

Background Materials on Chelsea REACH Program

For the past two years extensive planning work has been underway, leading to the development and soon-to-be-implemented Chelsea REACH Program. The planning activities have created a framework for a youth program with a focus on school success and career preparation for youth in grades 7th to 10th grade. Since March 2007 the latest design group of community representatives has met to complete the primary design of this new program which will serve 7th and 8th graders in its first year, beginning Fall 2007. Below is a summary of the design work done to date.

A. Program Target Population Criteria

1. The Chelsea REACH Program will be marketed to all students broadly as an exciting after-school program, which includes opportunities, rewards (incentives) and responsibilities for all participating students.

- Avoids labeling program and youth participants as “failing” or “problem” students;
- Provides an opportunity to let students of different academic levels work together and learn from one another;
- Avoids creating uniform groups of highly at-risk youth who can sometimes breed off of one another’s “negative energy” and “failures”.
- Recognizes that a large majority of Chelsea students share one or more risk factors.

2. Require youth to demonstrate a baseline level of interest, motivation and commitment.

- Eligible students will need somehow to demonstrate their interest in the program.
- Practically, this requirement must be flexible enough to support different student’s skills and barriers (e.g. shyness).
- Program should require some form of application, other method of demonstrating interest in the program (e.g. essay, artwork, etc) and/or demonstration of commitment (e.g. attending information session, sitting for an interview, etc).

3. Consider student attendance and tardiness rates, and over-age status (i.e. for grade)

- These represent three key risk factors measuring student engagement (a well-established indicator of likely student success/failure).
- The cohort of participants should contain a range of more highly and less engaged students.
- School and other community (e.g. CBO) staff/adults should have the opportunity to advocate for a student as someone who would a) benefit from the program and b) succeed with intervention.

Note that these factors are to be assessed in lieu of education measures. Grades were deemed too variable and subjective between classrooms and schools.

4. Consider adult/parent involvement and commitment.

- Support and commitment from an adult figure in a youth’s life has been shown to be critical in predicting program and life success.
- Program application process should seek out a committed parent or other adult community member who knows the student (sports coach, guidance counselor, school social worker, older sibling, church member, etc.).
- Adult figure should recommend the student and commit to regular involvement on behalf of the student. This commitment could be represented by a letter and/or attendance at information meetings or interviews.
- Program application process must make allowances for those students who lack committed adult figures in their lives; the program could then provide a vehicle for the student to connect to a caring adult.

5. Strive to reflect the true diversity of the Chelsea Community

Ideally, the final make-up of the participating students would closely reflect the demographic make-up of the Chelsea Public Schools student population. Given the program size and resources, there are some practical limitations on this given the extraordinary diversity of the community. However, the following demographic variables should be factors in selecting a truly diverse final cohort:

- Race/Ethnicity should be assessed using both the standard census categories and beyond so that, for example, new immigrant influxes not represented therein are recognized and represented as practically possible (e.g. Albania or Somalia).
- First Language spoken (81% non-English) and English Proficiency (19%)
- Income Levels as represented by free/reduced lunch (85%)
- Special Education Designation (15%)
- Gender (51%M/49%F)
- Parent Educational Levels
- Behavioral History
- Other Environmental Risk Factors

6. Recognize the challenge of implementing a program that will initially be able to serve 30-40 youth in a grade of 300 (10-14%).

- Program needs to prioritize success in early years so it can grow and seek program funding to serve a greater number of youth.
- For practical and budget reasons, program will have some limitations on the number and type of specialized resources it can employ (e.g. social workers, number of languages spoken for very new immigrants without basic English or Spanish skills, or specialized therapists for special needs).
- Program will likely avoid serving the very worst behavioral challenges, and may not be able to serve brand new immigrants who speak no English or Spanish (depending on staff language capabilities), etc.

All students, however, will be encouraged to apply and, within practical limitations, every effort will be made to be diverse, inclusive and representative of the broader community population.

