



Three Years into Chicago's Community Schools Initiative (CSI): Progress, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

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Executive Summary

The Chicago Public School's *Community Schools Initiative* (CSI) is a groundbreaking effort to take to scale a framework for community schooling within a large American urban school system. Now in its fourth full year of implementation, CSI builds upon the core features of the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program as well as local and national community school designs with the aim of developing a distinctive Chicago approach to community schooling. As of September 2006, CSI included 110 elementary and high schools working closely with more than 45 lead partner agencies (or LPA's) to stay open longer, open resources such as gyms and computer rooms to after school and community use, welcome parents as full partners, and deepen social and family support services. The schools include neighborhood elementary and high schools, magnet and specialty schools, and charter and contract schools involved in the city's new Renaissance 2010 Initiative. Sixty-two (62) schools currently receive funding through the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. A vigorous public/private partnership representing the business, philanthropic, and not-for-profit sectors helps finance and advocate for CSI.

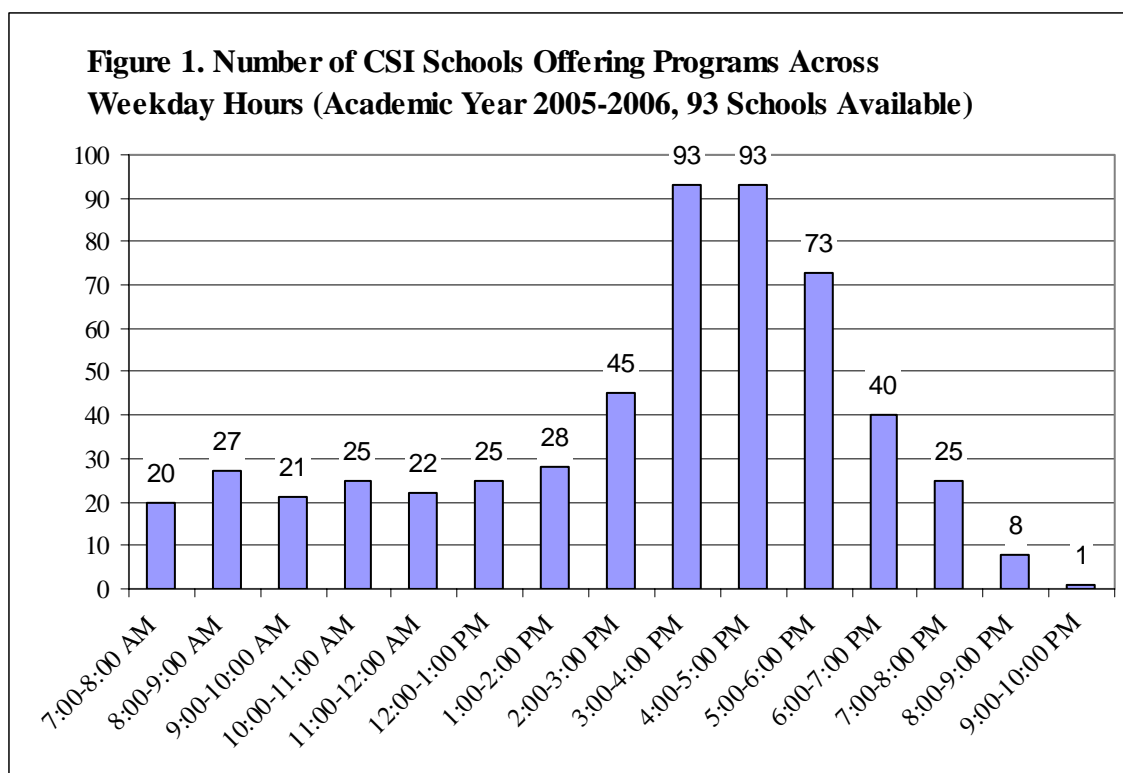
This report evaluates evidence that CSI is building community school capacity in Chicago, and realizing important benefits for the schools, students, and families involved in the Initiative. The report draws upon a wide range of data sources, including individual student participation records, detailed surveys of school programs and partnerships, analyses of school improvement plans, school-level summary statistics (e.g. overall standardized test performance), and interviews with program planners, managers, and participants.

