink the possibilities for our students’ learning in all Chicago public schools.

This education blueprint raises the expectations we had of our education system and our students in the past. It also challenges practices, policies, and beliefs that have led to racial and class inequities and that have offered the least educational supports to those who need it the most.

**MAKING EXTRAORDINARY GOALS ORDINARY**

With this document we set new and higher goals for ourselves and for the entire Chicago community. We believe that Chicago Public Schools can—and must—educate all our students at the highest levels, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are just learning English or are native speakers, and whether they are gifted or have special learning needs.

This is an ambitious goal, but we believe we can attain it by

> Developing the most skilled and knowledgeable educators at all levels of the system;
> Developing partnerships with families and community to provide a supportive climate; and
> Building and maintaining consistent and stable leadership.

We begin by recognizing the immense potential of our students and the assets they bring with them from their families and communities. We acknowledge that we need to build on the multilingualism and cultural diversity of our students as fundamental strengths and as resources that can enrich all our children’s learning experiences.

Our schools must create opportunities for all students in Chicago Public Schools to attain sufficient intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development to fulfill their highest potential in our 21st century global society.

If we want students to succeed, we must help them to learn more deeply and broadly. This includes engaging in reading and writing across a wide range of subject areas, discussing ideas and texts, understanding and using mathematical concepts to solve complex problems, learning science through inquiry, critically analyzing historical events using primary and secondary sources, developing strong academic language in English and other languages, developing artistic skills and sensibilities, collaborating with...

“Our vision of education is not to turn out workers to fill the ‘jobs of the future.’ It is to nurture creative, confident, curious thinkers and doers, who love their community and seek to find a better way to live and serve in it. They will create the jobs of the future and a new world, based on the values that we have taught them: hard work, cooperation, mutual assistance, justice, kindness, courage, creativity, joy, love of nature and art, and respect for all people, particularly the young and old.”

**PETE LEKI**

CPS parent and former LSC chair, Waters Elementary
others, and exercising leadership in school and in the broader community. Teaching students to develop ways to fully engage in their own learning will be central to how they sustain curiosity and become lifelong learners.

**ADULTS MUST MODEL THIS BEHAVIOR**

To realize this vision of student learning, the adults at all levels of the District—from teachers to District administrators—will need to exhibit these same characteristics. They must be powerful and creative thinkers, responsible global citizens, self-confident, and effective communicators. Parents and organizations working with the schools will be partners striving toward these same standards. All adults—families, teachers, administrators, and community partners—working in this education venture must adopt the dispositions of lifelong learners and be supported in developing these high-level skills in order to make these extraordinary goals for our students the ordinary and expected results in all schools.

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**Our aim is that all students in every school in every neighborhood will become…**

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**Powerful and Creative Thinkers**

Students will use critical, logical, and creative thinking skills to identify, understand, and solve problems, working both independently and collaboratively. Students will apply these academic skills to make informed decisions throughout their lives.

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**Responsible Global Citizens**

Students will value, understand the basic principles of, and participate in a democratic and culturally diverse society. Students will be prepared with effective social skills to develop meaningful and productive relationships with others, whether in the classroom or the wider community in which they live. Students will sustain mutually supportive relationships and have the ability to collaborate with others. Students will effectively and ethically interact within society and will accept responsibility for themselves and their relationship to the environment.

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**Effective, Literate Communicators**

Students will be effective, literate communicators in multiple languages across multiple contexts, including scientific, mathematical, and financial literacy. They will be skilled in using digital technologies as tools to support their learning. Students will have opportunities to cultivate individual talents in the arts as well.

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**Self-Confident Individuals**

Students will develop positive self-concepts, exhibiting motivation and perseverance, confidence, and self-sufficiency. Students will be flexible and entrepreneurial, adaptable, and resilient individuals who make informed choices about behavior, choices that support their intellectual, physical, emotional, and social well-being.
WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR THE DISTRICT TO REALIZE THIS VISION?

To be successful, the District must have a mission to ensure that all schools offer a comprehensive, high-quality education, with clear expectations for all schools. Yet, while the mission and expectations are necessary, they are not sufficient. Critical to achieving this vision is the District’s commitment to continuous support to develop the capacity of principals, teachers, and District and Area administrators to work with students and families to deliver on this vision. This will require rethinking the organization’s priorities, including what we teach, how it is taught, and how we support teachers and schools in a significant way.

The breadth and depth of what all our students need to learn must be continuously expanded and made available in all schools. We must ensure that there are consistent high standards as well as coherent and rigorous instruction from preschool through 12th grade that enable students to develop the competencies articulated in the vision. For students to become effective, literate communicators, for example, schools must provide students with increasingly more demanding opportunities to express their ideas and interpret and analyze others’ ideas.

This means that we must build the capacity of educators to teach at increasingly higher levels and in more effective ways that address the diverse needs and strengths of all students. Such a change requires continuous development of teachers’ knowledge of the subjects they are teaching along with pedagogical content knowledge: how children learn specific subjects and how teachers teach them. It also requires that teachers in all schools have the dispositions to be effective teachers.

To improve schools, all aspects of the system must align to support teaching and learning to meet the standards set by the District. Strategies to improve schools should build upon the best knowledge and practice of local and international systems, such as Finland; Victoria, Australia; and
Early Childhood Education: The Foundation for Success
By Barbara Bowman, Chief Officer, CPS Office of Early Childhood

The base for later school achievement is laid during the preschool years. School is a challenge for all children but particularly for children from low-income families, children from some ethnic communities, and children with disabilities. High-quality preschool programs can help ameliorate disadvantages and assure that all children—even those most at risk—can enter kindergarten ready to learn. Critical ingredients for school include a broad array of social, physical, and cognitive skills, which can be intentionally taught by strong and purposeful teachers. Early education is not a vaccination against later failure; however, it is the foundation for success.

High-quality programs have small groups, high adult-to-child ratios, and good equipment and materials. However, the most important ingredient is teachers who are well versed in child development, early learning objectives, and teaching strategies that engage children’s interests and attention. The high-quality program alternates large and small group activities both indoors and out, provides for extensive verbal interaction between teachers and children and among children, schedules preliteracy activities—including book reading, dictation, and phonemics as well as math and science lessons—all embedded in meaningful contexts for young children.

In addition, children learn best when their families and communities are involved. Teachers, administrators, and other staff are welcoming, collaborate with community groups, and give parents the opportunity both to contribute to the school and to learn from it.

The successful preschool is informal—young children don’t manage well in lock step; it is intentional—the school day is short and there is much to learn; and it cares about relationships—between the teacher and child, teacher and parent, teacher and colleagues, and administrator with teacher, parents, and the community.

Ontario, Canada. These school systems invest in knowledge building and focus the work of school and system leaders on continuous improvement of instruction. Thus, the District must invest in appropriate and valid research and program evaluation to support teaching and learning across the system.

