

Douglas Taylor Elementary School  
Rooted in Community Chicago Public School  
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	By the numbers:
Collaborative Leadership	730 students
Personalization	87% Hispanic
Parent Leadership	10% African American
Community Partnerships	3% White
Teacher Empowerment	97.1% Free Reduced
	20% Mobility Rate
Executive Summary	

Inspiring students to become teachers and community leaders is the goal of Douglas Taylor Elementary School. A feeling of continuity and connection are important to the school which opened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Housed in a beautiful old school building on Chicago's South East Side. Douglas Taylor School serves students Pre-K – 8. To maintain the feeling and the benefits of the middle school model, the middle school students take classes in an annex outside the main building. Despite this separation, the students are surrounded by something that feels greater than themselves- an institution that has been part of the community since 1878, when real estate entrepreneur Douglas S. Taylor donated \$2,000.00 to begin the school. The main hallway is lined with graduation photographs that document migrations: Germans, Swedes, Italians, and now Hispanics and African Americans. a more contemporary account of the importance of the school to the community and vice versa can be told by seven current staff members who were students at Taylor. The school was and remains a lighthouse in the community – one they wish to support and protect.

Taylor School's mission is to offer an intensive and rigorous literature and writing Program aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards. In addition, All Taylor Students will become confident and capable readers who will be able to write well for a variety of purposes. Taylor School has earned both state and national recognition as a high performing school including the Illinois Honor Roll Spotlight Award by the Illinois State Board of Education and a 2009 Met-Life Break Through School Award by the National Association of Middle School and Secondary Principals Association.

### Demographic Profile

The Chicago Public Schools is the third largest school district in the United States. Chicago Public Schools is the largest school district in Illinois with 589 elementary schools. Taylor School is an urban high poverty school located on the South East Side of the city of Chicago in the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward.

## Program Description

Taylor School has promoted academic rigor by building a common vision that all students can achieve outstanding academic excellence in the core areas of instruction: reading, mathematics, science, and social studies in a school with economic challenges of high poverty 97.1% free and reduced lunch by following the breaking ranks framework.

The application of the breaking ranks framework of collaborative leadership and professional learning communities, personalization, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment has accelerated Taylor School's standardized test scores on the I.S.A.T. Illinois Standards Assessment Test from 55.6% meets/exceeds in 2005 to 74% meets/exceeds on 2010 I.S.A.T. The school wide attendance has also increased from 94.7 % in 2005 to close to 96% in 2010.

### Collaborative Leadership Professional Learning Communities:

The Taylor School Instructional Leadership Team is composed of eight members. The teachers represent both general education and special education at primary, intermediate, middle school and the counselor case manager and administrators. The Taylor Instructional Leadership Team help articulate the mission and create an environment that encourages the maximum intellectual, emotional, physical, and social growth each individual student to fullest extent possible.

Collaborative Leadership is demonstrated by the school wide vertical committees academic learning committee and school wide comprehensive planning committees. The academic learning committees are in the core subject areas: reading language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and bilingual academic committee.

The school wide comprehensive planning committees: parent involvement, attendance, discipline, grant writing, awards, and professional development. These are the structures that are in place to ensure that all staff members can give input and have their voice heard. Each teacher chooses two committees to serve on for the school year. The process is that the committees meet every other week and generate a committee report. The committee report discusses the minutes of the meeting and action items. The action items are submitted in the committee report to the principal for feedback. The principal reviews the committee report with written comments. The committee report is then copied and sent back to committee members. The committee report is then shared with the faculty.

The Taylor Teachers develop professional learning communities in horizontal weekly grade level meetings by sharing best instructional practices, reviewing student data, and student work samples. The staff also collaborate with grade level articulation in the primary, intermediate and middle school. For example, middle school sixth, seventh, and eighth grade staff collaborate on developing transitions from eighth grade to ninth grade. The research has shown that that the middle school transition is crucial at the sixth to eighth grade to prepare for success in high school. For example, if a student has poor attendance, behavior issues, and poor academic

performance in sixth grade the student has a 10% to 20% chance to graduate from high school ( N.A.S.S.P. 2011).