Progress in the Implementation of CSI: Critical Inputs and Resources

CSI's vision for community schooling challenges educators to re-think how teachers, families, and communities can work together to support student success. At their best, community schools function like community centers that keep their facilities open beyond the final bell, encourage the use of school resources during evenings and weekends, develop services to support parents and

families, and encourage the participation of parents and community partners in planning and on-going evaluation. Current data suggest that CSI is attaining this vision in many key respects.

Extending School Hours to Meet Community Needs. *By the end of the 2005-2006 academic year, Chicago CSI schools had increased the total number of hours of school-related activity afforded to a significant number of CPS students on a weekly basis by roughly 50% in most participating schools. Among 93 CSI schools for whom complete program schedule information was available and verifiable, all 93 were programming or providing services during the critical after school hours of 3 PM through 5 PM (see Figure 1). Of these, 73 schools sponsored programming for adults and community members beyond 5 PM, 40 beyond 6 PM, and 25 beyond 7 PM on selected evenings. In Fiscal Year 2006, CSI schools averaged about 2 hours of programming before school began, and about 17 hours per week of after school programming. Forty-five (45) CSI schools reported Saturday programming for students and families.*



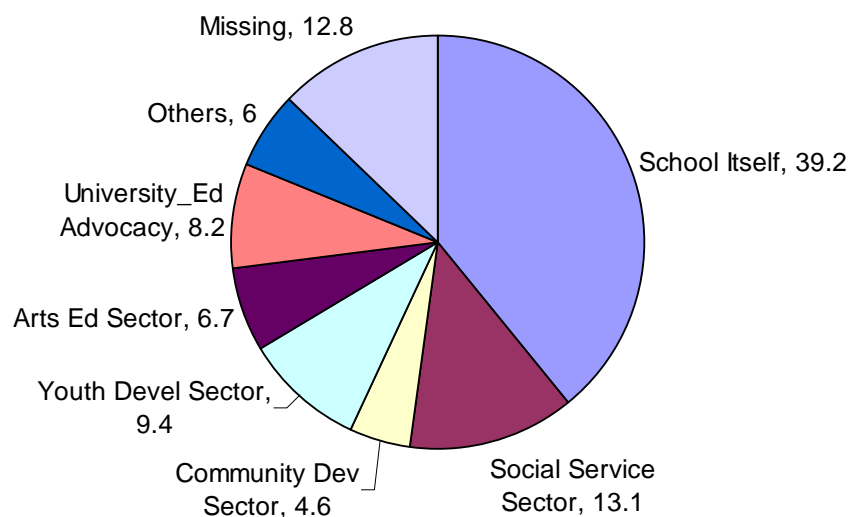
Enriching Out-of-School Time. Enriched out-of-school time (OST) is critical to diversifying student’s learning experiences, motivating them to attend school regularly, and supporting academic success. CSI schools and their community partners offered students over 1200 OST options and experiences during the 2005-2006 academic year, an average of 12 per school, and increased that average to 12.3 programs per school during the 2006-2007 academic year. Across CSI schools, students are receiving a balanced exposure to academic supports such as tutoring, academic enrichment in math, science, and literature, arts and cultural experiences, recreational opportunities, and other experiences aimed at building social and emotional resilience.

Expanding the Uses of Summer. CSI schools have been in the vanguard of CPS efforts within the Chicago Public Schools to deepen both academic and developmental supports for students

during the summer and combat “summer learning loss.” In Summer 2006, roughly 63% of CSI schools offered summer programming, with a mix of academic support, arts enrichment, and recreational activities similar to the school year. Field trips do increase in importance as a feature of enrichment learning experiences. During the summer CSI students are more likely to be away from their school buildings and on the move in the Chicago region.

Engaging Capable Community Partners. Chicago’s CSI emphasizes close partnership between schools and capable community organizations that help schools mobilize and coordinate assets for family support and academic success. In Chicago, the mobilization of community organizations as allies in program development and liaisons to families and neighborhoods is diverse and vigorous.