The District is thus responsible for ensuring

- Alignment and coherence of rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- A focus on continuous improvement;
- Capacity building of staff; and
- Equitable use of District resources based on needs of schools.

Ultimately, the District must organize itself to support schools to meet these more rigorous standards.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR EACH SCHOOL TO REALIZE THIS VISION?

While it is the District’s responsibility to set standards and expectations and to support schools, the important work of implementing these goals must occur in individual schools across Chicago. Research provides insights into what it takes for schools to improve. Examining schools in the early 1990s, the Consortium on Chicago School Research identified five essential supports for school improvement:

- Ambitious instruction that focuses on high standards for teaching and learning;
- Knowledgeable and skilled professional communities;
- Engaged families, partners, and communities whose resources are tapped by schools to support students’ learning;
- Climates conducive to learning and human development; and
- Leadership that enables schools to establish these supports.

The interaction of these essential supports is critical to the continuous development of effective schools as shown in the diagram on the previous page. Schools must continuously assess and strategically plan how to improve their organization around these essential supports.5

THREE ESSENTIAL ARENAS OF WORK

The three working groups described earlier developed recommendations focusing on these supports. The working groups were comprised of Chicago Public Schools’ local experts, including teachers, principals, families and community members, and educators from colleges and universities.

The workgroup recommendations are organized in three sections:

1. Instruction, assessment, and professional community;
2. Climates for student learning and partnerships with families and communities; and
3. Leadership.

For each recommended strategy, the working groups were asked to consider what schools needed to do, as well as the Areas’ and District’s roles and responsibilities. In keeping with the purpose of this blueprint, these recommendations are not directives for specific programs or a prescribed curriculum. Each school is situated within a community with particular assets and challenges, so recommendations are designed to support local application of these ideas.
Any genuine attempt to realize this new vision for high-quality instruction that will produce powerful and creative thinkers, responsible global citizens, self-confident individuals, and effective, literate communicators will require a significant change in how stated District priorities are implemented. This includes how the District’s administrative structures are organized and function, how the District supports teachers and schools, how important messages are disseminated throughout the school system and the broader Chicago community, and how budgets are allocated.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1**

**Ambitious instruction requires a coherent system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.**

Ambitious instruction that is effective for all students in all schools requires an aligned system of learning expectations, instructional materials and tools, assessments, and professional development. Misalignment of any of these components creates confusion about the expectations for students, teachers, administrators, and families, and can lead to fragmented instruction. Budget allocations at all levels also all need to support ambitious instruction.

An aligned system helps ensure equitable access to ambitious instruction and creates opportunities for targeted support and cost savings. For example, through the Chicago Math and Science Initiative begun in 2002, the District encouraged schools to select from a small set of designated instructional materials in mathematics and science. As a result, professional development and classroom support were aligned with high-quality curriculum tools, benchmark assessments were developed and aligned with instruction across the District, and the District saved money. The Social Sciences 2.0 Framework, developed in 2009, provides a clear vision for ambitious instruction in the social sciences and allows the District to systematically develop teacher and school capacity to realize this goal.

Expectations for District coherence need to recognize the diversity of schools and student needs in a district as large as Chicago Public Schools. “One size fits all” is not a reasonable approach and will discourage well-informed decisions addressing local needs. Clarity about what is and is not negotiable with regard to instruction and assessment is essential. The District needs to clearly define roles, responsibilities, and expectations at each level of the school system, as well as to craft clear guidelines about how the different levels communicate and interact. Without such clear definitions and expectations, District coherence is not possible and District-wide access to high-quality instruction is unlikely.
Section 1: Instruction, Assessment, and Professional Community Recommendations

Schools and the District must sustain a focus on improving teaching and learning.

The District must be resolute in achieving the education blueprint goals and fully committed to staying the course. Large districts are particularly vulnerable to external pressures to adopt the “next quick fix,” to shift to “new” or “better” tests, or to adopt new initiatives. To attain the bold vision of the education blueprint, District leaders must remain steadfast in focusing work that dictates considerable investment of time, resources, and support to bring the vision to fruition. It requires an unwavering commitment to stay the course and avoid pressure to “move on” to other pursuits. The District should build upon what is working, base new initiatives on sound and proven practices aligned to demonstrated needs, and give initiatives the time needed to take root. There are no quick fixes.

The District should harness internal and outside expertise.

Chicago Public Schools should take full advantage of its internal expertise. However, there are times when engaging outside expertise can enhance District efforts, particularly with complex problems such as assessment, instructional frameworks, and addressing the instructional needs of special populations. Chicago is home to world renowned educational institutions with experts who have demonstrated deep commitments in recent years to supporting instructional improvement in Chicago schools. The District should continue to develop partnerships with these individuals and institutions.

Ambitious instruction demands distributed leadership and specialized knowledge.

Instituting ambitious instruction requires leadership at different levels—such as instructional leadership team members, principals, high school course coordinators, and department chairpersons, Area coaches, and Central Office curriculum staff. It requires a variety of expertise about how to improve teaching and learning in specific disciplines and how to organize schools to foster good instruction. It is essential that the District develop instructional leadership at each level of the system.
Ambitious instruction requires an infrastructure engineered explicitly to support and enhance the core function of the District: to promote high-quality teaching and learning for all students. The education blueprint calls for a broad, well-rounded education that includes all subjects and promotes the development of the whole child intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically.

“Ambitious teaching requires that teachers teach in response to what students do as they engage in problem-solving performances, all while holding students accountable to learning goals,” according to experts on teaching. These learning goals include deep conceptual understandings, reasoning, problem solving, capacity for logical thought, explanation and justification, and linking knowledge in one discipline to another. This requires that teachers differentiate their teaching approach to meet each student’s learning needs and strengths, maintain the least restrictive environments possible for all students, and pay explicit attention to development of students with disabilities.

**KEY STRATEGY**

Build an organization that focuses at all levels on supporting and engaging all students in high-quality instruction.

**SCHOOL**

> Create local teams and structures designed to improve teaching and empower students to become active learners.

**AREA**

> Establish plans to provide supports to schools based on the goals of the education blueprint and schools’ individual needs.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**

> Structure and manage Central Office activities and responsibilities that direct and support classroom instruction to eliminate duplication, overlap, and inconsistency. The goal should be coherent messages to schools and Areas about instruction, assessment, and professional support.

> Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of personnel at each level, including non-negotiable expectations for all schools.

**KEY STRATEGY**

Revise the District’s instructional frameworks to reflect the education blueprint.

**SCHOOL**

> Establish classroom schedules and teacher assignments that include adequate time for instruction in all subjects by well-prepared teachers.