7. DRAFT Youth Selection Process

- Market and publicize the program to the community as a program targeted to serve any 7-8th graders who are interested in participating in this wonderful new program, emphasizing the exciting opportunity and rewards, as well as the required commitment and responsibilities. Network actively with identified community and school leaders to encourage and identify students to apply for the program. In particular, encourage these individuals to consider students for whom this type of program would provide an opportunity that could positively impact their lives.
- Interested students would demonstrate their personal motivation by submitting an application, a personal statement (written, artistic, etc), and commit themselves to attending an information session and interview.
- Based on interviews and personal motivation criteria, review names and consider attendance, tardiness rates and over-age for grade status to establish mix of school engagement levels (e.g., 75% low engagement, 25% high engagement). At this level in the process make the first cut down to a larger group of potential participants, perhaps 50 students per grade.
- Once this first cut's list of names is established, invite adult/parent to submit recommendation letter and invite in for a meeting to assess their commitment to participating in the program. Again, ensure that students without adult/parent figure are not prevented from participating in the program. For example, this stage may ask them to identify an appropriate adult and have them write a recommendation, etc, OR to pass in something themselves saying they do not feel they have such an adult in their life and to "apply for" an adult mentor should they be admitted to the program.
- Finally, use demographic criteria to make the final selection of thirty (or more) 7th graders and thirty (or more) 8th graders, in order to ensure that participating students accurately reflect overall CPS student population.

B. Program Component Overview

1. Chelsea Youth Program Philosophy

The Chelsea REACH Program will:

- Offer inspirational and/or transformational experience for participants;
- Provide student voice and choice: The program must be experiential, and feel connected to the youth, their lives and the things they care about;
- Not replicate the school day: Instead, the program should complement the school-day by providing activities that balance content-based learning with a mix of structure and unstructured activities, arts and sports, and opportunities for autonomy, choice and leadership;
- Set high expectations and standards.
- Establish attendance requirements and behavioral expectations, and provide appropriate outreach and clear consequences for not meeting these;
- Engage youth in employment or service in the community; and
- Incorporate evaluation into the program infrastructure from the beginning.

2. Key Operational Success Factors

The Chelsea REACH Program will:

- Hook youth with both fun and relaxing times;
- Healthy, caring relationships: Hire staff who develop real connections with participants;
- Recruit friends together;
- Match program attendance goals to participants needs;
- Reach out directly to youth and their families in their homes and communities;
- Help youth and their families understand the benefits of program participation;
- Provide growth opportunities for participating youth;
- Offer employment (or community service learning for younger teens);
- Offer meaningful material incentives (tiered to movement up the ladder to financial stipends); and
- Feed them a big, healthy snack/meal.

3. Core Program Component One: School success and college preparation

- Need to link academics to engaging projects by:
 - Offering sufficient choice of high-interest materials offered by engaged, inspiring staff in areas about which they are passionate;
 - Encouraging participation with writing and reading activities by focusing on students' individual experiences and their relationships to texts; and
 - Link reading activities to related field trips; and
 - Involve games and group-oriented activities that offer more socialization and fun into activities.
- Use rotating themes, building in opportunity to interact with technology (and media, for example).
- Need to include homework resource time, best done in small groups with high school or college tutors
- Utilize higher education partners to design college awareness component

4. Core Program Component Two: Career awareness and preparation

This component will expose youth to the world of work and build their academic, leadership and work readiness skills community-based apprenticeships within a context of progressive development (i.e. *laddering*) and experience. For the first year, this program component will focus on increasing youths' identification of individual interests and assets, as is appropriate for 7th and 8th graders. The program expects to develop a Chelsea- and Boston-based network of employers, supporting the local community's involvement while also leveraging the distinct resources and opportunities available in Boston.

5. Three Key Supporting Components

In addition, the Chelsea REACH Program will incorporate three key supporting components.

Family inclusion and case management

- Include parents and family as essential partners in the program from initial contact
- Develop a Parent Action Center (as at El Puente in Brooklyn, NY) that runs leadership workshops, technology and computer classes, and other adult education and support training
- Identify current Chelsea-based organizations to build off success in making connections with families

Leadership development

- Offer mentoring of 7/8th graders with younger, elementary age students (e.g. as at Coca Cola Valued Youth Program)
- Provide peer leadership skill training opportunities through partnerships with successful programs focusing on social activism and issues important to participants (environmental issues, drugs and alcohol prevention, healthy decision-making)

Healthy living and skills for life

- Work with current array of Chelsea-based community based organizations that specialize in specific substantive areas and collaborate to design integrated model of arts, sports and technology/media courses using a theme-based, semester-long, revolving structure.

In addition to the above program components, the Chelsea REACH Program will address the critical need for ongoing, quality staff development training, and will participate in and support successful training models available in conjunction with other youth serving organizations in Chelsea.

