Opportunity Compact: Education 2010

A New Blueprint for Communities and Schools
PREPARING TO COMPETE: STRATEGIES FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In 2008 the Chicago Urban League (CUL) and a coalition of Illinois families and Urban League affiliates filed suit against the state of Illinois and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to force a change in the way public schools are funded. The suit claims that Illinois’ school funding system favors wealthy districts over less affluent ones, and leaves minority and poor children in underfunded schools to receive sub par educations. Changing the way the state funds public schools holds the greatest promise for systemic change.

With this litigation as our cornerstone, CUL announces the creation of a new Office of Education Policy and presents a new policy agenda to provide solutions to a wide range of inequities in public education. CUL’s Office of Education Policy serves as a research arm, convening body and collaborative resource for our constituents, community and partners. The Opportunity Compact education policy agenda focuses on substantive change in four primary pathways that CUL believes will create better educational opportunities across the state.

CUL EDUCATION POLICY PRIORITIES

CUL recommends that changes in the state’s public education funding structure be targeted to support the following four priorities:

- **INCREASING EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS**
- **ENSURING HIGH NEED SCHOOLS HAVE HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS AND LEADERS**
- **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING**
- **ENSURING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

CUL recognizes that the changes we seek cannot succeed if we focus solely on what goes on inside the four walls of the schoolhouse. Change will require an unprecedented level of collaboration between communities, government, and the private sector. As Chicago’s and all Illinois’ schools face severe and unprecedented budgetary challenges, the focus must be put on proven strategies that strategically allocate resources and maximize educational outcomes. Chicago Urban League has identified four of these critical levers. Today’s students are tomorrow’s workforce, and their productivity will underwrite a future of our prosperity for our state, but only if we confront our shortcomings today. Many of the graduates leaving our schools this spring will enter a harsh economic environment where their skills will be tested like never before. Preparing for that future begins right here, and right now.

David E. Thigpen
*Vice President for Policy*
Chicago Urban League
Department of Policy & Research

Herman Brewer
*Acting President & CEO*
Chicago Urban League
THE ISSUE

Too many low-income African American and Latino students in Illinois do not believe they have the ability to do well in school, or become convinced that school is not for them. Formal learning is viewed as irrelevant, disconnected from their reality, and a nuisance to be tolerated but never fully engaged. For many, the thought of attending college is perceived as unrealistic. We all play a part in this deception—parents, teachers and principals, school district leadership and even the state. Too many parents don’t turn off the television and require reading and homework every night. Too many teachers allow students to get by with just passing grades. And too many principals and superintendents are satisfied with simply increasing the number of students meeting state standards even though they know that is not enough.

Illinois standards for elementary and high schools are low compared to other states and are far below what it takes to succeed in college and the workforce. A report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research reported a “major misalignment” between the elementary school ISAT standards and the college-readiness standards expected of all juniors in Illinois high schools as measured by the ACT. The report found that students need to score well into the Exceeds Standards category on the eighth-grade ISAT to have a good chance of scoring well on the ACT in eleventh grade. Students who meet ISAT standards have less than a 25% chance of scoring a 20 on the ACT. Since at least a 20 is required for admission to most colleges, the state is deceiving students who are only meeting the low Illinois standards. Expectations and standards must be substantially raised to increase the success of our students.

Core Issues:
• Low expectations are pervasive among African-American and Latino students.
• A lack of consistent classroom rigor characterizes many minority and low-income schools.
• State-level standards are low, leaving our students ill-prepared for academic success beyond high school.
• Low expectations are not just a problem among students and schools – families play a critical role in ensuring that schools provide — and students receive a high quality education.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

There must be a shift in this belief system at every level – in classrooms, schools, districts, and across all communities. This begins with parents, teachers, principals, administrators and community members acknowledging that this is our goal for our children and beginning the work required to meet it. State government must set its sights on meeting higher standards by providing extra resources to the schools that have the longest distance to travel to get there.

However, raising standards without raising the quality of what’s happening in the classroom will not make a difference. Teachers will need curriculum, training and support, and schools will need the labs and technology necessary to deliver more rigorous instruction. Our schools also need better tools for measuring and tracking student progress toward higher standards. The existing annual state assessments are just snapshots of student performance and are of little use to teachers. Our teachers need a computerized system for assessing student progress that provides them with timely information so they can adjust their instruction to individual student needs. Improved assessments and data systems will also make it possible to hold everyone more accountable for performance. Additionally, particular attention needs to be paid to assessment of English Language Learners (ELL) whose needs have received low priority from the state. Assessing the progress of special education students (SPED) also requires additional attention from the state. With ELL and SPED students, improved assessment should help schools better meet student needs.

