Cultivating Leadership
2023-24 PROGRAM SUMMARY

THE CHICAGO PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND
Introduction

In 2023-24, The Fund’s eight programs are empowering 378 aspiring leaders, principals, and principal supervisors in Chicago to create enriching learning environments. Our programs offer targeted support at every career stage, adapting to the diverse needs of school leaders and cultivating excellence citywide.

After spending years on COVID-related operational issues, principals are working to prioritize students’ social-emotional and academic needs. School leaders are engaging academic interventionists, refining instructional practices, cultivating teacher-principal trust, and promoting distributed leadership.

In The Fund’s 2019 Principal Engagement Survey, 95% of principals shared a desire to spend more time on curriculum and instructional leadership. The Fund adapted our programming to support these efforts. We shifted our program objectives to better meet leaders’ needs, introduced new incentives to increase attendance and deeper learning, and launched pilot initiatives to surface innovative practices in school communities most impacted by COVID-19, including Priority Schools.1

This report offers insights into our program offerings and partnerships during the 2023-24 school year.

1 Priority Schools are defined as those experiencing high chronic high student mobility, as defined in research from the University of Illinois Chicago and law schools and social workers affiliated with the University of Chicago Urban Education Survey. About 140 schools in Chicago fall within this category.
Program Summary

Currently, our participants lead in 345 district and charter-operated schools. Over half of our program educators are leaders of color, with 62% identifying as Black and Latino/a/x. In 2024, we are excited to serve additional educators in our second-semester pilots and programs.

**SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

- **Priority School**
  - 56.3%
  - Priority School
  - 43.7%
  - Non-Priority School

- **School Level**
  - 80.0%
  - Elementary School
  - 20.0%
  - High School

**PROGRAM PARTICIPATION**

- **151** Principals
- **193** Aspiring Principals *
- **34** Principal Supervisors
- **139K** Students Impacted

**Participant Demographics**

- **35.1%** Black
- **26.7%** White
- **27.7%** Latino/a/x
- **8.6%** Other *
- **1.8%** Asian

**EDUCATORS SERVED**

**Educator Role**

- Principal
- Assistant Principal (AP)
- Other School Leader
- Principal Supervisor
- School Community Member

**School Level**

- Elementary School
- High School
- Nonschool Based

* Aspiring principal includes assistant principals, instructional leaders, and teachers.

** Includes participants with demographic data that was either not available or missing at the time of data collection. Participants who identify with multiple ethnicities, and participants who are American Indian or Alaska Native.
## Program Investment Detail

### Students Impacted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total Slots</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
<th>Cost Per Slot</th>
<th>Diverse Learners</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
<th>English Language Learners</th>
<th>Temporary Living Situations</th>
<th>90%+ Black or Latino/a/x</th>
<th>Teacher Retention</th>
<th>Budget Change (FY23 to FY24)*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PILOT PROGRAMS &amp; NEW OPPORTUNITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Affinity Groups Program</td>
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<td>77.6%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
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<td>Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)</td>
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<td>8.0%</td>
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* District schools only included in budget data.
** Participants include associated charter schools.
*** 200 school leaders are leading and contributing to 378 across slot data.

378 School leaders across Chicago — including principals, principal supervisors, assistant principals, and aspiring leaders — are served by our programs.
Our Programs

Poor learning is a powerful tool. Our core programs are designed to provide collaborative environments where current and aspiring principals, as well as principal supervisors, can share best practices and receive on-the-ground support from the city’s top educators. We aim to ensure every leader is inspired, connected, and positioned to drive transformative change in their schools and communities.

PILOT PROGRAMS & NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Affinity Groups
- 33 Aspiring Principals
- Launched in 2022

The Affinity Groups Program aims to propel Black and Latinx educators into principal and assistant principal roles in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) by 2025. In 2023, we partnered with the Latino Leadership Pipeline (LLP) to provide aspiring leaders with robust professional networks, coaching opportunities, and targeted professional development to accelerate their path to formal school leader roles.