Figure 2. Percentage of FY 2007 OST Programs Directly Supported by External Partners (Organized by Partner Sector)



- ✓ Over 15% of the organizations engaging CSI schools are from the business sector
- ✓ Over 400 partner organizations concentrating in critical areas such as health and social services (17%, combined), youth development and community advocacy (13%), arts and cultural education (12%), and recreational services (5%) have engaged CSI schools since 2003
- ✓ External partners are involved directly in providing roughly two-thirds of school-based programs in CSI (see Figure 2). Organizations in three sectors – social services agencies (15%), youth development agencies (10.5%), and Educational Advocacy and University-based programs (9%) – account for the lion’s share of direct program involvement.

A Capable Corps of Lead Partner Agencies. At each community school, Chicago’s community school model envisions a particularly strong relationship between school administrators and an organization that plays the multifaceted role of “lead partner agency”, or LPA. The LPA can wear many hats, including administrator of community school funds, manager of after school programs, and convener and facilitator of planning and oversight activities that include family, community, and school stakeholders. As CSI has grown to include 110 schools, the corps of LPA’s has grown as well, from a freshman class of 16 in FY 2004, to 49 organizations that include many of Chicago’s premier youth and family service providers and community advocacy organizations in FY 2007. Several of these organizations now play the lead partner role with 5 or more schools, and are building expertise in managing collaboration with many schools in multiple communities.

- ✓ CSI Lead Partners are drawn primarily from six agency types: 13 social service agencies, 10 educational reform organizations, 9 community development and advocacy organizations, 5 youth development organizations, 3 Arts Education organizations (e.g. Urban Gateways), and 2 health promotion organizations
- ✓ Lead Partners directly sponsor and staff 31% of OST programs, while other external partner organizations provide about 15% of OST programs
- ✓ Three contributions lead others in frequency among the Lead Partners: direct contributions of program models and curricula, assignment of paid staffers to school-based roles, and allocations of in-kind resources and materials

Stakeholder Involvement in Planning, Oversight, and Governance. A distinctive feature of the Chicago approach to community schooling is a commitment to deepening stakeholder involvement in planning, governance, and oversight processes. CSI in its first three years has emphasized the importance of convening stakeholder representatives to plan and oversee community school development. Diversity is the most striking feature of advisory committee composition, both in terms of size and stakeholder representation.

- ✓ Overall, 725 people were listed as advisory or oversight members at the 71 schools in Fall of Fiscal Year 2007. We estimate that oversight participation in CSI as a whole exceeds 1,000 individuals from a broad range of roles and affiliations.
- ✓ On average, committees across the 71 schools included just over 10 members each, including about 3 ½ members employed by CPS, and 6 ½ non-CPS members, including resource coordinators, lead partner liaisons, parents, students, and at-large representatives from businesses and funders, other external partners, students, parents, and community members. Committee size varied from as high as 36 members to as low as 5 members.
- ✓ Parent representation appears strong overall (109 persons, roughly equal to Lead Partner representation) but varies widely by school. In fact, about two-thirds of schools either list no official parent representative (28 schools) or one parent representative (20 schools). At the other end of the spectrum, 19 schools include 3 or more parent representatives.

Commitment to Student and Family Health. In the 1980s, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed a comprehensive school health program (CSHP), highlighting 8

components. To gain a sense of the relative emphasis of health-related programming across CSI, UIC used the CSHP framework to inventory health programs and initiatives across 94 schools for which data was available. *The results establish that Chicago's community schools are experimenting with service delivery in all eight components defined by the CSHP model, with particular emphasis in the following areas:*

- ✓ *Physical Education.* This component was most ubiquitous, with all schools offering some sports and recreational options to students and/or adults
- ✓ *Enhancing the Psychosocial and Physical Environment.* 63 schools also offered programs designed to improve the psychic and physical experience of being in school, from gardening and mural painting to mentoring and anger management classes
- ✓ *Health Education.* Forty (40) surveyed schools also reported health education programs emphasizing prevention and health promotion, including gang and violence prevention, hygiene classes, nutrition and exercise, alcohol and drug use and abuse, pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention, asthma education, self-esteem and stress.
- ✓ *Nutrition Services.* Thirty-one (31) community schools reported that they offered nutrition services either by offering healthy snacks, third meals options and/or breakfasts to student participants; or by teaching healthy nutrition through educational lessons, cooking classes, and/or games.
- ✓ *Family and Community Involvement.* Thirty-six (36) schools reported involving families and community members in health-related educational workshops and seminars, health fairs, fitness classes, and links to community resources and public aid.