**AREA**

> Explore and pilot new models, such as regional collaborations among schools, for supporting instruction in the arts, languages, and other subjects and for working with special populations.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**

> Convene a task force of top internal and external leaders to redefine a core curriculum for all students that is aligned to the education blueprint. Such a task force should consider the new requirements of the Common Core State Standards; existing District frameworks and national recommendations for instruction in all subjects; and recommendations for effective use of technologies in the classroom.
The Power of Language Development
By Beatriz Ponce de León, Project Manager Bilingual Education and World Language Initiative, CPS Office of Language and Culture

“Today’s success for students is predicated on being able to use language effectively for a wide variety of purposes: to think critically, to solve problems, to collaborate with people of different backgrounds, to find and critically assess required information, to present and discuss ideas.” — Aida Walqui, Ph.D., Director, Teacher Professional Development Program, WestEd

Our schools, our cities, and our country need to value and promote the mastery of multiple languages and multiple literacies in order for students to achieve academically and have greater opportunities as adults. To do this, school districts will have to take bold steps to move beyond existing definitions of and beliefs about language and literacy education. Traditionally, language education has been compartmentalized by school districts. English language arts and English literacy instruction are generally separate from bilingual and world language education. There is typically the foreign language, or world language program, for students who are English speakers and want to learn a new language as an enrichment activity. Bilingual education is likely to be in a separate department and is generally perceived as a remedial program because students need to learn English and their first language is not accepted as an asset. This fragmented view of language development contributes to the ongoing omission of academic language instruction and of other literacies students need in today’s world. It exists despite the growing body of research that demonstrates the power of language development on the academic success of all students. Research shows that

- Learning two languages well has significant cognitive, academic, and social benefits that can lead to higher academic achievement for all students.
- Instruction in a student’s native language enhances academic achievement of English language learners, while the loss of the native language is associated with poor long-term academic outcomes.
- Teaching academic language across content areas and across languages can strengthen overall language development for English language learners and native-English speakers, increasing academic achievement for all.
- Dual language education programs are the most effective language programs for developing bilingual and biliterate students while also improving their academic achievement.
- Many proven instructional practices for English language learners are also effective with monolingual English speakers and can be particularly effective for students who speak nonstandard English.

The Chicago Public Schools is currently engaged in developing a language and literacy-rich framework that broadens the definition of language education and proposes rigorous language options from prekindergarten through 12th grade, fostering bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiculturalism while boosting academic achievement. The benefits of rich and effective language education go beyond being bilingual. They can be practical and personal, social and cognitive, emotional and economic.

“Ultimately the great benefits to the individual become great assets to society; everyone will win as Chicago Public Schools graduates more multilingual critical thinkers prepared for higher education and for work in their communities, in our city and in the international arena.”

KEY STRATEGY

Ensure that teachers and administrators have all the tools they need, including appropriate materials, to support high-quality instruction for all.

- SCHOOL
  - Create systems to ensure that all teachers have access to the appropriate tools required to do their jobs well.
- AREA
  - Ensure that local schools select and use high-quality tools and resources.
- CENTRAL OFFICE
  - Establish structures and systems that ensure teachers have the requisite, high-quality tools to do their jobs effectively. This may include the District having a scheduled plan for reviewing and supporting the adoption of high-quality materials and resources in each curricular area. Plans would also include centralized funding and purchasing to ensure judicious use of resources and their availability.
  - Establish minimum criteria for technology availability so that all students have appropriate access.
What we assess reflects what we value. Assessment takes different shapes and forms and can encompass many purposes. It is not restricted to standardized tests in reading and math or other written evaluations; it incorporates all activities that teachers and others undertake to collect evidence about students’ achievement. Teachers can use such evidence to alter instruction to address students’ learning needs.

The education blueprint establishes a broad vision for student learning that should be reflected in the Chicago Public Schools’ assessment system. To implement the new education blueprint, District leaders must rethink current assessment practices so that the system of assessments provides information aligned with high-level goals for learning and the language of instruction.

Chicago Public Schools must establish a model assessment system designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning that meets the following criteria:

- Employ a coherent collection of high-quality assessment tools and instruments that do not duplicate one another;
- Be a part of an aligned learning system of standards, curriculum, instruction, and teacher development;
- Increase emphasis on “assessments for learning” rather than on “assessments of learning” (Assessments useful to improve learning include student work samples, classroom observation data, curriculum-embedded assessments, and other types of “formative” assessments);
- Promote and measure critical thinking, strong analysis, and imagination and creativity;
- Encourage use of portfolios of student work to demonstrate progress and mastery of skills and knowledge;
- Develop teachers’ knowledge and skills to use student assessment data to guide instruction;
- Use data only in ways for which the assessments were designed and for which they are valid; and
- Develop a common understanding that the purpose of any well-designed system is the use of the assessment data—not the data alone.

Building an assessment system to improve the quality of learning first and foremost requires a system that focuses on what happens in the classroom every day. Teachers must examine and evaluate their teaching and students’ learning on a daily basis to understand what students know, what they have difficulty understanding, how each individual is constructing meaning about a subject area, and how to structure learning opportunities to engage different learners. Doing this in individual classrooms as well as in collaboration with other teachers within and across grade levels and subjects will enable teachers and schools to make needed changes and to gauge progress.

The new assessment system must be part of a larger, coordinated system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As it develops new assessment plans, the District must consider the intended users of information, how frequently they need the information, and how much detail they require to meet their goals and purposes. For example, teachers may require different kinds of data at different intervals than District leaders.

In the past few years, Central Office units, Areas, and local schools each have added assessments to the portfolio of required assessments. As a result, far too much instructional time is spent on external assessments that provide little new information and are of little value in improving the school’s daily instruction.
“Excessive testing and related test preparation in our schools not only deprives students of the joy of learning but also distracts teachers and students from engaging and rigorous instruction that will prepare students for living in and contributing to their communities.”

TAFFY E. RAPHAEL, Ph.D.
Director of Partnership READ, University of Illinois at Chicago

While much energy has been devoted to discussions of the data side of “data-driven decision making,” the “decision making” component is rarely discussed. Even with well-designed assessments, precious little time is allocated for teachers and school administrators to examine the data collaboratively in ways that will improve teaching and learning. The District’s investment in assessments and related technology needs to be coupled with a parallel investment in professional development for everyone—including local teachers and administrators, Area staff, and Central Office personnel—who will use such data for educational or organizational purposes. This professional development should be designed to deepen understanding about appropriate and inappropriate uses of various kinds of assessment data. Without this, the investment of resources, energy, and—most critically—instructional time are likely to be wasted on activities that do not improve teaching and learning. Even worse, data are likely to be used in ways that interfere with the teaching and learning process and potentially contribute to bad, high-stakes decisions involving students and teachers.
While the District advocates for data-driven decisions, many leaders elect to ignore definitive research showing that the more time spent on test preparation, the more poorly students perform on achievement tests. Exposing students to test structures and question formats is important, but it should not be used to supplant high-quality instruction. Too many schools and Areas continue to invest far too heavily in practice tests and related test-preparation activities that rob students and teachers of time for productive instruction and of resources to support it.