Through group sessions, participants deepen their understanding of the CPS Framework for Leadership and the CPS Equity Framework while exploring how to leverage their unique cultural identity as a cornerstone of their leadership. They refine their resumes to highlight the tangible results they achieve. By the program’s conclusion, participants will take concrete next steps, such as enrolling in a principal prep program or applying for a next-level leadership role (assistant principal, instructional support leader) within CPS.

UWCEL Professional Learning Series for Network Leaders
- 34 Network Chiefs and Deputies
- Launched in 2023

The University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership (UWCEL) Professional Learning Series offers development opportunities to CPS Network Chiefs and Deputies to enhance the quality of support they provide to principals.

The program aims to deepen the capacity of Chiefs and Deputies as supervisors of principals, as well as support them in coaching principals toward achieving equitable student outcomes. Chiefs and Deputies engage in a series of nine day-long sessions with experts from the UWCEL.

The UWCEL Professional Learning Series also works with the CPS Office of Network Support team to support best practices for adult learning grounded in UWCEL’s Principal Support Framework. Chiefs will measure progress and practice through readiness assessments and coaching, as well as increased principal satisfaction in their network.

Network 10

31 Elementary Schools
17,253 Students

30.6% English Language Learners
18.2% Diverse Learners
70.0% Economically Disadvantaged

Mira Weber

Mira Weber served Chicago’s students for over 14 years as a teacher and a principal. She is currently Chief of Network 10, overseeing 31 principals on Chicago’s Southwest Side. Her passion for education began in childhood, where her father’s mentorship instilled a love of learning. Her experience as a mother further defined her leadership style. As an education leader, Mira consistently advocates for special education students and inclusive classrooms.

During her 14-year tenure as principal of Tobman Elementary, Mira doubled her school’s enrollment by welcoming students from over 40 Chicago Public Schools, championed a comprehensive International Baccalaureate program, and guided a student-led school-renewal process that empowered her school community—experiences that were enriched by her own children attending Tobman. She also served as a Fund PLC Leader, who sharpened her leadership skills and inspired her to cultivate school leaders’ abilities in a formal capacity as Network Chief.

In her new role, Mira is leading initiatives to develop her network’s principals. This includes facilitating book studies on leadership development, hosting monthly meetings around equitable student outcomes, leveraging data for decision-making, enhancing the student experience, and building safe, inclusive communities.

In 2023-24, Mira is participating in professional development alongside her fellow Network Chiefs led by The Fund and UWCEL. Through tailored coaching, she enthusiastically looks forward to adopting a “through line” approach to leading, ensuring alignment and impact from the network to the student level.
Beverly Jordan

In 2021, Dr. Beverly Jordan returned to Jensen Miller Scholastic Academy — where she served as a teacher, reading specialist, and assistant principal — to lead as principal. With 30 years in education and as a proud CPS alumna from Chicago’s West Side, Beverly credits encouragement from her aunt — a fellow educator whom she taught alongside early in her career — as well as several other principal mentors with shaping her path.

Throughout her career, Beverly supported some of Chicago’s students furthest from opportunity as she learned to navigate systemic barriers, limited resources, and administrative complexities head-on. Before her position at Jensen, Beverly led Nathaniel Pope Elementary School and transformed it from a Level Three school into an award-winning campus. She firmly believes that students’ futures aren’t defined by their beginnings, reinforcing that “success is attainable.”

In 2023-24, Beverly is participating in The Fund’s Malott Educator Fellowship. She views it as an opportunity to learn and to share her experience leading schools through complex challenges. Through the fellowship, she hopes to be a thought partner for other principals and to help build a supportive network where school leaders share their experiences and effective strategies to encourage and empower one another.

The Reimagining With Community Toolkit pilot is a collaborative effort between The Fund, Civic Group, and CPS’ Department of Family and Community Engagement. Through this pilot, high school educator teams use a design toolkit to enhance community partnerships and organize in-person forums to meaningfully engage stakeholders.

Participating high schools take part in a yearlong process to learn and apply the toolkit’s nine modules, ranging from building trust and healing within the community to delivering recommendations to CPS’ Central Office. School leaders select three to five staff members to participate in the two full-day professional development sessions, five coaching sessions, and optional one-on-one calls.

