

**Validation Study For  
SCHOOLS THAT CAN\***

**TELPOCHALLI PUBLIC SCHOOL  
CHICAGO**

**By**

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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

**VALIDATION STUDY REPORT**

**APPENDICES**

**A. CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP**

**B. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

## 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. Telpochalli 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 Telpochcalli School in the STC network.

## TELPOCHCALLI SCHOOL

The Telpochcalli School is one of the Chicago Public Schools and is located in a predominately Hispanic community. Its literature describes Telpochcalli as “a small school dedicated to integrating the Mexican arts and culture into an innovative academic and social experience and the development of fully bilingual/biliterate students in English and Spanish. The school is comprised of students, teachers, parents and artists who aspire to nurture an understanding and appreciation of the self, family, community and world.” Telpochcalli has three professional artists that work with the teachers to plan and implement a year-round arts-integrated curriculum. The entire teaching faculty is bilingual. Telpochcalli occupies a wing of a large school building housing another, larger, public school. This creates a feeling that the environment is cramped and that more space is urgently needed. The principal indicated that occasionally issues arise over shared use of some aspects of the physical plant. School hours are 8:30 AM until 2:45 PM.

Leadership. Telpochcalli’s administrator has been in office for nine years and has been the only principal since the school’s inception. She is knowledgeable about the community and about educational issues impacting the community. She is also well regarded by the faculty. The principal indicated that she administers the school collaboratively with teachers, and all-important decisions affecting the school are made jointly with teachers’ input. School-wide guidelines regarding students’ rights and responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of teachers toward students are established. Considering the social needs of the community and the likely accompanying needs of the students, there is a severe shortage of social and clinical services available. The principal indicated that a school psychologist is available one-half day weekly. School literature indicates that students are to attend school in the school uniform which are available for purchase. T-shirts in many different colors can be used. The principal follows the rules and regulations promulgated by the Chicago Public Schools.

Instruction. Overall, instruction was adequate but did not uniformly engage students well. A primary grade classroom was engaged in a writing lesson and in addition to the classroom teacher there was a special education aide in the room during the observation whose responsibility is to support a student with multiple special needs. Students were divided into groups and the classroom teacher proceeded from one desk to the next, helping individual students at each desk. It appeared that the teacher was only modestly alert to activities at other desks when she was working with children.

An upper grade class was involved in a reading activity, with the teacher reading a story aloud to the students. The lesson began at 11:00 AM promptly but the students soon became restless. About one-third of the students did not appear to be engaged in the story, and they quickly started disrupting each other. Attempts by the teacher to reduce disruptions were mostly unsuccessful.

In working to provide students with a smooth transition, a permanent substitute was assigned to fill in for a teacher on leave. In a 4/5 grade math class, the substitute conducted an engaging lesson on fractions and their equivalents, and students were actively involved. He called on students by name, and gave them positive feedback for their correct responses.

### Parent Participation

All schools maintain that they involve parents. The schools in the STC network may be more dependent than local public schools on parent involvement, especially for fund raising opportunities. Each of the schools described open houses for parents, close contact between parents and teachers, and phone calls home to share both positive and negative events that occurred. The programs that were described did not stand out as extraordinary and appeared to be within the range of parental programs observed at many local public schools. The one exception to this statement is the community-sponsored and community administered parent program at Telpochcalli School, which was extremely strong.

Telpochcalli was unique among the six schools in that its parent population is overwhelmingly Hispanic, under-educated and not very familiar with the educational system in the United States. A local community organization working closely and collaboratively with the school, has an intensive parent training component that attracts between 100-120 parents weekly with a core group of 20-30 parents, to the school for one to three hours daily. The family-centered environment is open to any community parent, even if his/her children do not attend Telpochcalli. Parents are provided programs in English, literacy, computers, writers' workshops, and school organization. The latter workshops instruct parents in how schools work, their expectations, how parents can work with their children, and how to get help when their children need it. A local woman who grew up in the community and became the first in her family to attend and graduate from college administers this unique program.

The advantages of a heavy parent component are twofold. First, when parents are in school their children are happy to see them and are less likely to be disruptive. Second, parents learn how to be more effective advocates for their children, whose performance should be expected to improve. The schools' academic assessment scores, although still not stellar, nevertheless improved considerably during the past two years, a time frame that coincides with the rapid growth of the parent program. While a causal relationship between the intensive parent program and gains in school achievement cannot be claimed, this association deserves more in-depth study because it may represent an effective and relatively cost efficient way to improve the overall quality of schools. The importance of a home-school connection is well known and frequently discussed; however, it is rarely implemented to the degree that it is at Telpochcalli.

The parent component emerged as the single most intriguing feature of Telpochcalli School, and the one that differentiated this school from the majority of traditional urban public school programs. The uniqueness of the school community is what allows this kind of parent/community component to grow and develop.

CRITERION 1: POPULATION SERVED

The key demographics of Telpochcalli School are as follows:

**Table 20**  
**Telpochcalli Demographics**

Students enrolled	314
Lower school	212
Middle school	102
High school	0
Grade levels served	K-8
Percent white students	1
Percent African-American students	0
Percent Hispanic students	99
Percent eligible for free lunch	98
Percent mobility rate	17
Percent receiving special education	12

CRITERION 2: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

**Table 21**  
**Performance on State Assessments**

Organization	Reading 2003	Reading 2004	Math 2003	Math 2004
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade				
Telpochcalli	50	9		36
Area 10-CPS	38	41		63
Chicago	36	41	49	56
Illinois	62	65	68	79
5 <sup>th</sup> grade				
Telpochcalli	28	47	33	63
Area 10-CPS	36	47		63
Chicago	39	43	44	51
Illinois	60	61		72
8 <sup>th</sup> grade				
Telpochcalli	40	33	12	39

Area 10-CPS	47	52		37
Chicago	52	55	31	33
Illinois				54

The data displayed in Table 21 indicate that Telpochcalli School despite the fact that children in the lower grades scores generally more poorly than the average of students who attend Chicago public schools, undoubtedly relate to the high percentage whose native language is not English, by the time the students leave 8<sup>th</sup> grade their scores are about even with those in other Chicago schools.

**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 22  
Parent Satisfaction**

Organization	Not at all	Just a little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
Telpochcalli	1 (7%)	0	1 (7%)	5 (36%)	7 (50%)

As with other schools in the Bill Traylor network, parents are largely satisfied with their children’s school.

**Summary**

- Stable and highly regarding leadership
- Excellent parent involvement program
- Bilingual faculty and good bilingual instruction

A recommendation is for the school to conduct additional professional development on instruction. The instruction observed was not at a level to bring the school to substantially higher levels of academic achievement. The program does a decent job in acculturating a largely non-English speaking population and enables them to leave school with about the same skill level as other students who attend Chicago public schools. Improved instruction would bring the school to the next level.

## **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 an elected public school trustee in his community.