C. Program Structure and General Staffing Plan

1. Program Structure

- The program requires a core dedicated staff and location that would provide for continuity and cohesion, and would deliver a mix of skills and capabilities on a scale not currently available in Chelsea.
- By partnering with existing Community Based Organizations (CBOs), the program seeks to leverage the significant skills and capabilities that *do* exist in Chelsea, and to further integrate the new program with CBOs and the community.

The program should be structured as follows

- Operate 4 days per week, Monday-Thursday, 3:00-6:00
- Provide 12 hours of services weekly or an average of 48 hours per 4-week block
- Provide the following service components. *Number of hours per 4-week block*
- Homework support/tutoring provided by high school or college mentors (not as the first thing in the day)
- School Success and College Preparation (Academic Enrichment) activities, provided by staff, and including engaging and intellectually stimulating activities such as theme-based explorations and technology/media projects

- Career awareness and preparation activities provided by staff focused on age appropriate skills and interests that prepare youth for eventual engagement in “job shadowing” or “internships” (but only after a progression of activities that build workplace skills and interest).
- Leadership development activities through mentoring and peer leadership training offered by CBO partners
- Healthy living and skills for life activities such as arts, sports and technology courses offered by CBO partners
- Other miscellaneous time for group check-in/check-out, planning and meeting with students, meals/snacks
- In addition to the in-program services, the program will provide case management and family inclusion services on the fifth day of the week, weekends and evenings
- Transportation services will be provided at the end of the program day.

2. The program’s general staffing plan should include the following key positions:

1 Full Time Program Director.

- This position will have responsibility for supervising program staff, working closely with program funders to generate ongoing financial support for the program, and establishing effective partnerships and collaborations with Chelsea community-based organizations in the provision of high-quality services to the students in the program.
- The Director should have demonstrated skills and experience with staff supervision, program management, fundraising and community relations/partnerships.

1 Full Time Senior Staff position

- This position will have responsibility for implementing the academic enrichment and career exploration components of the program in conjunction with the Team Leaders. In addition, this position will design and manage the outreach services to the families of students participating in the program.
- The Senior Staff person should have demonstrated skills and experience with planning and implementing education programs for youth, and providing case management services to families in culturally and economically diverse communities.

4 Part Time Team Leaders.

- These positions are the front-line staff responsible for working closely with the students and their families to have a successful experience in the program.
- Each Team Leader will lead a group of 15 students during program hours
- They will work closely with the Senior Staff person to design and implement group activities to build a sense of team and program, and personal identity and pride
- They will build relationships with students’ families through bi-weekly phone calls
- Hours will be 1:30-6:30 Monday-Thursday and 4 hours of flexible time on Fridays, for a total of 24 hours per week.
- The Team Leaders’ qualifications should include commitment to hands-on, community-based learning; experience working with, and ability to engage, children and youth; and demonstrated commitment to teamwork and collaboration with diverse groups of people.

In all staff positions:

- Multi-lingual capabilities are strongly preferred.
- Familiarity with Chelsea specifically or similar communities preferable.
- Appropriate level of computer skills and ability to conduct administrative and data collection/evaluation tasks.

3. Partnering with community-based organizations

- The program should establish formal relationships with existing Chelsea community-based organizations to provide the following services:
- Healthy living and skills for life activities such as dance, sports, drama, arts, and technology courses.
- Leadership development activities such as mentoring and peer leadership training to include topics such as violence prevention, substance abuse prevention, decision making skills, conflict resolution, financial literacy, time management, teen pregnancy prevention and healthy relationships.
- Staff training.
- These relationships should be sought with those organizations who:
- Have a proven track record of providing high quality, responsive and community-oriented services to youth in Chelsea;
- Agree to commit adequate staff who have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the holistic, rigorous and passion-inspiring learning experiences; and
- Agree to both the principles of the program AND are willing to have staff participate in coaching, supervision and accountability activities that will help them enact these principles.

4. Tutoring/Homework Help

- The program should establish formal relationships with an organization or existing infrastructure to provide consistent, reliable and high quality homework support and tutoring services for the homework component of the program.
- Potential partners include the Chelsea Community Schools, higher education partners such as UMass, Suffolk University or Bunker Hill Community College, or Chelsea High School Students (through the National Honor Society).
- High school or college students would receive a stipend for the ongoing provision of this service.