The Malott Educator Fellowship is a two-year leadership-development program operated in partnership with the University of Illinois Chicago’s Center for Urban Education Leadership and Wise Leadership. The program creates a learning community that is specifically designed to support the unique needs of CPS Priority School Leaders.

The fellowship combines monthly full-day learning labs with high-dose, individualized leadership coaching. During learning labs, fellows engage in small-group PLCs that collectively surface, learn about, and work to address pressing challenges within Priority Schools.

The fellowship aims to positively impact principal self-efficacy, practice, and retention to ensure that Priority School principals thrive in their school leadership positions. These impacts are expected to cultivate stronger organizational and student learning outcomes in schools led by Malott Fellows.

The program will also contribute to valuable research around supporting the diverse needs associated with leading through pandemic recovery in Priority Schools.
Summer Design Program

- 15 Principal- or Aspiring Principal-Led Teams
- Launched in 2013

The Summer Design Program (SDP) helps school teams use design thinking to develop solutions that prioritize student needs and tackle pressing challenges that specific student groups face. Through a partnership between The Fund and Leadership-Design, participants engage in Design Studios — interactive two-day workshops that equip teams with skills in empathy interviews, design thinking-based problem-solving, and creating strategies to accelerate learning.

In 2022-23, we piloted coaching for select schools to kickstart their SDP projects. Following its success, this approach evolved into yearlong, tailored support. We partnered with Dr. Struggleish, Fulcrum Education Solutions, and Leadership Edge to provide individual coaching and group learning to ensure SDP initiatives are effectively implemented, supported, and sustained.

To measure impact and to better understand how participating teams are evolving and developing their leadership skills, we closely monitor targeted student outcomes associated with each project, as well as the Essentials of Effective Leaders scores.

Additionally, The Fund organizes an annual Design Challenge competition to promote innovative thinking, celebrate exceptional design solutions, and encourage healthy competition among participants. For the first time, our 2024 Design Challenge will be open to all CPS schools, broadening the scope for innovative contributions and participation.

Social Justice High School

302 Students

- 37.1% English Language Learners
- 14.6% Diverse Learners
- 89.4% Economically Disadvantaged

- 80.1% Latino/a
- 18.9% Black
- 0.7% White
- 0.3% Asian

Omar Chilous

Since 2018, Omar Chilous has served as principal of Social Justice High School (SJH), located on the Little Village Lawndale High School campus — a hub of four schools with a strong tradition of community activism and a commitment to equity. Omar is guided by the belief that schools should actively serve their communities.

In 2022-23, SJH saw a significant increase in newcomer students from Latin America, growing the Transitional Bilingual Program to represent 90% of the school. However, language barriers and limitations imposed by programmatic structures led to increased isolation and disengagement for students. Empathy interviews revealed students were facing difficulties in starting and successfully transitioning to their new lives in Chicago.

As part of SDP, teacher leaders Amy Levington and Megan Montalvo planned, launched, and facilitated an immersive summer program — Puente (Bridges) — focused on engaging newcomer students in experiential learning, field trips, and team-building activities, aiming to build connections and create community. Upholding the tenets of diverse leadership, Omar empowered them to co-design and implement systems of support with their students. So far, Ms. Levington’s and Ms. Montalvo’s program has helped foster better relationships between newcomer and English language learner students, while enriching their language development.

SJH was awarded the $10,000 grand prize at The Fund’s 2023 Design Challenge. Their future vision includes a culturally responsive curriculum for South Lawndale’s newest students, providing holistic support that addresses students’ basic needs.
Ernest Williams

Ernest Williams leads Ellington Elementary in Austin. Challenges during his middle school years shaped his leadership journey. Caring mentors recognized his potential and gave him a voice, inspiring him to champion youth throughout his career.

Ernest pursued education with a concentration in computer science at DePaul University before becoming a classroom teacher at Lane Technical High School and quickly rising to assistant principal at George Rogers Clark Elementary. Although opportunities arose in other cities, his commitment to Chicago students kept him local and brought him to Ellington in 2019.

