

SCHOOLS THAT CAN

Validation Report For

PROVIDENCE ST. MEL SCHOOL
CHICAGO

By

Jay Gottlieb, Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

Schools That Can (STC) is a national network of unaffiliated safe, high achieving schools located in inner cities and serving a largely poor minority population of students. Providence St. Mel School, Chicago, has been identified as one of these high-performing schools. As more schools are identified, they are included in the network subject to a validation of their education program. The network aims to celebrate, support and promote these schools' accomplishments. The entire list of criteria for inclusion into the network appears in Appendix A at the rear of this document.

After a school has been identified and initially vetted by Schools That Can representatives the actual validation begins. The validation process for each school is consistent, subject to variations in teachers' and school's schedules and parent availability. Typically the process includes the following steps:

- Two to three weeks before a site visit, administrators are mailed a one-page parent survey to be completed by a representative 15%-20% sample of parents and a one-page survey to be completed by all teachers. These survey forms are collected at the time of the site visit.
- Each site visit typically lasts for an entire school day, or close to that amount of time. Depending upon scheduling considerations, the visit begins with a brief meeting with the school administrator, who provides the visitor with the schedule for the day as well as any published or printed information about the school. Classes are then visited for about 20-30 minutes each when instruction is occurring. Usually five to six classes are visited. Classroom management styles, techniques for behavior management and nature and style of instruction are observed (e.g., whole class, small group, lecturing, modeling, active or passive learning requirements)) Time is allotted to interview teachers individually, although because of time constraints teachers are occasionally interviewed in small groups. Often but not always, a sample of curriculum materials is collected. Parents are interviewed either at the beginning or end of the visit, depending upon availability, and these interviews focus on their satisfaction with the program and why they sent their children to the school as opposed to their local neighborhood school.
- Academic performance data for the schools are then downloaded from the city or State website. Comparable data for neighboring schools, the entire city, and the state are also downloaded for comparison purposes. Occasionally, some schools do not participate in the state assessment process either because the state does not allow them to participate or because they opt not to. These schools invariably administer alternative standardized test data, and these data are used and compared to national norms the particular assessment device and/or are evaluated for performance over time.

- An exit interview is usually held with the school leader at the end of the day to provide him/her with a brief and general overview of the results.
- Information from the classroom observations, interviews and academic performance are then analyzed and a report is produced within two weeks of the visit.

This report provides results of observations, interviews of parents, administrators, and teachers, and a review and analysis of academic achievement data to support the inclusion of Providence St. Mel School in the STC network.

PROVIDENCE-ST.MEL SCHOOL

Providence St. Mel, founded in 1968, is an independent school located on Chicago's West Side. It was founded in 1968. Providence- St. Mel School has as its central purpose the preparation of its students for further academic work, and ultimately for responsible citizenship in the modern world. The school constantly strives for academic excellence along with personal and social development. The academic orientation of the school is paramount and is clearly stated in its philosophy: "to prepare our students for higher education." The school facility is attractive and well maintained. School hours are 8:00 AM until 3:05 PM.

Leadership. The school administrator has been in her position for nine years, and the president of the Board has been in office even longer. The school has stable leadership with the instructional leader and the on-instructional administration working well together. The principal had been a special education teacher prior to becoming an administrator, and she incorporates many special education instructional practices into the educational program. Although the principal conducts three formal observations yearly, there was a clear impression that many additional observations are conducted. Formal observations of the teaching staff are accompanied by written feedback and an exit conference. Faculty evaluation data is a factor in the allocation of merit pay. Salary increments are clearly linked to performance. The principal established an intervention program, analogous to extended time, for students whose grade point average is below 2.0. Students needing intervention services attend school one hour daily after school and three hours on Saturday morning.

The principal established a defined behavior management-training program (CHAMPS) as part of the school's professional development, and teachers use it very effectively. This issue will be elaborated in a different section later in the narrative. This school represents a superb illustration of how effective leadership guides and impacts instruction.

CRITERION 1: POPULATION SERVED

The key demographics of the school are as follows:

Table 5
Demographics for Providence St. Mel

Students enrolled	623
Lower school	199
Middle school	114
High school	310
Grade levels served	K-12
Percent white students	0.1
Percent African-American students	99.9
Percent Hispanic students	0
Percent eligible for free lunch	49
Percent mobility rate	5
Percent receiving special education	2

CRITERION 2: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

As an independent school in Illinois, Providence St. Mel does not participate in the State assessment program, and therefore its performance on State assessments cannot be provided. Instead, the academic rigor of Providence St. Mel can be illustrated by its performance on a variety of national assessments, including the Terra Nova assessments, a standardized program to gauge the achievement of students from elementary school through high school, the Advance Placement exams taken by juniors and seniors who participate in advance placement coursework in high school, and the American College Testing (ACT) program, taken by high school juniors and seniors as part of the college application process.

A. Terra Nova Test Scores (average percentile) by grade level (2005)

The scores for the Terra Nova assessments may be compared to the national average of 50th % tile.

Table 6
Terra Nova National Achievement Assessments

Academic Area	Score						
<i>Lower school</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Reading	93	78	70	62	58	76	
Math	95	74	64	86	58	76	
Science		53	55	78	55	76	
Social studies		62	90	83	60	69	
<i>Middle School</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>			
Reading	66	68	70				
Math	72	69	66				
Science	58	51	61				
Social studies	72	79	72				
<i>High school</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>		
Reading	63	70	69	65			
Math	55	72	68	62			
Science	68	60	63	60			
Social studies	48	63	70	57			

A review of the data above indicate that with the exception of 9th grade social studies, students at Providence St. Mel score above national norms for all academic areas at all grade levels.

