

Subject Line: November News from CICS!

Letter from the CEO:



Dear CICS team,

We've started the school year strong, and each CICS team member has played a critical role in helping our organization grow to better support our students in their learning.

With the release of Illinois school report cards and SQRP ratings for CICS campuses last week, we've seen demonstrated progress in our work to close the achievement gap in our campuses and significant academic growth for our Hispanic students and English Language Learners. Our team has worked tirelessly to increase school ratings across the network, and I'm excited that three CICS campuses have received Level 1+ school designations, the highest achievable rating. Congratulations to CICS Bucktown, CICS Irving Park and CICS West

Belden! Also, congratulations to CICS Northtown Academy for earning a Level 1!

While these scores highlight some of the great advancements we've made, they also show us where we can continue to focus our efforts to elevate the entire CICS network. Our growth this year is progress toward our long-range strategic outcome for all CICS campuses to earn a Level 1 or 1+ SQRP rating year-over-year within the next three years. Our students deserve consistently high-quality education and we know that SQRP ratings, while not a perfect framework, are a meaningful measure of quality for families in Chicago.

Together, we will continue to fulfill our mission of reaching every child, every day!

Onward and Upward,

Elizabeth Shaw
CEO, Chicago International Charter Schools

Strategic Planning Update

Over the past few months, many of our stakeholders have confirmed that our vision, mission and core values of excellence, equity and innovation still resonate with what they believe is important to CICS as an organization and for our students. We've taken this input to heart and have launched a streamlined strategic planning process this fall with a commitment to a smart, focused plan. This month, we are re-engaging our key stakeholders - including parents/guardians, teachers, SMO and school leaders as well as staff - to provide valuable input on our path forward, including our key outcome for all CICS campuses to earn a Level 1/1+ SQRP rating consistently within the next few years. Consistently high-performing campuses as measured by SQRP is a necessary step toward actualizing our Vision of Excellence for students. Please submit your thoughts on our network-wide pursuit of Level 1/1+ rated schools on our path to ensuring our students graduate equipped for the 21st century via this [link](#).

Using Art to Explore Culture

For Norrisa Pearson, CICS Bucktown’s Music and Enrichment Mentor Teacher, Hispanic Heritage Month presented the perfect opportunity to unify the school community and celebrate its diversity through the lens of art. A professional performer and experienced music teacher, Pearson and other Bucktown educators integrated lessons on Hispanic heritage into their classes, teaching students in grades 5-8 about Latin history, dance, art, music and culture. These lessons culminated in a final celebration where students performed Bachata and presented about influential Hispanic individuals in both Spanish and English in front of Bucktown’s primary K-4 students.



“I’m passionate about integrating the arts into core subjects. If we were going to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, I knew it wouldn’t be enough to show a picture or to only dance. The culture is so much more than that. Why not celebrate it as such?”

With about 80% of Bucktown’s student population identifying as Hispanic, Pearson recognized the unique blend of cultures that exist within the community and challenged her students to consider what Hispanic Heritage Month meant to them as a school and as a family.

“It’s important for children to not only see themselves when they’re learning but to also learn about themselves,” said Pearson. “Cultural diversity is beautiful and learning about one another is also important for understanding, appreciating and respecting each other.”

Cultivating Global Leaders



Educational innovation is at the foundation of our organization. Micro-Labs support the development of revolutionary teaching models, allowing programs like the Global Leaders Initiative (GLI) at CICS Longwood to nurture diverse perspectives and cultivate global citizens.

Grounded in a dedication to helping students develop global competence, the GLI curriculum teaches students the mindsets essential for thriving in our modern, interconnected world. GLI utilizes a discussion-based model to encourage collaborative problem solving, and students learn in mixed grade classrooms where they are regularly exposed to content that is on and above their grade level.

Through this program, students gain the strong academic and social skills necessary for success in high school and beyond while developing a greater sense of self, global perspective and social responsibility. GLI also prepares students for admittance to high-quality high schools that meet their academic and social needs. Beyond preparing students academically and socially, GLI also fosters a close-knit, supportive community.

“Global Leaders Initiative is an experience like no other,” said Nicholas, a GLI 7th grader. “When we walk in the door, it just feels like a family. The teachers always push us to be our best selves and help us understand the work.”

Apply for the CICS Education Entrepreneur Fellowship!

We are still accepting applications for our Education Entrepreneur Fellowship! This unique program is designed to help innovative education leaders develop and launch new approaches to supporting Chicago students at CICS campuses. Do you or someone you know have a great idea to bring into the classroom? Visit the [Education Entrepreneur Fellowship](#) page or contact Paul Boye at pboye@chicagointl.org to learn more. **Applicants are encouraged to [apply](#) no later than November 15.**

Inspiring Growth and Innovation



We are dedicated to ensuring CICS staff members have the tools they need to make the biggest impact possible in the lives of their students. That's why we facilitate opportunities for educators to share effective teaching strategies and best practices with each other. Central to this work are Inspiration Visits, experiences that help education leaders break the mold of traditional teaching practices and unlock their imaginations about what is possible inside the classroom. With past visits centered around student identity affirmation, personalized learning, restorative justice practices and more, these events inspire educators to implement new strategies and serve as a catalyst for growth.

Last month, participants visited Barbara A. Sizemore Academy, an African-centered charter school located in the Englewood community that serves K-8 students. Educators at Barbara Sizemore shared strategies for emphasizing identity affirmation in the classroom and utilizing culture as a means of centering students.

Educators leave with powerful observations and takeaways, with one Barbara Sizemore participant noting, "Identity affirmation occurs when adults empower students' sense of belonging. The culturally responsive curriculum is student-centered and uses their relative access points to foster learning."



Check out our [Innovation Visits](#) page to learn more about past visits and upcoming opportunities.

CICS Leadership Office Hours

Last month, we introduced CICS Leadership Office Hours to connect with faculty and staff from throughout our network. These meetings have provided valuable insight into the work our incredible team members are doing with our students and allowed us to understand how we can best support these efforts. CICS CEO Elizabeth Shaw and other members of the leadership team will continue to hold office hours three times each month at various campuses. We encourage you to join us to share your perspective on how we can elevate our organization together. Contact your School Director to learn the date and time of office hours at your school.