Shaped by his personal experiences and academic research on the school-to-prison pipeline, Ernest’s leadership approach is anchored in equity. He believes it is vital to bridge gaps between leaders, particularly Latino and Black male principals. Ernest emphasizes collaborative problem-solving, saying that “collectively, we can address some of these issues that we’re facing, especially issues of equity.”

In 2023–24, Ernest leads the Chicago Male Leaders of Color Learning Collaborative, a PLC aimed at nurturing growth among male school leaders of color. By creating a space where these leaders can be their authentic selves and develop an courageous, transformative leaders, Ernest seeks to inspire and equip his PLC participants with fresh ideas and strategies to advance student learning in various contexts. Through his mentorship, Ernest hopes to cultivate a generation of leaders deeply attuned and committed to equity in their school communities.

Edward K. “Duke” Ellington Elementary

403 Students

3.2% English Language Learners
19.5% Diverse Learners
72.2% Economically Disadvantaged

Spotlight

Professional Learning Communities

- 171 Unique School Leaders
- 29 PLC Leaders
- Launched in 2016

Led by the city’s top educational leaders, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are peer study groups composed of eight to ten current and aspiring principals.

In 2023–24, we are facilitating two types of PLCs: yearlong PLCs and semester PLCs. In both types of PLCs, school leaders build their own networks, gain exposure to new ideas, and learn to implement new solutions in their own school contexts. We assess impact via the ESSential and principal satisfaction on our annual Principal Engagement Survey.

Additionally, PLC Leaders enhance their skills through a Community of Practice facilitated by Lead Learning from MSp College at Northeastern University. Four sessions focus on their PLC’s vision, progress monitoring, data collection, and year-end reflections, which ultimately lead to better experiences for their PLC participants.

Yearlong PLCs

Fourteen yearlong PLCs are serving 98 participants via eight 90-minute sessions. An expert principal leads each PLC and creates a curriculum to facilitate sessions on student-centered instructional approaches, school management, community partnerships, differentiated instruction, leveraging student data assessments, and more. To incentivize attendance and maximize the PLCs’ impact, yearlong PLC participants with an 80% attendance rate can apply for up to $5,000 to attend or present at educational conferences.

Semester PLCs

Designed as a flexible alternative to our yearlong PLCs, our fall and spring semester PLCs accommodate principals and assistant principals seeking professional development with a reduced time commitment.

In fall 2023, we are offering 11 semester PLCs serving up to 94 participants, structured into four or five sessions lasting 90 minutes each. To ensure high-quality engagement, participants are limited to enrolling in only one semester PLC per term but can explore different topics in the subsequent term. Certain PLCs enable participants to earn Illinois Administrator Academy (IAA) credits, which helps to fulfill annual certification requirements.

Aspiring Principal PLCs

Since 2019, our Aspiring Principal PLCs have developed assistant principals and emerging leaders using our successful PLC framework. These PLCs pair assistant principals with experienced principals who mentor them through a curriculum designed to prepare them for the principal role, should they choose to pursue it.

In 2023–24, The Fund is launching two PLCs serving 13 participants aimed at enhancing the team-building, critical conversation, and change management skills of aspiring principals. These sessions equip participants with the leadership tools and understanding needed to make a difference in their current schools and beyond, preparing them for success in principal positions.
Masterclass Learning Series
- 24 Principals | 51 Aspiring Principals |
- 6 Masterclass Leaders
- Launched in 2022

Led by experienced PLC leaders, our Masterclass Learning Series is now in its second year and serves principals and assistant principals new to Fund programming. The series offers comprehensive half-day sessions on budgeting, equitable grading, entry planning, and well-being in a flexible format. In 2023-24, we are offering six Masterclasses. Upon completion, participants gain access to specialized resources on The Fund’s website and to one-on-one coaching sessions to put their learning into practice. Like PLCs, select Masterclass sessions allow participants to earn IAA credits.