B. Advance Placement Scores

Advance placement course are offered by high schools for students who want to experience college level coursework. Providence St. Mel offers advance placement coursework in three academic areas: Calculus, English, and U. S. History. Scores on the Advance placement exam range from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. Outcomes for Providence St. Mel appear in Table 4.

Table 7
Advance Placement Scores

Area Tested	Score	Number of Students Attaining Score
Calculus (AB)	3	5
	4	3
	5	3
English	1	8
	2	6
	3	3
American History	1	3
	2	10
	3	3
	4	2

Average AP score for Providence St. Mel = 2.41
National AP average score = 2.00

A score of 3 or higher on an AP exam is frequently accepted as an indication that a student has mastered college level work. A score of 4 or higher is invariably accepted for college credit. More than half the students who took the AP math exam scored four or higher, and all scored at least three. This is an especially powerful indicator of academic performance. Although scores on the American History and English exams were not as high, especially in English, the fact that students participated in the AP curriculum and most scored above the minimum grade is an indication of the high level of expectation and achievement at this school. Moreover, most urban public high schools do not offer their students an opportunity to participate in the AP curriculum. Nationally, only 6% of students who take AP assessments are African-American (Associated Press, Report: More Students Passing AP Test, January 25, 2005). The average AP score for African-American students is 2.0, according to the Associated Press report. The average score for students at Providence-St. Mel is 2.41, as calculated from the data appearing in Table 5.

C. ACT Scores (2004)*

ACT exams are one of two major national assessments used by colleges as part of the admission process, the other being the SAT. The data in Table 8 below present scores for Providence St. Mel, Illinois and the country as a whole.

Table 8
American College Testing Scores.

Organization	Average ACT Score
Providence St. Mel	21
Illinois	20
National	19

* Scores for Chicago were not available as of this writing.

The data above are self-explanatory insofar as students at Providence St. Mel score higher than both the average both for all students in Illinois who participate in the assessment and for the nation as a whole.

D. High School Graduation Rates

A hallmark of any school is the percentage of students who graduate and go on to higher education. During the last three years for which data are available, School Year 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2003-04, approximately two-thirds of Chicago Public School students graduated from high school. Virtually all Providence St. Mel students will attend college. In fact, from the current senior class of 55 students, 53 seniors graduated (96%) and garnered a total of 291 acceptances to various colleges nation-wide. Included in the list of acceptances were four seniors who were accepted to top-tier liberal arts college, 3 to Grinnell and 1 to Davidson College, and seven students who were accepted to top-tier private universities, including three students accepted by Tufts, two by Northwestern, and two by Emory.

Graduation rates of Providence St. Mel may also be compared with overall graduation rates for the State of Illinois where in School Years 2000, 2001 and 2002, 76%, 74% and 74% graduated, respectively, a rate similar to that reported earlier by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The rate for Providence St. Mel may also be compared to the national average of about 67%, as indicated previously.

CRITERION 3: VALUED BY PARENTS

Parents ratings on a scale indicating the extent of their satisfaction with the school their children attend were as follows:

Table 9
Parent Satisfaction

Organization	Not at all	Just a little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
Providence St. Mel	0	6 (5%)	16 (13%)	38 (31%)	73 (59%)

As was the case for the Academy of the Pacific Rim, the overwhelming majority of parent respondents were satisfied with their children's school. At Providence St. Mel, 90% expressed satisfaction.

Summary

Overall analysis of the program at Providence St. Mel indicates that the school has in place policies that promote high academic performance, well-regarded leadership and sound instruction. More than any other school reviewed, Providence St. Mel has put in place replicable practices that can be applied to other school sites. The high academic achievement, reflected in extremely high graduation and college attendance rates, occurs against the backdrop of a student population that resides in the most crime-ridden community in the United States, according to FBI statistics.

The strengths of the program are its:

- Rigorous academic focus
- Standards based criteria for grade level promotion
- Effective leadership
- Emphasis on and promotion of appropriate social behavior
- Development of good character in students
- Excellent and well-maintained physical facility
- Attractive physical space

The only "weakness" in the academic program I observed was relatively poor performance on the AP English exams, where a majority of students scored 1. This is only a weakness in relation to the stellar scores obtained by largely the same students on the AP math assessment.

APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

SCHOOLS THAT CAN member schools provide families and students from economically disadvantaged urban areas with an education based on the following criteria:

- 1. Located in the inner-city and primarily serving an economically disadvantaged population of students that are representative of its community, with at least 50% eligible for free lunch**
- 2. Striving to achieve superior levels of academic performance as measured by objective assessments and outcomes**
- 3. Emphasizing character based education**
- 4. Providing a safe, disruption-free, non discriminatory environment, where teachers can teach and children can learn**
- 5. Valued by parents and actively engaged within their communities**
- 6. Characterized by dedicated and effective leadership**
- 7. Attaining a high level of sustainability**
- 8. Willing to share “best practices” and assist other STC network schools.**

APPENDIX B

Biography

Jay Gottlieb is a professor of educational psychology in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University. He received his doctorate in 1972 from Yeshiva University in New York City and has spent the past thirty years conducting teaching and conducting research and evaluations in urban schools. His research focuses on the education of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Dr. Gottlieb has served as a special education expert for federal and state court cases involving special education, studied special education in the Oslo, Norway public schools, and participated in the drafting of reports to re-organize special and remedial education in the New York City schools. He has published 90 articles in various professional sources and has been the principal investigator of about two dozen research grants and contracts as well as director of several training grants, including one to train doctoral level researchers in applied research. Dr. Gottlieb was a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a member of numerous other professional organizations, and at various points in his career, served on the editorial boards of half dozen professional journals. Dr. Gottlieb also served two terms as and elected public school trustee in his community.