

Good morning, my name is Elizabeth Delaney Purvis. I am proud and honored to be here today to speak with you about the role of charter schools in public education. For the last 8 years, I have served as the executive director of the Chicago International Charter School. CICS is a network of 15 charter school campuses serving 8,800 students from kindergarten through 12th grade in Chicago and Rockford, Illinois.

Prior to joining CICS I was a special education teacher in Montgomery County, MD; an early interventionist in Nashville, TN; and after receiving my doctoral degree in special education at Vanderbilt University, I served for 5 years as an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The mission of Chicago International Charter School is, to provide, through innovation and choice, an attractive and rigorous college-preparatory education that meets the needs of today's students. 86% of CICS students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 95% are African American or Latino, and 6 of the 14 Chicago Campuses are located in the 10 highest violent crime neighborhoods in Chicago. Our 15th school is located in Rockford, IL which was recently ranked by the FBI as the 9th most violent city in America. CICS Patriots is in the midtown neighborhood, the area of Rockford with the most concentrated poverty and the highest rate of unemployment.

The teachers and staff across the CICS network are working diligently to achieve the mission of CICS. During the 2009-2010 school year, the average student at a CICS campus that was opened for three or more years was performing at or above the national average in reading and math according to the NWEA Measure of Academic Progress. The 4-year graduation rate was 84% with over 90% of the graduates being accepted into college.

As you know, charter schools are public schools of choice. Although they are freed from much of the bureaucracy that prevails traditional schools, charter schools must:

- Employ certified or highly qualified teachers
- Meet state learning standards and assess students according to state requirements
- Educate children with disabilities according to IDEA
- If a Title I School, meet all federal eligibility criteria
- Participate in a renewal process on a regular basis, as determined by the local authorizer. This review process requires an in-depth analysis of student performance, financial stability, and compliance with local, state, and federal regulations.

I strongly believe that because they are **part of the public schools system**, charter schools represent change within the public domain not change from "outsiders". Charter schools are

not the **only** answer to school reform, but represent one way that school districts and state agencies can efficiently and affordably improve and increase educational options for families.

According to Illinois State law, initial enrollment in charter schools occurs by "blind" lottery. In addition to the 8,800 served by Chicago International this school year, another 2000 remained on the waiting list during the 2010-2011 school year. The families that CICS serves, much like most charter schools nationwide, have few resources to make other educational choices for their children. In a city like Chicago, where -- according to the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago -- an elementary aged male students who is African-American or Hispanic has less than a 10% chance of graduating from college, having choices is critical. Parents know that although the quality of the selective public high schools in Chicago is exemplary, the traditional high schools offer little hope for students who strive to go to college.

For this reason, most charter schools are located in high-crime, high-poverty neighborhoods where the traditional schools are not meeting the needs of students and families.

In 2009, the Chicago Public Schools approached CICS and asked us to open a school in the Altgeld Garden neighborhood of Chicago. Unfortunately, Altgeld Gardens gained infamy in September 2009 when Derrion Alpert was beaten to death in by his peers in the aftermath of a fight that had occurred earlier in the day at Fenger High School. Because Altgeld doesn't have a neighborhood high school, CICS opened the Larry Hawkins campus last September so that students would not have to travel the just under 6 miles across gang lines by public bus from Altgeld to the Roseland neighborhood. What we have learned since opening this school is that the neighborhood feels betrayed and forgotten by the City of Chicago. The average reading level of the 10th, 11th, & 12th graders who enrolled in CICS Larry Hawkins is 5th grade. In addition, over 50% of the students self-report attending school for fewer than 30 days during the previous school year. As shocking as these facts are, we find the students mostly well-behaved, eager to learn, and proud that a new school opened "just for them".

I am extremely proud to tell you that Derrion Alpert's grandfather, Mr. Joseph Walker, joined the CICS Larry Hawkins Launch Committee and spoke on the school's behalf to the Chicago Public School Board. Included in his remarks was the point that opening the CICS Hawkins campus had helped to heal the Altgeld community. Mr. Walker and the CICS Community Liaison, Ms. Adrienne Leonard have founded another group -- *Pain to Power* -- which works to provide safe passage to and from school for children at 4 CICS and numerous traditional Chicago Public Schools.

