

Place-Based Engagement on Chicago's Northeast Side: Towards Sustainable Relationships in University-School Partnership Work

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Abstract

Loyola University Chicago (LUC) is a Jesuit university with a mission to prepare students to “set the world on fire” by promoting justice in the world. Led by its School of Education, LUC has worked to engage this mission in its emerging work with public school partners guided by core principles of mutual benefit among partners, place-based engagement within our communities, and a focus on sustainable relationships. While serving others represents the genotype of our 150-year-old Jesuit university and community and civic engagement represents its phenotype, the last ten years has seen change in the university’s phenotype through dramatic growth in both the strategic approach of its place-based engagement commitments and its direct work among multiple community schools. In 2011, the School of Education engineered a radical overhaul of its teacher preparation program moving from a traditional approach to teacher education that was campus- and text-based to a field-based apprenticeship model (Heineke & Ryan, 2018). To achieve this ambitious project, the School of Education generated and solidified relationships with 20-25 core school partners where field-based learning could take place. Transformation of the teacher preparation program coincided with a comprehensive school-university partnership at a neighborhood-based public high school that currently features more than 20 academic initiatives. In 2016, LUC introduced Schools 2020 to build on this success with five additional public schools. In 2018, LUC began to serve as the Lead Partner Agency (LPA) at six Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Community School Initiatives (CSI) sites. Currently more than 1000 students are served through out-of-school (OST) programs while 100 part-time instructors (LUC faculty and students, school teachers, and community organization staff) work with students through more than 100 unique program activities. More than \$4 million in CPS-CSI funding has been secured through 2024 to support this work. In this article, we seek to present the historical context in which our university-school partnership emerged and has developed, our approaches to and examples of the work, discuss challenges that have surfaced in the work and, finally, describe horizon opportunities for LUC. We argue here for a place-based, mutually beneficial approach to university-school partnerships that places relationships at the center of the work in order to achieve sustainability over time. We believe that relationships based in trust and mutuality throughout and across our institutions lead to powerful outcomes for faculty, teachers, students, and ultimately communities. We argue here that a focus on relationships can lead to organizational and community transformation in ways that transactional operational systems may not.

Historical Context

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 2000s and into the second decade of the 21st century, cities and school districts have been drafting and implementing various school reform measures and strategies. These reform measures have included a focus on curriculum, teacher development, school leadership, school structure, and community and family engagement as strategies to improve school performance (Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Russo, 2004; Datnow, 2005). A sometimes-bewildering range of reforms, at times working at cross purposes, have come and gone based on student and school performance. Traditional or unlikely coalitions – comprised of community leaders, school leaders, business community, philanthropists, and politicians – have exerted pressure from on top or from below to initiate or torpedo various initiatives (Shipps, 2002).

School reform efforts launched in Chicago in the late 1980s followed decades of frustrating school performance and unequal student outcomes. One of the first reform measures on the scene was the advent of the Local School Council (LSC), a unique school leadership approach advocated by parent and local community groups frustrated with inefficient, corrupt, and out of touch district and school leadership. Local control embodied in the LSC devolved key decision-making (budget and principal hiring authority) from district leadership to a council of local leaders (teachers, principal, community members, parents, students) (Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Mirel, 1993). As performance continued to lag and as the nation moved toward No Child Left Behind, however, reform measures became more

punitive as low-performing schools were placed on probation and threatened with sanctions including the release of principals and even entire teaching faculty at low-performing schools (Hess, 1999).

In the 1990s, the district continued some of its punitive measures while experimenting with community partnership strategies and reducing school size. The Annenberg Foundation invested millions of dollars in school-community partnerships that emphasized collaboration, time to develop innovation in learning, and professional development (Bryk, Nagaoka, & Newmann, 2000). District leadership also reasoned that lagging performance may have been due to the physical structure of large, “anonymous” urban school buildings where students from higher stress economic environments lacked the ability and opportunity to have more personalized relationships with teachers, faculty and staff. Following the lead of successful small schools in places like New York City under the leadership of Deborah Meier, large schools were subdivided into 3-5 independent small schools or re-designed into small learning communities (Barrow, Schanzenbach & Claessens, 2015; Wesley, Fine, Gladden, Holland, King, Mosak, & Powell, 2000). Aligning with the trend toward smaller learning environments, Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan also launched Renaissance 2010, an effort to open more than 100 small schools across the district – many of them charter or contract schools – essentially turning CPS into a school district of choice (Duncan, 2006; Lipman & Haines, 2007; Brown, Gutstein, & Lipman, 2009).

Another major effort launched by Duncan's team shortly after the launch of Renaissance 2010 was the High School Transformation Project (Karp, 2009). Universities across the metropolitan area were asked to develop curriculum in English, Science, and Math and provide ongoing professional development for teachers in high schools with the rationale that current curriculum was not motivating students toward higher achievement. The district hoped through these initiatives to both strengthen student performance on standardized assessments and narrow the achievement gap between students of color and White and Asian students. Each was a response to the pressures of No Child Left Behind and the ongoing threat of teacher and principal firings and school closings.

In this high-pressure educational context, Chicago's mayor invited the leadership of Loyola University Chicago to consider a “take-over” of Senn High School, a school located in a community bordering Loyola's Lakeshore campus. For the past decade, Senn High School had been under duress to improve its grades, test scores, enrollment, and attendance. Once a large urban school with student enrollment of more than 3000, the first decade of the 21st century saw a continued decline in key performance measures with student enrollment dropping to under 1000 and graduation and college-going rates falling below 50%. In response to low enrollment, a new naval academy was located inside the school in the early 2000s to more “effectively utilize” school space while increasing academic options in the city. Placing small contract or charter schools inside existing schools with declining enrollments was controversial among neighborhood public school supporters. The approach to co-locate a school at Senn to “improve” school options for Chicago families was undertaken against the wishes of existing school leadership, faculty and many community residents. (The co-placement arrangement ended in 2019, as Senn's enrollment rebounded to 1,450 students with college-going rates rising to 70%.)

