



# Illinois State Board of Education

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## **Illinois State Board of Education Approved Lead Partner Organization:**

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## **Abstract**

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### **Target Audience**

NCS serves high schools in the Transformation model in or near the city of Chicago. The majority of schools in our cohort serve students of color and/or students receiving free or reduced lunch. NCS partners with school principals who: 1) recognize the need for outside perspective to push their thinking and learning on the critical levers for comprehensive school change, 2) seek collaboration and shared learning with a community of other school leaders to identify problems and develop solutions to improve their high schools, and 3) want to strengthen their role as instructional leaders and develop the capacity of teachers and counselors to lead efforts in the school building. Teachers receiving NCS services are often department chairs and team leaders who want to network with their peers in and across schools to improve teaching and learning.

### **Evidence of Effectiveness**

NCS has a successful track record for increasing the conditions and capacity for instructional improvements in CPS high schools. Qualitative and quantitative evaluations of NCS demonstrate more effective leadership, and improved school environments and student outcomes. In 2009-10, when NCS schools were organized as a single CPS Area, NCS schools collectively had the highest percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> graders On-Track to Graduation (72%) of all nonselective high school areas, the highest proportion of freshmen and sophomores making expected gains in reading and math, and the highest FAFSA completion rates – all of which are leading indicators of graduation, college enrollment, and college success. In 2009-10, NCS schools also led the district in increases in college enrollment (56 to 61%) in four-year college enrollment (36 to 42%), and enrollment in selective colleges (7.4 to 9.2%).

In 2011, CPS invited NCS to become the Lead Partner for two Transformation schools, Wells Community Academy High School and John Hancock College Preparatory High School, under the U.S. Department of Education School Improvement Grant (SIG) Program. Between 2010 and 2013, both schools greatly increased their On-Track rates with Wells increasing from 60% to 77% and Hancock

from 80% to 91%. Both schools more than doubled the number of students enrolling in Advanced Placement and/or International Baccalaureate classes, which can greatly improve the number of students enrolling and persisting in college. Another key metric, student attendance, increased dramatically at both schools during the same period. Hancock's attendance increased by 10%, and Wells from 67% to 80%. Due to the successful results at Hancock and Wells, the CPS Office of Strategic School Support Services invited NCS to scale our Whole School Transformation Model to six additional SIG-awarded high schools in 2013-14. NCS became the Lead Partner to four existing SIG schools that are currently in the second or final year of their three-year grants. The remaining two schools, Thomas Kelly High School and Bronzville Scholastic Institute, were awarded new three-year grants—the only schools awarded grants in the city—and chose NCS as their Lead Partner.

### **Pre-intervention / Needs Assessment**

Prior to partnering with a Transformation school, NCS and key school staff conduct an intensive audit of the school in the primary domains of: governance and management, school climate, curriculum, instruction and assessment, school climate, finances, program effectiveness, human capital, systems and structures, and community resources.

Data gathering methods include:

- Assessment of principal performance based on NCS and LEA competencies
- Comprehensive review of all documents related to these domains, such as the SIG Needs Assessment, EPAS test gains, freshman on-track and college enrollment data, Chief Area Office performance management decks, school records on attendance and truancy discipline incidents, and family and student survey data
- Audit of teaching and all other staff positions and responsibilities in the school, performance evaluation documents and results and the distribution of staff in each level of the evaluation scale
- Listing of all in- and after-school programs and community-based partnerships, the related resources deployed to operate them (including time, dollars and staff), and a review of any existing evaluation of effectiveness
- School visits to observe policies, programs and practices in action and assess the fidelity among them, and their appropriateness.
- Review budgets and alignment with key student achievement levers
- Survey of community resources, strengths and weaknesses

For each of these measures, NCS looks at trend data in order to determine schools' progress over several years. NCS staff also meets with CPS officials to discuss District's short and long-term programmatic and financial capacity to commit to operational flexibility, extended time and high quality school leaders and teachers.

### **General Description of Supports Provided**

#### **Instructional reform, including assessment, curriculum and instruction**

Key components of NCS supports to improve instruction include: curriculum development; improving instructional practice; and assessment for learning. NCS employs research-based tools and strategies to guide this work. Curriculum development utilizes a backward-design approach. Guided by the Illinois State Learning Standards/ Common Core Standards and College Readiness Standards, we begin by organizing teacher teams to identify the content knowledge, core academic skills, and academic behaviors they seek to develop through their instruction. These become the learning goals that guide curriculum development and selection as well as instruction and assessment practice. We use the 5 Dimensions of Rigorous Instruction as the vision for expert teaching to improve instructional practice. NCS staff brings unique expertise in the development and use of standards-based assessment to drive instruction and organize student supports, enrichments, and interventions. This allows us to provide critical leadership in developing school practice in backward-design curriculum development, standards-based instruction, and assessment for learning. Finally, we employ the Targeted Leadership Framework as the strategy to achieve expert teaching and instructional transformation. Many of our schools implement West Ed's Reading Apprenticeship Framework towards improving disciplinary literacy.

### **Instructional and Leadership Coaching**

NCS's intensive coaching builds the capacity of the principal, other school leaders and teachers by developing and supporting teacher teams and leadership teams to organize collaborative work; use research to guide programs and practices; and build systems and structures to sustain improvement. We support the school to take an inquiry-based approach to understanding student academic needs, identifying research-based instructional practices to address those needs, and organizing the professional learning teachers need to become expert in their craft. A key strategy in our work is to provide CPS leaders with opportunities for open and honest reflection, shared learning, and collaborative problem solving. Moreover, NCS supports enable school leaders to develop a common vision and language around change management and school or system transformation

### **Instructional Improvement and Teacher Development**

NCS provides customized coaching on instructional improvement by helping schools develop and sustain effective Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs). In schools, NCS helps ILTs facilitate professional learning cycles. In a professional learning cycle, ILT members: 1) identify an area of instruction across content areas to improve learning for all students; 2) examine student work and data to guide instruction and professional learning; 3) build capacity to use effective, research-based instructional practices; and 4) align resources toward efforts that most improve learning for all students.