Concerns about inconsistent grading practices within and across schools have long been raised but rarely addressed. The current use of online grade books throughout the Chicago Public Schools requires that the District examine grading practices, particularly in relation to the goals outlined in the education blueprint.

It is essential that current plans to adopt a value-added measure* in the teacher evaluation process align with the goals of the education blueprint.

Now is the time for Chicago Public Schools to undertake the work outlined in the education blueprint. National efforts are under way for all states to adopt minimum Common Core State Standards. Two consortia, made up of education experts from throughout the nation, are currently building quality assessment tools and resources for Illinois and other states.

Nothing short of a full reexamination of Chicago Public Schools assessment practices will enable us to make vital connections between assessment and learning and improve teaching practice.

**KEY STRATEGY**

**Conduct research and make recommendations for a coherent and efficient system of assessments that will lead to improved teaching and learning.**

**CENTRAL OFFICE**

> Convene a high-level task force of external and internal assessment experts, Area leaders, principals, and teachers to evaluate the current assessment system and make recommendations for improvement.

> Empower the task force to make recommendations to District leaders and the Board of Education on establishing a balanced system of assessments including nonstandardized measures—such as portfolios, teacher observations, or end of unit tests—for all students and appropriate assessments for special populations to replace the current system.

> Implement the assessment system recommended by the task force.

**KEY STRATEGY**

**Support appropriate uses of various assessment data, including formative information.**

**SCHOOL**

> Create structures and time for the school’s instructional leadership team, as well as other teachers and administrators, to analyze assessment data and use it appropriately to improve teaching and learning.

**AREA**

> Develop the capacity of school leadership, including teacher-leaders and administrators, to use assessment data appropriately to improve teaching and learning.

> Support school leadership in developing structures and time for appropriately analyzing and using assessment data.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**

> Develop a model for improving assessment competency and enhancing assessment practice at all levels throughout the District.

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* Value-added measures are developed by using complex statistical models that use multiple years of student test score data to estimate the added value of a school or a teacher.
KEY STRATEGY
Limit standardized test preparation activities.

AREA
> Ensure that schools are increasing the amount of time spent on core classroom instruction and reducing time spent on test preparation.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Establish a clear and definitive District stance on the benefits and limitations of test preparation activities, including some restrictions on the purchase of test preparation materials.

KEY STRATEGY
Update current grading practices to align with Common Core State Standards and the education blueprint.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Establish a process to assess the implications of the Common Core State Standards and the education blueprint on current grading policies and practices.
> Revisit the District’s 2009 “Proposed Statement about Grading in High Schools” and recommendations regarding grading policies in elementary school, such as the use of developmental report cards for primary grades.
CRITICAL PRIORITY 3
DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGEABLE AND SKILLED PRACTITIONERS

To reach the goals of the education blueprint, the District must allocate time and develop structures to allow teachers to plan and collaborate to improve instruction. Establishing this as routine practice in every school should be a non-negotiable, top priority of all school, Area, and District leaders. Such professional learning communities should be focused on instructional strategies for enhancing student learning, using classroom and other assessment data in valid ways as guides.

The most effective professional development to improve teacher practices is closely linked to what teachers are doing in their classrooms. General professional development, such as workshops on best practices, standards, or data usage, can be important; however, it yields marginal results for improving the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. Promoting more curricular coherence across the District is critical if the District is to provide professional development.

“An effective school values the capacity of its adult resources and with clear vision, purpose and leadership, directs them toward solving the school’s academic and social/emotional student challenges. In their myriad of daily interactions, teachers, staff, and administrators infuse the school with a natural, cohesive sense of purpose.”

BARRY MCRAITH
English Chair and Teacher, North Lawndale College Prep HS
focusing initially on particular strategies and tools for administrators to support high-quality instruction for all students in literacy and mathematics.

There are some instructional areas in which nearly all teachers and administrators lack the appropriate background and skills. These areas are critical for Chicago Public Schools to achieve its stated goal of improving teaching and learning for all students. They include supporting or working with English language learners, students in special education programs, and students who are gifted learners in particular areas. Chicago Public Schools needs a concerted, District-wide professional development effort to build the capacity of teachers and administrators to address the needs of these special populations. Such an approach, however, should integrate with and complement professional development in content areas rather than being developed and offered by independent Central Office units, as is currently the practice.

Chicago Public Schools must engage in collaborations with teacher-education partners to ensure that the teacher-education programs equip novice and experienced teachers with

- Strong content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge;
- Knowledge of how to evaluate and support all learners; and
- Knowledge and skill regarding teaching special populations of students.

Purposeful partnerships with universities include strengthening clinical placements and creating a “bench” of future teachers for the system.

Hiring the most competent and qualified teachers, principals, District leaders, and support personnel is essential to transforming instruction in Chicago Public Schools. Unfortunately, the hiring process at all levels often does not receive attention commensurate with its importance. The hiring process needs to become a top priority of all District leaders. The District needs a well-defined strategy for supporting principals in making good hiring decisions. And once new personnel are hired, better systems are needed to support them.

The District should view developing teacher leaders and career ladders as among its highest priorities. Explicit plans should be in place and negotiated when necessary to develop and nurture teacher leaders in all schools, such as instructional leadership team members in elementary schools, and course coordinators or department chairs in high schools.

For Chicago Public Schools to develop and support a knowledgeable and skilled professional community, the District needs to collaborate with the teachers union around issues of common interest, such as teacher development and advancement by career ladders, and working conditions that support teaching.

Continued on the next page
KEY STRATEGY
Establish time and structures for teacher collaboration within and across schools.

SCHOOL
> Allocate time for teacher collaboration as a routine part of the school’s weekly schedule.

AREA
> Create structures that encourage and support cross-school collaboration.
> Provide support to facilitate the work of school leadership teams, including allocating time for collaboration.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Negotiate policies that extend the school day to ensure time for teacher collaboration.

KEY STRATEGY
Align teachers’ professional development and the new teacher evaluation system with the goals of the education blueprint, instructional programs, and curricular frameworks.

SCHOOL
> Determine what professional development best meets school needs, including teacher coaching in classroom and schools.
> Establish and implement a professional development plan aligned with the school’s and the individual teacher’s needs.
> Work with teachers to establish individual development plans that are informed by their evaluations.

