



# Effective Parent-School Partnerships

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A Research Report by  
Parents United for  
Responsible Education  
(PURE)

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August 2006

## **Acknowledgments**

This report is the result of nearly two years of work looking closely at parent involvement in the Chicago Public Schools. We are grateful to the many people who helped turn an idea into a project which has the potential to improve our children's quality of education through stronger parent-school partnerships.

Arne Duncan, Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools, made the project possible by suggesting the idea and then making sure it happened. Many thanks to Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins, Chief Instructional Officer Domingo Trujillo, Charter School Director Genita Robinson, and the wonderful Arianne Heien Miller, who ironed out the kinks.

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Special thanks go to Nora Grodzins, who initiated the project as a PURE volunteer. PURE's Executive Director Julie Woestehoff led the Survey Team which also included Willard C. Hall, Jr., Jim Callaghan, and Mary Pat Hartung. Israel Vargas translated the survey into Spanish. The report design by Scott Wills & Associates turned words and charts into a lively, parent-friendly document.

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# Executive Summary and Recommendations

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*Parents United for Responsible Education conducted a baseline survey of parent involvement in the Chicago Public Schools in the late summer of 2005. Our survey set out to answer the question, “What is the state of parent involvement in the Chicago Public Schools?” We surveyed the parents of students in 92 Chicago public schools. More than half of the surveys went to high school parents.*

**What did we find out from the 4,320 elementary and high school parents who responded?**

# General Findings

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## 1. Parents are eager to share what they think about their school involvement experiences.

We received scores of calls and e-mails from parents who were grateful but surprised to be asked for their opinion. "I am thrilled to take this opportunity to voice my opinions on parental involvement," wrote one mother in a letter she enclosed with the survey.

## 2. There is no significant difference in the level of parent involvement in traditional and non-traditional schools.

A small consistent advantage on the Non-traditional school side—averaging about 3% in elementary schools and less than 6% in the high schools—mirrors similar results at the national level. Overall scores for Traditional schools skewed a little lower because there were significantly more responses from less-active high school parents.

## 3. Contrary to popular opinion, high school parents have not lost interest in being involved.

While high school parents reported that they are less active than elementary parents, they also said that their schools provide fewer opportunities to be involved. We received more survey responses from high school parents (2,276) than elementary parents (1,954).

*We designed our survey to focus on four areas of parent involvement: communication, home learning, volunteering/participating, and decision making.*

## 4. We found that higher student achievement correlates most strongly with high levels of volunteering and decision making opportunities provided by the school and with higher parental activity in volunteering and home learning.

- Schools offering more opportunities to volunteer were associated with a 10% higher rate of students meeting or exceeding state standards, yet parents said schools provide the second-least support in this area (55% overall compared with 59% for communicating and 60% for home learning).
- Schools providing more decision making opportunities were associated with a 6% higher student achievement rate, yet less than half of all parents reported positively about school support in this area (48% in elementary schools, 38% in high schools).
- We also found an association between parents reporting more positively about their own volunteer activities and a 17% higher achievement rate at their schools, and between parents being more involved in home learning and a 10% higher student achievement rate at their schools.

## 5. We identified some missed opportunities, areas where parents said that they are active but don't get much school support.

For example, parents reported consistently high levels of involvement on select home learning activities (ranging from 93% in Traditional high schools to 97% in Non-traditional

*...high school parents have not lost interest in being involved.*

elementary schools), but said that only about 60% of their schools provide significant support in that area. A little more effort on the part of schools or the district could improve the quality and quantity of home learning activities which correlated in our study to higher student achievement.

#### **6. Correlations with parent satisfaction reveal more promising opportunities.**

Respondents were 27.5% more likely to say they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” when they answered positively to school support for home learning activities. They were also 16.6% more likely to say they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” when they answered positively to having opportunities to contribute to school decision making and 13% more likely to be satisfied when they answered positively about opportunities to volunteer.

Parent satisfaction had a negative 4% correlation for communication, suggesting that communication may be a basic expectation which does not contribute much to better parent-school relationships.

While the majority of parents across all types of schools said that they are satisfied with the school's efforts to involve them, they feel welcome and think the school respects their cultural heritage, there are a lot of dissatisfied parents (36%). Unsolicited written comments told a disturbing story that should not be ignored: “I felt excluded.” “...very prejudiced.” “(The) school does not welcome you like they should.” “ ...not polite at all.”

#### **7. Parents have an easier time getting through the school door than the classroom door.**

Overall, an average of 37% of all parents said they have observed in their child's classroom, and 44% have been invited to observe, compared with 70% who have been invited to a school event and 75% who attended such events.

We call this the “low-hanging fruit” phenomenon - schools do far better with the easiest, least complex or intense activities (sending out newsletters, holding open houses, etc.) and less well with the more challenging activities (classroom observation, involving volunteers, or supporting parents as decision makers). Limited resources explain much of this phenomenon, but it's important to keep in mind that the more challenging, complex activities correlate most in our study with higher achievement.

*Parents have an easier time getting through the school door than the classroom door.*

# Background Summary

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PURE's study grew out of a conversation in June, 2004, between our executive director, Julie Woestehoff, and CPS Chief Executive Officer, Arne Duncan, about the need for more information about parent involvement in charter schools, which are required to have some type of parental involvement structure. Mr. Duncan invited PURE to examine the parent involvement practices of charter schools.

PURE received a generous grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to expand the study beyond a focus on charter schools only, so that a comparison might be made of parent involvement in the 46 CPS "non-traditional" schools and an equal number of CPS "traditional" schools which have local school councils. We partnered with University of Illinois/Chicago (UIC) Associate Professor Robert Bruno to create a 70-question survey. We structured the survey on a national model of parent involvement developed by Dr. Joyce Epstein and adopted by CPS in its No Child Left Behind parent involvement program. We put together a list of 46 Non-traditional schools with the help of the CPS charter school office. We contracted with the UIC Survey Research Lab to select 46 Traditional schools by random sample. We mailed English/Spanish language surveys to the parents of all students enrolled in these 92 schools. UIC sociology graduate student Lisa Setlak prepared the data analysis with input from Professor Bruno and the PURE Survey Team.

This is a baseline study. It cannot answer all of our initial questions or the many new ones this survey has raised. We hope we can continue our research and look more deeply into some of the most interesting and important questions and issues raised here.

A full report covering our survey development, dissemination and analysis, and related recommendations follows.

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# Recommendations to Strengthen Parent Involvement in CPS

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Our overall recommendation is that CPS work to create a culture from the top down that clearly and intentionally demonstrates respect and value for the active involvement of all parents and the importance of trust and collaboration among parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community in our common goal of providing a high-quality education for all students.

## **To encourage an increase in those parent involvement activities most tied to student gains in our data...**

1. Invest in high-quality materials and workshops for schools to use to assist parents with home learning activities tied to relevant state learning standards and classroom instruction (such as the CPS Benchmark Assessment parent reports and workshops). Include this information on CPS cable-TV programs and web site.
2. Provide support for expanded school volunteer programs, perhaps through a liaison between CPS External Affairs and Instruction departments, to provide information about best practices, volunteer training, and incentives (from local businesses, etc.). Recognize schools with active parent volunteer programs.
3. Assure that high school parent involvement resources at the school and central office levels are equal to those provided for preschool-grade 8. This could include parent workshops on helping students build good study habits, college readiness, and how to access scholarships.
4. Improve support for parent involvement in school governance by outsourcing centralized services for local school councils to qualified independent contractors, and require similar training for governance bodies in all schools.

## **To increase school and system accountability for parent involvement...**

5. Provide a standard, CPS-approved, comprehensive annual parent survey; require schools to use it or some comparable tool to gather parent input prior to developing or modifying parent involvement and school improvement plans for the coming year.
6. Require all schools to report to the public annually on progress with parent involvement, such as data generated by a parent survey and level of parent activity, and to include this information on the school web site.
7. Conduct a system wide annual survey of randomly-selected parents on school and district efforts to involve them, and report results to the public (CPS web site, etc.).
8. Require governance bodies of Traditional and Non-traditional public schools to adhere to the Open Meetings Act including providing public access to information about governance group membership, meeting schedules, minutes and reports.

*...a culture to promote parent involvement is needed.*

**To support more effective implementation of *No Child Left Behind* parent involvement mandates...**

9. Insure that schools have access to high-quality training for parents and teachers on parents' right under NCLB to observe in classrooms, including proper decorum, scheduling observation times, and connecting observation with support of children's educational progress towards mastery of state learning standards; require schools receiving NCLB funds to report annually on how many parents participated in classroom observation.
10. Provide all NCLB Parent Advisory Councils with an inclusive resource list of providers of NCLB parent involvement programs; post list on the CPS web site.