It was into this blizzard of school reform strategies that Mayor Rahm Emmanuel met with Loyola University Chicago's school leadership to encourage the development of a formal partnership, or in the words of the mayor, a school take-over. The mayor had also been meeting with corporations (Google, Microsoft) and other universities (DePaul, Northeastern Illinois) to promote his vision of school reform embedded in school/external partnership development logic. Whereas the mayor essentially offered Loyola's School of Education the keys to the school, leadership pushed back arguing for a partnership approach that would be rooted in mutually beneficial relationships.

At the same time, the Loyola's teacher training program was undergoing its own dramatic reconfiguration from a traditional campus/text-based model of teacher education to a field-based, apprenticeship model. The four-year

program featured logically sequenced course offerings co-developed by senior faculty with course instruction taking place on-site at school buildings within the District, and year-long internship requirements during the fourth year. The re-imagined program required multiple school partners to host students for apprenticeship learning opportunities. Within the first two weeks of their teacher preparation program, students would be placed in schools, community organizations, and cultural institutions. The new teacher preparation program required partnerships with schools and teachers who could provide deep and rich experiences working with diverse (race, culture, class, language, ability) student populations. The mutual benefit seemed natural: Schools received university students with energy, spirit, and emerging skills to support classroom work while Loyola received authentic, diverse, clinical placement opportunities for its students, which allowed for and enabled direct connections between theory and practice. As students learned about social emotional learning (SEL) theory, for example, they were asked to identify and analyze SEL practices in the classroom and challenged to build their teacher toolkit in both theoretical approach and practical application - as freshmen. Faculty also had opportunities to continually engage with current school and district practices while developing relationships with administrators and teachers at their school site. Consistent contextual learning opportunities for Loyola students enabled them to see and participate in teaching and learning in diverse contexts for four years of their teacher preparation program.

Senn High School proved to be a viable and valuable partner with which to co-construct a teacher education program. Senn also was Loyola's flagship partnership school that first extended beyond Teaching, Learning and Leading in Schools and Communities (TLLSC) (the School of Education's teacher preparation program) clinical placements. LUC and Senn developed a multi-faceted partnership featuring 20-25 educational initiatives each year that engage multiple partners from across the university as well as a wide variety of academic programs and post-secondary initiatives at Senn. Though initially offered as a school reform takeover by the city's mayor, the School of Education conceived the partnership as an opportunity to support and strengthen each institution through projects and initiatives that emerged naturally through relationship building. To facilitate the work, LUC identified a clinical faculty member who would serve as liaison to the school. The school provided office space enabling the faculty to be embedded in the daily life of the school, meet regularly with the school principal, and build relationships with other administrators, staff, security, external partners, teachers, and students. But relationships were not limited to the LUC faculty liaison; new relationships were facilitated for LUC faculty, staff, and students who also propose projects and play key roles in the wide variety of initiatives that have emerged.

In order to sustain relationships that are mutually beneficial, it is critical that the relationship that forms the foundation of the partnership be tended to consistently lest the relationship devolve to transactional exchanges. The impulse to meet the immediate needs of an institutional partner is always present and must, of course, at times be fulfilled. However, without ongoing attention to the firmament of relationship, the partnership becomes simply transactional. Over the course of our partnerships, relationships between and across the institutions have emerged and developed allowing the partnership to thrive in ways that a narrower set of relationships, though easier to control, might not have enabled. The individual relationships are critical to the success of the work, but the larger institutional commitment between LUC and schools in the community provides the framing for the common work of strengthening student outcomes to develop and grow. The strength of partnership is in both the institutional commitment to the work and the relationships that have tendrilled out across the university and school. Indeed, the university consistently touts the Loyola/Senn partnership as a key element of its missional work in the community and the school speaks with pride about the length and depth of its relationship with Loyola.

Recognizing the early success of the Senn/Loyola partnership, LUC used the relationship-based partnership model as a foundation to commit to other local schools in the community. Schools 2020, an internally funded community engagement plan of the university to build transformative relationships with schools near Loyola's Lake Shore

Campus, emerged in 2016 with a focus on supporting local schools toward strengthened student outcomes. Two key elements of the five-year plan helped to frame the expanded work: (1) Placed-based engagement in our contiguous communities and (2) support for local, neighborhood-based K-12 public schools in those communities.

While public schools to the immediate south of the university in the city's Edgewater community were beginning to rebound from decades of poor performance, schools in Rogers Park, adjacent to the university, were still struggling with academic performance with more than half of the community's families sending their children out of the community for "better" options within the city's school system of choice. Funding and a new staff member were assigned to generate a similar set of relationships with four elementary schools ([Kilmer](#), [Gale](#), [Jordan](#), and [Field](#)) and one high school ([Sullivan](#)). Each of these schools, extraordinarily diverse in race, ethnicity, language, immigration status, Socio-Economic Status, and ability, had long struggled with enrollment, retention, graduation rates, on-track status, and academic achievement scores. The intent of the university was to work with the schools to identify key areas of growth where support from the university could be leveraged to improve school performance, again, without dictating or pre-identifying interventions or strategies. These schools also became sites where School of Education teacher candidates could apprentice, volunteer, and complete internships. Students and faculty from across the university have engaged these schools in numerous ways that have addressed school needs while presenting opportunities to learn, serve, and conduct research.