The systems that are in place at Taylor School to ensure a smooth transition from eighth to ninth grade: departmentalized schedule, career options education program, high school investigation day, and the data from the school improvement plan which track Taylor Elementary School Freshmen on Track to Graduate from High School. The departmentalized schedule sixth, seventh, and eighth grade follows the middle school model. All Taylor Students in the sixth through eighth grade receive core instruction in reading language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. This structure allows Taylor Students to experience the high school expectations at the elementary middle school level. The career options education program exposes Taylor Students to a variety of career options and helps students understand the educational requirements to meet the career. In addition, the program helps students set individual goals. The Taylor Students receive 40 minutes of career options instruction twice a week by the counselor case manager. The counselor brings in guest speakers and role models from all careers. Taylor School has a great partnership with the East Side Chamber of Commerce. These businessmen and business women volunteer their time to mentor and coach Taylor Students. This partnership leads to internships for Taylor Students. High School Investigation is a partnership with the local high school in which all Taylor eighth grade students board a bus to the local high school. The counselor, administrator, and parents accompany the eighth graders to the local high school to complete a scavenger hunt and meet the high school staff. The development of these systems has improved the data on school outcomes on Freshmen on Track to Graduate from High School from 43.50 % in 2007 – 2008 to 81.40 % in 2009-2010. Taylor School is setting new goals with the power of collaborative leadership of moving the target of Freshmen on Target Graduate to 100%. Taylor School is also increasing the number of eighth grade students who get accepted into Chicago's Select Enrollment High Schools from three in 2007-2008 to six in 2009-2010.

#### Personalization

The second component of the breaking ranks framework is personalization. Personalization is the connection students feel toward classmates, teachers, and the school. The process of building personal connections between students and others in a school or between students and their learning becomes difficult when poor discipline is an issue. School leaders recognized that students' behavior had become an issue at Taylor. The current discipline system was not meeting the needs of students, staff, or the school. The staff rejected the well worn path of using punitive measures that remove students from classrooms and prevent teachers from teaching. The staff implemented a positive discipline plan and school wide calm classroom system. During the first three days of school Taylor Students learn about the behavior expectations matrix and calm classroom expectations the plans emphasis: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be at Your Best.. At the heart of the initiative are teacher created, clear, consistent discipline plans that establish class rules and consequences along with incentives for positive behavior. The data shows a reduction in total student misconducts from 81 in 2007 - 2008 to 41 total misconducts in 2009 – 2010.

Taylor School offers robust and innovative in school and after school programs to address individual student needs through partnerships and grants. These include:

After School Academic Programs which offer remediation and enrichment to students four days a week from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Getting us Ready For Life ( G.U.R.L. ) a fifteen week program for seventh grade girls that teaches self esteem, conflict resolution, career education, and financial planning in partnership with Chicago Communities in Schools.

All Stars Program: a thirteen week research based interactive program for seventh grade boys that focuses on leadership, personal commitment, and community.\

The Reading 180 Program: a research based program to help improve literacy utilizing the best practices of differentiated instruction, guided reading, technology, to develop students vocabulary and reading comprehension.

The Power to Change: a twelve week program in which selected students from grades five through eight to meet in a peer to peer setting to learn impulse control and anger management strategies.

A middle school peer mentoring program: the eighth grade students work with third grade students to improve their academic performance a potential boon to mentors and protégés. These programs are reminders of how little things can make a big difference in changing the culture of Taylor School which leads to academic success.

#### Personalization English Language Learners

This principle also applies to English Language Learners. There are often times when new students enter Taylor School from other countries where the academic instruction is not at the same standard as the United States. From the time students enter Taylor School all of the staff work together to make connections with students and their families. At Taylor we create a safe and nurturing environment where E.L.L. students can feel accepted and have their culture validated through out the school year. Students are assigned projects which give them an opportunity to learn and grow by using both their Spanish and English skills in all content areas including the arts. The school wide celebration of Hispanic Heritage, multi-cultural history projects done by E.L.L. students, and E.L.L. students reading classics in high interest graphic novels. This format helps encourage students that have difficulty with English Fluency to read while exposing them to literacy classics. The parents and families are also supported by the parent groups in the school the B.A.C. Bilingual Advisory Committee. This committee is composed of twenty parents advise the principal on the needs of the bilingual children and their parents at Taylor School. Taylor School has a partnership with Olive Harvey College which offers E.S.L. English as a Second Language classes for parents on site at Taylor School. Taylor School has been awarded a grant to develop an intensive reading literacy program to meet the needs of bilingual first and second grade students to help prepare them for state testing.

#### Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The third component of the breaking ranks framework is high quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment. One of the reasons that Taylor School continues to increase in academic achievement is the alignment of effective teaching practices and continuity from the kindergarten through the eighth grade. The reading curriculum kindergarten through the eighth grade is S.C.R.M.A. Supported Core Material Adoption Program. This aligned reading program emphasizes best instructional practices in literacy read aloud, guided reading, and differentiated instruction along with R.T.I. response to intervention with Tier 1 and Tier 2 assessments. There is a school wide focus on building instructional capacity in literacy. The staff spends time on data analysis. Grade level and individual plans are developed for students and overall school. Each teacher receives a data chart with student level reports and a data binder to track student progress. The staff has been trained through professional development on data driven decision making to drive instructional decisions. This allows the staff to focus their instruction on very specific student weaknesses and strengths and seek out resources to improve student achievement.

The resources or insights may come from as close as the classroom next door or a more formal professional development. The “ next door “ insights are gathered through peer walk through the S.T.A.R.S. Programs School Teams Achieving Results for Students. Teachers can sign up to host staff meetings in their classrooms to share best instructional practices on teaching and learning. Staff members who attend the meetings take a “ My Best Ideas Sheet “ into other teachers classrooms to record best ideas and practices.

The data sources include consistency and alignment of teacher authentic assessment from kindergarten through the eighth grade. D.I.B.E.L.S, Scan Tron Fall, Winter, and Spring Assessments of standard scores and percentile rankings, criterion referenced tests, portfolios, analysis of students strengths and weaknesses from the I.S.A.T. Illinois Standard Assessment Test, on going student assessments every five progress reports and ten week report cards. All these assessments are used by the Taylor Staff to promote exceptional student performance.

### Leadership

Taylor Staff members are always searching for ways to increase academic rigor especially in the areas of literacy and math. Taylor School increased the amount of vocabulary development strategies, guided reading, differentiated instruction, and read aloud strategies across grade levels to align the schools mission: All Taylor Students will become confident, capable readers, who will read for pleasure and knowledge for the rest of their lives. Taylor School earned a grant to offer high school algebra to eighth grade students if they meet a certain criteria and sign a contract agreeing to come to school from 7:15 a.m. to 8:15 a.m. every day and complete extra homework. As part of the algebra grant the Taylor eighth grade math teacher was able to receive summer training and coaching from a professor from the University of Chicago. The coach observes the eighth grade algebra teachers classroom every two weeks and identifies what is currently working and what needs improvement. In addition, each month the five other grant recipients get together and share strategies and difficulties with various teaching concepts. All five teachers in the grant use the same textbooks get together monthly. At these meetings the teachers gain a better understanding of the mathematics concepts themselves; so that they can better teach their students.

### Relationships and Parent/Community Involvement

Taylor staff members reach out to the community through such events as Family Math Night, Family Literacy Night, and Taylor Family Fun Fair each event brings out over five hundred students, parents, staff, community members, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Alderman John Pope. The East Side Chamber of Commerce helps support the school by advertising their businesses in the Taylor Assignment Notebook. The sponsorship of the ads helps reduce the overall cost of the assignment notebook. The East Side Chamber of Commerce offer mentoring and internship programs to Taylor School. The parents are also highly involved at Taylor School. The Taylor Parent Patrol is a unique group of thirty-five parents who help ensure the safety and well being of the seven hundred and thirty students at arrival and dismissal. In May 2008 Mayor Richard M. Daley recognized the Taylor Parent Patrol at his safety luncheon as one of the best parent patrols in the Chicago Public Schools. In addition, the Taylor Parent Patrol was asked to be part of a parent focus group sponsored by the United States Department of Education. During the day the Taylor Parent Patrol also provide additional help as greeters in the main entrance of the school.

Taylor School has also created systems to involve parents through the N.C.L.B. No Child Left Behind Parent Committee and the Bilingual Advisory Committee, both of which advise the principal by sharing community concerns. All communication is distributed in both English and Spanish to reach as many parents as possible. Taylor School offers computer classes on site for parents to teach them technology. Parents commend Taylor School for its structure and clear rules and they appreciate the school for its discipline and emphasis on safety. The parents also commend the teachers for their willingness to work with students and listen to parents concerns. A supportive caring environment created at the school coupled with a cooperative home-school community link is the formula for student success and life long learning.

- a. 730 students
- b. 70% reading on grade level
- c. 74% Meet/Exceed I.S.A.T.
- d. 97% minority
- e. 18% students with disabilities
- f. 97.1% free and reduced
- g. 20 % ELL

Illinois Honor Roll Spotlight School 2006, 2007

Illinois Principals Association

Featured in A.S.A. 2009 Seattle Summit Break Through School Model

Featured in N.M.S.A. 2010 Fall Convention Break Through Schools

Chicago Consortium on School Research My Voice My Schools

Featured in N.A.S.S.P. Publication “Voices of Experience Perspectives from Successful Middle Level Leaders”