# Introduction

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It's a truth almost universally acknowledged that parent involvement has a major positive impact on children's academic success. Yet despite growing concerns about poor-performing schools and dismaying achievement gaps, little has been done to examine, much less use, the power of parent involvement to improve student achievement.

With this study, Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) hopes to initiate a serious, objective conversation about parent involvement in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) which we hope will lead to positive action for more effective parent programs focused on improved student learning.

Our report is based on an August, 2005, survey of parents in 92 CPS schools—46 Non-traditional schools which we identified in coordination with CPS (charter, contract, military and small schools) and 46 Traditional schools selected at random by an independent research laboratory. We identified Traditional schools as schools with elected local school councils. Each set of 46 schools included 25 elementary schools and 21 high schools.

The report includes an analysis of our results and a description of our purpose and methodology. We have included as appendices a more detailed description of

our methods, data and analysis; the list of schools we surveyed; an overview of some unique aspects of parent involvement in Chicago; a brief history of PURE; and a select bibliography.

The stakes have never been higher for districts, schools, students, families, and communities. Everyone is being called on to take more responsibility for school improvement. Consequences are beginning to kick in for schools and districts failing to make adequate yearly progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Glaring achievement gaps uncovered by new NCLB reporting requirements are heating up the debate over resource equity and how to address the needs of the most at-risk students. While there is strong disagreement about the extent and cause of the problems with public education, few would argue against the need for continued reform.

The challenge before us is to find out, share the truth about, and support what is needed for every school to be a high-quality school and for every child to receive a quality education. An essential part of this truth is a better understanding of effective parent involvement.

*...the  
stakes have  
never been  
higher.*

# Survey Purpose and Structure: Why and how we did this survey

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# 2

**O**ur survey set out to answer the question, “What is the state of parent involvement in the Chicago Public Schools?”

This question emerged from a conversation between PURE’s executive director, Julie Woestehoff, and the CPS CEO Arne Duncan in June of 2004. Ms. Woestehoff was reporting specific concerns PURE had been hearing from parents of students in charter and other non-traditional type schools. She pointed out that the district’s annual report on charter schools has no information about parent involvement although the charter school law requires such involvement.

PURE’s experience over the seventeen years that Local School Councils (LSCs) have been in place in Chicago is that LSCs have had a major positive impact on parents. In addition to their proven success in improving schools (see Chapter 8), LSCs provide a built-in, meaningful parental role in the overall accountability system and help level the playing field, especially between low-income, minority parents and school professionals. We have been concerned that at least some parents in schools without LSCs were finding themselves at a disadvantage which may have a negative impact on their involvement.

Mr. Duncan’s response to this concern was to invite PURE to examine the parent

involvement practices in charter schools. We accepted the invitation and began to draft a small survey in the summer of 2004. But we worried that the lack of comparative information about non-charter school parent involvement would make the study somewhat useless.

PURE successfully submitted a proposal to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to broaden the study to look at equal numbers of what we labeled Non-traditional and Traditional schools. We were also able to include a significant focus on high school parent involvement and bring in a professional research team to assist in the project.

With this study, PURE hoped to gain valuable information about parent involvement in the different types of schools, an area which has not been extensively measured. Our results could be used to inform the discussion over the creation of new schools as well as provide existing schools with valuable parent feedback. PURE hoped we could begin to identify schools with successful parent programs as possible models for other schools throughout the CPS system. Finally, the study could provide valuable information for our own work with CPS parents and LSC members.

We partnered with University of Illinois/Chicago Associate Professor Robert Bruno, who had consulted with PURE on a

*What is the state of parent involvement in Chicago Public Schools?*

2003 parent involvement survey of LSC members commissioned by the Chicago Teachers' Union.

The PURE Survey Team was made up of PURE's executive director, Julie Woestehoff, Dr. Bruno, UIC Sociology graduate student Lisa Setlak, Nora Grodzins, Willard C. Hall Jr., and volunteers Jim Callaghan and Mary Pat Hartung. We prepared the survey instrument over four months of research, writing, and consultation with stakeholders and experts.

We structured our survey on the Epstein model of parent involvement, a comprehensive framework developed by Dr. Joyce L. Epstein and her colleagues at the Center on Family, School, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

The Chicago Public Schools has adopted this model for their NCLB parent involvement programs.

The Epstein model identifies six areas of parent involvement activity: parenting, communication, home learning, volunteering/participating, decision making, and community collaboration.

Our survey covered four of these six areas; for the sake of brevity and to keep the focus on school-parent activities, we did not ask questions about parenting or community collaboration.

The main purpose of our study was to look at the opportunities schools provide for parent involvement. We asked 43 questions about school-provided activities, and then used a sample of similar questions to find

out what parents actually do in each of the four areas. This also helped shorten the survey and still gave us enough information to make a comparison.

The survey had four parts:

- student information (how many children at the school, what grades, etc.)
- school activities (opportunities the school provides for parent involvement)
- parent activities (what parents actually do), and
- demographic information.

The survey was translated into Spanish, and was printed in both English and Spanish.

The mailing list of approximately 55,000 names came from the student lists of children enrolled in the 2004-05 academic year in all 46 Non-traditional schools identified in coordination with CPS (charter, contract, military and small schools), and 46 Traditional elementary and high schools selected at random by an independent lab.

The surveys were printed in batches for each school, with the school name printed in red on the cover, so that the parents would know which school they were being asked about and so that we could assign their responses to the correct school.

The surveys were mailed in mid-August, 2005. 4,320 surveys were returned, a 12.2% response rate (see Appendix C for details of how we determined this figure).

Our survey captured parent reports of what their children's schools are doing and what parents themselves are doing in the four parent involvement areas we asked about:

communication, home learning, volunteering/participating, and decision making. We broke these results down across the four types of schools: Non-traditional elementary schools, Non-traditional high schools, Traditional elementary schools, and Traditional high schools, to see how they compared.

Our study also looked at the relationship between outcomes in the four areas and a number of control variables to see if there was any significant relationship between survey responses and the school type, school grade, and demographic characteristics of respondents.

We included a school performance variable in order to assess whether schools that are doing better in these areas also perform better on state standardized exams.

Finally, we examined whether there was an association between reported parent levels of satisfaction with their school's overall

parent involvement performance and the Positive scores given in each of the four areas we studied.

This is a baseline study designed to gather information about the extent to which various parent involvement practices occur in individual schools. By comparing the frequency of parent involvement practices with student achievement and parent satisfaction, we found some significant correlations. However, this study was not designed to determine the causal relationship among such factors. Nevertheless, we believe that the descriptive data produced by this survey will be helpful in school planning, development, and policy making at the local, district, state and national levels. It can also provide a solid foundation for future study.

# General Findings: Who responded, and what did they say?

# 3

An immediate result of our survey was a wave of emotion from parents. As soon as the surveys hit Chicago mailboxes, we began to receive telephone calls and e-mails from parents expressing both surprise and appreciation for the contact. “I am thrilled to take this opportunity to voice my opinions on parental involvement,” wrote one mother in a letter she returned with the survey.

The survey stirred up a lot of issues, too. Many parents learned about PURE for the first time through this mailing. They were excited to find a group which exists to support parents and were eager to tell us about their personal experiences. Several asked for help with individual school or student problems, which we were happy to provide. Some parents asked us to call a meeting so that they could talk with us and other parents about the survey. Hundreds included their names and addresses on the return envelopes. Clearly, there is a great unfilled need for parents to talk to other parents and find support. We were gratified to hear so many parents say, “We’re so glad to know that PURE is there to help us!”

**Who answered the survey?**

A total of 4,230 parents or parental guardians completed the surveys (Table 1).

We sent surveys to an equal number of Non-traditional and Traditional schools. This resulted in more surveys being sent to high school parents, because overall enrollment in

| School Type     | School Grade Level |             |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|
|                 | Elementary         | High School |
| Non-traditional | 838                | 524         |
| Traditional     | 1,116              | 1,752       |
| <b>Total</b>    | 1,954              | 2,276       |

high schools is higher. It also resulted in more surveys being sent to Traditional school parents since overall enrollment in Traditional schools is higher.

Non-traditional respondents represented 32% and Traditional 68% of the total surveys analyzed. High school parents accounted for 53.8% of the total.

Female respondents accounted for 87.3% of the surveys completed. The vast majority of respondents had at least some college experience (73.1%) and only 7.3% had less than a high school degree.

