

Medgar Evers Fine and Performing Arts School

City of Chicago District 299

School Context

The City of Chicago District 299 is the largest district in Illinois, serving more than one-fifth of the state's public school children. The district serves almost 439,000 students in 602 schools and faces challenges with overcrowding and growth in certain parts of the city. The achievement gap between its White and African American students is another district concern. This is particularly significant given that more than half the students in District 299 are African American, while fewer than 9% are White. At the Fine and Performing Arts School, all students are African American, and the majority is also low income.

The schools in District 299 are governed by local school councils, site-based management teams which wield particular power in the district. Councils' primary responsibilities include selecting the principal, renewing principal contracts, approving the school improvement plan, and approving the school budget. At the elementary level, local school councils are composed of the principal, two teachers, six parent representatives, and two community representatives.

In the Evers School improvement plan, the neighborhood is described as "a well-maintained, black residential community with working class and professional members," although the population has changed to include "Welfare constituents" and foster care families. The school, part of the Washington Heights Magnet Cluster, has a fine arts focus. The principal cites challenges tied to No Child Left Behind's mandate to accept students from other schools. She adds, however, that the school's magnet program allows them to reject some students.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

The Illinois Learning Standards, Chicago Academic Standards, and the Curriculum Framework Statements form the curriculum used in Chicago Public Schools and the Evers School. Committees within Chicago Public Schools, with direction from the Chicago Teacher's Union and standards-based curriculum experts, developed the Chicago Academic Standards (CAS) several years ago. Teams of teachers then developed the Curriculum Framework Statements define the CAS, which were reviewed and revised by numerous stakeholder groups. While the CAS correlate with the state standards, some state standard elements are not addressed; because of new requirements in No Child Left Behind, which holds districts and schools accountable for *state* standards, the district currently faces the challenge of revising the CAS to fully align with the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS). The principal at the Evers school describes the ILS as comprehensive and high quality, noting that the standards cover higher level thinking skills and push for students to achieve at higher levels. She requires that teachers look at the ILS and develop benchmarks for their students. Teachers at the school explain that they have developed their own goals beyond the ILS performance descriptors, and many teachers emphasize that the school improvement plan and the Illinois State Board of Education website provide further clarification for what needs to be taught and learned at each grade level.

Student Demographics*:

	<i>Medgar Evers</i>	<i>Chicago District 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	86.4	84.9	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	0.0	14.5	6.3
% Mobility	28.3	24.5	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	0.0	9.3	58.6
% African-American	100.0	50.4	20.7
% Hispanic	0.0	36.8	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.0	3.3	3.6
% Native American	0.0	0.2	0.2

Chicago Public Schools struggles to ensure all students have equal access to the knowledge and skills they need. While the district's essential standards documents explicitly define these knowledge and skills, the size of the district poses challenges in ensuring the standards are equally implemented across schools. In an attempt to create curricular coherence across schools, the district implemented accountability measures, including the development of mandated exams. Nevertheless, the district has abandoned the high school exam because it did not align closely with instruction and was not well received.

Student Achievement*: Percentage of students scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for the grades and subjects tested on the ISAT.

<i>Medgar Evers</i>	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3		
Reading	42.8	59.4
Mathematics	60.8	65.6
Writing	48.1	37.5
Grade 4		
Science	43.9	46.7
Social Science	24.4	40.0
Grade 5		
Reading	41.3	29.3
Mathematics	48.3	38.5
Writing	50.0	12.5

Educators at the Evers School participate in a variety of activities focused on curricular improvement. The principal at the Evers School stresses the need for curriculum articulation and alignment from elementary to high school as well as the need for more rigor in the school's curriculum. To move these efforts forward, the principal uses articulation meetings with high school principals to discuss her school's role, and she examines the high school curricula to ensure that her students will have the knowledge and skills to attend the more selective high schools in the district. Within her school, the principal creates deliberate discussions about curriculum between teachers at various grade levels, and she monitors curriculum implementation in the classroom. At the beginning of each school year, vertical teams (e.g., K-2 and 3-5) work on long-range planning, examining the state curriculum and test results to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Using these data, teachers build the year's curriculum to address the primary challenges. At the end of the year, teachers reconvene to reflect on progress.