AREA
> Help schools to identify professional development needs and to implement professional development supports.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Evaluate all professional development offerings in relation to how they directly support classroom teaching and how closely they align with the curricular frameworks and tools that teachers are using in their classrooms.
> Analyze current and past practices regarding coaching, mentoring, and promoting instruction-focused professional communities.
> Analyze the multiple current evaluation tools and frameworks as the new teacher evaluation model is negotiated, and advocate for one that is research-based.
> Offer professional development to equip teachers and administrators to deal with the needs of special populations.

KEY STRATEGY
Align professional development for administrators with the goals of the education blueprint.

AREA
> Work with principals to determine their professional development needs so that principals can better support high-quality instruction in all content areas.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Work with Area officers to determine their professional development needs so that Area officers can better support high quality instruction.
> Offer professional development that improves administrators’ ability to provide instructional leadership in all content areas, beginning with literacy and mathematics.

KEY STRATEGY
Work to align teacher preparation with District programs and needs.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Use existing partnerships between the District and universities to establish minimum requirements and expectations, which may surpass state requirements, to align teacher preparation with District programs and needs.
> Establish policies that require all teachers to meet the minimum expectations and requirements within a specified time after being hired.
KEY STRATEGY
Improve and expand the knowledge base regarding good hiring practices.

SCHOOL
> Make the hiring process a top priority of principals and other instructional leaders, such as high school department chairs and grade-level team leaders. This should be reflected in the amount of time dedicated to hiring new staff and engaging other personnel in the hiring process.

AREA
> Provide additional supports to school personnel involved in the hiring process.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Identify successful models and tools for making hiring decisions.
> Offer professional development to District leaders, including directors, Area officers, and school personnel involved in the hiring process.
> Align budget and staffing projections to allow for earlier hiring.
> Improve accuracy of staffing projections to minimize disruptions due to layoffs.

KEY STRATEGY
Establish a meaningful career ladder for teachers with substantial focus on keeping teachers in the classroom.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Establish, negotiate where necessary, and implement new career ladders for teachers that keep good teachers in the classroom, recognize their skill level, and develop them as teacher leaders.

Teaching Students with Special Needs Is Just Good Teaching

The high-level goals of this blueprint apply to all children regardless of their individual learning needs.

The implications for schools and the District are that: 1) all students should have equal access to high-quality schools and be included in mainstream classroom settings to the extent that they are able; 2) all teachers should have the capacity and resources to address differentiated learning needs in all classrooms; 3) all schools must eliminate isolation, segregation, or exclusion of any children; and 4) the District must support all schools becoming compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act so that students and families can fully participate.

DIFFERENTIATION IS THE NEW NORM FOR TEACHING
Our teachers increasingly educate diverse learners, including English language learners, special education students, and students whose skills and knowledge vary across a wide spectrum. Goals for learning must be high for all children, although teaching strategies and supports must be varied.

“There is ample evidence that students are more successful in school and find it more satisfying if they are taught in ways that are responsive to their readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. ... Another reason for differentiating instruction relates to teacher professionalism. Expert teachers are attentive to students’ varied learning needs; to differentiate instruction, then, is to become a more competent, creative, and professional educator.” 18
Developing schools that produce powerful and creative thinkers, responsible global citizens, self-confident individuals, and effective, literate communicators requires the intentional efforts of administrators, students, teachers, and families to create engaging, respectful, supportive, trusting, and equitably accessible environments for teaching and learning. These environments must respect and embrace similarities and differences, engaging all in a common conversation about children’s learning. They must provide opportunities for students and teachers to reflect and be open to rigorous but respectful debate. All schools must leverage the assets of families and communities to enable students to pursue deep intellectual learning, understand their individual and collective responsibilities, and develop their talents. When all members of a school community engage in building such a school climate, schools support students’ intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development—thus fully preparing them to succeed at each step of their education.

**Guiding Principle 1**

Positive learning climates contribute to academic achievement and student development.

For schools to be places where children can succeed, schools must create humane climates that support learning. This means that all adults must show respect for every person with whom they interact. Schools must create cultures in which everyone feels physically, academically, and emotionally safe to ask questions, think about ideas, share knowledge, persevere in difficult tasks, discover new things, and work with others with confidence, respect, and integrity.

**Guiding Principle 2**

Family and community supports align around teaching and learning.

Families and communities are key partners in the education of all children. Schools need to leverage the strengths and assets of their students’ families and cultures to undergird academic and social development. Schools benefit from the purposeful use of community resources to enrich and expand learning opportunities for children. At the same time, linking children’s academic learning to the life of the community makes education more relevant to and respectful of children’s lives and cultural identities.
“VOYCE SAYS THAT A SAFE SPACE WOULD BE …

> A place where students can express themselves and don’t have to worry a lot;
> A space where everyone gets along;
> A place like home where students can be vulnerable and still loved;
> A place where students worry about what they are going to learn next and not what they have to do to get out of trouble or what got you in trouble;
> Feeling comfortable to speak, willing to listen, eager to support;
> Allies coming from all over—a space where everyone looks out for each other;
> A space in which people really listen to each other and take an interest in growing from one another;
> No yelling—no verbal abuse—no mental, emotional, or physical abuse of any kind;
> A place with consistent consciousness raising in which people hold themselves accountable; and
> A place where students can have the freedom to learn without worrying about judgment, cruelty, harassment, and disappointment.”

**VOICES OF YOUTH IN CHICAGO EDUCATION (VOYCE)**
Youth from 7 community organizations and 12 Chicago Public High Schools

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**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3**

**Including voice and respectful relationships build strong school climates.**

Fundamental to learning is establishing a sense of one’s own voice. When learners, whether they are adults or students in a school, feel safe and can trust those around them, they are more likely to think critically, to ask questions, to risk voicing ideas, and to persist after failures. These dispositions are necessary for intellectual growth as well as collaborative decision making in a school. This free expression should apply not only to teachers and students but also to parents, community members, and educators at all levels of the District working to encourage learning and to learn from one another.

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**WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?**

*By John Payton and Roger P. Weissberg et al., Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*

“Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to

> Recognize and manage their emotions;
> Set and achieve positive goals;
> Demonstrate caring and concern for others;
> Establish and maintain positive relationships;
> Make responsible decisions; and
> Handle interpersonal situations effectively.

These critical social-emotional competencies involve skills that enable children to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships and resolve conflicts respectfully, make ethical and safe choices, and contribute constructively to their community.”
A positive school climate is the foundation that undergirds any action, strategy, or program the school implements to improve teaching and learning. To build a positive school climate, adults must develop norms, values, and expectations that provide emotional, intellectual, and physical safety for students, faculty, administration, parents, and community members. Mutual trust and respect for every individual—including adults—forms the basis of a positive school climate.

Schools with positive climates promote social-emotional learning among students in all aspects of their schooling, from learning math, to eating lunch with their friends, to studying world languages. Schools with positive learning climates have clear objectives, rules, and non-punitive methods of managing behavior that help all students and staff to learn effective ways of relating to one another and resolving conflict when necessary. A positive climate is critical to the success of any school.