African-American parents made up 49% of the survey respondents, while Latinos and Caucasians accounted for 22.8% and 21% respectively. There were however, some significant differences in the racial composition of Non-traditional and Traditional households. African-American participants were much more heavily represented in the Non-traditional responses (66%) than in the Traditional ones (41%). Likewise, there were a higher number of Caucasian respondents (26%) among the Traditional households than among the Non-traditional (9.8%). Latino participants were more represented in Traditional (24%) than

**Table 1**  
*Number of Respondents by School Type and Grade Level*

| Parent Involvement Areas    | School Type     |             |             |             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                             | Non-traditional |             | Traditional |             |
|                             | Elementary      | High School | Elementary  | High School |
| Communication               | .64             | .57         | .58         | .52         |
| Home Learning               | .71             | .51         | .68         | .45         |
| Volunteering/ Participating | .62             | .56         | .59         | .44         |
| Decision Making             | .48             | .38         | .48         | .38         |

**Table 2**  
*School Activities:  
Summary of  
Positive Scores*

in Non-traditional (20%) schools.

Overall enrollment in CPS in the 2004-05 school year was 49% African-American, 38% Latino, 9% Caucasian, and 4% other (Asian, Pacific Islander and Native American).

The average income of a respondent was between \$30,000 and \$39,000. However, nearly one-third (32%) earned less than \$20,000 and 17% had incomes under \$10,000. In addition, a higher proportion of Non-traditional respondents (75%) than Traditional parents (67%) earned less than \$50,000.

We found no statistically significant differences between respondents' answers based on education, race, income or any of the other demographic variables we surveyed.

**How do schools compare in parent involvement?**

The key question that led to this survey was whether there was a difference in parent involvement in schools with LSCs (Traditional schools) compared to schools without LSCs (Non-traditional schools).

Tables 2 and 3 show the positive ratings of school and parent activities, respectively. Table 2 summarizes parents' reports of school activities and Table 3 summarizes parents' reports of their own activities in each of the four areas we studied.

In each table, the results are broken out into Non-traditional elementary schools, Non-Traditional high schools, Traditional elementary schools, and Traditional high schools.

Positive scores are based on the percent of parents who said that the schools or they did something "sometimes," "often" or "always."

Overall, elementary school and elementary parent scores are higher than high school and high school parent scores. The only exception is the high score Non-traditional high school parents gave to their own activity in the communication area.

We found no significant difference between Positive responses for Traditional and Non-traditional elementary schools and Traditional and Non-Traditional high schools. There is a small consistent advantage on the Non-traditional school side, averaging about 3% in elementary schools and less than 6% in the high schools.

**National study shows larger advantage in "chosen" schools**

These findings are consistent with other parent involvement research. In December, 2005, a broad-based national study published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U. S. Department of Education, using a structure similar to PURE's, compared responses of parents in "chosen" public and



“assigned” public schools. These categories closely parallel our study’s Non-traditional and Traditional groups. All of the CPS Non-traditional schools would be considered chosen. All but the two elementary magnet schools and the four selective enrollment high schools in the Traditional schools group would be considered assigned or mostly assigned.

For example, NCES found that parents of students in “chosen” public schools rate them higher in school information practices than parents of students in “assigned” schools. 85% of “chosen” school parents in the 2003 NCES study compared with 75% of “assigned” school parents reported that school information practices were done very well, an advantage of 10% for the chosen schools. This compares with a smaller, 5.5% advantage for CPS Non-traditional schools over Traditional schools in the area of communication in our survey.

NCES found a similar advantage for small schools with enrollments up to 600 students. Most of the Non-traditional schools in our survey are small, while many of the Traditional schools are quite large.

The small advantage of CPS Non-traditional schools over Traditional schools may thus be a factor of parental choice and/or size rather than better parent involvement practices.

| Parent Involvement Areas    | School Type     |             |             |             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                             | Non-traditional |             | Traditional |             |
|                             | Elementary      | High School | Elementary  | High School |
| Communications              | .69             | .74         | .70         | .64         |
| Learning at home            | .97             | .94         | .95         | .93         |
| Volunteering/ Participating | .77             | .53         | .68         | .49         |
| Decision Making             | .52             | .46         | .49         | .38         |

**Table 3**  
*Parent Activities: Summary of Positive Scores*

*We found no significant difference between Positive responses for Traditional and Non-traditional schools.*

**Table 4**

*Communication:  
Positive Scores  
by School Type  
and Grade*

| Items   | School Type     |            |             |             |            |             |
|---|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|   | Non-traditional |            |             | Traditional |            |             |
|   | Total           | Elementary | High School | Total       | Elementary | High School |
| Informs me about school programs.   | .86             | .91        | .77         | .82         | .87        | .79         |
| Asks me about my child's talents, interests, or needs.  | .61             | .65        | .55         | .47         | .57        | .40         |
| Asks for my feedback about my child's progress.   | .72             | .76        | .66         | .58         | .68        | .51         |
| Asks me to review my child's schoolwork.  | .80             | .89        | .67         | .67         | .84        | .57         |
| Tells me what skills my child needs to learn this year.                                       | .75             | .82        | .65         | .63         | .78        | .55         |
| Contacts me about my child's progress.  | .82             | .85        | .78         | .75         | .78        | .73         |
| Visits me at home to talk about my child's progress.  | .04             | .03        | .04         | .03         | .05        | .02         |
| Informs me how my child's schoolwork is connected to academic standards.                      | .71             | .77        | .64         | .73         | .68        | .55         |
| Tells me how the school grading system is connected to academic standards.                    | .68             | .71        | .64         | .60         | .64        | .58         |
| Sends home regular school newsletters.  | .72             | .79        | .62         | .73         | .79        | .71         |
| Invites me to attend an open house.   | .89             | .92        | .84         | .85         | .87        | .84         |
| Uses phone calls, emails, and other methods of two-way communication between home and school. | .74             | .76        | .72         | .68         | .63        | .71         |
| Schedules parent-teacher conferences.   | .87             | .92        | .81         | .75         | .80        | .72         |
| Offers social activities where I can meet teachers and other parents.                         | .62             | .66        | .57         | .57         | .63        | .53         |
| Makes it possible for me to meet with teachers and the principal when I need to.              | .87             | .88        | .85         | .80         | .84        | .79         |
| Talks to me about my child's future.  | .62             | .63        | .62         | .51         | .56        | .49         |
| Makes sure I know whom to contact when a problem comes up with my child.                      | .80             | .81        | .79         | .73         | .77        | .70         |
| Welcomes my questions about the school and my child's education.                              | .81             | .84        | .78         | .76         | .81        | .74         |
| Works with me to resolve problems and concerns about my child's education.                    | .81             | .83        | .77         | .72         | .76        | .70         |

# Results by Type of School-provided Parent Involvement Activity

# 4

## How did parents rate school efforts to involve them through communication, home learning, volunteering/participating, and decision making?

Tables 4–7 list the percent of Positive responses parents gave to questions about their schools’ parent involvement efforts.

### Communication (Table 4)

While Non-traditional schools earned higher marks on all but one item (“sends home regular school newsletters”), on nearly every item a robust majority of respondents gave their respective schools Positive answers.

There were three exceptions. Only a bare majority (51%) of Traditional respondents said that the school their child attends “talks

to me about my child's future” and less than half of these respondents (47%) agreed that the school “asks me about my child's talents, interests, or needs.”

Some of the school communication activities with the highest Positives were “informs me about school programs,” “invites me to attend an open house,” and “schedules parent-teacher conferences,” all fairly basic activities. And almost no one does home visits (less than 5%).

Not so highly rated were more intensive efforts such as “asks me about my child's talents, interests, or needs,” “offers social activities where I can meet teachers and other parents,” “talks to me about my child's future,” and home visits.

This response pattern is consistent throughout the survey - parents rated schools higher on the least complex or

**Table 5**

*Home Learning: Positive Scores by School Type and Grade*

| Items   | School Type     |            |             |             |            |             |
|---|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|   | Non-traditional |            |             | Traditional |            |             |
|   | Total           | Elementary | High School | Total       | Elementary | High School |
| Provides me with specific skill-building activities for my child to do at home. | .50             | .62        | .32         | .36         | .59        | .25         |
| Gives me ideas for talking to my child about what he/she learned in class.      | .54             | .65        | .38         | .39         | .55        | .29         |
| Sends home learning materials for me to use with my child.                      | .47             | .61        | .25         | .33         | .57        | .18         |
| Assigns homework that gets my child to share ideas with me.                     | .69             | .80        | .53         | .57         | .72        | .48         |
| Works with me to plan a program to meet my child's needs.                       | .66             | .69        | .62         | .57         | .65        | .53         |

| Items  | School Type     |            |             |             |            |             |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|  | Non-traditional |            |             | Traditional |            |             |
|  | Total           | Elementary | High School | Total       | Elementary | High School |
| Makes me feel welcome when I come to the school.   | .88             | .90        | .86         | .84         | .85        | .83         |
| Invites me to observe in my child's classroom  | .52             | .61        | .39         | .36         | .51        | .27         |
| Invites me to attend activities at the school that include student work and performances | .76             | .83        | .67         | .64         | .72        | .58         |
| Provides me with a variety of ways to volunteer  | .67             | .76        | .56         | .60         | .70        | .55         |
| Offers after school programs that involve parents  | .53             | .58        | .46         | .47         | .53        | .44         |
| Provides a space where I can meet with other parents                                     | .54             | .57        | .49         | .51         | .55        | .48         |

**Table 6**  
*Volunteering/  
Participating:  
Positive Scores  
by School Type  
and Grade*

intensive activities, which we call the “low-hanging fruit.” Dr. Bruno noted the same pattern in his 2003 parent involvement survey.