By 2018-19, Loyola University's School of Education felt that it was both appropriately positioned and sufficiently resource-endowed to propose to serve as a Lead Partner Agency for one or more schools through the district's [Community Schools Initiative \(CSI\)](#). CPS agreed. Thus, Loyola University became the Lead Partner Agency for five community school efforts (Sullivan, Kilmer, Gale, Field, and McCutcheon) and has since added an additional school (Clinton). Each community school partnership in Chicago carries with it a five-year grant agreement.

Presently, [Loyola University Chicago](#) is the only university in the city serving as a Lead Partner Agency (LPA) for neighborhood-based public schools. Typically, city-wide youth-serving agencies such as [Youth Guidance](#), [Metropolitan Family Services](#), and [YMCA](#) or more community-based organizations such as [Brighton Park Neighborhood Association](#) and [Logan Square Neighborhood Association](#) serve as LPA's to support the more than 150 community school sites in Chicago. However, a university represents a trove of resources beyond what most organizations can offer and can be leveraged to support community school efforts with 16,000 graduate and undergraduate students, 1,100 faculty, 2,000+ staff members, three metropolitan campuses, expertise in a wide range of areas including pedagogy, research and evaluation, STEM, health disciplines and resources, communications, the arts and athletics, and many others. As a Jesuit university with a commitment to justice, faculty, staff, and students have eagerly embraced the opportunities represented through our university-school partnerships to teach, learn, lead, serve, research, and seek justice.

Launched in various cities in the 1990s including [New York City](#) and [Chicago](#), community school initiatives seek to re-position urban schools in the context of their immediate communities through [four core features](#): (1) Expanded/enriched out-of-school learning opportunities; (2) collaborative leadership and practices; (3) active family and community engagement; and (4) integrated student supports.¹ Community schools recognize that students accessing programs and supports often come from stressful environments or conditions that may include homelessness or unstable housing, high mobility rates, poverty circumstances, diverse learning needs, language learning needs, immigration/refugee status, mental or physical health concerns, or a complex combination of two or more of these conditions (Coalition for Community Schools, 2003). Hence, community schools seek to provide enriched learning opportunities and a range of supports in collaboration with community organizations and institutions that may not

¹ https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_INFOGRAPHIC.pdf

ordinarily be provided through the school. “For more than 100 years, community schools have provided a simple, fundamentally American value: School, community and family are inextricably joined and must work closely together for the benefit of every child” (Coalition for Community Schools, 2003, p. 2).

Conducting evaluations on community schools outcomes has proven to be complex and challenging work as many variables are at play in determining correlation or causation between out-of-school enrichment programs and traditional in-school metrics. While community schools work has struggled to demonstrate positive correlation between out-of-school interventions and improved student academic performance, data suggests evidence of improved discipline, on-time grade progression, and academic achievement. Johnston, Engberg, Opper, Sontag-Padilla, and Xenakis (2020), Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) and Dryfoos (2000) argue that data from community schools work indicates important positive outcomes and compares favorably with evaluation data from other school reform initiatives. Johnston et al. (2020) found that community school initiatives in New York City have had positive impacts on student school attendance, on-time grade progression, math achievement, and reduction of disciplinary incidents, while Maier et al. (2017) and Dryfoos (2000) argue that data from community schools work compares favorably with evaluation data from other school reform initiatives. Maier et al. (2017) found in a meta-analysis of community schools research that community school development as a school improvement strategy is effective in meeting the needs of low-achieving students in high poverty schools. Furthermore, thoughtfully designed expanded learning opportunities in community school efforts are associated with positive academic and nonacademic outcomes, and integrated student supports are associated with positive student outcomes among other positive findings. Warren (2005) further argues that school-community collaboration can improve the social context of education, foster parent and community participation in student education, transform the culture of schools, and build strong political support for public education toward equity.

Loyola University Chicago led by its School of Education enters into this work to: (1) Build positive working relationships in our schools and throughout our communities; (2) work in partnership with local neighborhood-based schools to strengthen student, school, and community outcomes; (3) generate opportunities for university faculty, staff, and students to be meaningfully engaged in our community through our schools; (4) generate a local K-16 educational pipeline that increases the number of students who both consider and choose to enroll at Loyola; and (5) as an anchor institution, strengthen community outcomes in the communities of Rogers Park and Edgewater.

Before leaving this section, it is important to expand on our decision as a university to engage with public, neighborhood-based schools. It is a decision rooted in a commitment to social justice. In the early 2000s, Chicago Public Schools ramped up its identity as a school district of choice through Duncan’s Renaissance 2010 initiative. As a school district of choice, students and families gradually had access to learning opportunities in schools across the city. The options played out inequitably, however, with many families striving to secure positions for their children in [selective enrollment schools](#). Stovall (2012) named this the *politics of desperation* as all district families were put into competition with each other to seek coveted seats in highly regarded schools, thereby leaving vast numbers of students with limited options. Besides selective enrollment schools, families were also able to access magnet, military, charter, and contract schools. However, many families seeking to enroll their children in one of these option schools would have to “settle” for the neighborhood school or, if they had means, seek out a private school. Lipman and Haines (2007) argued that this process toward privatization led to increased segregation and even exclusion of African American students and families. Jankov and Caref (2017) provide evidence, in fact, that African American student population fell by 33% during reform. Neighborhood-based public schools, particularly high schools, became the schools of last resort for many and were lowly regarded by families, communities, and elementary feeder schools. Loyola University Chicago decided, therefore, to invest significant resources into these schools that have been abandoned through school choice policies and politics.

