STRATEGIC PILLAR

High Standards, Rigorous Curriculum and Powerful Instruction

OVERVIEW A 21st century public education must develop students who are innovative thinkers, civic-minded collaborators and effective communicators. Achieving this goal requires teaching and learning that challenges students to think critically, sparks their creativity and supports their diverse needs. It also means expanding the definition of core instruction to subjects including the arts, health and physical education, and offering out-of-school enrichment to promote the comprehensive and balanced development we want for all children.

OBJECTIVES

- **Implement the Common Core Standards in all grades K-12.** The Common Core State Standards are a national benchmark for math and literacy skills needed for success in today’s global economy. They go beyond the basic skills of yesteryear with expectations that children be able to think deeply, such as by constructing logical arguments, critiquing each other’s reasoning and understanding the perspective of others. Consistently providing students in all classes, across all schools with Common Core instruction will require these key efforts:

  > **Clarity of Expectations:** Rigorous expectations for student learning will be matched by equally rigorous expectations for teacher planning and instruction. The new CPS Framework for Teaching provides teachers and principals with clear guidance on how to provide Common Core-aligned curriculum, instruction and assessment. The CPS Curriculum Frameworks will further define expectations for the kind of engaging and complex instruction all students should experience in literacy, mathematics, social science and science at every school. A streamlined assessment system will measure student progress during the year in mastering the breadth and depth of Common Core learning. Teachers will receive training on using assessment data to determine where students need extra support to reach year-end goals.

  > **Alignment of Supports:** Teachers will be supported in understanding how to design Common Core instruction through professional development and appropriate curriculum materials. Every school and region will be required to have a professional development plan that provides differentiated support for teachers and administrators to meet Common Core expectations. Professional development will be aligned to the expectations of CPS Curriculum Frameworks and will also focus on how to help teachers provide supports for students with diverse language, communication, physical and emotional needs. New texts and digital curriculum will provide teachers and students with a range of tools that promote interdisciplinary thinking, discovery and analysis for all students, and that in turn support consistently high expectations across subjects and grade levels.
Expanded use of digital curriculum, in particular, will better enable us to provide rich and engaging material, while also offering interactive assessments that provide real-time feedback and adaptable resources to meet the needs of diverse learners.

- Ensure students arrive at 1st grade ready to learn. In 2012, the Mayor launched Chicago: Ready to Learn!, an initiative aimed at improving the quality of early childhood programs citywide and increasing access for families that need these programs the most. Opportunities will expand and will be distributed more equitably across neighborhoods, and programs will be held to high expectations for instruction and community engagement. All providers and schools will be trained on these expectations and will be supported with tools for continuous improvement. In addition, CPS recently established the requirement that full-day kindergarten be offered at all elementary schools to help all of our students enter 1st grade truly ready to learn.

- Raise the bar for high school course-taking to align with college and career expectations. High school courses as well as students’ course-taking patterns currently vary tremendously in content and rigor across the district. The result is unequal access to college and career preparatory curriculum. To prepare all students for post-graduation success, we will establish common standards for coursework across the system, resulting in a more streamlined high school course catalogue offering only those courses that meet college and career readiness standards.

In addition, we will outline clear courses of study – 4-year course-taking roadmaps – that meet the needs of all students’ interests and achievement levels and that guide students across the graduation stage and onto the post-secondary path of their choice. The senior year, in particular, must serve universally as a time to gear up for the rigor of college and employment – for example, through challenging college-level courses and internships – rather than as a time to coast to the end of high school.

- Expand high-quality school models and programs that accelerate students on the path to college and career success. We are committed to offering proven and innovative high-quality school models in every part of the city – serving a broad range of student interests – regardless of whether these are neighborhood, magnet, charter, or contract schools. Students in every neighborhood deserve convenient access to high-quality options. We will continue to expand proven models while cultivating and scaling-up innovative new models. Programs such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), Early College, Career and Technical Education (CTE) and International Baccalaureate Programmes (IB) are just some of the current options that accelerate students’ postsecondary preparation. An innovative blended approach to learning that launched in CPS in 2012, New Classrooms, allows students to progress through a math curriculum at their own pace using a combination of large group, small group and individual practice on computer software. Technology-enabled instruction will be a growth priority, and other school models may focus on world language, fine arts, service and citizenship, software coding and much more. As we expand these options, we will share best practices district-wide so that all students can be more successful in school.

- Ensure quality education for students with diverse learning needs. Special education has historically been focused too narrowly on compliance with the law and not enough on improving the quality of instruction. We must establish a shared goal of ensuring all students
succeed in their grade-level curriculum, Pre-K through graduation. We will train educators at all levels to provide students the supports they need early on, so they are not inappropriately labeled down the road. We will learn from best practices within our district and across the nation, and we will provide professional development to schools on how to serve diverse learners in the least restrictive environment. We will also deploy specialists such as speech pathologists, social workers and psychologists more equitably across the district to ensure that resources follow student needs.

- **Ensure the quality of bilingual and multilingual programs.** The district’s population of English language learners (ELLs) is growing at the same time that academic standards are rising. Students must succeed in a rigorous, grade-level curriculum while learning the English language. To equip teachers to meet the challenge, we are providing significant professional development on teaching the Common Core Standards to English language learners. Bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL) and general education teachers will be trained along with their administrators to ensure an integrated, school-wide focus on supporting English language learners.

  Principals will also work to increase their numbers of teachers with ESL or Bilingual endorsements, both through recruitment and through encouragement of teachers already on staff to seek these endorsements. CPS is working with local university partners to provide this coursework for CPS teachers at a reduced cost. In addition, CPS is committed to ensuring that students’ home language and culture are valued and reflected across the school – from the use and development of the student’s home language in class, to a learning environment that incorporates cultural artwork, literature and activities, to the availability of translators for families.

- **Expand health instruction and physical education.** A new health curriculum will support teachers to integrate health instruction, including nutrition and age-appropriate sexual health, into the language arts and science curriculum. Beginning in 2014-2015 we will expand the daily physical education requirement at high schools from two to four years. We are piloting new physical education curriculum in selected elementary schools with the goal of establishing daily PE in all elementary schools within five years.

- **Integrate arts education for students at every grade level.** The arts are a vital piece of a well-rounded education, stimulating creativity and critical thinking; but, in recent years some CPS elementary schools have eliminated art instruction altogether. The CPS Arts Education Plan, adopted in 2012, will now require a minimum of 120 minutes of arts instruction each week by certified art teachers for all students in grades K-8. The curriculum will cover visual art, music, dance and drama. High school students will also be required to earn two credits from these art forms. Each school will be matched with an external arts partner that can provide additional enrichment for students and professional development for teachers.

- **Grow out-of-school time opportunities and participation.** Activities that take place after school, before school and during school breaks play an essential role in providing students with a well-rounded education while also solidifying schools as the hubs of their communities. Clubs, competitions and sports help students explore athletic, artistic, service and academic interests while developing them as leaders and team players. CPS is committed to pursuing city and community partnerships – such as the Community Schools Initiative – to increase the number and type of out-of-school time program offerings available to students throughout the city.

"[The CPS summer internship program] gives the intern the opportunity to get a glimpse of the real world and allows local businesses to serve in a mentor role to young adults."

Laura Left, Office Manager
State Farm