Educator Advisory Committee
- 21 Principals | 14 Assistant Principals
- Launched in 2013

The Fund’s Educator Advisory Committee (EAC) is a yearlong initiative that unites over 30 school leaders monthly to provide feedback on The Fund’s work. The program aims to shape The Fund’s policy agenda, generate recommendations on programming, and facilitate connections with other leaders across the city. The 2023-24 EAC also specifically focuses on co-creating the criteria, design, and implementation of awards for school leaders.

Each of the eight sessions is 90 minutes long and held virtually or in person at The Fund’s office or a school, in appreciation of their commitment, participating leaders receive a stipend.

Leadership Bridge
- 17 Aspiring Principals
- Launched in 2019

Leadership Bridge, in facilitated partnership with New Leaders, the University of Illinois Chicago, and Accelerate Institute, seeks to develop a robust, high-quality, and diverse pipeline of school leaders in Chicago. The program provides practical, on-the-job professional development and expert coaching to equip aspiring principals with the skills needed to secure CPS principal positions within three years.

Leadership Bridge guides principal and AP pairs through reflection, self-assessment, collaboration, and comprehensive planning as they prepare for the principaship and develop succession plans. It ensures smooth transitions and maintains academic and cultural consistency in schools, as measured by tools like the SEssentials.

Local School Council Work
Local School Councils (LSCs) are critical levers for supporting principals. LSCs appoint and evaluate principals and approve school budgets and strategic plans. We support LSC members in navigating these important responsibilities.

As in previous years, we are offering four bilingual working sessions and focus groups for LSC members to connect, share ideas, and learn from one another. In 2023-24, we are expanding our support through a partnership with the CPS Office of Equity, Office of Local School Council Relations, and Department of Principal Quality to help deploy a citywide survey and develop an LSC-focused report.

Javier Arriola-Lopez
During his 17-year tenure as principal of Carson Elementary, Javier Arriola-Lopez has been a driving force in bilingual education, advocating for dual-language programs and fostering an inclusive environment for Spanish-speaking families. His leadership played a key role in establishing Carson as a front-runner in adopting dual language within the district.

Recognizing the crucial role of family involvement, Javier introduced bilingual reading groups eight years ago to bolster biliiteracy and sustain community engagement beyond students’ time at Carson. These initiatives have evolved into robust programs, including parent-led book clubs and monthly family nights, rallying the broader community to advance student language and learning development.

In 2023-24, Javier is co-leading the Dual-Language Leaders in Action PCL with Principal Louise Jimenez of Ruben Salazar Bilingual Center. He is leveraging his years of experience to support and mentor school leaders new to dual-language programs. Building on the foundation laid by Dr. Olomia Bahena — who is now the CPS Deputy Chief of Language and Cultural Education — Javier and Louise are creating space for peer learning and the sharing of best practices, all with one goal: to strengthen dual-language programs and support English language learners across the city.

Additionally, PLC participants will develop formal recommendations to expand the adoption of dual-language programs in CPS.
Conclusion

As Chicago’s school leaders continue to accelerate student learning and build school capacity, we are proud to support them through our array of programs and partnerships. We encourage practice change through individual coaching and leveraging the insights of Chicago’s top principals.

We plan to track the ultimate success of these programs through participant satisfaction, improvements in capacity as indicated by the SEssentials, and new learnings.

We are especially excited about our four new pilot programs supporting school leadership at all levels: aspiring leaders, current principals, and principal supervisors. The strength of our approach lies in its adaptability. We introduce new pilots to help us identify innovative practices that measurably support leaders and their schools, and we sunset programs when necessary.

Looking ahead, we will continue to refine and expand our initiatives, reinforcing our commitment to being a catalyst for strong school leadership in Chicago and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Fund’s board members, leaders, and partners for their ongoing support and guidance. We are grateful to the many individuals, organizations, and schools that have contributed to this initiative.

We would like to express our appreciation to our partners at CPS and, most importantly, extend our gratitude to the school leaders who shared their valuable insights with us for this report.
Cultivating Leadership

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Learn more about The Fund and the innovative educators in our network.

TheFundChicago.org

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