Approaches to University School Partnerships

Relationship-driven engagement

We believe that the root and foundation of effective university-school partnerships is a deep commitment to relationships. Relationships are as important as the programs themselves. While Loyola has a long history of working with Chicago communities, as described above, its School of Education engaged university-school partnership work in 2011 to generate site-based learning opportunities for its [teacher education program](#). At the same time, the opportunity to assume responsibility for a local high school was presented by the mayor. Rather than take over responsibility for the school or build the partnership around a specific program(s) or set of predetermined outcomes, relationships between the institutions (Senn High School and Loyola University Chicago) were foregrounded in order to lay the foundation for co-created and co-generated initiatives that emerged authentically and dynamically through discussion between the partners. The logic of this approach set the stage for relationships across the institutions to emerge and initiative and program ideas to surface.

While the Senn/Loyola and Schools 2020 partnership liaisons continue to be critical in bridging the institutions and work (most closely with school principals), multiple departments, centers, programs, and faculty have participated in school relationship-building efforts. Similarly, CSI sites represent opportunities for relationships to be built and curated across the institutions to act on school needs that can be addressed utilizing university resources. Without trust-based relationships that flourish between university and school partners, emerging programs could not be sustained over time.

Relationships between Senn and Loyola exist at a number of levels among administration, faculty, staff, and student. Yet these relationships need to be sustained. Strier (2014) proposes organizational paradox theory, suggesting that tensions will inevitably surface as partnerships develop over time. Strier proposes seven fields of paradox that may be encountered in a partnership: (1) Top down institutional presence v. grassroots engagement; (2) organizational effectiveness v. relationship development; (3) strengthening trust v. exposing unequal power relationships; (4) respecting hierarchies v. fostering egalitarianism; (5) transformational goals v. tangible achievements; (6) encouraging esprit de corps v. respecting multiplicity of identities; and (7) discipline for long term development v. commitment to innovation. We explore here some of the tensions faced in our partnership work.

A first tension, top down institutional presence v. grassroots engagement, can limit local, collaborative action. Both institutions exist within a set of hierarchies, different but bearing some similar characteristics. In this partnership, Loyola needs to be responsive to both mission and margin within the institution's framework yet has had the capacity to be more mobile and nimbler. Schools, on the other hand, need to be responsive to a tighter, more constricted set of expectations and demands put in place by administrative bureaucracies, standards, and expectations at multiple levels. The ability of each partner to hold in tension the opportunity to collaborate in a dynamic partnership without ignoring the institutional and oftentimes hierarchical rails and limitations that bureaucracies inevitably impose is key to a successful partnership.

A second tension exists between a commitment to innovation and the discipline required for long-term development. There will always be a dynamic nature to a relationship that encourages innovation, emergence, experimentation, and even uncertainty. Yet it is clear that programs and initiatives need time to develop and sink roots in order that they can stand on their own. A partnership must make decisions between supporting projects to maturity and beyond and advancing new and innovative ideas. This can sometimes become a numbers game where new ideas may resonate more deeply with key stakeholders than existing long-term projects. Our partnerships seek to derive value from the dynamic, evolving, risk-accepting nature inherent in growth-oriented relationships. The opportunity in a

relationship-driven partnership is precisely that there can be uncommon space to innovate, experiment, test, and advance ideas. Failure may occur but so too will deep success. As substantive conversations are encouraged to identify and test new areas for engagement, new players and leaders emerge that may take the partnership in new, innovative directions that were not anticipated. These directions must, however, be aligned with school-identified goals and institutional limitations. Clarity around core values and strategic directions enables the partnership to navigate these sometimes murky waters with greater success.

Strier articulates another tension between the need for organizational effectiveness and the desire to maintain and strengthen the relationship. It is always tempting to work transactionally; the institution has an immediate need that can ostensibly be fulfilled by its partner institution with little fanfare or cultivation. For example, a school partner may need volunteer chaperones or space to conduct its own professional development. The university may need students for a summer program. If the partnership begins to devolve into a set of transactions, however, that do not attend to relationships and align with partnership values and strategic directions, the partnership itself may begin to lose traction. We have found that the painstaking and deliberate work of building and sustaining both personal and professional relationships is key. These relationships permit occasional transactional opportunities but must not become simply a set of negotiated transactions that only meet the immediate self-interest of one institution. The pressures are great, the spaces complex and dynamic, and the time short to do the hard and necessary work of relationship building, but this work must be done.

A final polarity that we address here considers transformational goals versus tangible achievements. The broad and colorful language of transforming schools and communities has the power to inspire passion and commitment. Yet tangible outcomes are the pedestrianism of everyday life within an institution, particularly when the pressures to perform are not just great but can be overwhelming. Both institutions seek in their language, rhetoric, and action to transform but realize as well that short-term achievements must demonstrate in everyday language the progress of the partnership and the individual needs of partner institutions. The Senn/Loyola partnership has contributed to remarkable change in the high school and university: Senn's college-going culture (particularly with respect to Loyola, where more than one-third of Senn's senior class now applies to Loyola) has seen dramatic growth while Loyola's teacher preparation program has benefited tremendously through its partnership with Senn. Each of these can be seen as successful transformations built on years of tangible, on-the-ground successes. The challenge has been, and will remain, organizing the partnership work around tangible outcomes that align with broader, transformational goals.

Mutually beneficial relationships

Loyola University Chicago enters these relationships from a commitment to a more socially just world. Our obligations to live into this commitment drives our mission, but our engagement is understood from a perspective of enlightened self-interest. In other words, how can our engagement as a university both strengthen neighborhood-based public schools, their students and families and grow opportunities for our university? We see our mutual benefit emerging in multiple ways.

First and foremost, Loyola understands that its engagement in community-based schools generates a wide range of opportunities for its faculty, staff, and students including teaching and learning, volunteering, mentoring and serving, paid and unpaid internships, facilitating after-school programs, conducting research, and having the opportunity to engage with and better understand our public schools and the public school system. Our eight school partners continue to be important School of Education partners for apprenticeship learning and student teaching assignments. Each one of these opportunities also helps the university fulfill its mission to the world by engaging hundreds of faculty, staff, and students in our local community.