Chicago Public Schools is currently moving forward with a comprehensive standards-based reform initiative. Chicago Public Schools is piloting its Standards-Based Curriculum Initiative in 44 schools, including in the Evers School, with an additional 100 schools targeted for participation next year. The goal of the initiative is to help schools develop school-based assessment standards through a four-step curriculum alignment process that targets curriculum, assessment, instruction, and analysis. As part of this initiative, the district is building assessments aligned to the standards. Additionally, teachers at the Evers School have participated in professional development sessions related to the initiative.

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

The site-based management structure places the responsibility of principal selection in the hands of local school councils. While the district, with approval from the school board, defines requirements for principals, school councils are charged with selecting principals. School councils advertise open administrator positions in the district's human resources bulletins, and principals apply directly to the councils. The principal selection process varies by council, although councils are required to submit their principal selection to the school board for final approval.

Chicago Public Schools projects a severe principal shortage in the next five years. One district official estimates that 80% of principals in Chicago Public Schools will retire in the next five years, creating a serious challenge for recruitment and retention efforts. In the past, the district has relied on teachers to self-identify as aspiring administrators and independently pursue the necessary administrator requirements. However, the district is currently developing new recruitment strategies to identify talented administrator candidates both internally and externally. Additionally, the district has developed the Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago (LAUNCH) principal preparation program that integrates cohort training and internship activities to prepare aspiring educators for administrator positions.

Although Chicago Public Schools recruits teachers for schools, teacher selection occurs through a decentralized process. Chicago Public Schools targets recruitment in a 500-mile radius, placing particular efforts in Big Ten universities and neighboring states. Moreover, the district recruits at universities recognized as leaders in teacher preparation, including Harvard University and Columbia Teachers College. Staff from one of the district departments give presentations and attend job fairs. Additionally, the district recruits teachers through direct email, direct mail, and its website. The district develops the prospective teacher candidate pool, and principals are then responsible for interviewing and selecting teachers from this candidate group. At the Evers School, the principal describes district teacher recruitment efforts as proactive and explains that she attends district job fairs and advertises widely in district-sponsored recruitment publications. When selecting teachers, the principal includes varying stakeholders (e.g., assistant principal, grade-level teams, fine arts teams, parents) in the process, depending on the position to be filled. The school uses an Interview Record Sheet to rank candidates on various aspects of personal qualities (e.g., appearance, speech, judgment) and background for position (e.g., experience, responsibilities assumed, training, skills, performance record, professional service record, maturity for position, understanding of duties and responsibilities of position, professional aspirations).

New principals and teachers in Chicago Public Schools are required to participate in induction programs. All first-year principals must participate in the Leadership Initiative for Transformation (LIFT) program, which includes a four-day orientation, five multiple-day retreats, and three one-day instructional sessions. Moreover, each new principal is paired with a coach who collaborates with novice administrators at all required retreats and sessions and interacts with their mentees on a weekly basis. For new teachers, the district mandates participation in the Guidance, Orientation, and Leadership Development Empowering New Teachers (GOLDEN) program for their first two years. First-year teachers participate in an orientation, at least one observation of a colleague, professional development opportunities, and networking activities. Additionally, first-year teachers are paired with a mentor who interact with new teachers at least six hours each instructional quarter and conduct at least three observations of the new teacher. Second-year teachers receive support in completing their Individual Growth Plans, which define goals and provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection on their instructional practices and student learning. Each second-year teacher is paired with a coach who meets with novices twice each instructional quarter and participates in two observations. Both mentors and coaches participate in training prior to taking on support roles, and these educators receive financial compensation for supporting new teachers.

Teacher Demographics*:

	<i>Medgar Evers</i>	<i>Chicago District 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	13.6	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	58.2	53.9
% of Teachers with Master's Degrees	--	41.7	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	0.0	7.6	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	7.6	2.1

Educators at the Evers School offer varying appraisals of the collaboration that occurs at the Evers School. Teachers at the school have 40-minute planning periods, as required by the teachers' union contract. The principal indicates that grade-level teams are required to meet on a monthly basis, but the more enthusiastic teams meet more frequently, both after school and in the summer. Teachers collaborate on activities such as instructional planning and the primary grades science fair. According to one teacher, teacher collaboration is increasing at the school, and another emphasizes that teachers view themselves as part of a team. However, one teacher explains that the best time for teachers to meet is after school because there is not a lot of time during the school day for collaboration, yet many teachers have other commitments (e.g., graduate courses, family). This teacher adds that the principal tries to schedule time for teacher collaboration, but teachers at the school need to give more time for these opportunities.