#### Home learning (Table 5)

Both Non-traditional and Traditional schools earned their highest marks on the same home learning items (“assigns homework that gets my child to share ideas with me” and “works with me to plan a program to meet my child's needs”). The schools also received their lowest marks in “sends home learning materials” for parents to use with their child.

Positive scores for Traditional schools dropped below 40% on three of the items; “provides me with specific skill-building activities for my child to do at home” (36%), “gives me ideas for talking to my child about what he/she learned in class” (39%), and “sends home learning materials for me to use with my child” (33%). Non-traditional scores were lower on these same items.

Non-traditional and Traditional parents gave their schools higher marks on home learning activities that required less effort

(e.g., sending homework home) than on activities that necessitated more elaborate material preparation (e.g., sending home learning material that parents can use with their child).

#### Volunteering/Participating (Table 6)

The volunteering/participating category includes a variety of activities that bring parents into the school. Results in this category reveal an interesting discrepancy. Respondents in both Traditional and Non-traditional schools agreed by significant majorities that their schools made them “feel welcome,” invited them to “attend activities at the school” (involving their child's work), and provided parents “with a variety of ways to volunteer” at school.

However, respondents from both school types reported decidedly lower Positive scores when commenting on access to their child's classroom. Just slightly over half (52%) of Non-traditional parents/guardians said that they were ever invited “to observe in my child's classroom.” On this count Traditional schools fared even worse; a strikingly small 36% admitted ever being invited to visit the classroom.

| Items  | School Type     |            |             |             |            |             |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|  | Non-traditional |            |             | Traditional |            |             |
|  | Total           | Elementary | High School | Total       | Elementary | High School |
| Provides opportunities to discuss school achievement data  | .59             | .61        | .55         | .56         | .61        | .54         |
| Holds meetings to discuss the coming year's school budget and program plans                      | .48             | .47        | .50         | .54         | .58        | .51         |
| Sends out parent surveys   | .52             | .54        | .48         | .45         | .48        | .43         |
| There is an active effective parent group  | .58             | .61        | .53         | .57         | .61        | .55         |
| Provides training and information about how I can become more involved in school decision making | .50             | .52        | .49         | .52         | .56        | .49         |

These findings suggest that public schools in Chicago are doing a better job accommodating parents at the front door than they are at helping people become observers of their children's education. Yet the No Child Left Behind act specifically encourages parents to observe in their child's classroom as a way of improving home-school communication and involving parents in school improvement efforts.

### Decision Making (Table 7)

Overall, parents reported fewest opportunities at the school and their own least active involvement in the decision making area. This is somewhat surprising because Chicago's LSCs have provided a built-in opportunity for parents to participate in school site decision making for over seventeen years.

On three items ("provides opportunities to discuss school achievement data," "there is an active effective parent group," and "provides training and information about how I can become more involved in school decision making") there was no statistically significant difference in Positive

scores among respondents. But according to survey participants, Non-traditional schools did a better job in "sending out parent surveys" (52%), while Traditional schools held more meetings for parents "to discuss the coming year's school budget and program plans" (54%), perhaps because LSCs hold bi-annual meetings for that purpose.

Interpreting scores in the decision making area was complicated by the fact that there were an unusually large number of "don't know" and "does not apply" responses to questions about the existence of school-based oversight bodies (i.e., charter boards, special education committees, bilingual advisory committees, No Child Left Behind advisory committees, and local school councils). The high rate of items in which no substantive response was given suggests that these questions were not understood or that the survey participants were genuinely unaware of the availability of certain school decision making bodies. Those items had to be removed from the assessment done in the decision making domain, and our analysis was based on the five remaining questions shown in Table 7.

**Table 7**  
*Decision Making:  
Positive Scores  
by School Type  
and Grade*

| Items  | School Type     |            |             |             |            |             |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|  | Non-traditional |            |             | Traditional |            |             |
|  | Total           | Elementary | High School | Total       | Elementary | High School |
| <b>Communications</b>  |                 |            |             |             |            |             |
| Shared information with the school about my child                  | .87             | .91        | .81         | .80         | .88        | .76         |
| Read material sent home from the school                            | .96             | .98        | .94         | .95         | .97        | .94         |
| Attended scheduled parent-teacher conferences                      | .92             | .95        | .88         | .87         | .90        | .85         |
| Met with my child's teachers in between scheduled conferences      | .80             | .85        | .73         | .67         | .81        | .59         |
| Worked with staff to solve a problem my child was having in school | .79             | .80        | .77         | .69         | .75        | .66         |
| <b>Home Learning</b>   |                 |            |             |             |            |             |
| Talked to my child about the school day                            | .97             | .98        | .95         | .96         | .97        | .96         |
| Reviewed my child's schoolwork                                     | .95             | .98        | .90         | .91         | .97        | .88         |
| <b>Volunteering/Participating</b>                                  |                 |            |             |             |            |             |
| Volunteered at the school  | .44             | .55        | .28         | .39         | .53        | .30         |
| Attended school activities involving students work                 | .80             | .87        | .70         | .71         | .83        | .65         |
| Observed my child's classroom                                      | .42             | .53        | .26         | .32         | .51        | .21         |
| <b>Decision making</b>   |                 |            |             |             |            |             |
| Attended school meetings to give input into school decision-making | .51             | .55        | .44         | .40         | .50        | .34         |
| Attended school meetings to discuss school achievement             | .46             | .50        | .41         | .36         | .45        | .29         |
| Completed a parent survey  | .61             | .65        | .54         | .50         | .55        | .47         |

**Table 8**

*Parent Activities:  
Positive Scores  
by School Type  
and Grade*

# Results by Parent Activity

## **H**ow did parents rate themselves in the areas of communication, home learning, volunteering/participating, and decision making?

Table 8 lists the percent of Positive responses parents gave to questions about their own activities.

In nearly every area measured, parents from both Non-traditional and Traditional schools report that they are making significant efforts to be involved in their children's education. Parent efforts to be actively involved in their children's education revealed responses that closely mirrored the performance of their children's school in providing parent involvement opportunities. As Table 8 indicates, in all four areas (communication, volunteering, home learning, and decision making), Non-traditional respondents gave small to moderately higher Positive scores than Traditional parents.

Here, too, interpreting scores for parent involvement in decision making was handicapped by the inability to use parent responses to items about local school governance bodies. However, it is still clear that both Non-traditional and Traditional schools parents are considerably less involved in school decision making than they are in the other three parent involvement areas.

The lowest Positive scores for both groups of parents involved how often they have

visited their child's classroom and provided any volunteer service at the school. An additional activity that also deviates from the majority of robust Positive marks is attending "school meetings to discuss school achievement." These three items represent the only activities for which respondents from both school types recorded below 50% involvement.

### **New light on high school parent involvement?**

We found a more significant difference – about 9% – between overall Positive scores of elementary and high school parents' reports of their own level of activity. However, the differential between elementary and high school positive parent reports of school activity was 12%. This suggests that, while high school parents said they are less active than elementary parents, they also report fewer opportunities to be involved.

For example, Table 2 shows that only 44% of Traditional high school parents report positively about the school's support for volunteering, compared with 59% of Traditional elementary school parents.

Add to this the fact that we received more survey responses from high school parents than elementary parents (Table 1) and we have growing evidence that high school parents have not given up on being involved!

*Parents are making significant efforts to be involved.*

# Comparison of School and Parent Activities

# 6

## **W**here are school and parent efforts similar and different?

Using separate sets of questions for school efforts and parent activities allowed us to compare parents' reports of what the schools do with what they themselves do, as a kind of check and balance.

Overall, parent reports of their activities closely mirrored their reports of school activities, except that parents report their own efforts at somewhat higher levels than the schools' efforts (compare Tables 2 and 3). The area of decision making is the consistently lowest score within like groups.

## **Gaps suggest potential opportunities**

Some areas of difference suggest potential opportunities to involve parents that could be tapped. For example, parents reported consistently high levels of involvement in select home learning activities (ranging from 93% in Traditional high schools to 97% in Non-traditional elementary schools), but report that only about 60% of their schools provide significant support for home learning. A little more effort on the part of schools or the district could have a big impact on the quality and quantity of home learning activities.