Secondly, Loyola is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) that seeks to grow its diversity. By working in extraordinarily diverse communities, we expand the likelihood that young people in our communities will consider applying to and then attending Loyola University Chicago. Eight years ago, virtually no Senn students considered applying to Loyola, a private, Jesuit university. The 2018-19 academic year saw more than 125 student applicants with 20 students choosing to enroll at the university. Five of these students received the coveted [David Prasse Scholarship](#), which pays for all college expenses beyond Expected Family Contribution and federally subsidized loans. The same year, three Senn graduates were commencement speakers out of a total of 11 commencement ceremonies. Senn graduates are not just attending Loyola in ever greater numbers and benefiting from a Jesuit education, they are participating actively and fully in the life of the university from study abroad programs to founding or leading student organizations to volunteering in programs that support their high school alma mater and in our communities.

Third, as an increasing number of local students matriculate to Loyola, we are working to build a K-16 pipeline within and among our communities. Students begin to see Loyola as a possible destination and explore how the university can help them achieve their dreams and goals. Teachers and faculty begin to see emerging possibilities for collaboration. Loyola has long supported Senn's journalism program, for instance, and now partners to manage an emerging IB Career Programme in journalism. As educators collaborate together on this and similar projects, students see a clear pathway to and through Loyola as a legitimate opportunity. As this work builds, we are able to successfully engage the mission/margin tension that all universities face in contemplating how they can realize a return on their community investment.

Placed-based engagement and racial equity

From the 1990s into the 21st century, we have seen a rapidly emerging conversation around the role of the modern university in our communities and cities. Many universities have moved beyond the credentialing role they have traditionally played and have begun to explore and act upon emerging commitments to mission beyond the campus and into their communities in ways that address complex problems. Strategic responses embodied in concepts of anchor institution, collective impact, and place-based engagement have captured the imagination of hundreds of universities across the country. Loyola University Chicago became a founding member of the [Place Based Justice Network \(PBJN\)](#) in 2015 (based at Seattle University), one of approximately 20 universities committed to exploring and acting upon commitments to their local communities with the specific intent to understand their work through a racial equity framework. "Place-based community engagement invites the institution of higher education to more deeply connect to its sense of place" while "the persistence of racism within our universities and in our communities challenges [them] to think critically and act thoughtfully in pursuit of a vision of racial equity" (Yamamura & Koth, 2019).

Boyer (1996) argued that the role of the modern university is to engage faculty and staff in the problems of the community and work toward solutions. Harkavy (2006) builds on Boyer's work by proposing that the university should seek to work in collaboration with the community towards solving those problems. Yamamura and Koth (2019) further refine these propositions in arguing that the university should work in its immediate community with local leaders, organizations, and institutions toward community transformation and propose that the work must be seen through the lens of racial justice and equity. Taken together, these impulses for university-school partnerships - addressing and working to solve critical problems, working in collaboration with the local community, and engaging the work through an equity lens - inform Loyola's partnership work in our communities. By accepting and living into its role as a community member, with both much to give and much to receive, opportunities for transformation at individual and institutional levels begin to surface.

Place-based engagement presents a set of rich opportunities for Loyola. The university exists within some of the most diverse communities in Chicago, the country and perhaps the world. It is not uncommon for more than 50 languages to be spoken at our public schools. It is an ideal setting for our teacher candidates to explore and learn

about what it means to teach in diverse settings. Logistically, place-based engagement enables Loyola community members to access teaching, learning, and service opportunities quite easily. Importantly, place-based engagement enables the university to seek and live out the meaning and purpose of its mission in ways that have immediate implication for the university itself.

But place-based engagement also challenges our university to examine its own assumptions and values as it engages over time with local partners and communities. Through place-based engagement we must stay consistently engaged with organizations and with people. Though the allure of partnering throughout the city and metropolitan area is real, our partnership works to stay committed to schools and organizations in our immediate communities. The intensity of the engagement can and does reveal understandings and misunderstandings, assumptions and deeper realities, commonalities and tensions. As we commit to place-based engagement, we also must commit to facing and engaging the daily realities that shape our partner schools.

Promising Practices

Strategic goals

LUC's university-school partnership work is organized around four core objectives: (1) Post-secondary access and success; (2) strengthened teaching and learning; (3) civic engagement; and (4) engagement by LUC faculty, staff, and students in ways that also strengthen and enrich the university. These objectives emerged based on strategic planning events with school partners. Clarity around these objectives has enabled our partnership work to stay focused on those things most important for the university and its school partners. In this section, we provide examples of how our strategic goals are translated into programming in collaboration with school partners.

Post-Secondary Access and Success

Each year during LUC's spring break, the university welcomes 1,450 Senn High School students and their teachers to campus to explore college. March to College engages multiple university staff, students, and faculty, school staff and faculty, as well as community businesses, organizations, and political representatives. Offerings during the week include career conversations, social-emotional learning opportunities ([Circesteem](#) and [Kuumba Lynx](#)), college class lectures/presentations, [campus tours](#) led by Senn graduates now studying at Loyola, soft-skills and wellness workshops, college preparation workshops (scholarships, match-fit sessions, essay writing) and perhaps most popularly lunch in student cafeterias. In addition to March to College, Loyola offers campus tours and experiences for student groups from each of our partner schools in addition to a variety of summer and school year programs (arts, civic leadership, science internships). One very popular event during the past two years has been the women's basketball game to which almost 20 local schools are invited to attend the game free of charge. It is the best attended game of the year for the team.