Engaging Parents as Partners in Education. Community schools are committed to the idea that effective urban schooling requires a thorough re-thinking of the relationship between schools and parents, and dedication to making schools welcoming venues for parent input and activity. CSI currently features a wide range of experiments in addressing the needs of parents as educators, and making community schooling, in the words of one CSI principal, “a family affair.” A few key pieces of evidence support the view that CSI schools are progressing in their engagements with parents:

- ✓ CSI's 21st Century Community Learning Centers have maintained steady levels of parent involvement in OST programming from FY 2005 (2299 parents reported across 51 Centers) through FY 2006 (2300 parents reported across 51 Centers), representing about 47 adults served per school each year.
- ✓ Two-thirds of schools (65%) either maintained or increased their parent engagement levels, while about one-third of schools decreased their parent engagement levels by 10 or more participants. Moreover, engagement of parents as paid or volunteer program staff increased at most schools, from about 13% of total staff in FY 2005 (or 3 parents per school) to over 15% of total staff in FY 2006 (or about 3 1/3 parents per school staff).
- ✓ During the 2005-2006 academic year, 178 programs were targeted to CSI adults, including over 30% targeted parenting skills and helping parents support student learning at home.

Over 13% of programs addressed adult academic progress, particularly through GED and ESL classes.

Evidence of Benefits for OST Program Participants

The study explores relationships between OST participation and academic improvement using three measures: teacher ratings of academic engagement and positive behaviors associated with academic success; school grades in reading and mathematics; and standardized measures of achievement against Illinois state standards in reading, mathematics, and science.

Building Student Participation in Out-of-School Time Activities. *Overall enrollment of students in OST increased by 17% between FY2005 and FY 2006, from an average of 156 students to over 183 students per school.* The number of “regular attendees” surpassing the 30 day mark also increased by 7% from FY2005 to FY 2006, and represented about 54% of total program attendees. More importantly, the average of 49.3 days of attendance per student posted in FY 2006 far exceeded the 21st CCLC criteria for regular attendees. These levels of annual participation are comparable to those reported in the recent national evaluation of 21st CCLC programs, as well as evaluations of privately funded efforts to expand OST and community school programs.

In the case of daily attendance, schools with more years of experience as 21st CCLC grantees appear to have an advantage in sustaining participation. On the other hand, higher levels of crime and unemployment, coupled with lower property values, suppress attendance. Student biographical characteristics also affect whether or not students decide to attend frequently. More girls were enrolled in OST programs, but boys attended significantly more days of programming (boys, 50.0 days versus girls, 46.9 days). Lower income students averaged about 5 fewer days of attendance than students not qualifying for free/reduced lunches. African-American students were somewhat more likely to accrue days of attendance than other ethnic groups (49.8 days versus 46.3 days for Hispanics, Whites, and Asians combined).

Two other features of student participation in OST programs deserve to be highlighted:

- ✓ While older students are often difficult to recruit into OST programs, CSI 21st CCLC schools are sustaining strong participation through 8th grade. *This suggests that CSI is positioned to help many 8th graders effectively transition to high school.*
- ✓ The inclusion of students with special needs in OST programs is a high priority in Chicago. *Inclusion of students with IEP’s among 21st CCLC participants increased 59% from FY2005 (759 IEP attendees) to FY2006 (1208 IEP attendees) within the same group of 53 schools.*

Teacher Ratings of Classroom Performance. As part of the 21stCCLC Annual Performance Report (APR), teachers in FY2006 assessed 53% of program participants for the quality of their daily classroom performance both early and late in the 2005-2006 academic year. Results of the teacher survey on selected items indicate the following:

- ✓ Of the student participants rated, 60% needed to improve their completion of homework, 53% their participation in class, 45% their classroom behavior, and 67% their overall academic performance.
- ✓ Among those needing to improve in these areas, 70% improved their completion of homework, 72% their participation in class, 66% their classroom behavior, and 73% their overall academic performance.
- ✓ We found no statistically significant associations between the number of days that students attended OST programs and their teacher ratings at the end of the year. CSI programs tend to include a wide range of students in OST programs, from the best adapted to those who are “troublesome” or struggle to adapt to daily classroom life.