**Table 9 (left)**

*Correlations of School Activities with Select Factors*

**Table 10 (right)**

*Correlations of Parent Activities with Select Factors*

*Bold items denote statistically significant correlations*

| School Activities                         | Regression      |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>School-Communication</b>               |                 |
| non-traditional                           | .0903**         |
| high school                               | -.0793**        |
| race                                      | -.0993*         |
| gender                                    |                 |
| education                                 | .0638*          |
| income                                    | .0223           |
| performance                               | -.0214**        |
| satisfaction                              | -.0466**        |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .0257           |
| <b>School-Home Learning</b>               |                 |
| non-traditional                           | <b>.1366**</b>  |
| high school                               | <b>-.1917**</b> |
| race                                      | .0268           |
| gender                                    | -.0238**        |
| education                                 | -.0457          |
| income                                    | .0260           |
| performance                               | .0197**         |
| satisfaction                              | <b>.2758**</b>  |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .0890           |
| <b>School-Volunteering/ Participating</b> |                 |
| non-traditional                           | <b>.1133**</b>  |
| high school                               | -.0764**        |
| race                                      | -.0223**        |
| gender                                    | -.0593**        |
| education                                 | .0266           |
| income                                    | .0147**         |
| performance                               | <b>.1030**</b>  |
| satisfaction                              | <b>.1299**</b>  |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .1110           |
| <b>School-Decision Making</b>             |                 |
| non-traditional                           | .0305           |
| high school                               | -.0440**        |
| race                                      | -.0120**        |
| gender                                    | .0689           |
| education                                 | .0483           |
| income                                    | -.0246          |
| performance                               | .0600**         |
| satisfaction                              | <b>.1667**</b>  |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .0555           |

\*\* = 99% confidence level; \* = 95%

| Parent Activities                         | Regression      |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>Parent-Communication</b>               |                 |
| non-traditional                           | .0298           |
| high school                               | -.0472**        |
| race                                      | .0022           |
| gender                                    | -.0307          |
| education                                 | .0376           |
| income                                    | -.0355          |
| performance                               | -.0645          |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .0041           |
| <b>Parent-Home Learning</b>               |                 |
| non-traditional                           | .0110           |
| high school                               | -.0272**        |
| race                                      | -.0113**        |
| gender                                    | .0018           |
| education                                 | .0253**         |
| income                                    | .0218**         |
| performance                               | <b>.1039**</b>  |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .0225           |
| <b>Parent-Volunteering/ Participating</b> |                 |
| non-traditional                           | <b>.1326**</b>  |
| high school                               | <b>-.1635**</b> |
| race                                      | -.0898**        |
| gender                                    | .0076           |
| education                                 | .0864**         |
| income                                    | .0584**         |
| performance                               | <b>.1734**</b>  |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .1770           |
| <b>Parent-Decision Making</b>             |                 |
| non-traditional                           | .0276**         |
| high school                               | -.0705**        |
| race                                      | .0537           |
| gender                                    | -.0349          |
| education                                 | .0350           |
| income                                    | .0330           |
| performance                               | -.0918**        |
| Adjusted R Square                         | .0201           |

\*\* = 99% confidence level; \* = 95%

# Correlating Type of Activity with Student Achievement and Parent Satisfaction

## Which parent involvement practices are associated most with student achievement and parent satisfaction?

Potentially powerful opportunities to involve parents in more effective ways emerged when we correlated the survey responses with a number of variables including school type, parent characteristics, and school performance on the annual state assessments. We also correlated the four areas of involvement with overall parent satisfaction.

Table 9 shows the correlation results for school activities and Table 10 shows the same information for parent activities. Areas of significant correlation are highlighted in bold type in the charts. (Details of the correlation methodology can be found in Appendix F.)

### Student Achievement

We found that higher student achievement correlates most strongly with high levels of volunteering and decision making opportunities provided by the school and with higher parental activity in volunteering and home learning.

- Schools offering more opportunities to volunteer were associated with a 10% higher rate of students meeting or exceeding state standardized tests, yet parents said schools provide the second-least support in this area (55% overall compared with 59% for communicating and 60% for home learning).

|                          | Non-traditional |             | Traditional |             |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                          | Elementary      | High School | Elementary  | High School |
| Very satisfied/satisfied | 72.5%           | 64.2%       | 68.5%       | 55.4%       |

- Schools providing more decision making opportunities were associated with a 6% higher student achievement rate, yet less than half of all parents reported positively about school support in this area (48% in elementary schools, 38% in high schools).
- We also found an association between parents reporting more positively about their own volunteer activities and a 17% higher achievement rate at their schools, and between parents being more involved in home learning and a 10% higher student achievement rate at their schools.

The correlation of achievement with home learning was less than 2%, while the area of home-school communication, which schools do well, showed the lowest correlation to achievement (negative 2%). This is further evidence that picking the lowest hanging fruit may produce the smallest harvest.

### Parent satisfaction

The survey asked, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your school's effort to involve you in your child's education?" As Table 11 shows, a majority of parents in all types of schools responded positively ("satisfied" or "very satisfied").

**Table 11**  
*Satisfaction Level: Percent of Positive Responses by School Type and Grade*

*School communication was the only activity that generated a negative association.*

Correlations with parent satisfaction reveal more promising opportunities. Respondents were 27.5% more likely to say they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" when they answered positively to school support for home learning activities. They were also 16.6% more likely to say they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" when they answered positively to having opportunities to contribute to school decision making and 13% more likely to be satisfied when they answered positively about opportunities to volunteer.

#### **Negative Association**

It is important to note that school communication was the only activity which generated a negative association with both student achievement and parent satisfaction. This finding is strongly suggestive of a flaw in school strategy. Communication was the area in which parents gave schools the second highest Positive scores (64%). It would be logical to expect school communication efforts to be positively associated with levels of parental satisfaction. Parents, however, appear to place a higher value on their school's more complex-relational activities (i.e., home learning, volunteering at school and decision making) as a means to involve them in their children's education.

#### **Significant Rate of Dissatisfaction**

While the majority of parents across all types of schools report that they are satisfied with the school's efforts to involve them, they feel welcome and think the school respects their cultural heritage, there are a lot of dissatisfied parents (36%). Unsolicited written comments told a disturbing story that should not be ignored: "I felt excluded." "...very prejudiced." "(The) school does not welcome you like they should." "...not polite at all."

# A Closer Look at Student Achievement and Parent Involvement in Decision Making

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# 8

In our study, parent involvement in decision making correlates positively with both student achievement (6%) and parent satisfaction (16.7%). These results are noteworthy given other positive research about the impact of LSCs in Chicago.

The most recent such research is provided in “The Big Picture,” a 2005 report by Designs for Change. This report identifies 144 CPS schools which were low-performing in 1999 but avoided district intervention and the accompanying loss of major LSC decision making.

These 144 schools have improved from an average of 20% to an average of 50% in the percent of students scoring at or above national norms in reading on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, which have been used by CPS as a high-stakes test for students and schools. Improvements in math scores have been even greater at these 144 schools.

The report compares those 144 successful schools with 113 other low-performing schools where CPS intervened and took over key school decision making from the LSC. Most of these schools have been on probation for years. Probation is a label used by CPS for schools whose overall standardized test scores fall below the 40th percentile. Being on probation involves various district interventions such as required curricular programs and external partners. The schools' achievement test scores have also remained far below the minimum standards required to meet state or federal goals.

In his chapter in *No Child Left Behind?* (2003), Anthony S. Bryk looks carefully at various influences on CPS student test scores and concludes that the change to LSC-style site-based management should be credited for much of the improvement district officials ascribe to later strategies: “the effects of decentralization reform was probably the single biggest source of the much heralded system successes during the late 1990's.”

*Empowered Participation*, a 2004 book by Harvard Kennedy School of Government professor Archon Fung, praises LSCs as a model of effective civic involvement. Fung's research shows how LSCs build direct communication and oversight between local officials and the communities they serve, help build social capital to reverse the trend of civic deterioration, and, most importantly, have a positive impact on student achievement.

Fung notes some evidence that LSCs have a stronger impact on low-income communities whose residents have few other opportunities to have a voice in issues that directly affect them. For example, he found that voter turn-out in LSC elections in low-income communities is proportionately larger than that for regular municipal elections. And Fung found that the improvement effect of LSCs on student achievement was stronger in low-income communities than in middle class schools.

# Conclusion

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# 9

**W**hat's the state of parent involvement in Chicago Public Schools? This study suggests that parent involvement in CPS needs more focused effort in areas that have the most impact on student achievement.

By every measure, parents of all grade levels demonstrated a continuous interest in participating in their children's education. While schools in Chicago are doing well picking the "low hanging fruit" (i.e., communicating to parents), they are performing much less well in areas such as supporting parent involvement in school

decision making that treat parents as true educational partners and are positively correlated to higher student achievement.