We believe that these events have contributed to an important increase in students from our local public schools considering Loyola University Chicago as a possible and even realistic choice for college. Loyola has primed the pump by offering five full tuition scholarships for Senn High School graduates; the David Prasse Scholarship enables five low-income, usually first-generation students to attend college without burdening their families with financial concerns.

Strengthening Teaching and Learning

Loyola entered its partnership with Senn High School at the same time that Senn was moving from an IB cohort model to a [wall-to-wall IB program](#). Chicago Public Schools sought to expand course rigor by making the [IB](#)

[Framework](#) accessible to more students across the district; expanding IB in an existing school was one strategy to increase high impact learning opportunities for all students (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2009). Rather than provide professional development for Senn teachers, teachers and faculty from the School of Education created a shared professional learning community to build knowledge, understanding and skills required to effectively teach IB pedagogy effectively as classroom teachers and teacher preparation faculty. University faculty used learning to develop and offer an IB certificate program the attainment of which made graduating teacher candidates significantly more marketable in Chicago as the district expanded its offering of IB programs. Additionally, Loyola provided direct supports to the Senn IB program by making available university faculty and space resources to support sophomore year personal projects and junior year extended essay projects. The extended essay project supports now culminate in a research symposium where students present their research projects to faculty who in turn provide insightful feedback to support students as they move from final draft to completed research study.

Inspired by the success of the Senn/Loyola partnership in supporting the development of public school teachers, Loyola's Schools 2020 created a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for teachers in partnering elementary schools located within Rogers Park (Eugene Field, New Field, Gale, Jordan and Kilmer). Led by Loyola's [Center for Science and Math Education \(CSME\)](#), the PLC focuses on Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and inquiry-based learning. Since launching in 2017, dozens of neighborhood teachers have participated in the program which consists of quarterly professional development sessions, regular coaching visits from CSME faculty, and school-based science team meetings. The project also includes workshops for principals to learn about NGSS so they can better support teachers when implementing inquiry-based science in classrooms.

Schools 2020 also recently deployed faculty from Loyola's School of Education to help Sullivan High School's English as a Second Language Department redesign its curriculum for English Language Learners (ELL). The project resulted in clear outlines for units and activities for ESL classrooms, generated scope and sequence that aligns with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the SAT, and the CPS constitution test requirements while focusing on linguistic development across all ESL classrooms. Loyola faculty have created new ESL curriculum templates for Sullivan teachers and have provided additional curriculum design strategies targeting ELL's. Schools 2020 is also working with Sullivan's ESL Department, Loyola's Office of Student Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, and several student organizations to create opportunities that will help provide post-secondary planning supports for Sullivan ELL students. The supports include connections to LUC's Lake Shore and Arrupe campuses, workshops and events focusing on college and career exploration, common-experience mentorships, service projects and Parent University coordination.

As Senn High School was revamping its curricular offerings in the early days of the partnership to complement the existing IB program and emerging SennArts program, it articulated a desire to build a journalism program in collaboration with LUC's School of Communications. The [journalism program](#) was to be one of the few in the district and would become one of the most robust. Students currently take a five-course sequence that positions them to enter university at sophomore or even junior level of skill and knowledge base for a typical journalism program. The partnership identified and secured local foundation funding to equip the new journalism program with state-of-the-art broadcast equipment in addition to hiring a clinical faculty member to co-design curriculum with the new journalism teacher. Loyola committed the resources to enable the school's English teacher to gain a master's degree in Journalism. Loyola faculty and students frequently volunteered and even co-taught courses with the journalism teacher and made its downtown professional campus available for student field trips. The most recent innovation has been the advent of the [RogersEdge Reporter](#), an online, hyper-local news source providing timely neighborhood stories for the community. The Reporter is staffed by Loyola and Senn journalism students and coordinated by a former Chicago Sun Times reporter. Its emergence as a legitimate news source coincided with the demise of DNA Info in Chicago and around the country.

It is important here to note that not all ideas or initiatives ultimately bear fruit. One example illustrates how promising ideas do not always find fertile soil. Loyola University is justifiably proud of its [Institute for Environmental Sustainability \(IES\)](#), founded to generate teaching and learning opportunities that address the complex environmental challenges now facing our world as well as to guide the university's physical presence, growth and development. The IES stood ready to support the development of an environmental studies program at Senn High School. Due to marginal interest from the high school teacher and flagging interest in the course from students, early efforts to build upon early successes with IB and journalism were abandoned. It is a cautionary tale of how the right ideas, resources, and people must align at the right moment in time in order for an initiative to take root.

Civic Engagement

Civic participation is a core value at Loyola University. That value is manifest in multiple ways throughout the university including its [experiential learning requirement](#)² and its [Community Action and Service office](#). This commitment to engagement in the community was shared by its community partner schools. It made sense then that Loyola would work with its partner schools to explore opportunities for civic engagement together. One of the first opportunities was to apply with Senn High School for the State of Illinois' [Democracy Schools program](#) that confers "democracy school" designation upon schools demonstrating both a track record in democracy education and a commitment to expand democratic learning opportunities for students. The application process led to the creation of a Democracy Schools team that continues to meet regularly to strengthen pedagogical approaches such as service-learning and civic action and support a robust student voice initiative.

In the past two years, Senn has seen prominent student body civic actions take place including a school walk-out in the aftermath of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting and a student sit-in following identity-targeting harassment. While we can't argue for correlation between Democracy Schools civic work and direct student action in the school, we are not surprised that students are finding space to engage in important civic questions through both action and service. In addition to in-school approaches, Loyola offers a week-long civic leadership program for high school students and a four-week policy action program for middle school students on campus. Both approaches engage students in in-depth analysis and action around critical social and political issues and civic action strategies that might be undertaken to address these problems.