Parents also must understand expectations for their children so they can assist and encourage them to succeed. The state should provide families with clear descriptions of what students should know
and do at each grade level—pre-K through 12—including expectations for attendance, behavior, homework, appropriate reading and after-school activities. The materials should also provide a description of what families can do to help their children meet the expectations, and where to find help when they are not.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Expectations and standards for all students – especially African-American and Latino students – must be raised in order to provide a high quality education and the opportunity for a viable future. Parents, teachers, principals, administrators and community members need to acknowledge that this is our goal for our children, and begin the work required to meet it.

### THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE’S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that most of our African American and Latino students are not meeting the existing low standards, why are we insisting on raising the bar? The Chicago Urban League believes that we have to begin by setting goals for our students that, when met, will ensure their success. If we continue to set goals for our students that leave them short of being able to compete, then we’re continuing to deceive them and ourselves. These goals and recommendations are directly aligned to President Obama’s recently announced proposal for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which focuses on raising standards and rewarding success. In an effort to address these issues, the Chicago Urban League supports the following key policy recommendations:

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<td>• Advocate with its community, legislative and business partners for Illinois to adopt higher standards for schools at all levels.</td>
<td>• Raise learning standards from pre-K through high school to a level that ensures that students meeting state standards are well prepared for success in college and workforce.</td>
<td>• Make it clear to children that you expect them to be successful and that success includes college and/or training for employment.</td>
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<td>• Advocate for additional funding to support the higher standards, especially in high need schools.</td>
<td>• Support development of new student assessment tools and data systems to provide teachers with the information they need to adjust instruction to individual student needs.</td>
<td>• At each grade level, develop an understanding of what your child needs to know and be able to do to be successful.</td>
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<td>• Publish learning expectations for students from, pre-K to 12, including things that families can do to help their children to be successful.</td>
<td>• Refuse to tolerate failure, eradicate the culture of “cool” around low achievement.</td>
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What the Chicago Urban League Will Do: What the State of Illinois Should Do: What Families Should Do:

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- Make it clear to children that you expect them to be successful and that success includes college and/or training for employment.

- At each grade level, develop an understanding of what your child needs to know and be able to do to be successful.

- Refuse to tolerate failure, eradicate the culture of “cool” around low achievement.

TheBOTTOMLINE

Expectations and standards for all students – especially African-American and Latino students – must be raised in order to provide a high quality education and the opportunity for a viable future. Parents, teachers, principals, administrators and community members need to acknowledge that this is our goal for our children, and begin the work required to meet it.
FOCUS AREA #2 ENSURING HIGH NEED SCHOOLS HAVE HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS AND LEADERS

THE ISSUE

Strong school leadership is not only required for the effective management and oversight of schools, but it is also critical to developing and retaining high quality teachers. It’s the combination of a strong administrator and effective teachers that ensures student success. There continues to be a shortage of high quality leaders for minority/low-income schools. Once the strongest principals are identified, the state and districts should provide incentives – both financial and operational – to encourage the strongest principals to seek out positions in the highest need schools. Top principals who are willing to move to high need schools should be eligible for increased salaries, bonuses, additional autonomy, and the ability to select a school team.

A 2005 study found that a student who has a teacher ranked in the 85th percentile can expect substantially higher gains in achievement than a student with an average teacher. A succession of excellent teachers can result in huge leaps in achievement. Unfortunately the opposite is also true. A student with a below average teacher can expect lower gains and a student with multiple years of bad teachers can fall hopelessly behind.

Core Issues:

- The uneven distribution of high quality teachers in schools most in need; the limited numbers of quality teachers certified in critical instructional areas (e.g., math, science)
- Higher percentages of poor quality teachers across the neediest, predominately African-American and Latino schools
- Lack of a consistent and comprehensive teacher evaluation system resulting in teachers receiving higher ratings than warranted; no link between teacher performance and student achievement outcomes
- Strong teachers unions which in some cases limit the ability to make critical modifications in teacher evaluation, performance management and hiring/firing of poor quality teachers
- A significant need to help parents and families understand what “good teaching” looks like and what they should expect from their students’ classroom teachers

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Implementation of effective recruitment, evaluation, and retention practices must be instituted across Illinois for sustainable improvement in teacher quality. Most school districts across Illinois continue to grapple with the challenge of recruiting and retaining high quality classroom teachers, especially those certified in high need subject areas. This is further challenged by the need to not only increase the number of high quality teachers, but also ensure the equitable distribution of those teachers across those schools most in need.

