



BPI PROGRAM OVERVIEW

PUBLIC EDUCATION INITIATIVE

BPI's focus on education reform began in the early 1990s as an effort to improve the quality of public education for low-income children of color throughout the City of Chicago. As a result, BPI became an early and ardent proponent for the creation of small schools as places where such students could “beat the odds.” Subsequent BPI efforts addressed challenges faced by small and innovative schools. This early work indubitably raised the bar for public expectations of schools in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system, and helped ignite the emerging charter movement, which drew on educators’ experiences and lessons learned from small schools.

However, as accountability for CPS schools escalated dramatically – evidenced by 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation, successively more stringent CPS probation policies, school closings, and most recently a focus on rigorous performance management – CPS lacks systemic, scalable models to build the internal organization and capacity of traditional schools to meet the increased expectations for student achievement.

In response, during 2008-09, BPI initiated the Partnership for Instructional Leadership in association with CPS Area 4 (Logan Square/Hermosa) and a cohort of seven Area 4 neighborhood elementary schools, as a demonstration of such a systemic, scalable model for whole school improvement. The Partnership applied an approach developed by Targeted Leadership Consulting that had been used successfully by schools in Boston, New Jersey, and Chula Vista, CA (the largest and now the best performing elementary school district in California).

Current Initiatives:

Partnership for Instructional Leadership. The Partnership’s framework links together proven and familiar school improvement components into a well-paced, user-friendly school-wide effort organized around addressing a “Targeted Instructional Area” (e.g. reading comprehension, writing) in 4-8 week “Cycles of Professional Learning”. Each school organizes a representative Instructional Leadership Team of teachers and administrators; establishes student

achievement goals, including multiple ways of measuring student progress; and employs proven instructional practices that are utilized for every student across the school.

BPI provides leadership, project management, and coaching support to the Partnership. Targeted Leadership Consulting provides the framework, curriculum and training for each school's Instructional Leadership team, BPI coaches, and CPS Area staff.

Expected outcomes of this three-year phased project are:

- Significantly increased student learning in each school's targeted instructional area
- Full implementation of the BPI/TLC "framework" components, thus building each school's capacity for rigorous, evidence-based professional collaboration and learning
- Institutionalization of the "framework" within the schools by Year Three so that the work is largely self-sustaining within the schools
- Expansion of the Partnership model to additional cohorts of schools either within or outside Area 4

School Funding Litigation. In March 2010 BPI and its pro bono co-counsel, Sidley Austin, filed a lawsuit in state court challenging the constitutionality of the Illinois school funding system on the ground that it violates the equal protection clause of the Illinois Constitution. BPI contends that under the Illinois funding system, property owners in property-poor school districts are effectively forced to pay higher school property tax rates than property owners in property-rich districts. This, in our view, is a violation of what the state Constitution guarantees every citizen: equal protection under the law. The case is currently being heard by the Circuit Court of Sangamon County in Springfield, the seat of Illinois State government.

Schools in CHA Transformation Plan Communities. BPI's Public Housing and Education staff have begun a joint effort to examine what might be done to improve the educational options of families living in the Housing Authority's Transformation Plan communities. We are launching this exploration by collecting key school and community data for a number of mixed-income and traditional public housing developments.

Practice-Based Inquiry School (PBI) Visits. BPI has successfully piloted the use of PBI School Visits at 12 Chicago schools. PBI visits are a rigorous, peer-based, whole-school assessment tool that uses a team of experienced local educators as members of the evaluation team. (PBI has been used for 10 years in the Rhode Island public school system.) Continued PBI work will be in partnership with the University of Chicago's Network for College Success.

Chicago Schools Policy Luncheon Series. For more than a decade, BPI has co-sponsored an annual Chicago Schools Policy Luncheon Series, which provides a forum for policymakers, educators, the business community and advocates to grapple with cutting edge, challenging education reform issues of the day.

Milestones:

2010 BPI and the Chicago law firm of Sidley Austin LLP , file a lawsuit on March 24, 2010 challenging the constitutionality of the State of Illinois' school funding system.

2009 BPI files EFAB lawsuit, prompting newly-installed Governor Quinn to appoint new EFAB members. BPI begins the second year of the Partnership for Instructional Leadership; the 12th PBI Visit is conducted at Kenwood Academy High School.

2008 BPI launches a new Partnership for Instructional Leadership program together with seven traditional schools and CPS' Area 4, as an outgrowth of its Chicago Schools Alliance schools. A PBI Visit is conducted at CPS' first "turn-around" school, Harper High School.

2005 BPI and the Alliance successfully pilot the first two PBI Visits in Chicago, at Perspectives Charter School and Al Raby High School for Community and the Environment.

2003 BPI releases *Voices from the Field: Small Schools, Next Steps*, based on in-depth interviews with small schools educators, containing a set of recommended strategies for strengthening and supporting small schools in Chicago.

2000 With BPI leadership, Young Women's Leadership Charter School of Chicago opens its doors, among the first in a new wave of Chicago charter schools.

1995-96 CPS issues a Request for Proposals to form small schools. Nineteen new small schools are established, largely as an outgrowth of BPI's advocacy and leadership.

Current BPI Staffing:

Kim Zalent, Director

Anoa Changa, Polikoff-Gautreaux Fellow

Hannah Birnbaum, Aizik Wolf Human Rights Fellow