Emerging Work: Community Schools Initiative

From Senn to 2020 to CSI: Building on Success

The early success of the Senn/Loyola Partnership and Schools 2020 encouraged Loyola to move into community schools work with existing school partners. One key element of CSI is the provision of OST programming. Expanded learning opportunities beyond the school day, OST and summer programs, can play a strong role in improving academic performance, college and career readiness, social and emotional development, connections to community and student health (Lauer, Akiba, Wilderson, Apthorp, Snow, & Martin-Glenn, 2006; Little & Harris, 2003). Recognizing this, Loyola has spent the last three school years working to expand the capacity of its neighborhood public schools through the Community Schools Initiative.

Neighborhood public schools in Chicago are under pressure to compete for neighborhood students due to the advent of charter and selective enrollment schools in CPS that tend to draw the highest-performing students away from neighborhood schools. When the enrollment of a school drops, so does financial support from the district,

² Loyola University Chicago requires that every undergraduate student complete at least one 3-credit course that offers service-learning, internship, or field experience. Students are expected to engage in 20-25 hours in order to complete the classroom-based requirement. <https://www.luc.edu/engagedlearning/aboutengagedlearning/engagedlearningrequirement/>

often leaving the schools with insufficient resources to provide students with high-quality, well-rounded educational experiences. Through its CSI work, Loyola addresses this need for high quality programming in neighborhood public schools near our campus. The LUC-CSI connects with six neighborhood public schools toward meeting student academic, civic and social and emotional goals. Our collaborative effort is committed to a culture of continuous improvement designed to support and contribute to that culture through specific goals, objectives and outcomes and evidenced based strategies and ongoing formative evaluation.

CSI goals, objectives and outcomes are based on meeting the needs of the school communities. Our school partners are six culturally and linguistically diverse neighborhood public schools that demonstrate a need for OST academic support to enhance student academic achievement as evidenced by standardized test scores. Although each school has been making gains, there is still room for improvement, and we believe a collaborative and full-service approach to this effort is needed to make those strides.

Challenges

We present here a number of challenges that we confront in our university-school partnership work. First, though our university has a clear and vibrant vision and mission that clearly articulates the desire to engage our faculty and students in social justice issues globally, we are at times less clear about how that vision translates into direct, strategic, and even financial support for this work now and in the future. Our movement from an idea in 2011 to transform the teacher education program to the explosive growth in the just the last three years that has resulted in formal, university-, grant- and school district-supported partnerships with eight schools in our communities, positions us to have these kinds of strategic conversations with university leadership even as new leadership is settling in the university, Provost's Office for Academic Affairs, and in the School of Education. The university continues to spawn and support a set of conversations around community engagement in the city and in our local communities that represent the work of colleges, schools, departments, and centers. What are the best and most appropriate ways to align university resources strategically to advance multiple interests both within and beyond the university? These conversations represent in part the historic tension between mission and margin. Most university stakeholders articulate a deep commitment to the mission of the university that articulates a passion for social justice in the world but concerns about financial margins can reign in that passion at inopportune times.

Our work with schools is situated within a cultivated and always growing sense of competition among schools in our public school system. Schools have been driven to market themselves to Chicago's families in order to attract students to increase enrollment, which eventually translates into institutional survival. However, the competition among schools can at times diminish the appetite for school leaders to collaborate with one another. More and more, Loyola finds itself positioned to be a convener of schools around common purposes whether these purposes are focused on academic, civic, social-emotional, post-secondary, or health outcomes. The extent to which the university can continue to play this role and play it more robustly may be limited by but is ultimately contingent upon schools desiring collaboration across the community. Foregrounding place-based engagement within the university and into the community positions us to be able to convene multiple partners in ways that reinforce emergent ideas around collective action and anchor institutional status as well as strategic action.

High poverty urban schools have historically struggled with engaging students and parents in collaborative decision-making. Epstein (1991) has presented a six-point typology of school-family engagement. Most of the ways schools have traditionally collaborated with families is by asking parents to support the articulated goals and mission of the school. Here parents are less legitimate stakeholders in the development of the school and more volunteers to support a mission articulated by school professionals. Far less often have families been invited to be part of the decision-

making process or communities asked to collaborate to identify needs and engage assets and resources that might be leveraged to support students. Our work to support and strengthen student voice and strengthen relationships with parents and community organizations has at times been met with resistance. New relationships and partnerships may signal to some school leaders a loss of control. The more stakeholders beyond the school become invested in school success, the greater the degree of difficulty in managing diverse relationships and interests for school leaders. Indeed, school leaders may at times be more compelled to “keep the lid on”. Extant conditions that emphasize both competition and survival, can make school leaders more risk-averse in seeking out and strengthening community and family relationships. Our CSI work in particular invites our staff, faculty, and students as well as community members into deeper relationships with students and parents, which might at times be seen as threatening to school leaders. However, we must be committed to recognizing and working through this tension, as we remain committed to the framework of authentic community and family engagement as important levers to strengthen the academic, social-emotional, and civic growth of our students.

In an age of school accountability that is often measured in traditional metrics of school attendance, GPA, discipline, and standardized test scores, there may not always be space to generate programs or opportunities that might be seen as taking away academic learning opportunities. Programs that offer exposure, build skills, or strengthen leadership and social-emotional outcomes may be shelved in order to guarantee classroom time that is more narrowly focused on academic performance. LUC structures its CSI programs to build skills, increase connection to school, and strengthen social-emotional skills. We continue to think through ways that this programmatic orientation can exist alongside a more traditional orientation where academic outcomes may be preferenced to the detriment of other important student development opportunities.