### **Leadership Development and Change Management**

NCS also provides coaching for CPS leaders and/or school principals. The sessions can focus on three possible strands: instructional leadership, coaching, and supervision; executive management and leading school or system change; and peer sharing and problem solving. Coaching incorporates collaborative dialogue and problem-solving to strengthen CPS leaders' roles as transformational leaders in the District and in schools.

### **Program Management / Progress Monitoring and Data Driven Decision Making**

NCS provides Project Managers and Data Strategists to schools to support progress monitoring. Project Managers are responsible for developing and monitoring project plans that ensure the successful

implementation of the Transformation school's improvement plan. Working directly with the Transformation Leader and Principal, the Project Manager coordinates the implementation, execution, monitoring, quality and completion of all aspects of the plan, ensuring consistency and coherence with the school's vision, strategy and goals.

The Data Strategist focuses on data collection, analysis and dissemination to support strategic evaluation and decision making that actively support the school's improvement efforts. In addition to coordinating, aggregating and presenting real time data at the school site, the Data Strategist works with school teams to build their capacity to develop sustainable processes for data collection and analysis.

### **Community and Family Engagement**

Using the Community School model, NCS engages a nonprofit community-based organization (CBO) to partner with each Transformation school. In Chicago, a Community School is defined as a partnership between a public school and a nonprofit organization. That nonprofit, in partnership with NCS and the school, implements a full Community School model by: coordinating after-school and weekend activities for students, providing services and communication to families, leveraging additional community partnerships, building relationships with local business, and reaching out to elected officials in order to harness holistic supports to meet students' academic and social needs. The Community School model works towards a high quality core instructional program; a wide variety of enrichment experiences for students, families, and community members; and by removing barriers to student achievement through direct services and community partnerships.

### **School Climate and Culture**

The NCS Transformation model supports the creation of a college-going culture with high expectations for all students throughout the school. NCS Social and Academic Support Facilitators helps schools develop a broad-based Social and Academic Support Team that use early warning systems to identify students for early intervention, prevention, and support. This team builds the leadership skills of social workers and counselors and empowers them to change school climate and culture, building the systems and structures to provide the services which students need in order to be successful. In addition, this team supports teachers' efforts to establish a positive classroom culture with high expectations for all students.

### **Strategies for Post-grant Sustainability**

The NCS Transformation model builds systems, structures, and capacity of all levels of high school leadership: principal, teachers, counselors and social workers. This shared leadership structure facilitates deep change in the culture of work in schools. The capacity to manage change and identify and address problems independently establishes a core purpose for school staff to sustain and manage continuous improvement.

Evidence of sustainability includes functioning teams in the key areas of student achievement, continued growth in gains on the EPAS system and school climate, systems and structures remain in place to review data and to generate, organize, and monitor necessary student supports. In three years, under the NCS Transformation model, principals and their schools move through the following phases of executive management and school change.

In the third year, we expect that schools will be able to sustain these practices independently.

Year	Key Activities	Potential Impact/Results
Year 1	Assessment, planning, staffing and establishment of systems (teams, processes, programs, structures, data and communications) in key areas of student achievement; Implementation, monitoring, developing staff, evaluation and refinement of systems	Culture and climate changes (attendance; reduced student disciplinary incidents etc); Increased grad rates, on track, FAFSA applications; college enrollment (note: schools may also see student achievement dips here: as teacher expectations increase; they may see <u>teacher retention/satisfaction dips as well</u> )
Year 2	Continued implementation and enhancement of systems, monitoring, evaluation and refining systems, begin to see more wide-spread results in student academic achievement, staff begins to run systems with <u>greater independence</u>	Student achievement increases
Year 3	Systems (teams, structures, processes, programs, communications) are operational, functional, results more widespread and consistent, staff demonstrates leadership in implementing systems and are able to sustain results for continuous improvement	Student achievement and college enrollment increase

### Other Organizational Hallmarks

NCS has been working with the Chicago Public Schools since 2007. We work extensively with the Consortium on Chicago School Research and draw on research from other national sources. Our professional development and coaching are designed to help schools translate research and data into practice.

In 2011-12, NCS expanded its CPS Network-level supports to provide extensive training to help High School Network Chiefs establish a coherent instructional strategy with principals and ILTs. NCS partnered with CPS Central Office to develop and facilitate district-wide professional development sessions for all high school ILTs related to the Common Core State Standards. NCS's Network-level trainings reached approximately 80 Network staff members, 100 principals and 500 teachers (ILT members). According to participant session evaluation data, 87% of ILT participants reported that these sessions were of good or excellent quality and 81% reported that the sessions met the objectives that were set.

In 2012, NCS established a formal relationship with the six CPS High School Network Chiefs and their Deputy Chiefs in a monthly Chiefs' Collaborative. This professional learning community helped Chiefs build strategies around district priorities; gain an understanding of the latest research and data critical to improving outcomes for high school students; and develop effective systems of principal support. The Collaborative provided Chiefs with the opportunity to address the challenges of supporting high school improvement. In 2013-14, NCS is developing and delivering professional development to the new Chiefs and Deputies, who now all have K-12 Networks. We have a deep partnership with OS4.

### Additional Resources

[ncs.uchicago.edu](http://ncs.uchicago.edu)