Class Grades in Reading and Mathematics. Grades in reading and mathematics for the 1st and 3rd quarters of the academic quarter were also collected for program participants as part of the FY2006 APR process. Grades in both subject areas were collected for about 58% of participants.

- ✓ Third quarter grades in both math and reading averaged about C+. Among program participants who started the academic year with a math grade of C or below, 44% improved at least one-half grade by the third quarter, while 42% remained unchanged in grade.
- ✓ The pattern was similar in reading: 43% improved, while 44% remained unchanged. Thus a large proportion of OST program participants improved their reading and math grades over the course of the year.
- ✓ Across all CSI 21st CCLC schools no strong relationship, positive or negative, emerged linking the number of days of OST attendance to improvement in math or reading course grades.

Standardized Test Scores in Reading, Math, and Science. In March 2006 all CPS students in grades 3 through 8 were tested using the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). In reading, 57.9% of students in CSI schools tested (Student N = 10,436) met or exceeded the Illinois state performance standards for their grade level. In math, 64% of students tested (N = 10,424) met or exceeded the Illinois state performance standards for their grade level. In science, 61.2% of students tested (N = 3,202) met or exceeded the Illinois state performance standards for their grade level. *These performance levels are comparable to the performance levels within CPS as a district.*

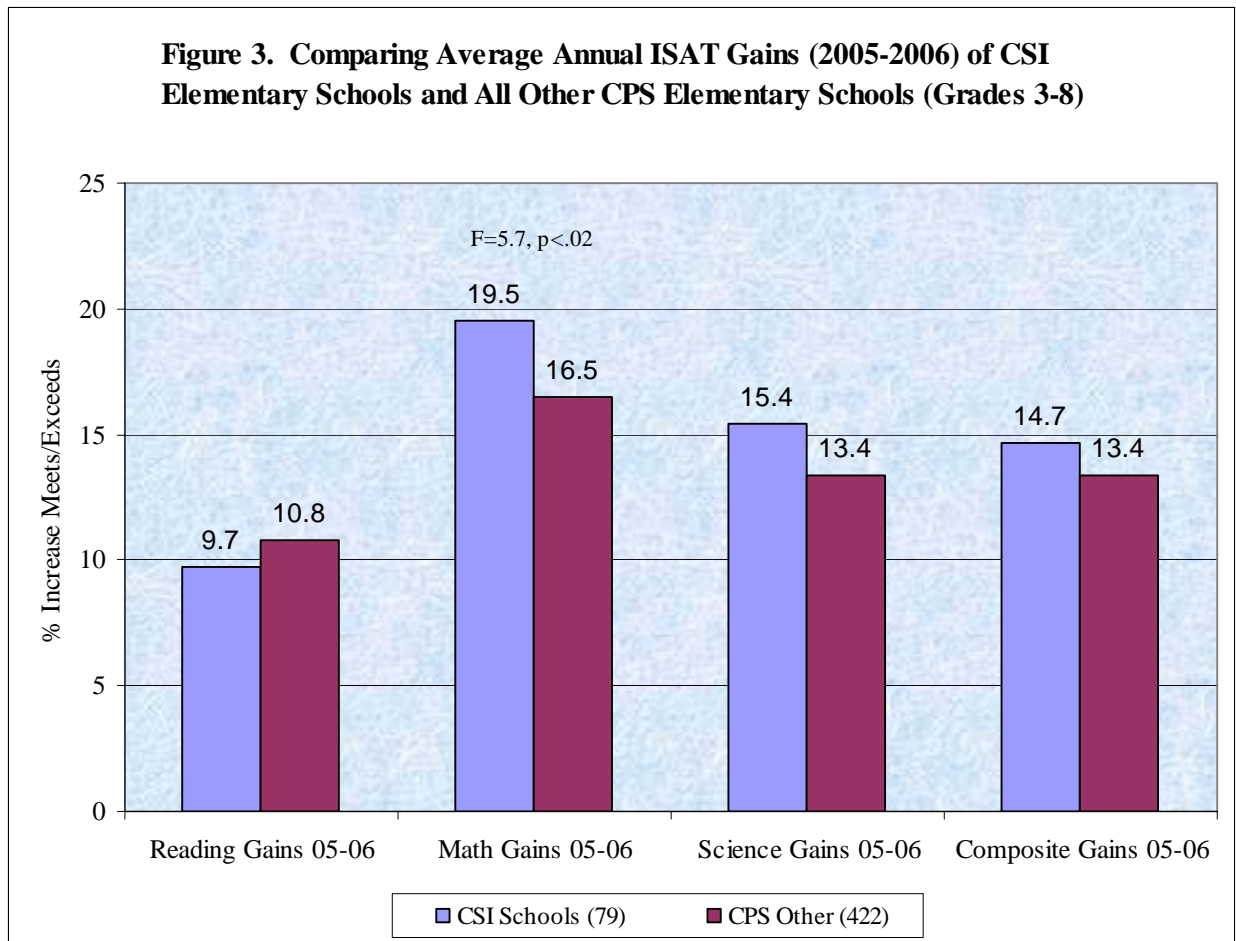
We then examined correlations between total days of OST attendance and percentile scores in these three content areas. The patterns closely paralleled the results for course grades. OST attendance correlated very weakly but positively with reading percentile ($r = .03$, $p < .01$), math percentile ($r = .01$, $p = .156$), and science percentile ($r = .03$, $p = .09$).