Is there a difference between parent involvement in Traditional and Non-Traditional schools? We found no significant difference and a great deal of similarity in the needs and aspirations of parents to partner with their children's schools.

We hope to build on this foundation in future studies to illuminate this and other important areas of parent involvement.

# Appendix

# Overview of Recent Chicago Parent Involvement History

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## LSC Basics

The School Reform Act of 1988 established an elected Local School Council (LSC) at each Chicago public school. Each LSC consists of six parent representatives elected by parents and community residents; two community representatives elected by parents and community residents; two teachers selected by the school staff and appointed by the Board of Education; the school's principal (ex-officio); and, in the high schools, a student selected by students and appointed by the Board.

Unique among U.S. cities, Chicago's LSCs were given strong decision making powers, including:

- **Principal Selection and Evaluation:** LSCs appoint the school's principal to a four-year contract and rehire or replace the principal at the end of this contract period. LSCs supervise and evaluate the principal on an ongoing basis.
- **School Improvement Planning:** LSCs set priorities for their school's improvement by helping develop and voting on an annual school improvement plan.
- **School-Based Budgeting:** LSCs help develop and vote on the school budget. They control an average of \$500,000 per year in flexible money from state and federal supplemental funds.

LSCs have created a consistent base of about 6,000 active, involved parents,

community members, teachers, students and principals who work to change and improve their individual schools. Non-LSC members can participate in LSC committees. The principal must involve the LSC and the entire school community in developing the annual program plan and budget. The law requires every LSC to present the program plan and budget to the community every year for comment prior to approving them.

Nearly 20 years of research affirm the success of LSCs as an effective vehicle to connect increased parent involvement with improved student outcomes.

But LSCs have had an uphill battle for recognition and effective support from the city despite this evidence of their positive impact. For example, a December, 2000, letter from a high-ranking Chicago Public Schools (CPS) official expressly forbade any LSC or its members from visiting classrooms for the purpose of monitoring the school improvement plan, which is a legal duty of the LSC. Classroom visitation is a well-established method of program evaluation. A subsequent letter stated that, since LSCs received "ample information" from the principal and the Board to make decisions for the school, they did not need to enter any classrooms. Similar letters to LSCs from the Board Law Department stated that LSC members had no right to be in the school except to attend LSC meetings. This policy led to several LSC

members being arrested or threatened with arrest as they tried to carry out their LSC duties.

LSCs and independent groups regularly complain that the CPS central administration undermines LSC effectiveness with misinformation and interference. In 2003, a coalition representing over 30 community and education reform groups unsuccessfully called on CPS to dismantle the department charged with LSC support and outsource its duties to independent groups.

#### **New reform efforts impact parent involvement**

In 1995, the Illinois legislature modified the Reform Act to give Chicago's mayor more control over the CPS Board of Education and central administration and expanded their power to intervene in failing schools. Several intervention strategies were tried including placing schools on probation, "re-engineering" and "reconstitution". However, many CPS schools continued to perform poorly.

By 2004, the mayor proposed a school revitalization program called Renaissance 2010. The program is designed to create a variety of educational choices for students within the public school system. Under the plan, at least 100 new schools will be created by the year 2010. Many of these new programs will open in schools closed by the system for low performance or building underutilization.

Some concerns have been raised that Renaissance 2010's central operating principle - closing and reopening schools - may create undue transience of children. Research is clear that each time a student

moves from one school to another, he or she can lose several months of academic progress. Many fear that Renaissance 2010 will increase student mobility and result in some children losing ground educationally.

Another concern is a diminished role for parents in school governance. The new schools generally do not have LSCs. According to Illinois law, charter schools must be governed by boards which include parents, and CPS also requires that proposals for new schools under Renaissance 2010 have mechanisms for parent involvement in school decision making. However, parents tend to be outnumbered in these alternative governance structures, and the effectiveness of these bodies is not clear.

Other concerns about Renaissance 2010 include the uneven track record of charter and other non-traditional schools locally and nationally, and the lack of a "safety net" for students who may be turned away from or pushed out of a Non-traditional school for reasons such as lack of money for required fees, special education needs, discipline problems, low achievement, limited English proficiency, or other issues.

#### **Other CPS parent programs *Improvements under Duncan***

In 2001, Mayor Daley appointed Arne Duncan as CPS CEO. Mr. Duncan has taken several positive steps to improve partnerships with parents. At PURE's request, Mr. Duncan initiated a program to provide identification badges for LSC members to help address the problem of school principals threatening LSC members with arrest.



The Duncan administration has also made a major commitment to improving the way information about student and school progress is shared with parents. One example is the new "scorecard," a user-friendly one-page data sheet with information about each CPS high school (<http://www.cps.k12.il.us/Schools/scorecard/>).

Another example is the CPS Benchmark Assessment parent report for parents of 3rd through 8th graders. These reports provide parents with student results on quarterly standards-based tests and offer specific suggestions for activities parents can do at home with their children to address areas where they need improvement. PURE helped CPS create these parent reports, and developed parent workshops to reinforce their message.

#### *Parent Advisory Councils (PACs)*

While LSCs and LSC committees are a major opportunity for Chicago parents in Traditional schools to have a voice in school decision making, there is a growing involvement of parents in the Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) which are required for all schools receiving federal Title 1 (NCLB) funds. These funds are designed to supplement the educational opportunities for children from low-income families. At least 1% of NCLB funds must be used for parent involvement activities both district wide and at any local school eligible to receive NCLB money.

PACs exist to provide parents/legal guardians, teachers/staff, and concerned community individuals with opportunities to participate in the planning, design,

implementation, and evaluation of Title I programs, to increase the involvement of parents at the school, and to strengthen the ability of parents to support their children's academic progress at home. The PAC serves as an advisory group to the principal and, in Chicago, to the LSC, by providing input on current and future Title I programs and by developing a parent involvement policy which includes a school-parent compact or agreement. PACs also share NCLB Title I information updates received from cluster and citywide PAC meetings sponsored by CPS.

Parents in Chicago's PACs have reported many of the same problems with the central office as LSCs have had. For example, schools requesting to spend their own NCLB parent involvement funds on programs offered by independent providers have been put on hold for months waiting for a bureaucrat's signature. The same CPS department administers both LSCs and PACs.

#### *Child-Parent Centers (CPCs)*

Chicago's Child-Parent Centers (CPCs) have a remarkable history of parent involvement and academic success. However, CPS has closed down most of these centers, citing their higher costs.

The CPC program was founded in 1967 to serve families in high-poverty neighborhoods that were not being served by Head Start or similar programs. All CPCs have a parent center and a full-time parent resource person. Parents with children in the program were required to be at the site one half-day every week until recently,

when welfare-to-work mandates made it impossible for some.

Arthur J. Reynolds of the University of Wisconsin/Madison has carried out 20 years of research on CPCs and found them to be highly successful. CPC participants were almost 30% more likely to complete high school than a comparison group of equally disadvantaged children. Forty percent fewer

CPC participants were held back in school or placed in special education programs, and CPC participants had 41% fewer arrests for violent crime. Dr. Reynolds calculates that for every dollar invested in the preschool component of the program, \$7.14 was returned to society in increased earnings for participants and reduced costs to society for remedial education and crime.

# About PURE

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PURE originated during a 19-day Chicago public school strike in 1987 when a large group of parents and teachers began to meet once a week in a park district field house. They were angry that school, city and state officials could be so irresponsible that they would allow children to be out of school that long. This sentiment was the basis for the name of the organization, Parents United for Responsible Education, commonly known as PURE.

The parents also refused to be pitted against teachers in this fight; they realized that the system itself needed a major overhaul. After the strike ended, most people in Chicago agreed that sweeping changes were needed to improve the public schools. PURE was determined that parents would play an active role in planning and implementing those changes. We believed that parents had the most at stake and would be the least likely to put self-interest ahead of the best interests of children.

In the spring of 1988, PURE and other school reform and community groups were invited to the office of Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan to develop the school reform law. PURE developed a list of 13 objectives recommended to be incorporated into the law including the development of elected parent-majority Local School Councils (LSCs).

All of PURE's 13 points were incorporated into the School Reform Act of 1988.

## **Some of PURE's recent accomplishments and honors include:**

With a staff of four over the past eight years PURE presented over 1,700 parent and LSC workshops with a total attendance of over 28,000.

During the 2004-2005 school year, PURE attended 370 meetings in 64 schools for individual advocacy, discipline and IEP hearings, and other issues. This work has helped dozens of students get back into school and improved services to special education students.

In 1999, PURE filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights which led to major improvements in the fairness and educational soundness of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) student promotion policy in 2000. For example, the policy's segregated Academic Preparatory Centers for eighth graders unable to "pass" the Iowa test have been shut down and the programs moved into high schools. Recent reports show that the eighth grade graduation rate of the students in the programs has doubled and the one-year drop out rate has decreased from 21% to 16%.