Defining and identifying quality teaching is the cornerstone of any effort to increase student performance. According to a 2007 study completed by The New Teacher Project (TNTP), Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has created a more rigorous selection process resulting in a selection rate of approximately 12%. While this represents substantive improvement, it has yet to translate into consistent levels of quality teaching across the district, especially in the neediest schools.

Assessing teacher quality and effectiveness must include an assessment of actual student performance. In addition to recruitment, inconsistent teacher evaluation resulted in a severely skewed performance evaluation system. According to the same TNTP study referred to above, only 3 out of 1000 teachers received an unsatisfactory rating and 88% of CPS schools had not issued an unsatisfactory rating.
over a 4-year period. Given the low level of student performance at most minority and low-income districts across Illinois, the disconnect between teacher evaluation results and student achievement in low performing schools makes improvement efforts moot. The absence of an effective statewide teacher evaluation system and antiquated contractual agreements often result in lackluster teachers receiving tenure. While these agreements provide support and job security for teachers, too often they serve as a barrier to identifying, retaining, and distributing the highest quality teachers to students and schools with the highest need.

The issue of accurately assessing teacher performance and linking this performance to student achievement is in the early stages of being addressed. CPS is currently piloting a new teacher observation tool, based on Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. Additionally, the district has also implemented the Chicago Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) which provides performance-based compensation based on teacher performance and student outcomes. At a statewide level, in January 2010, Governor Quinn signed into law the Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010, a bill to implement new, rigorous evaluations for teachers and school principals across the state. The new law is aligned to the federal Race to the Top fund to provide much needed funding to states that meet specific qualifications.

Teacher attrition must be addressed. According to Advance Illinois, nearly 40% of Illinois’ public school teachers leave within the first five years. In schools serving high-risk students, attrition rates can rise to nearly 70%. Specific supports must be put in place to retain high quality teachers. Beginning in 2006, CPS invested heavily in intensive supports for new teachers in certain geographic areas. Novice teachers received assistance from a mentor trained and supervised by the Chicago New Teacher Center every other week and attended monthly professional development focused on improving the quality of their teaching practice. Given the quality of this support, in 2009 CNTC services and supports were expanded to provide much needed induction support to all new teachers across the district.
**THE BOTTOM LINE**

The work to support new teachers and encourage the strongest teachers and principals to work in the highest need schools – particularly racially isolated, low income African American and Latino schools – should be accelerated. The pilot programs to measure and then support improved teacher quality should also be expanded and targeted to address the needs of minority students.

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**THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE’S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

We believe that there are two primary ways to improve the quality of teachers in high need schools: 1) helping new teachers in high-need schools to be successful by providing intensive support during their first years in the classroom, and 2) identifying the strongest teachers and providing them incentives to work in high need schools. Additionally, it is critical that an effective statewide teacher evaluation system be implemented to accurately assess the quality of teachers. We believe the state should make these recommendations a priority and provide dedicated funding support. To address these issues, the Chicago Urban League supports the following key policy recommendations:

**Identify the Best Teachers, Provide Intensive Support and Encourage Them to Work in High-Need Schools**

- Identifying teachers with strong practice and above average student outcomes, and providing incentives to work in high-need schools.
- Expanding the TAP program to additional high-need schools to increase the quality of teaching staff and retain these strong teachers to work in high-need schools.

**Implement a Statewide Teacher Performance Evaluation System Linked to Student Performance**

- Implementing a teacher evaluation system based on teacher level evidence of student learning and observation-based evidence of teacher practice.
- Providing the most successful teachers with substantial financial incentives to teach in high-need schools.
- Utilizing performance management data for removal of teachers who are not contributing to student success.

**Encourage Families to Support School and District Efforts to Advance Teacher Quality**

- It is critical that families support and advocate for improvements in teacher quality for their students; in order to provide this support, families must understand what “good teaching” is and partner with the schools to support these efforts.
- In serving as advocates, families must raise issues with their legislators in an organized fashion and encourage students to always show respect for their teachers.