Linking Community Schooling to Whole School Improvement

The long-term ambition of Chicago’s *Community School Initiative* is to establish a model for urban education that removes barriers to student learning, mobilizes community resources for school improvement, and aligns the interests of parents and teachers around the development of the whole

child. While not all children may be able to participate equally in OST programs, and not all parents can equally attend school events, the community school process aims to make schools more welcoming and engaging places for *all* students and families. Three sources of early evidence suggest that the community school process is contributing to the efforts of CSI schools to improve general instruction and the climate for learning in their buildings.

Closing the Achievement Gap among CPS Schools. Trends in standardized test results clearly indicate that CSI schools have steadily closed the gap in achievement between themselves and CPS as a district between 2001 and the last testing year, 2006 (See Figure 3). The trends exhibit steady improvement for all schools in mathematics, with accelerated gains starting in 2004, and steeper gains for CSI schools. CSI schools gained 46.3 percentage points in math from 2001 through 2006, while the balance of CPS schools gained 37.6 percentage points – roughly an 8.5% difference in favor of CSI as a school cohort. Turning to reading, general improvement across the system has been significant if somewhat less consistent, with parallel patterns between CSI and remaining CPS schools – roughly an 8% difference in favor of CSI as a school cohort.



There is evidence as well that longer experience in the practice of community schooling, as well as more sustained community school funding, may yield dividends in academic progress. The more experienced (“older”) CSI 21st CCLC schools showed significantly greater gains in reading from 2005 through 2006, as well as statistically significant gains in the overall ISAT composite. The six-

year trends indicate that the older and newer 21st Century grantees tracked very closely from 2001 to 2004 in both subject areas. But the more experienced grantees began showing strength in math starting in 2005, and jumped strongly in reading in 2006.

Safe and Secure Environments. Analyses of CPS data pertaining to the annual number of school disciplinary incidents suggest that CSI schools may enjoy lower rates of reported incidents than comparison schools. In general, the rate of reporting of disciplinary incidents has risen within CPS over the last five years, in part due to stricter reporting policies. But CSI schools have been consistently lower than comparable non-CSI schools, at levels of statistical significance at or below the “.1” level. In many instances, CSI principals and counselors are working with community-based Lead Partners to develop early interventions that keep student disciplinary infractions from escalating to levels that might trigger suspension or expulsion.