PURE has become a national model for successful public school parent advocacy. Our work was cited in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's November 2003 Educational Leadership

magazine, by national parent involvement expert Anne Henderson in *The Case for Parent Leadership*, and as a case study at the November 2004 national conference of the Applied Research Center of the University of California, Berkeley.

PURE won a 2003 Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World award, one of 17 awardees selected from a national pool of more than 1,300 nominations representing individuals and leadership teams that are tackling some of the nation's most entrenched social problems.

#### **More about PURE...**

Each year, PURE provides direct assistance or referrals to hundreds of parents and local school council (LSC) members calling our hotline for help and information. PURE provides informative and empowering

workshops for LSCs in all areas of their responsibility. PURE also offers a variety of parent workshops and develops new workshops to meet parents' expressed needs. PURE publishes regular newsletters to keep parents, LSC members, and other school leaders informed of current educational changes and issues. PURE works actively to focus attention on the parents' perspective in any discussion of critical school problems through such means as organizing, public presentations, legislation and media work.

While there are other groups working to improve public schools, PURE has a special role in focusing on issues from the parents' point of view. PURE's Board of Directors, membership of nearly 800, staff, and constituency are multiracial, multi-cultural, and economically diverse.

# Survey Response Rate

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Assigning an exact response rate for this survey was complicated by the manner in which CPS mailed out the surveys. The questionnaire asked parents to fill out only one survey per school based on the experience of their eldest child attending the school whose name was printed on the cover in red. But the CPS mailing data base included the name and address of every child attending the school, not every household; mail was addressed "To the Parent of ...". This system resulted in a substantial over-mailing of surveys to individual households. In addition, CPS confirms that they typically have a 20% return rate on mail communications due to bad addresses. We did not keep track of the number of returned surveys.

Another factor in the return rate was the late mailing of our survey due to the time it took to overcome numerous bureaucratic barriers. We had hoped to have the survey out before the end of the 2004-05 school year, no later than April, 2005, so that we could enlist the schools'

help in encouraging parents to complete and return the surveys and thereby increase our response rate. Our budget included funds to send reminder flyers home to the parents. However, the survey was not mailed until mid-August, a scant two weeks before the beginning of the new school year. The late mailing raised questions in many parents' minds about which school they were to describe when answering the questions, especially if their child had graduated or would be attending another school.

Our estimated response rate was determined first by creating a factor from the average number of children respondents reported having in CPS schools (1.3) and then dividing that factor by the number of students in the schools (57,000), minus 20% (45,600). This produced 34,629 surveys likely to have been appropriately mailed to households. Dividing the actual number of returned surveys (4,230) by 34,629 produced a 12.2 response rate.

# Details of Our Methodology

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## School selection

Obtaining accurate and complete information on the Non-Traditional schools was difficult, as that information wasn't organized or accessible to outsiders in a single comprehensive document. It took repeated inquiries and research in several departments to assemble the information necessary to prepare our sample, i.e., identification of all the Non-traditional schools, and in some cases, their interrelated structures, school start-up dates, enrollment numbers, eligibility for the federal free and reduced price lunch program, etc.. It was far easier to assemble the same set of information on the 600-plus Traditional schools.

We omitted any schools that opened in the fall of 2004, believing that a new school's start-up process is an intensive, piecemeal effort, making the first year's parent involvement practice too new and idiosyncratic for the purposes of this study.

We made a further division of the sample between elementary/middle schools and high schools, primarily due to the condition of the project grant that at least half of the sample be high schools or high school parents. Some Non-Traditional high schools (ACT, Perspectives, and Young Women's Charter schools) include middle school grades, but we decided to count them as high schools as they comprised grades 9-12. Chicago International Charter School-

Longwood Campus is unique in that it includes grades K-12. In this case we divided the school according to grades between elementary and high school subsets. However, the survey instrument asks the parent to indicate their child's (or children's) grade(s), which allowed us to differentiate between parent involvement practice at each of these various years and stages of education.

We also eliminated Youth Connections Charter High School from the survey because of the number of individual campuses and its very individualized programming for students who had dropped out of high school, many of whom are over 18 years and have become their own guardians.

We contracted with the University of Illinois' Survey Research Lab to draw a random sample of 21 high schools and 25 elementary/middle Traditional schools (listed in Appendix E). We gave the Survey Research Lab a list of 614 Traditional schools created from lists obtained from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, the CPS Office of Instruction and School Management, and the CPS Bureau of Food Services. We removed Traditional schools that were inappropriate for our study, as we did with the Non-Traditional schools, i.e., they opened in 2004, were located in correctional facilities, or were strictly preschool or alternative schools with adult

students and/or very low enrollment. The Survey Research Lab used Microsoft Excel software to scramble the original order of the schools in our data file. They then selected every 46th school from the new list to be in our sample, returning to the top of the list until 46 names had been drawn.

We collected data on student enrollment in all Traditional and Non-Traditional schools during the fall of 2004, as well as their enrollment in the school's free and reduced price lunch program. This allowed us to calculate the percentage of students eligible for this federal program in each school, an indicator of socio-economic status (SES) commonly used in public school research. According to the Survey Research Lab, the difference between the weighted averages of the SES percentages for both sets of selected elementary/middle and high schools is not statistically significant. The demographic data collected for each respondent (Part IV of the survey) allows us to compare responses within and between schools and sets of schools while controlling for factors such as income, age, race/ethnicity, and education.

### **Dissemination**

A cover letter to the parent and a postage paid return envelope accompanied the

survey. The letter explained the purpose of the survey, how the data would be used, the average amount of time needed to fill out the survey (about 5 minutes), and that the parent's participation was voluntary and anonymous. It identified PURE as the organization conducting the project with the help of Dr. Bruno, and listed contact information for Ms. Woestehoff and Dr. Bruno in case the parent had questions. We felt that this provided adequate information to assume informed consent by participants. The survey also included a letter from CEO Arne Duncan which stated that CPS did not endorse the survey but agreed with and supported its purpose.

All information was provided in both Spanish and English.

We mailed surveys to the homes of all the parents (or guardians) of students enrolled for the 2004-2005 academic year in the 46 Non-Traditional schools identified in coordination with CPS (i.e., charter schools, contract schools, and small schools), and 46 Traditional elementary and high schools selected at random.

# List of Schools Surveyed

| <b>Traditional Elementary &amp; Middle Schools</b> |                       |                                 |                   |                                   |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Unit</b>  | <b>School</b>         | <b>Count Free/Reduced Lunch</b> | <b>Enrollment</b> | <b>Percent Free/Reduced Lunch</b> |
| 6810   | Price                 | 407                             | 476               | 85.5                              |
| 2590   | Little Village        | 782                             | 814               | 96                                |
| 6070   | Stone Academy         | 385                             | 606               | 63.5                              |
| 2430   | Bouchet Academy       | 931                             | 1,092             | 85.0                              |
| 3020   | Dever                 | 345                             | 796               | 43.5                              |
| 6740   | Dett                  | 467                             | 485               | 96.0                              |
| 5690   | Sauganash             | 125                             | 425               | 29.5                              |
| 2730   | Greeley               | 513                             | 571               | 89.8                              |
| 4390   | Kozminski Com Academy | 451                             | 453               | 99.5                              |
| 7790   | Sabin Magnet          | 460                             | 520               | 88.5                              |
| 4860   | Montefiore Special    | 86                              | 98                | 87.7                              |
| 4350   | Kipling               | 427                             | 503               | 84.9                              |
| 2761   | Chase                 | 700                             | 733               | 95.5                              |
| 2970   | Davis                 | 1,770                           | 1,931             | 91.6                              |
| 6170   | Johnnie Colemon       | 221                             | 278               | 79.5                              |
| 3460   | Funston               | 675                             | 705               | 95.7                              |
| 3820   | Zapata Academy        | 779                             | 837               | 93.0                              |
| 4420   | Lasalle               | 119                             | 564               | 21.0                              |
| 4020   | Holden                | 634                             | 680               | 93.0                              |
| 6550   | Bond                  | 664                             | 669               | 99.2                              |
| 5660   | Ruggles               | 457                             | 544               | 84.0                              |
| 6960   | Overton               | 360                             | 428               | 84.0                              |
| 5420   | Garvey                | 539                             | 622               | 86.6                              |
| 4800   | Mcperson              | 697                             | 884               | 78.8                              |
| 6290   | Albany Park Academy   | 260                             | 284               | 91.5                              |
| <b>Trad E&amp;M Totals</b>                         |                       | <b>13,254</b>                   | <b>15,998</b>     | <b>82.8</b>                       |