**Identify and Evaluate Best Principals, Provide Incentives to Work in High-Need Schools**

- As with teachers, the lack of principal performance measures makes it difficult to identify the strongest principals. Building a system for evaluating principal performance based on both student progress and leadership practice needs to be a priority for the state and for districts. Once the strongest principals are identified, the state and districts should provide incentives – both financial and operational – to encourage the strongest principals to seek out positions in the highest need schools.
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<td>• Support and advocate for statewide efforts to improve the quality of instruction in high need schools.</td>
<td>• Increase support for intensive induction for new teachers in high need schools.</td>
<td>• Support school and district efforts to advance teacher quality.</td>
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<td>• Engage parents and communities directly through faith networks and parent peer organizations on an advocacy plan to support high quality teachers.</td>
<td>• Implement a teacher evaluation system based on teacher level evidence of student learning and observation-based evidence of teacher practice.</td>
<td>• Raise these issues with your legislators in an organized fashion.</td>
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<td>• Support and advocate for district efforts to place principals with record of success in high need schools.</td>
<td>• Provide the most successful teachers with substantial financial incentives to teach in high-need schools.</td>
<td>• Encourage your children to respect their teachers.</td>
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<td>• Support development of transparent systems for evaluating principal performance based on student outcomes and leadership practice.</td>
<td>• Remove teachers who are not contributing to student success.</td>
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THE ISSUE

The family plays a critical role in the school success of children, both in the home and outside of it. Just as we are demanding that the state and school districts step up in providing critical resources and support for students, we need to make similar demands of families. Parent and caregiver involvement is a critical part of a child’s success in school. However, too often they are minimally engaged, or not engaged in their students’ learning. As expectations increase for students, there must be a similar increase in expectations for families. As President Obama has often stated: “the responsibility for our children's education must begin at home – this is not a Democratic or Republican issue, but an American issue.” Parents and caregivers must be consistently reminded that the home is a learning community as important as the school.

Core Issues:

• The responsibility for a student's education must not solely reside within schools, but must also include a high level of family engagement in the student learning experience.
• Parents and caregivers are too often disconnected from student learning and school experience and are not demanding high expectations and a high quality education for their students.
• Many parents in our communities have educational deficits that result from bad experiences in the same schools that their children are now attending. School leaders need to recognize this history, and ensure that a parent's own experience in school doesn’t act as a barrier to their child's success.
• Parents and families do not have a clear understanding of what differentiates a high quality school or classroom from one in which children's needs are not being effectively served.
• Parents and families do not have the right resources to understand school-level performance in assessing their schools and determining whether to consider other options for their children’s education.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Families need help figuring out how to support their children’s success in school. Assistance must be a combined effort between districts and individual schools to provide this critical support. In addition to encouraging families to adopt “old school” standards like limiting TV and video game time, and establishing structured time and place for daily homework, schools need to help families help their children to learn. Promoting a set of common school-wide family support practices, offering sessions with teachers on how to help students with particular subjects, and working with parents to help them make connections between school and adult success require sustained attention and resources from schools. In order to sustain that kind of quality family support over time schools may need staff dedicated to this effort and strong partnerships with community-based organizations that can deliver the required parent support.

Another important element of increasing family engagement is empowering families to serve as advocates for their students. However, until parents and community residents know how well their schools are doing moving students toward high standards, they will have a difficult time either helping to make the schools better or determining whether to consider other options for their children. Parents and caregivers commonly report feeling unwelcome in schools and feel disrespected and disregarded by teachers and administrators. Administrators and teachers report incidents of intimidation on the part of parents. The terms of engagement between parents and schools must be reset. Schools must begin to create “learning community” teams led by the principal and staffed by teachers and counselors to develop ways of creating constructive dialogue between schools and parents.

In order for families to serve as effective advocates for their students, Illinois districts and schools must provide “family friendly” materials and resources to enable families to make the best decisions for their students. Such materials might include detailed school-level report cards similar to those implemented by the Chicago Public Schools and family handbooks. Such resources could assist families in constructively engaging with school officials.
In an effort to increase the level of family engagement, schools, districts, families and students must become a joint partnership to increase commitment and expectations. For there to be real change, there must be a common understanding and commitment from all stakeholders involved in the student learning experience. Until these critical stakeholders are on the same page our children will continue to suffer from inequitable educational experiences.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

Our students have the capacity for success. Families must ensure that their experience in school advances them toward success. It is imperative that all the adults with responsibility for our children, including their family members, are held accountable for their progress in school.

**THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE’S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

To increase family engagement, families must become full partners in the student learning experience and take a more active role. For this to occur, families must feel welcome to appropriately engage and have the right resources to make decisions for their student’s education. In an effort to reach these goals, the Chicago Urban League recommends the following key policy recommendations:

**Increase Opportunities for Consistent and Effective School and Family Interaction**

*The Chicago Urban League recommends:*

- The development of community teams visiting each student home at least twice during a school year. Home visits outside of the school setting can help create a more receptive climate for family/school dialogue and generate the goodwill necessary for a true partnership.
- The establishment of “learning community” teams led by the principal and staffed by teachers and counselors to develop ways of creating constructive dialogue between schools and parents. Currently, many schools provide opportunities like “parent night” and “family reading night”, however in order for this engagement to occur there must be increased engagement and participation.
- Learning community teams should consider visiting each student home at least twice during a school year. We believe home visits outside of the school setting can help create a more receptive climate for family/school dialogue and generate the goodwill necessary for a true partnership.

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<td>Work with community-based organizations to develop ways of consistently reminding families of the critical role they play in their children’s education, and of the importance of a stable home environment to school success.</td>
<td>Provide funding for districts to encourage parent engagement in learning with parent coordinators or other supports.</td>
<td>Participate in your child’s learning. Be open to new approaches from schools like home visits.</td>
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<td>Develop models for home visits and other processes that might help improve the conversation between families and schools.</td>
<td>Develop state standards for parent engagement in student learning.</td>
<td>Observe etiquette in interactions with school officials.</td>
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<td>Encourage districts to use home visits and other new approaches to engaging families in their children’s learning.</td>
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Help Families Understand School Performance Through “Family-Friendly” Resources and Materials

The Chicago Urban League recommends:

- The development of common school-specific scorecards similar to those provided by CPS for all Illinois schools. State scorecards will help families better understand what matters in their schools so they can be more informed consumers.
- Making school scorecards available through a public web site designed in partnership with the Chicago Urban League and other community partners. Such a website could combine social networking and be modeled after a site such as Greatschools.net that provides both data on school performance and a forum for comments and dialogue by parents and students on their experiences and impressions of the school.
- Working with community partners to educate parents about school performance using the new scorecards.
- Development of a handbook aimed particularly at Latino and African American families similar to the pamphlet published by Education Trust called Improving Your Child’s Education: A Guide For African American Parents. The handbook would help families constructively engage with school officials.

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<td>Develop a statewide school scorecard that provides families with information about the critical elements of school success.</td>
<td>Use the data provided in the new school scorecards and web site to encourage school improvement in the areas that matter most to student achievement.</td>
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<td>Work with its community partners to expand parent peer networks to help families understand school performance using scorecards and other information.</td>
<td>Work with community-based organizations to popularize and encourage the use of the scorecards by parents.</td>
<td>Support state and district interventions, e.g., school closings in failing schools, (additional compensation for staff in high performing, high-need schools) that are consistent with the data provided on the school scorecards.</td>
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<td>Develop materials and training to help parents to both understand what they should expect from their child’s teacher and principal and to advocate for their children in school.</td>
<td>Work with community-based organizations to develop a public web site that combines data on school performance with social networking for families about experiences and impressions of schools.</td>
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<td>Develop materials for parents to help them understand how to use tutoring, after school programs, and parent-teacher conferences to help their children.</td>
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<td>Work with the state and select school districts to develop and promote the use of a public web site that combines data on school performance with social networking for families about experiences and impressions of schools.</td>
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The Establishment of a Joint Partnership Between Districts, Schools, Families and Students

- We propose the creation and promulgation by community groups of a contract between the school, families and students agreeing to limit TV, perform homework every night, spend reading time together, and share information about school.

- Create and promote the use of a contract between school, family and students to recognize, respect and support parents’ work to help their children succeed in schools.

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<td>Provide funding for districts to encourage parent engagement in learning with parent coordinators or other supports.</td>
<td>Agree to follow the terms of a parent support contract with your child and his or her school.</td>
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What Parents Can Do:

- Talk to your child. Communication is important to understand what your child has to say about his or her education, teacher, homework, and school and to show that his or her education is important.

- Monitor your child’s homework. As a parent you do not necessarily have to understand or be able to explain all the assignments that your children receive, but you can monitor your child to make sure they are really working and understanding the homework.

