

## The Project:

Over the 2023-2024 School Year, Chicago's six federal Head Start (HS) grant recipients and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) partnered to implement a pilot project where CPS itinerant special education teachers and related service providers delivered services to students in their HS classroom.

*"The benefit [of this pilot] is not having such young kids with high needs split their day and be bussed. I think that's amazing."*

*– Related Service Provider*

This change in special education service delivery:

- Reduced educational disruptions by eliminating the need for HS students to travel by bus midday to CPS locations
- Made critical services more accessible for students and families

## The Model:

Six HS sites were chosen to be a part of this pilot project. Students at those sites were eligible for the pilot if they:

- Had an Individualized Education Program with up to 275 minutes per week for early childhood special education services, excluding other related service minutes (e.g., speech pathology or social work), or
- Only received speech-related services

### Pilot Project Participants

Role	Count
CPS Itinerant Teachers	12
HS Lead & Assistant Teachers	21
Related Service Providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speech Language Pathologists</li><li>• Social Workers</li></ul>	13
Students	40

## The Evaluation:

This evaluation measured the process by which these changes in special education service delivery were made, the experiences of the individuals involved and gathered suggestions for project improvement efforts. These findings were collected through:

1. Surveys to HS and CPS staff and parents conducted at the beginning and end of the school year
2. Interviews and focus groups with HS and CPS staff conducted in the middle of the school year
3. Meeting notes, agendas and presentations

Link to the full project evaluation report can be [found here](#).

## Results:

### Positive Experiences:

- An increase in:
  - Children receiving their special education services in their HS classroom
  - Agreement on the importance of inclusion among CPS and HS staff
  - Agreement on the effectiveness of co-teaching for implementing inclusive practices
- HS and CPS teachers built strong relationships with one another and learned new skills throughout the year

*"Not only students benefit because they're receiving what they need, but I think that teachers are benefiting, and teachers appreciate the support and the feedback."*

*– CPS Teacher*

### Challenges Faced:

- Lack of set time for HS and CPS teachers to collaborate with one another
- Differences between HS and CPS:
  - Instructional approaches and classroom structure expectations
  - Mindsets regarding the effectiveness of this model, as well as confusion around the pilot model processes, roles and expectations
- Classroom behavior issues decreasing focus and group learning time
- Lack of set contact person or system for staff and parents, resulting in communication and administrative challenges
- Staffing shortages and turnover for both CPS and HS programs

### Suggestions for Improvement:

- Provide more detailed initial training on the pilot project model
- Increase professional development opportunities throughout the school year related to special education services, communication and collaboration
- Improve communication among all project staff, students and parents
- Continue to engage in discussions about plans for program expansion

## Conclusion:

The foundational work done in year one of the pilot project was key to establishing a model of community-based special education services in Chicago. With improvements in training and communication for year two, this early childhood education system improvement project has and will continue to positively impact the staff, families and children receiving these services.

Link to the full project evaluation report can be [found here](#).