



*Remarks made by Arne Duncan, Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools
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Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*

Thank you so much, Marty and Ira. And Marty, your research is confirming much of what we believed to be true in Chicago, and we are starting to see the result ourselves. My interest in community schools actually goes back to before I was born. My mother came to Chicago in 1960 and tried to set up an after-school program in the inner city. She couldn't get any school to let her in the door because those schools all shut down at 2:30. So my sister, brother, and I were raised our entire life going to her after-school program in various church basements, and that's what never made sense to me.

When I graduated from college and came back to Chicago, my sister – we both tried to set up our own after-school program 30 years later. My mother came in 1962; we came in 1992. The same situation was the case, that we couldn't get into a school to help our kids. We ended up in the same church basement as my mother. And so, in this position we really wanted to find a way to change that culture -- and it started to change before I got this job – and really open up our schools to the community and have them, again, not just open five, six hours a day, but open 10, 11, 12 hours a day, Saturdays and Sundays as well.

There are a couple basic reasons, much of which Marty has already talked about. In Chicago, we have 600 schools. Every neighborhood – rich, poor, black, white, Latino, it doesn't matter. Our schools are wonderful, wonderful, physical resources. Every single one has classrooms, they have computer labs, they have libraries, they have gyms, they have pools, and historically these have belonged to either the principals or to the engineers union and not to the community. And these are extraordinary community assets. Our schools are absolutely safe havens. We have been able to establish that a bit. While we might have some fears about crime and safety on the street, our schools truly are safe. So what better place to really engage the entire community, where is a better place to get families working together, learning together, than in our schools? We see huge potential academic dividends by doing this.

We want to offer, in non-school hours, a rich array of very high quality programs for our students, the core of which will always be academic support and building upon the curriculum from the school day, but also drama and arts and sports and yearbook and chess and debate and French. It's funny to me -- and I came from a private school located by the University of Chicago-Hyde Park, where all these things were not seen as extracurricular; these are part of the curriculum. Somehow for our public school students these have always been seen as extras, or something the school system couldn't afford. These are all natural parts of students' healthy emotional and intellectual development. We have to offer these things. If we're not able to offer them during the school day, we have to offer them during the non-school hours -- as Marty has talked about, give our students a reason to be engaged, give them a reason to be excited about coming to school every day.

We have to focus not just on our students, but on their parents as well. And families that learn together, families that grow together -- we just know there will be, again, tremendous

educational and academic benefits for our students. So in our community centers and our schools today we're offering GED classes, sometimes in some schools in two different languages; ESL; counseling classes; sewing classes; computer classes, where some of our students are helping teach their parents on the computer. We're having some real exciting programming where we're teaching young parents how to teach their young children how to read and really starting to engage the entire family. So as our schools become community centers, we're convinced that it is going to be extraordinarily beneficial to our students long-term.

We're excited about this initiative. We started with 20 community centers this year; we're thrilled with that. We want to add an additional 20 each of the next four years, so we will get up to 100 over five years. We made sort of two key strategic decisions. The first one was that we, as the Chicago Public Schools, cannot do this alone. And we're blessed in Chicago – I don't think we're unique, but I know it is a very, very special climate there – we have so many wonderful community partners and nonprofit agencies, and we would be very, very foolish to try to do all this very tough and exhilarating work by ourselves. And why not engage the community, why not bring in all these wonderful partners that have been serving our communities for 10, 20, you know, 50, 150 years in Chicago? Why not engage their extra teaching and passion, open our doors and bring them into our buildings?

So, just to run through quickly a couple – we have universities coming to the table to help join our community centers. We have the local Boys and Girls Clubs; the YMCAs; Jane Addams' Hull House, it was mentioned earlier; Children's Aid Society. We have wonderful, wonderful partners that are helping to run our programs with us. And again, we don't think that's giving up power; we just think that's enhancing what we do and bringing great expertise and leadership to the table.

Secondly, we're also blessed in Chicago to have a wonderful, wonderful philanthropic and corporate community that has been very supportive of everything we're doing educationally, that has been extremely supportive of us in this area. Judy Dimon is standing in the back. Judy has provided just huge leadership from the corporate and from the philanthropic community. Everything we're trying to do strategically, in terms of our education agenda, we want to have our support from the nonprofit, from the for-profit, from the philanthropic community for these efforts. We feel that if we can't sell them what we're doing, it is probably a bad idea. (Laughter.)

So, we have been able to have 20 community centers that every dollar that we put into these matched dollar for dollar, one for one, by the corporate and philanthropic community. We have had tremendous leadership by Judy, by the Polk Brothers Foundation, about five or six other local companies as well, so it clearly stretches our resources. Chicago Public Schools, like every other school district, is struggling financially and we have to make hard decisions. This has enabled us to literally do twice as much as what we would have been able to do by ourselves. So we think this is absolutely the right thing to do. We believe we can't do it alone. We have to engage our nonprofit partners; we have to engage the corporate and philanthropic community.

And if you look at results -- and we do have to be bottom-line orientated, and we want to do everything: we want to do the educational piece, we want to do the social and emotional

piece, we want to provide this wide variety of very high-quality after-school programming. It's very interesting, if you look just in the past year at what we have done, our test scores jumped to all-time highs, our mobility rate dropped to its lowest point ever, our truancy rate dropped to its lowest point ever, our graduation rate is at an all-time high. For the first time ever, we have eighth graders beating national norms; that has never happened before. In a district where 85 percent of our students live below the poverty line, that was a huge real and symbolic accomplishment, and our goal now is to move the entire system above that 50 percent threshold. And part of the reason – we can't say this is the only reason, but part of the reason we think we did so much better is last year we added about 50,000 students to our after-school programming, and this year we're coming back with another 15,000, both high school and elementary.

So this is a core, core part of our educational strategy. Everywhere I go I talk about this, along with our literacy initiative, along with teacher development and principal excellence. We think this will fundamentally help to transform the Chicago Public Schools. I thank you for your leadership in really bringing this to the attention of the citizens on a national level.