Like most charter schools nationwide, the CICS Lloyd Bond and Larry Hawkins Campuses reflect the ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic makeup of the neighborhood.

Charter schools are required to serve all children who apply through the lottery and are accepted. This means that charter schools have a legal and ethical responsibility to serve children in the least restrictive environment according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Currently approximately 14% of the students served at Chicago International Charter School have disabilities. Like traditional public schools, the majority of students served by charter schools have high incidence disabilities such as ADHD, specific language impairments, and learning disabilities. It is important to note, however, that charter schools also serve students who have low incidence disabilities such as blindness and visual impairment, traumatic brain injury, hearing impairments, and autism.

I have often been asked if charter schools "counsel out" students with disabilities. As a person who spent the first 14 years of my career working as a special educator, I am a passionate advocate of the rights of children with disabilities. The statistics that I quoted to you earlier about CICS academic performance include the performance of our students with disabilities. I believe that the disciplined environment and "no excuses" expectations of most charter schools are ideal for students with disabilities. I also believe that the ability to veer quickly from the prescribed curricula when results aren't apparent is a strength of charter school curricula.

I think it is important to note that charter school employees also participate in statewide educational activities and are not always "outsiders to the system". Since 2005, I have had the privilege of representing charter schools on the Illinois State Advisory Council to the Illinois State Board of Education in accordance with IDEA

It is my experience that charter schools provide a strong vehicle for neighborhood change because they often establish the school in the midst of a blighted neighborhood. Charter school operators are explicit about the communities in which they want to operate. By opening schools from the ground up, they can structure the school day, school-year calendar, and curricular materials to address the needs and interests of the families who live in the community. Charter school operators often make significant investments in buildings in which they reside, create new job opportunities, and seek partnerships with local businesses in a way that is difficult for traditional public schools.

Chicago International owns 5 of its current campuses and has 15-30 year leases in 9 of the others. All nine leased facilities are owned by the Archdiocese of Chicago. Over the 15 years of its existence, CICS has infused over \$20mm into these properties in terms of ADA accommodations, preventative maintenance and school readiness. The pastors of all nine parishes report that, if they were not receiving rent from CICS, their parishes would most likely close and the buildings would remain empty.

In 2007, CICS issues \$49,000,000 in municipal bonds. \$16,000,000 of these bonds were used to build the CICS Ralph Ellison high school in the heart of the Auburn-Gresham neighborhood of Chicago. The site where the school currently stands had been empty for 12 years, with neighbors reporting use of the abandoned schools by drug users, drug dealers and prostitutes. Over 90% of the first graduating class of Ralph Ellison was accepted into college last year.

Charter schools are most effective when they respond to the needs of the community as defined by the community. In 2008, Chicago International was approached by Rockford Mayor Larry Morissey about opening a charter school in his city. After a year of meetings with local business leaders, community based organizations, and school officials, the Chicago International Charter School partnered with Zion Development Corporation and the Patriots Gateway Center to open a new charter school in the midtown neighborhood of Rockford.

In August 2010, the CICS Patriots Campus opened with 240 kindergarten through fourth grade students inside the community center. The school principal, Charo Chaney, is a former RPSD205 teacher who enrolled her two sons in the school. The majority of the teachers reside in Rockford and see the charter school as a real choice for middle and low-income families in a city with few affordable private school options. By locating the school within an established community center with a long and storied history of community service, the charter school staff is inextricably linked to the local residents and community interests.

CICS Patriots is about to complete its first year of educating children. I am proud to announce that end-of-year testing in reading and math using a nationally normed assessment called the NWEA Measure of Academic Progress shows that the average student at CICS Patriots made over 1.2 years academic growth. There is a waiting list in every grade for next year. A charter high school is scheduled to open in 2013.

Please know that the federal dollars made available to new charter schools enabled CICS Patriots to open its doors with new furniture, interactive white boards in every classroom, and a full-time social worker. Without that support, I do not believe that our year would have been as successful as it has been.

In closing, I urge you to support the work of charter schools in your districts. As public schools of choice, charter schools give parents options regardless of the child's skills or the family's economic status. I believe that, nationally, charter schools have improved significantly the lives and broadened the opportunities for the children who have few quality choices.

I encourage you each to visit a charter school so that you can understand first-hand that charter schools are truly public schools that serve your constituents.

Thank you.