Chicago Public Schools provides intensive support for its two major curricular initiatives—the Reading Initiative and the Chicago Math and Science Initiative (CMSI). Currently, all district schools receive support through the Reading Initiative, and 200 schools will receive extensive support through CMSI. Each initiative relies on district coaches (assigned to geographic areas of the district) and content specialists (assigned to particular schools). Coaches and content specialists receive training in content and process, and they provide full-time instructional and content-related assistance to schools. Currently the district has increased support associated with math and science by 400% since the initiative began, and Chicago Public Schools is trying to double the number of content specialists in the elementary schools. As one administrator explains, one content specialist is not enough to assist with 850 students, the average size of a district elementary school. This district administrator describes the current level of support from coaches and content specialists as “meager” given the size of the district. In addition to support staff, Chicago Public Schools offers professional development opportunities that reflect the districts focus on reading and math/science.

The Chicago Public Schools' nine principles of professional development drive training efforts in the district. According to these principles, professional development is effective when it is curriculum focused, student centered, data driven, coherent, continuous, and results oriented and occurs in the context of learning communities, shared leadership, and adequate resources. A district-provided rubric allows schools to evaluate their professional development. Chicago Public Schools requires seven professional development days for teachers. The new teacher contract also imposes a system-wide restructured day twice monthly; during these days, students are released at noon, and teachers remain at school to participate in professional development activities. Schools are responsible for creating professional development plans that align with their improvement plans. The district reviews professional development plans on an annual basis. In addition to direction provided within these plans, teachers can individually select training opportunities; the district website provides planning tools to assist teachers in selecting appropriate professional development opportunities.

The Evers School is 1 of 135 elementary schools participating in the district's School Teams Achieving Results for Students (STARS) professional development program. The STARS program seeks to help schools develop a cohesive professional development framework that supports their efforts to ensure academic achievement for all students. The Evers School designated a leadership team, composed of the principal and several teachers. During the first year of STARS participation, leadership teams attend a week-long STARS Summer Teacher Leadership Academy that offers training on capacity building, managing change, designing effective instructional strategies, building a learning community, developing the leadership team, and planning. During the school year, leadership teams participate in six follow-up training sessions focused on research-based instructional strategies, including cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, brain-compatible classrooms, and graphic organizers. A second-year summer training institute covers the following topics: differentiated instruction, assessment, using student work for decision making, and promoting higher order thinking. The district's Office of Professional Development employs eight coordinators responsible for helping STARS schools implement instructional strategies and facilitate professional development opportunities.

Principals in Chicago Public Schools participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. The district collaborates with the principal’s union to provide school administrator training through the Chicago Leadership Academies for Support Success (CLASS) program. The CLASS progress is comprised of five separate training strands:

- LAUNCH—leadership development for aspiring administrators,
- LIFT—new principal induction program,
- Illinois Administrators’ Academy—mandated professional development activities,
- Chicago Academy for School Leadership—portfolio program targeting enhanced leadership skills and promotion of academic achievement, and
- CLASS Academy—comprised of new initiatives, action learning labs, and mini-conferences on emerging educational issues and instructional strategies.

At the Evers School, educators’ professional development centers on topics related to the district’s two primary educational initiatives—the Reading Initiative and the CMSI. Many of the topics covered during the school’s professional development days focuses on reading, math, and science, and teachers have pursued a variety of additional training opportunities (e.g., conferences, training sessions) related to these core-content areas. The principal has allocated professional development dollars for substitutes so teachers can attend professional development programs such as the CMSI training, in which teachers at the school participate on a monthly basis. Additionally, many teachers report participating in professional development sessions targeting fine arts topics, a primary focus of the Evers School’s magnet

program. Although most teachers appreciate their professional development opportunities, one teacher expresses concerns about the amount of time teachers spend out of the classroom due to training activities.

Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

The site-based management structure in Chicago Public Schools creates challenges in program consistency and curricular support across schools. According to one district administrator, the site-based management structure in the district gives local school councils the authority to select their school’s instructional materials and programs, although schools on the academic watch list have less autonomy in selecting their materials. Site-based management limits the amount of content- and program-related support that the district can provide because of the diversity of materials and programs being used in Chicago schools. Moreover, it contributes to a lack of curricular direction in the core-content areas. In order to try to move schools in a common direction and create more programmatic coherence, the district has identified particular sets of instructional materials in math and science that align closely with the standards. Approximately 230 schools have adopted these materials, and in return, they receive high quality support and other incentives from the district.

Instructional Information*:	<i>Medgar Evers</i>	<i>Chicago Dist. 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	19.3	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	34.0	22.6	20.6
- Grade 1	14.5	24.0	21.3
- Grade 3	30.0	24.7	22.5
Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):			
- Mathematics	50	50	56
- Science	24	25	30
- English/ Language Arts	150	144	146
- Social Science	30	28	31

The Evers School mission revolves around reading instruction. According to the school improvement plan, the “mission at Medgar Evers is to provide a high quality reading instructional program through a nurturing, caring and integrated curriculum environment.” Students participate in a mandatory two-hour block of reading activities and instruction. Reading activities include the Pizza Hut Book Program, Read to Succeed, Hug-a-Book, Accelerated Reader, Word of the Week, literature circles for Great Books, Social Center Eagles Book Club (grades 1-4), and Reading Club (grade 5) as well as chorale, shared, and independent reading. Additionally, the school pairs upper elementary students with primary students for embedded reading and writing buddy activities. The school has also partnered with the University of Illinois Extension Office for Rally to Read.

The Evers School’s magnet program focuses on fine arts programming and activities. The Evers School uses an integrated arts curriculum that incorporates visual art, music, dance, and drama components. Students have block scheduled visual arts classes, although the principal notes that the 80-minute art classes are too long for primary grade students. After school programming includes drama and dance instruction. Students showcase their talents through school performances and displays of artwork in the school halls and cafeteria. Additionally, the Evers School takes part in the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education and the Museums and Public Schools program. The school has also received arts-related grants funding activities with the Muntu Dance Theatre and the eta Theater as well as mosaic tile and fountain art projects at the school.

To address the school’s vision and goals, Evers School educators developed a school-wide writing improvement program in partnership with Columbia College. As part of the program, teachers must integrate daily writing activities, and the principal provides monthly writing prompts, each of which has a particular focus (e.g., narrative, persuasive, expository, poetry, creative expression, letter writing). Teachers in grades 3 and 5 (i.e., the benchmark grades) must give the principal essays for all students, while teachers at all other grades provide the principal with examples of two A, two C, and two D/F papers. Additionally, the program mandates that teachers display editing/proofreading marks around the classroom and monthly student writing samples on hallway writing boards. All students must also have writing portfolios.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Chicago Public Schools and the Evers School use a variety of measures to assess and monitor student progress. In addition to the state-required ISAT, Chicago Public Schools requires additional testing for elementary students, including the ITBS reading and math subtests (grade 3), the Miscue Analysis Assessment for reading (grades 1 and 2), Criterion Referenced Tests for the Comprehensive Reading Program for reading and math (kindergarten), and Logramos Spanish language achievement test (grade 3). Additionally, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading and Mathematics tests, although optional, are suggested for testing students who will be served in remedial programs. The district is also currently developing benchmark assessments in math and reading that will be administered once each academic quarter. These assessments will give schools and teachers information on how well students are performing in relation to the standards. At the school level, Evers School educators administer textbook tests and compile student writing portfolios throughout the school year. Teachers at the school cite the use of rubrics, checklists, and performance assessments. They also rely on Accelerated Reader Student Record Report for each student, and they create 10-week classroom progress reports to track classroom-level reading and math data related to the number students passing and failing chapter/unit test as well as the number of students receiving grades of A/B,C,and D/F.

Chicago educators and stakeholders have extensive access to a wealth of student data. The district employs both internal and external research evaluation teams to help analyze the extensive student data collected by Chicago Public Schools. The district website offers a number of data reports, including school profiles, school and citywide ITBS and state achievement test results over time, and citywide elementary promotion rates. Query tools allow individuals to select specific statistics for individual schools, such as demographic information, general information, or specific test results. Educators can make specific data download requests. The district also creates Running Records reports that indicates how many students citywide are reading at proficiency level by grade level. In addition to Chicago Public Schools data, educators at the Evers School review the Grow Network’s GROW School reports, which include ITBS and ISAT reading and math results aggregated by grade and performance quartile as well as data on the percent of students meeting standards.