As an LPA for six community schools, LUC hires and employs each Community Schools Resource Coordinator (RC). We believe that in managing the RC positions, we are able to strengthen accountability toward more robust programmatic designs and student outcomes. We also believe that this management strategy enables us to more readily access and leverage university resources to live more fully into the vision of community schools. Often community schools work devolves to a set of after-school programs that do not draw from or contribute to ongoing academic, social-emotional, and civic growth and development among students. We believe that our management strategy increases leverage in working with the school to reconsider its relationship to and contextualization within the community that can lead to a more expansive understanding of school in the context of a community. However, this is not always a simple space for RCs to navigate as they find themselves at times between two competing philosophies.

Finally, LUC’s School of Education is firmly rooted in the theory and practice of [asset-based development](#). Coursework in its teacher education program introduces students to the theory and practice of asset-based development, which prepares students to recognize and engage the “funds of knowledge” that students and their families bring to classrooms. Sensitivity to the assets that students bring to schools and the ways in which they can be built upon, counteracts the countless negative messages that marginalized groups of people hear in this country in overt, intended and unintended ways that may reflect implicit biases. The asset-based perspective that we work to bring to schools may bump up against attitudes and perspectives among school stakeholders that reflect a deficit perspective. This presents challenges for staff and students, particularly those who are of color, who work to navigate and negotiate relationships and programs from an asset-based perspective. This is ongoing work for ourselves, for our students, and for our partners in communities but work that is well worth undertaking.

Horizon Work

We conclude this article by pointing to work that sits on the horizon of our current efforts. As mentioned above, Loyola University Chicago, now celebrating its [sesquicentennial](#), has long been committed to a set of core values that are rooted

in a commitment to social justice in our communities and around the world. As the university concludes and evaluates its most recent five-year plan and begins to discern its next five-year plan, a series of conversations across the university have taken place that are centered around our role in the community, city, and world beyond our call to educate students. These conversations seek to include myriad voices committed to the vision of a university that exists to engage in and help solve the complex and deep problems that currently face our society including health, racial inequality, violence, education, and the environment. Conversations around place-based engagement sit alongside generative discussions about anchor institution and collective impact discussions. Each of these emergent ideas must be considered with the ways in which the university can or ought to best collaborate and act strategically across university campuses that represent divergent but at times convergent theories of action in our communities. It is a dynamic discerning process that continues to take place across our campus as we look toward our 151st year in Chicago.

We continue to receive requests from Chicago Public Schools to serve as LPA for additional schools through the Community Schools Initiative. As we prepare to enter our third full year of community schools work, we continue to build infrastructure, systems, relationships, resources, and strategies that can more fully support schools as they navigate community school space. Community schools often begin with a set of quality OST program opportunities for students, families, and communities. Our work has been no different. Loyola-led CSI programs include STEM, arts, athletics, mentoring, social-emotional, entrepreneurship, literacy, health, and nutrition-oriented programs for students and their parents. These programs draw on community resources and orientations, build skills, and develop deeper connections to school and community. In order to fulfill the promise of community schools, our work must now make deeper connections with teachers, families, and community in order to re-imagine and re-purpose schools as grounded in their local communities.

Recognizing that the School of Education is now uniquely positioned to attract students, teachers, administrators, scholars, community leaders, activists, second-career professionals to pursue graduate studies in Teaching and Learning within a framework of community engagement, the School of Education recently redesigned its M.Ed. and Ed.D. programs to reflect how teaching and learning can and perhaps should be embedded in our communities. We see evidence, for example, that few educators leave higher education programs with deep knowledge and experience in how to build cross institutional/organizational relationships, connect, and collaborate with families and communities in addition to understanding what it means to re-conceptualize schooling as contextualized learning. These academic programs are set to come online in 2021 with the intention of providing deep learning opportunities for individuals with diverse experiences seeking to work in ways that root schools deeply in the context of local communities. We also continue to see emerging opportunities to engage in research in and with our community and [university partners](https://www.luc.edu/schoolpartners)³ that are participatory and framed around community-identified issues.

Similarly, we are currently in the design phase of creating an interdisciplinary undergraduate social activism degree program that would capitalize on and connect the deep passion many of our students bring to their learning with knowledge, skills, and experiences to work in and ultimately lead non-profit community organizations. Academic programs preparing students for careers in community organizations tend to emphasize non-profit management or social work skills. An interdisciplinary degree at the undergraduate level can, we believe, offer students the opportunity to experience and prepare for careers in non-profit community work. Often students with degrees in the liberal arts leave college with uncertainty regarding their next steps in life. We believe work with and preparation for work with community organizations during the undergraduate experience can join passion for justice with organizational skills that cannot just prepare students for work in communities but enable them to more readily discern their first steps toward a meaningful vocation.

³ <https://www.luc.edu/schoolpartners>

As Catholic parishes across the city are facing the difficult decision to close or reconsider how worship and educational spaces are utilized more effectively, there are substantive opportunities for the university to interact with its various communities in utilizing these types of spaces. We anticipate that university-school partnership work can be made more accessible, connected, and collaborative as these opportunities begin to take shape in the next two to three years.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ongoing work of relationship-building must continue if our work is to advance in mutually beneficial and sustainable ways that respect the needs and desires of our institutions while holding the good of the community at the center of the work. We are willingly thrust into the day-to-day work of our community school partners and the communities within which they operate. Relationships are not always present and can be strained as communities and schools in high poverty circumstances work to persist in stressful environments. We continue to believe that our universities, in particular those that make a deep commitment to their own geographic communities, are well-positioned to facilitate, convene, and lead (Hodges & Dubb, 2012) schools, community organizations, and communities toward a vision that is rooted in social justice where a common good characterized by diverse and inclusive access and opportunity is consistently present.

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