Emerging Influence on School Improvement Strategies. CPS schools were required to complete a comprehensive school improvement plan (or SIPAAA) during spring of 2006 that reflect the school’s agenda for development in areas such as curriculum and instruction, parent engagement, student engagement and motivation, and teacher professional development. A preliminary review of SIPAAA documents from CSI schools suggests that community school principles and strategies have found a central place in how many of Chicago’s community schools understand whole school development. For example, many CSI schools included representatives from their Lead Partner Agency on the SIPAAA planning teams. References to community engagement, whole child development, and parent partnership are also evident in vision and mission statements.

On-Going Challenges of CSI Implementation

Chicago’s *Community Schools Initiative* represents an exceptional opportunity to test the viability and impact of community school practices under the often challenging conditions facing urban educators. Our review of indicators of progress confirms that community school strategies are within the reach of urban schools to implement, and that establishing these practices can contribute to the learning and quality of life of many students and families. In this report we have examined evidence for the quality of implementation of community schooling in the first three years of the CPS Community Schools Initiative.

To be sure, not all CSI schools are advancing academically, nor do all partnerships between schools and community organizations cohere sufficiently to plan, implement, and coordinate the components of Chicago’s community school model. Our discussion of current limitations on the vitality of collective processes of stakeholder consultation, governance, and oversight suggests one area in which the implementation of a key feature of Chicago’s community school model is currently under-realized. Our study points to other areas of community school development featuring strong pockets of excellence, but also broad inconsistency of practice and implementation. They include the following:

- ✓ *Parent involvement.* Our data bear out that several CSI schools have developed strong practices and school-wide dispositions that welcome parents to school and attract parents into enrichment and family support programs. Successful and attractive program models are not lacking at this point within CSI. However, policy constraints on funding parent

involvement in paid staffing positions have slowed some leadership development efforts, while the emphasis of 21st Century funds on student achievement has discouraged the deployment of those funds to parent activities. Further, continued reliance on traditional school communication strategies with parents – the ubiquitous “kidmail” flyer – have also proven difficult to re-imagine and diversify. As a result, the power of parent engagement as a factor in overall school development as well as student success remains under-realized in the majority of CSI schools.

- ✓ *Development of integrated services and supports.* CSI currently includes inspiring examples of schools that use community school funding to increase the number and availability of health and social service professionals, recruit CBO expertise in the delivery of crucial services, and link CPS specialized service professionals with CBO colleagues and into community school advisory processes. Our data, on-site observations, and interviews all suggest, however, that CPS social workers and counselors often are minimally aware of the community school effort within their assigned schools, including the presence of CBO service providers. Our advisory committee data show clearly that these professionals are rarely included in advisory or oversight conversations. While most CSI schools have addressed some health and well-ness concerns with available funding and partner expertise, progress toward integrated, “wrap-around” services remains under-realized in most CSI schools.
- ✓ *Student OST Recruitment and Retention.* Overall student participation in OST programs is a strong suit of Chicago community schools, as noted above. But our research also suggests that resource coordinators and program managers operate in a “black box” when it comes to crucial issues such as why some students consistently participate in OST opportunities while others consistently refrain and leave school at 2:30 PM. Many schools are content to allow the apparent “fairness” of first-come/first served enrollment policies to cover over serious differences in family capability to accomplish basic enrollment tasks such as registration and return of parent signatures. These differences put a “natural” brake on enrollment levels in programs that face space and funding constraints on enrollment and capacity. However, lack of inquiry into the many factors that may limit student OST participation also constrains creative consideration of how non-participating students might be reached with enrichment and academic support opportunities.

Across the schools, through both successes and failures, substantive lessons are being learned about empowering parent leaders, enhancing student and family health, and linking learning strategies across the school day and after school time. Further, it is clear that the quality of instructional leadership and professional development within school faculties remains a critical determinant of student success in Chicago schools. Within CSI, a growing cadre of principals and school leaders is emerging that understands how to integrate the components of Chicago’s community school model into a cohesive strategy for whole school improvement. Just as important, an infrastructure of support has grown around CSI schools to help clarify and disseminate these lessons, led by organizations such as the CPS Office of Extended Learning Opportunities, the new Illinois Federation for Community Schools, The University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. It is among the tasks of the UIC evaluation of CSI to document and share these lessons, and assess whether the early successes of Chicago’s community schools can be built upon and sustained over time.