Teachers at the Evers School complete self-evaluations of their performance during the school year. The school's Teacher Self Evaluation document requests a variety of general information from teachers, including days absent, days tardy, school committee membership, involvement in field trips, and professional development participation. Additionally, teachers describe two professional accomplishments, their role in providing student assistance to support academic achievement, and their strengths and weaknesses. Finally, teachers are also asked to rate their attendance (e.g., exceeds, meets, does not meet), their classroom management and classroom performance skills relative to student performance (e.g., A, B, C, D, F), and an overall efficiency rating (e.g., superior, excellent, satisfactory, unsatisfactory). In addition to the self evaluation, school administrators observe teachers multiple times during the school year.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments

Recognition activities at the Evers School focus on student academic and fine arts performance. The school sponsors a student incentive program which includes a Student of the Month award. Recognition activities also highlight student success in math contests, Principal's Scholars (students with all As), the Honor Roll (As in reading and math, Bs or As in other classes), and Honorable Mention awards (B average). Fine arts recognition at the school includes scholarships for performing arts achievement, performances and showcases of student work, and displays of student murals in the school hallways and cafeteria as well as on school bulletin boards.

Chicago Public Schools and the Evers School use a variety of intervention strategies for students needing additional assistance. The district provides extensive after-school services for students who are behind as well as summer programs for students in the early grades who need additional instructional support. Chicago Public Schools has also implemented the step up grade for third grade students who are behind in reading. At the school level, teachers, parents, and students from the University of Illinois at Chicago serve as tutors for students having difficulties with math and reading. The Evers School also sponsors the "Future Teachers of Chicago" tutorial program that pairs struggling students with tutors from a local high school.

According to the school improvement plan, the school faces particular challenges with intervention due to an increased need for mentors and tutors for students at risk. In addition to tutoring, the school provides additional math and reading assistance through pull-out programs in which students participate three to five times each week. Because the school's attendance rate fell below the 95.5% threshold, the Evers School must develop an attendance plan for the upcoming school year that defines intervention activities that will be used to address the school's attendance problem.

The Evers School struggles to effectively meet the needs of its accelerated students. According to the principal, the school is moving toward a more rigorous curriculum for students exhibiting early mastery of the traditional curriculum, but she wants to be able to do more for these accelerated students. While the principal asserts that the school needs an accelerated program, she recognizes that the Evers School does not enroll enough accelerated students to receive funding for a full program; currently, the principal estimates that approximately 10 to 12 students would qualify for accelerated programming. She suggests that teachers at the school need to use more flexible grouping arrangements in the regular classroom to provide some additional activities for these students.

Other Factors Influencing Practices

The Evers School, like many other schools, faces challenges with parent involvement. While educators at the school stress the value of parent involvement and input, many express concerns about parents' involvement in the school. As a Title I school, parents must sign a parent compact that outlines their responsibilities in their children's education, including responding to all school communications requiring signature or response, monitoring homework, ensuring work is turned in on time, and reading to their children daily and having their children read to them. The school receives parent input from those on the local school council and those participating in the parent teacher association, which both the principal and teachers describe as active. The school has tried to involve parents more in committees and decision-making processes in order to strengthen parent-school partnerships.

The school hosts an open house at the beginning of the school year to communicate state and school goals and review the school schedule, and parents must pick up student report cards at parent-teacher conferences twice each school year. The principal reports that parent participation is low, and teachers provide similar assessments, with estimates of participation levels varying between 20% and 40%. According to one teacher, a core group of parents provides continual support, and assembly attendance has increased significantly; however, this same teacher notes that in the previous year they had 20 parents chaperoning an annual field trip, while no parents volunteered to chaperone for the trip during the current school year.

Resource Allocation*:

	<i>Chicago Dist. 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$5,286	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$8,482	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	50.7	45.5
General Administration	1.6	2.5
Supporting Services	38.5	31.0
Other Expenditures	9.2	21.0

*Financial Indicators 2001-02