

The Transformation of Eight Chicago K-8 Schools

A neighborhood network of eight failed Chicago Public Schools (CPS) K-8 transformed their state scores and climate in one to three years. Transformation and Turnaround are defined as a school improving more than four times faster per year than in the average of at least three prior years. The CPS did not require that any of the staff be removed before our work started, as the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) requires, at least the principal.

Six schools turned around within two years, and two in the third as measured by the Composite Score, which includes the reading, math and science scores from the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

SLI started with training staff in May 2006. Instruction in the schools started in September.

The line graph compares the SLI schools with the CPS citywide average for the 473 schools, the black line. Note that the SLI schools start well below the Citywide Average and then exceed it. Cather was the most improved school in the City out of 473 schools. Faraday was did very well too. In the second year, Cardenas was the most improved. Cather, Faraday and Finkl jump-started their improvement in their first year. Cardenas jump-started their results in their second year. Finkl had over 200 low performing students transfer in and brought down their scores.

The jump-start is critical for facilitating the turnaround in the climate as many of the stakeholders said to each other, as early as January and based on the data from the weekly formative assessments, "We have turned around!" These statements were based on the rapid improvement of the students on assessments which are tied to the Illinois Standards plus the culture change that improved collaboration, respect and better communication.

SLI, the external partner, completed their work in May, 2010. The first three K-8 schools, including Cather and Faraday, turned about their climate and state scores in 2007. A fourth school, Cardenas, turned around their climate and scores in 2008.