

## How Do We Produce Reliably Excellent Schooling?

The debate over whether America's schools need dramatic reform is over. The consequences of low high school graduation and college-readiness rates, and the persistent failure of schools serving poor children, have made the answer abundantly clear.

However, efforts to address our nation's education challenges have been stymied in a sea of solutions, many of which exist only in theory or anecdote.

American policymakers need real, comprehensive solutions to this problem – solutions backed by data and proven through practice. We need evidence-based models and tools that effectively prepare students for the rigors of college, the workplace, and life. We need preparation and support programs that empower teachers and school leaders for success.

### The University of Chicago Urban Education Institute

The University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) creates research-based models and tools for the nation. Our work is distinctive. At UEI, expert practitioners and scholars create and support urban schools, undertake applied research to inform policy and practice, develop and test innovations to solve the major problems facing urban schools, and train the next generation of teachers and leaders.

**Why?** The University of Chicago believes that the nation's leading academic centers should take a new and decisive role in transforming PreK-12 education—and significantly increase the number of urban children prepared to succeed.

Watching the game from the sidelines is unacceptable.

### A Comprehensive Solution

UEI is singularly dedicated to answering one question: how do we produce reliably excellent schooling for children growing up in urban America?

To answer this question we conduct rigorous research, train outstanding teachers and leaders for urban schools, create scalable tools and practices to improve student social and academic outcomes, design and operate charter schools, and support new schools across Chicago.

#### 1. The School House

We operate four charter schools that serve children from the South Side of Chicago. Admitted by lottery, nearly all of the children attending our schools are African American.

Approximately 80 percent of those students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. To support and develop our students, UEI has created a school model that delivers ambitious extended instruction and comprehensive academic and social supports.

Our school model includes: 1) Regular diagnostic assessment, targeted interventions, and a team that monitors each student's academic and social progress, 2) Expanded instructional time, including extended day, week and year, 3) A dynamic student support system that addresses individual student needs in real time, and 4) Intense professional development, supports, and incentives for teachers and school leaders.

The model stems from a strong empirical base. It is shaped by the knowledge of the academic and social supports that are critical to student success. And it is getting results.

For example:

- The Illinois Honor Roll recognized the University of Chicago Charter School as one of only nine high performing schools beating the achievement gap in Chicago.
- Our eighth-graders were accepted to selective enrollment high schools at a rate three times higher than the CPS average.
- Students who completed eighth grade at the University of Chicago Charter School have gone to college at a rate of 92 percent compared to 51 percent of CPS high school students.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Human Capital**

Essential to the dramatic improvement of schooling is the preparation and support of exceptional teachers and school leaders. At UEI, the Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) prepares and supports teachers to succeed in the most challenging urban schools.

We develop teachers that have deep content area expertise, experience a full year teaching residency prior to entering the classroom, and are carefully prepared for the distinctive challenges of teaching in an urban environment. Critically, UTEP provides graduates with two years of intensive support upon entry into the classroom, helping to boost retention rates. The amount of training and support that UTEP provides distinguishes it from traditional teacher training programs.

We have recently expanded UTEP to create a new model for training and supporting high school mathematics and science teachers for urban schools.

The retention rates for UTEP graduates dramatically exceed national, state and Chicago norms. 100 percent of UTEP teachers trained within the last three years are still teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the average of the graduating classes of 2010 and 2011

## **Applied Research**

UEI's Consortium on Chicago School Research undertakes cutting-edge research on Chicago Public Schools to inform policy, practice, and the public. We have found that sustainable school improvement depends on reliable, timely research on multiple academic and social indicators, not just test scores. We produce regular reports aimed at improving educational methods and policy, while identifying critical academic and social indicators that educators and policy makers can track to measure progress towards graduation and college readiness.

Our applied research has informed policy and practice across Chicago's schools, altering the way our city assesses student progress. For example, Chicago Public Schools adopted CCSR's "on-track indicator" to measure whether students are making progress toward high school graduation. Districts nationwide have followed the lead. The U.S. Department of Education has now begun using CCSR's indicator as part of its own work to improve high school graduation rates.

CCSR research on the key characteristics of elementary schools that improve student learning led CPS to revamp its school improvement planning process for every elementary school in Chicago. Its research on college access for urban students led to an extensive CPS program that included tracking systems to monitor the completion of financial aid forms and the proportion of students at each high school entering and graduating from college.

New consortia based on our model have been created in New York City, Newark, and Baltimore. CCSR is now supporting the incubation of applied research centers in 20 major urban centers across the country.

### **3. Innovation**

UEI has developed a series of tools aimed at improving college readiness, teacher practice, and technology in the classroom.

The STEP™ (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress) tool for Pre-K to grade 3 is a developmental literacy assessment that includes a set of tools, tightly aligned with scientifically established milestones in reading development. UEI has developed STEP™ over the last decade and has worked with Chicago Public Schools and others nationwide to study its impact. STEP™ provides teachers with fine-grained data about individual student's reading strengths and needs. This allows teachers to be proactive and provide the crucial targeted instruction needed to accelerate learning. STEP™ has become an integral part of literacy development in schools across Chicago, and in New Jersey, New York City, New Haven and New Orleans. It's used in some of the highest performing school networks in the nation, such as KIPP, UnCommon Schools and Achievement First.

6to16 is a new classroom and online high school and college readiness program for grades 6 to "16" (the completion of the undergraduate degree). In Chicago, only 8 percent of high school freshmen in 1995 graduated with a bachelor's degree by the age of 25, according to a CCSR 2006 study. The goal of 6to16 is to radically increase the

number of urban students who apply, are accepted and graduate from college. 6to16 does this through classroom curricula and an online social networking tool that provides each student with a College Support Team (school and community mentors, as well as college students and career professionals from fields of interest). There is interest from numerous districts and networks across the country to adopt 6to16.

The Digital Youth Network (DYN) is a digital literacy program that creates deep opportunities for youth to engage in learning environments that span both school and out-of-school contexts. DYN leverages new media and technology (including robotics, digital media and design tools) to improve outcomes for urban youth. En route, it teaches students to become creators, designers, builders and innovators. It is being developed and tested in Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Public Library and other venues. It expands to New York City in the fall of 2009.

### **A Resource for Policymakers**

At the root of our model is one principal: reliably excellent schooling depends upon each of UEI's components joining forces. If we are to systemically educate children growing up in urban America at high levels, reform must:

- Support the development of effective school models,
- Systematically train, support and place human capital for urban schools,
- Support applied research that informs day-to-day practice in the classroom, and
- Employ tested tools and practices that help bridge the achievement gap.

Through our ground-level engagement and by sharing new knowledge and models with national implications, the Urban Education Institute can dramatically improve the outcomes of urban students on a national scale.

As the White House and Congress work toward a comprehensive solution, the Urban Education Institute is ready to be a resource. We invite you to:

- Consult our experts
- Request our research
- Visit our schools

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