## Traditional High Schools

| Unit | School                 | Count<br>Free/Reduced<br>Lunch | Enrollment    | Percent<br>Free/Reduced<br>Lunch |
|------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1810 | Young Magnet H S       | 747                            | 2,104         | 35.5                             |
| 1630 | Washington H S         | 1,028                          | 1,547         | 66.5                             |
| 1230 | Bogan Tech HS          | 1,564                          | 2,099         | 74.5                             |
| 1820 | Curie Metro HS         | 2,389                          | 3,048         | 78.3                             |
| 1690 | Northside Center       | 197                            | 251           | 78.5                             |
| 1560 | Steinmetz A C          | 1,871                          | 2,350         | 79.6                             |
| 1200 | Hancock HS             | 837                            | 1,025         | 81.6                             |
| 1790 | Chicago Agr HS         | 251                            | 590           | 42.5                             |
| 1540 | Senn Metro Academy     | 1,371                          | 1,621         | 84.5                             |
| 1920 | Vaughn Occ HS          | 175                            | 205           | 85.3                             |
| 1670 | Hubbard HS             | 1,390                          | 1,627         | 85.4                             |
| 1450 | Lindblom               | 100                            | 112           | 89.2                             |
| 1270 | Crane Tech HS          | 1,029                          | 1,145         | 89.8                             |
| 1010 | Chicago Vocational     | 1,786                          | 2,279         | 78.3                             |
| 1030 | Dunbar Voc HS          | 1,543                          | 1,691         | 91.2                             |
| 1570 | Sullivan HS            | 1,080                          | 1,180         | 91.5                             |
| 1740 | Northside College Prep | 284                            | 993           | 28.6                             |
| 1090 | Walter Payton          | 263                            | 799           | 32.9                             |
| 1860 | Corliss HS             | 1,251                          | 1,296         | 96.5                             |
| 1160 | Westinghouse           | 740                            | 815           | 90.8                             |
| 1220 | Austin                 | 1,320                          | 1,339         | 98.5                             |
|      | <b>Trad Hs Totals</b>  | <b>21,216</b>                  | <b>28,116</b> | <b>75.4</b>                      |
|      | <b>Total Trad %</b>    |                                |               | <b>78.1</b>                      |

### Non-traditional Elementary & Middle Schools

| Unit | School                         | Count<br>Free/Reduced<br>Lunch | Enrollment   | Percent<br>Free/Reduced<br>Lunch |
|------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| 6670 | *Chicago Academy               | 277                            | 568          | 48.7                             |
| 4520 | Betty Shabazz                  | 189                            | 291          | 64.9                             |
| 4910 | CICS-Bucktown                  | 461                            | 670          | 68.8                             |
| 2420 | *CICS-Longwood                 | 869                            | 1,132        | 76.7                             |
| 6530 | Choir Academy                  | 164                            | 221          | 74.2                             |
| 3060 | North Kenwood Charter          | 292                            | 390          | 74.8                             |
| 3640 | Ariel Comm                     | 316                            | 413          | 76.5                             |
| 7130 | CICS-Basil                     | 448                            | 584          | 76.7                             |
| 3120 | Drummond Montessori            | 238                            | 307          | 77.5                             |
| 7710 | KIPP-CYVA                      | 108                            | 138          | 78.2                             |
| 3310 | Foundations                    | 118                            | 150          | 78.6                             |
| 6490 | Williams Multiplex             | 233                            | 278          | 83.8                             |
| 6850 | Passages Charter               | 176                            | 208          | 84.6                             |
| 3050 | Dodge                          | 367                            | 432          | 84.9                             |
| 4730 | Alain Locke Charter            | 364                            | 413          | 88.1                             |
| 7810 | KIPP Ascend Charter            | 149                            | 167          | 89.2                             |
| 2290 | CICS-Wash Pk                   | 446                            | 493          | 90.4                             |
| 3860 | Woodlawn Comm                  | 209                            | 231          | 90.4                             |
| 5810 | Octavio Paz Charter            | 715                            | 782          | 91.4                             |
| 6770 | L.E.A.R.N.                     | 272                            | 292          | 93.1                             |
| 5320 | Triumphant Charter             | 190                            | 201          | 94.5                             |
| 3380 | Telpochcalli                   | 304                            | 315          | 96.5                             |
| 4220 | CICS-Prairie                   | 388                            | 399          | 97.2                             |
| 7120 | CICS-W Belden                  | 483                            | 495          | 97.5                             |
| 4050 | Nia                            | 93                             | 93           | 100.0                            |
|      | <b>Non-trad E&amp;M Totals</b> | <b>7,869</b>                   | <b>9,663</b> | <b>81.4</b>                      |

## Non-traditional High Schools

| Unit | School                    | Count<br>Free/Reduced<br>Lunch | Enrollment   | Percent<br>Free/Reduced<br>Lunch |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| 7740 | CICS-Northtown            | 208                            | 556          | 37.4                             |
| 2420 | CICS-Longwood             | 189                            | 249          | 75.9                             |
| 2490 | Young Women Lead Charter  | 242                            | 330          | 73.3                             |
| 1800 | Chicago Military Academy  | 374                            | 505          | 74.0                             |
| 7340 | BEST HS                   | 199                            | 265          | 75.1                             |
| 1020 | Best Practice HS          | 338                            | 434          | 77.8                             |
| 7550 | Global Visions            | 196                            | 250          | 78.4                             |
| 7530 | Mose Vines Academy        | 333                            | 419          | 79.4                             |
| 7730 | Big Pic Co (Met)          | 44                             | 54           | 81.5                             |
| 1960 | Perspectives Charter      | 221                            | 268          | 82.4                             |
| 1105 | North Lawndale            | 330                            | 392          | 84.2                             |
| 1930 | Noble Street Charter      | 406                            | 482          | 84.2                             |
| 7380 | Entrepreneurship HS       | 401                            | 476          | 84.2                             |
| 7310 | Phoenix Military Academy  | 317                            | 370          | 85.6                             |
| 7800 | Ramirez Charter HS        | 233                            | 271          | 85.9                             |
| 7280 | Big Picture HS 1          | 51                             | 59           | 86.4                             |
| 7370 | School of the Arts        | 355                            | 401          | 88.5                             |
| 7220 | School of Tech            | 255                            | 284          | 89.7                             |
| 1720 | ACT Charter               | 292                            | 322          | 90.6                             |
| 7230 | School of Leadership      | 325                            | 350          | 92.8                             |
| 7360 | Chicago Discovery         | 386                            | 409          | 94.3                             |
|      | <b>Non-trad HS Totals</b> | <b>5695</b>                    | <b>7,146</b> | <b>79.7</b>                      |
|      | <b>Total Non-trad %</b>   |                                |              | <b>80.7</b>                      |

# Relevance of Control Variables on Epstein Measures

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In addition to an itemized comparison of the Positive scores of Traditional and Non-traditional schools, the study also examined the relationship between outcomes in the four areas of involvement for school and parent performance and a number of control variables. Using regression analysis the survey authors assessed if there was any significant relationship between survey responses and the school type, school grade, or demographic characteristics of respondents. The test also included a school performance variable in order to assess whether schools that are doing better in the various involvement areas are also performing better on state standardized exams. Figures in each of the cells are converted from percentages (i.e., .0111 is 1%). Finally, we examined whether there was an association between reported parent levels of satisfaction with their school's overall parental involvement performance and the Positive scores given on the separate areas of involvement.

Dummy variables were created for all the demographic characteristics. Race is coded as one (1) for all non-white racial categories (excluding other). The race indicator is

interpreted as non-white respondents who had a greater likelihood in percentage terms of giving Positive ("sometimes" or higher) responses on questions in each involvement area. Gender is coded as one (1) for female. The education indicator is coded as one (1) for respondents who had at least some college education. The income question is coded as one (1) for respondents who reported earning at least 150% of the poverty line for a family of four. High school and Non-traditional school respondents are also coded as one (1).

The school performance variable is based on the annual Illinois state standardized test scores as reported on the Chicago Public School website and is represented as a percentage (in decimal form). The percentage of students who met the state standards in a respondent's child's school was regressed against positive outcomes in each area of involvement. In addition, the satisfaction variable was made up of either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" responses to the question, "How satisfied are you with the school?"

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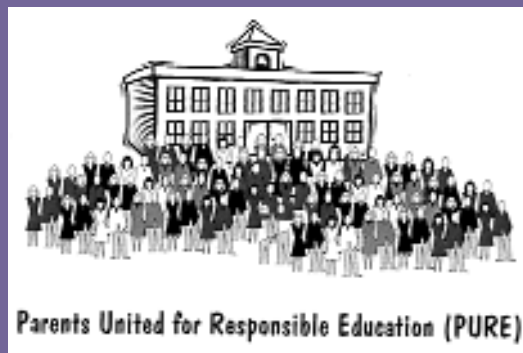
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PURE is a parent-run, parent-organized group formed in 1987 to promote a strong parent voice in improving education in the public schools.

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