“The film Waiting for Superman portrays students as victims of the public education system. I disagree with this message because I believe I am not a victim but a youth leader who is working with other youth to make a positive change in our school system.

As youth leader with Voices of Youth in Chicago Education and Logan Square Neighborhood Association, my vision is for every student to be able to get a high-quality education at his or her neighborhood public school. That means creating a system that creates supportive relationships among students and school staff, building an environment where all students feel safe to participate and making sure all students take challenging classes that prepare them for college and careers.”

BRIAN Perea
Kelvyn Park High School, class of 2010
Parents and families are the first educators of their children. Successful schools know how to welcome and engage families as partners. Families bring many assets to school that can become resources in classrooms and schoolwide. Schools should draw parents and families into the schools, not only as partners in classroom and school activities but also to give them information about what is being taught and how to support their children’s learning at home. Parents can also inform schools about their children’s strengths and needs and how to engage them and support their learning.

It is critical for schools and families to have high expectations of all students and to know how to support those expectations to help them. This is particularly important for families of students with disabilities because of society’s low expectations of these children.

The District needs to help families leverage available resources that support their children’s advancement.

**KEY STRATEGY**

**Ensure that every school engages families in their children’s learning and development.**

**SCHOOL**
- Create ways to regularly share information with families about what children are learning and how they are progressing.
- Provide information about ways to support the learning and development of their children both in and outside of school, such as explaining what is developmentally appropriate learning in reading and writing, discussing topics they are learning at school, and using outside learning opportunities to extend experiences related to learning.

**AREA**
- Provide models and coaching for school leaders to develop partnerships and systematic communications with families.
- Share best practices across schools to encourage family engagement.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**
- Set expectations for school partnerships with families.
- Support communication systems between schools and families that enable regular information sharing about their children’s progress both academically and socially.
- Provide resources to reduce language barriers to family participation in schools (such as translating important documents or creating multilingual web resources).
- Provide clear information about educational options and resources to parents and families of children with special needs.

**KEY STRATEGY**

**Develop opportunities to draw on the resources of families to support the school’s work.**

**SCHOOL**
- Offer welcoming environments for families.
- Create structures for families to provide supports or services to classrooms or the school at large (such as having parents conduct tours of the school in multiple languages or having parents teach students about an area in which they have specific knowledge).

**AREA**
- Provide models and other support for school leaders to develop welcoming environments for families.
- Share best practices across schools that welcome and engage families.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**
- Set expectations for schools to draw on the resources of families to support the school’s work.
- Provide staff and resources to promote family engagement in all schools.
CRITICAL PRIORITY 3
COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS WORKING TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN STUDENTS’ EDUCATION

Children learn not only from experiences in their classrooms and schools but also from their peers, their families, their communities, and the world. The work of schools can be strengthened by organizations offering learning opportunities or supporting students’ academic, physical, social, and emotional development. Effective schools regularly draw upon these resources and link them to the teaching and learning agenda of the school. These community resources can be visible during the school day, after school, or on weekends. One particular model is that of community schools—of which there are more than 100 in Chicago Public Schools—in which services of community organizations are made available in an organized way inside the school building.

Chicago offers rich resources for schools through its community organizations, museums, universities, and nonprofit organizations. Effective schools draw systematically upon these resources and engage them as partners in educating and developing all of the students in the school. As a result, the wider community becomes a campus for learning.

“An effective and supportive school climate is only as strong as the relationships between and among adults and young people in a school. There is no shortcut or one isolated program that can lead to a strong school culture. While programs like advisories, restorative justice, and leadership/civic engagement can be powerful vehicles that support school climate, they alone cannot carry the burden of transforming a school into a place where young people feel supported and challenged within the context of powerful and purposeful relationships.”

LILA LEFF
Umoja Student Development Corporation

SECTION 2. CLIMATES FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY STRATEGY
Develop purposeful partnerships between schools and external organizations in the wider community.

SCHOOL
> Identify and engage external partner organizations whose work is aligned with specific learning and development goals of the school (such as universities, museums, environmental organizations, health clinics, youth leadership groups, and tutoring centers).
> Utilize external resources to expand opportunities for learning in extracurricular areas (such as debate teams, robotics programs, school newspapers, instrumental and choral music, and language classes).

AREA
> Provide models for school leaders to effectively leverage community partnerships to further each school’s learning and development goals.
> Share best practices across schools on developing external partnerships.
> Coordinate and support elementary and secondary school uses of external community-based organizations.
> Support elementary schools’ communication with early childhood education providers in the community to improve readiness and transition of preschool children into elementary schools.
> Develop and manage collaborations with community and citywide organizations.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Set expectations for and facilitate purposeful partnerships between schools and external organizations.
> Develop District collaborations with community and citywide organizations.
> Provide staff and resources to promote effective school-community partnerships.
> Establish information systems to collect and organize data on school partnerships across the District.
> Develop standards for establishing, maintaining, and evaluating high-quality school-community partnerships.
> Seek sustained funding for school-community partnerships and advocate for Elementary and Secondary Education Act policies that support using community resources to strengthen the work of schools.
KEY STRATEGY
Strengthen the interactions and relationships between schools and the wider community.

**SCHOOL**
> Provide opportunities for staff to meet, coordinate activities, and align goals with external partners.
> Create opportunities for school staff to learn about and engage with the broader community.

**AREA**
> Share best practices for developing and sustaining school-community relations.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**
> Develop and implement strategies for communication and collaboration between the District and Chicago communities (such as the 2007 Bilingual Education and World Language Commission community meetings).

KEY STRATEGY
Use community resources to highlight and incorporate the cultural assets of the community in instruction and help children to connect learning to their lives.

**SCHOOL**
> Incorporate the cultural assets of the community in instruction.
> Leverage local organizations and the wider community as experiential learning sites that link academic content to students’ real life experiences.

**AREA**
> Provide models that incorporate community resources into instruction.
> Provide models for school leaders and teachers to leverage local organizations and the wider community as experiential learning sites that link academic content to students’ real life experiences.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**
> Set expectations for school leaders to leverage local organizations and the wider community as experiential learning links for students.
> Support the use of existing curricular frameworks that include community-based learning.

“School-community partnerships work best when a community organizes around the school’s goals of educating children and the school embraces the partnership of the community.”

**SARAH J. DUNCAN**
Coordinator of Community Schools Program, The University of Chicago
Creating the conditions for the Chicago Public Schools to achieve its vision of all children becoming powerful and creative thinkers, responsible global citizens, self-confident individuals, and effective, literate communicators requires that the District change the way that it defines, develops, and supports leadership at all levels of the system, particularly at the school level. High-quality leadership is the main driver of change in a continuously improving system, but that leadership goes beyond the isolated work of individuals. Leadership includes not only principals, but also teacher leaders, Area leaders, and District leaders. Each leader’s specialized knowledge about educational practice and effectiveness in working collegially is part of a collective effort to continuously improve instruction and make the school an effective learning organization.

**FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES UNDERLIE THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP:**

> Leadership is consistent and stable.

> The system has coherent structures for leadership.

> Internal and external expertise are valued and shared.

> Leadership draws upon specialized knowledge.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1**

**Leadership is consistent and stable.**

Stable and consistent school leadership focused on instructional improvement is required to strengthen teaching and learning in a school over the long run. A critical first step is a clear plan and infrastructure that enables the District to develop and sustain coherent leadership throughout the system.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3**

**Internal and external expertise are valued and shared.**

Chicago Public Schools needs to develop a system that maximizes the sharing of knowledge to improve instruction within the school system. The District needs to take advantage of the knowledge of outside experts as well as the “inside” knowledge of successful practitioners that is usually not utilized or transferred to other schools or parts of the system.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2**

**The system has coherent structures for leadership.**

The system needs common leadership structures and processes, but it is also important to honor the need for flexibility at school and Area levels. A coherent and articulated infrastructure should support flexibility, autonomy, and adaptability at various levels. For this to happen, District leaders must consider what is and what is not negotiable with respect to core programs and policies.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4**

**Leadership draws upon specialized knowledge.**

Schools and the system must be structured to draw upon the specialized knowledge of individuals. To make the most of the power of specialized knowledge, the District needs to move beyond thinking about leadership assignments solely at the level of the individual and consider the role of instructional leadership teams.
within and across schools. Such an approach moves beyond exclusive reliance on the ability and expertise of any one individual—such as the principal—and capitalizes on the particular expertise of many. It also creates opportunities for a variety of roles and responsibilities in schools at different levels of compensation and helps to retain thoughtful and capable leaders in the District.

A Good Principal
By Kathleen Mayer, Ed.D., Leadership Coach, University of Illinois at Chicago

“A feared leader is hated by the people, the popular leader is applauded by the people, but the best leader is not noticed by the people who say, ‘We did it ourselves.’” — Lao Tsu (paraphrased)

A good principal knows curriculum, how to use assessment, and the latest research about instruction. A principal must also know the students, the culture of their homes, and the strengths and needs of their families. A good principal looks for and advocates for resources for the school and families when necessary.

A good principal selects and develops the right people for the right tasks. He recognizes leadership abilities and expertise among the adult learners in the school community and engages his team to strategically plan for school improvement.

A good principal believes her mission is to teach and reach every child, but understands that all learning will be limited without family and community participation in children’s education from infancy to adulthood.

A good principal has the knowledge, the skills, and experience to manage a school. She has drive and enthusiasm and she motivates the school community to dream and achieve their fullest potential.

The good principal holds stakeholders accountable for results. He gives credit to individuals and to the team for success and believes that accountability for failure begins with “me first.”
CRITICAL PRIORITY 1
INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Schools and the District need to be organized to support teacher collaboration and distributed leadership. An infrastructure that supports best practices of leaders throughout the system requires clear definitions of positions, roles, responsibilities, and organizational routines that will foster maximum use of educational and management expertise within schools, Areas, and at the Central Office to address continuous improvement.

**KEY STRATEGY**

Develop and engage more distributed leadership throughout the system and define new roles and responsibilities accordingly.

- **SCHOOL**
  - Ensure that school leadership has been defined in each school to include teacher leaders and leadership teams.

- **AREA**
  - Work with school principals to develop and support school leadership teams.

- **CENTRAL OFFICE**
  - Provide models and protocols for effective teamwork and distributed leadership roles to Areas and schools that are focused on organizational and instructional improvement in specific arenas of work (such as instructional content areas, grade-level supports, and special needs populations).

**KEY STRATEGY**

Strengthen communication within and across schools and with the District Central Office.

- **SCHOOL**
  - Improve communication within schools and with external agents and agencies through structured processes.

- **AREA**
  - Ensure that there are regular venues for schools to share ideas with the area staff.
  - Actively share ideas across schools and assist schools in learning from effective models.

- **CENTRAL OFFICE**
  - Develop infrastructure and use technology to support communication among leaders at all levels of the system.

**KEY STRATEGY**

Use organizational routines and strategies that support school-wide thinking about instructional improvement (such as vertical curriculum planning, instructional rounds, or lesson study).

- **SCHOOL**
  - Implement the appropriate routines and strategies to engage school personnel in improving instruction.

- **AREA**
  - Encourage and support the design and effective use of organizational improvement routines that are purposeful and aligned with the organizational development plan of each school.

- **CENTRAL OFFICE**
  - Support, monitor, and evaluate key organizational development routines at District Office, Area, and school levels.
  - Identify and codify successful routines so that they are available for use across schools.
CRITICAL PRIORITY 2
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Developing leaders should mean continuously improving leadership practice across the District, and it should focus on the core work of schools: instruction. The District needs to shift from using the workshop and training model exclusively, toward developing leadership practice in context. In addition, principals do not lead and manage schools single-handedly. Rather, the practice of leading and managing takes shape in the interactions among two or more leaders—principals, assistant principals, curriculum leaders, and teacher leaders. Continued learning and development of leaders needs to develop leaders’ practice on the job and support teams within and across levels of the system. Such work will necessitate a shift in thinking for many, not only in terms of moving away from an exclusive focus on individual leaders to focus on collective leadership, but also in terms of regarding professional development as an inherent part of the job and not as an added task.

KEY STRATEGY
Make leadership development an inherent aspect of leaders’ work by allocating resources and designing infrastructures to support that development.

SCHOOL
> Provide opportunities for teachers and leadership teams to work together and to critically examine their teams’ effectiveness.

AREA
> Provide high-quality professional development for principals regarding how to develop teacher leaders and how to evaluate leadership potential and team dynamics.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Create budgets that support ongoing leadership development.
> Create more flexible staffing rules that allow leaders to take on additional responsibilities (such as teacher leaders or subject matter coaches) for additional pay.

KEY STRATEGY
Incorporate mentoring at all levels to develop leaders.

SCHOOL
> Within schools, provide coaching and learning opportunities for leadership practice for teacher leaders and leadership teams.
> Provide parents with coaching and mentoring to lead in school and in the community.
> Provide leadership coaching and mentoring to students at all grade levels (such as classroom leadership, school leadership, community-based leadership, and service projects).