- Look for the following warning signs in homework assignments that might indicate that your child is not being challenged in school: Your child has read few books in his or her English class. Your child is in 8th grade and the major project is to do a collage for class. Your child finishes his or her homework very quickly.

- Read to your child or have your child read to you.
FOCUS AREA #4  
ENSURING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

THE ISSUE

A critical element in ensuring future success for children in low-income communities is access to high quality early childhood education.

The achievement gap begins with school readiness, and too often minority and low-income students do not have access to quality early childhood programs. Children who start off behind usually stay behind – gaps in school readiness skills put children on a trajectory of failure. Differences in socioeconomic status commonly dictate access to high quality early childhood programs. According to the Ounce of Prevention Fund, children living in poverty who have access to quality preschool are more likely to graduate from high school, be employed, earn more, and commit fewer crimes as adults than those who did not.

Access to high quality early childhood programs have a lifelong impact. The first comprehensive research to be conducted on this impact was the Abecedarian Project – a study conducted in North Carolina by Dr. Craig Ramey. The project tracked 111 low-income African-American families over a 5 year period. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to receive full-time educational intervention services in daycare in infancy; the other half did not. Overall, the study showed that young children who receive high-quality early education from infancy to age five had better outcomes in each of the following areas:

- Scored 1.8 grade years higher in reading and 1.3 years higher in math as young adults
- More likely to attend a four-year college (36% vs. 14%)
- More likely to obtain a skilled job (47% vs. 27%)
- Less likely to have had their first child at age 18 or younger (26% versus 45%)
- Smoked less (39% vs. 55%)
- Less likely to use marijuana (18% vs. 39%)

Core Issues:
- Not all minority and low-income students have sufficient access to quality early childhood programs.
- Where programs are available, there is not consistent assessment of the quality and ensuring the programs are meeting the needs of students.
- Parents and families must make greater efforts to ensure that they are taking full advantage of the early childhood programs available to their students.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Illinois has made progress in promoting the importance of early childhood education. It’s now time to ensure that every child that needs it has access. 44% of 3 and 4 year-old children in Chicago are still not enrolled in early childhood learning. Programs in Latino communities have waiting lists, while slots in predominately African-American communities go unfilled. In addition to getting children enrolled, we also need to ensure that programs serving our children are high quality. There is limited information available on the quality of early childhood programs to help inform parent enrollment decisions.

There is also clear long-term return on investment from high quality early childhood programs, making it even more critical to ensure high levels of enrollment. Based on a study of 989 students enrolled in Chicago-Parent Child Centers through eighth grade, society saves more than seven dollars for every dollar invested in pre-school. The quality interaction between caregiver and child taught in many good early childhood programs – such as reading and speaking to children frequently — creates habits of educationally-oriented behaviors in families that can extend throughout elementary and secondary school.
THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE’S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to ensure that every student who needs it is enrolled in a high quality early childhood program, the Chicago Urban League supports the following policy recommendations:

Ensure Access to High Quality Early Childhood Program for All Students
- It is critical for all students who need it, to have access to high quality early childhood programs; as a result the state and districts must ensure that these programs are readily available.
- In order to ensure these programs are of the highest quality, the state should develop a system to assess effectiveness and implement measures to maintain quality.

Families Must Take Full Advantage of Available Early Childhood Programs
- Families must take responsibility for enrolling their children in available early childhood programs at 3 and 4 years-old to provide their students with a strong beginning educational foundation.
- Families must also stay actively involved and encourage a focus on development of school readiness skills for their students.

What the Chicago Urban League Will Do: What the State of Illinois Should Do: What Families Should Do:

- Work with the state, CPS, and the City of Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services and its community partners to encourage families to enroll their children in quality programs.
- Develop a system for evaluating early childhood programs and reporting on their quality to help inform parent choice.
- Use all available information to assess the quality of early childhood education providers before enrolling your children.
- Promote and publicize the best early childhood programs.
- Encourage districts to work with community organizations to encourage enrollment of all high need students in quality early childhood education programs.
- Enroll children in early childhood education when they are 3 and 4 years-old.
- Encourage a focus on development of school readiness skills in your child's program.

THE BOTTOM LINE
Enrolling our students in early childhood programs will have immediate and long-term educational benefits. It is critical to not only ensure access, but to also ensure that these programs are of high quality and effectively assessed.
OPPORTUNITY COMPACT: EDUCATION 2010
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