AREA
> Identify good mentorship practice and foster the mentoring of principals.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Create a District-wide system for leadership mentoring.
Leaders at all levels of the system must support the education blueprint’s vision for every child. The District needs to implement leadership evaluation that goes beyond relying exclusively on student test scores. Schools and school leaders should be evaluated on a broad set of roles and responsibilities that foster improved learning. These include organizing the school to support instructional improvement, engaging parents and communities as partners in the education of children, and creating climates and tone that support human development of children and adults in the school.

**KEY STRATEGY**

Ensure that evaluation of leaders includes a review of the multiple dimensions of school and District leadership.

**SCHOOL**
- Participate in the design of rubrics for evaluation of school leaders, including teacher leaders and leadership teams.
- Participate in the design of rubrics for evaluation of Area and District leadership from the school perspective.

**AREA**
- Participate in the design of evaluation rubrics regarding leadership, including Area and District leaders.
- Evaluate school leadership and support Local School Councils’ understanding of high-quality performance indicators for principals.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**
- Lead the design of leadership evaluation rubrics.
- Evaluate Area leaders.

**KEY STRATEGY**

Implement a rigorous peer review process that includes opportunities for 360-degree feedback.

**SCHOOL**
- Participate in reviews of Area and District support to the schools and school personnel.

**AREA**
- Utilize school-level feedback for Area-level improvement.

**CENTRAL OFFICE**
- Create systems for all leaders to receive direct and actionable feedback from direct reports (for example, principals provide anonymous feedback to Chief Area Officers, teachers provide feedback to principals).
CRITICAL PRIORITY 4
LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

The District should cultivate leadership of educators throughout the system to ensure continuous use of expert knowledge within and across schools. In keeping with the focus on leadership teams and distributed leadership, the District should design a system to identify and develop emerging leaders. Chicago Public Schools has made progress in setting eligibility standards for principals. Other leadership positions and eligibility requirements, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, need to be developed at various levels throughout the system. The District also needs to work with external partners to strengthen principal and teacher leader preparation, in particular in the core curriculum areas.

KEY STRATEGY
Review and improve the District’s principal eligibility criteria and process.

AREA
> Link the work of the Office of Principal Preparation and Development to that of Area offices to identify existing leadership talent in the schools and match with leadership needs of schools.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Engage teachers, principals, Area officers, District leaders, and outside experts to redesign principal eligibility criteria and application process.
> Develop eligibility criteria and process for chief Area officers.
> Train chief Area officers on principal eligibility criteria and process.

KEY STRATEGY
Work with external partners to strengthen principal and teacher-leader preparation and development.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Use existing partnerships between the District and universities to establish minimum requirements and expectations for all leadership positions, exceeding state requirements if necessary, to align leadership preparation with District needs and expectations.
> Encourage participation in approved leadership programs by offering automatic eligibility for graduates of partner programs.
KEY STRATEGY
Identify and engage emerging instructional leaders.

SCHOOL
> Allocate time and resources to develop teacher leaders.

AREA
> Help Local School Councils to use new personnel database for leader succession.
> Ensure that leadership development supports emerging leaders.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Create information database identifying leaders and their expertise (at all levels and roles) and make information available for use in personnel decisions.
> Use personnel database to guide Area and District leader succession.

KEY STRATEGY
Support and retain successful leaders.

SCHOOL
> Foster leadership among emerging leaders within schools and encourage them to pursue formal leadership roles.

AREA
> Help Local School Councils to understand characteristics of high-quality principals.
> Support the development and retention of teacher leadership positions within and across schools in the Areas.

CENTRAL OFFICE
> Determine mechanisms to reward successful leadership and build career ladders for instructional leaders (such as establishing and sustaining leadership roles for classroom teachers within schools, leadership roles for principals and coaches across networks of schools—with appropriate compensation increases).
We have an opportunity to elevate our aspirations and rethink the possibilities for how and what our students learn in all Chicago Public Schools. The education blueprint challenges past expectations we have held of our education system and of our students. The plan also challenges practices, policies, and beliefs that have led to racial and class inequities and have offered the least educational supports to those who need it the most. With this plan we raise the bar to set higher goals for ourselves, our students, and the entire Chicago community.

There are no simple solutions. Educating children from diverse backgrounds—with various strengths and needs—to these high standards is a complex task. It sets high demands on schools and on the District. It requires strategic and comprehensive changes in how we support schools to improve teaching and learning. It also requires that the District and schools collaborate with families and the community at large. District and school leaders must develop priorities and next steps to implement these recommendations—while building on prior effective strategies and giving new initiatives based on sound practices a chance to take root.

Every child in Chicago should be able to attend a neighborhood school and receive a high-quality education. This must be our common purpose.

“This plan provides a real challenge to each of us as we move toward ensuring that the daily work of our teachers matches the demands of the Common Core Standards. This plan gives us a real blueprint for success; I know I look forward to using this plan as the springboard for substantive discussions centering on what great instruction looks like and how this translates into a world-class learning environment.”

JOSEPH KALLAS
Principal, Norwood Park Elementary School
References and Endnotes

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“We have to think of fairness, not as giving the same thing to every student, but fairness as giving each student what they need to be successful. In practical terms what that means is for us to build a system in which resources follow needs.”

**Charles M. Payne**  
Interim Chief Education Officer  
Chicago Public Schools

“Providing all students a fair and substantive opportunity to learn is critical, if our end goals are systemic education reform, transformative innovation, consistent progress, increased participation in our democratic society and global leadership in a knowledge-based economy.”

**The Schott Foundation for Public Education**  
National Opportunity to Learn Campaign

“Unlike high-achieving nations, we have failed to invest in the critical components of a high-quality education system. While we have been busy setting goals and targets for public schools and punishing the schools that fail to meet them, we have not invested in a highly trained, well-supported teaching force for all communities, as other nations have; we have not scaled up successful school designs so that they are sustained and widely available; and we have not pointed our schools at the critical higher-order thinking and performance skills needed in the twenty-first century.”

**Linda Darling-Hammond**  
Charles Ducommon Professor of Education  
Stanford University
EVERY STUDENT BELIEVES
I can be successful in school and achieve at a level required to reach my goals. I feel safe in my school and supported by adults who care deeply about my well-being and believe in me. I know that what I am learning connects with the real world and prepares me for what I must know and be able to do to succeed in the world that is my future.

EVERY TEACHER DEMONSTRATES
I am able to engage, motivate, and teach each student in my classroom. I expect that all of my students can meet high standards and that all have the ability to go to college. It is my job to ensure that for each student this is a realistic choice. For me to succeed I am committed to my ongoing professional development, I collaborate with my colleagues, and I rely on honest and constructive feedback from my colleagues and principal.

EVERY PARENT SAYs
I know what my child must know and be able to do to succeed in school, graduate, and be prepared for college and career. I feel welcome in my child’s school and supported in my role as a parent. My child’s school is an important resource for our neighborhood school that provides me with opportunities to be engaged in and support my child’s education.

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