

THE CATALYST SCHOOLS' VISION and THEORY of CHANGE

Mission

The Catalyst Schools believe that every child possesses inherent value and potential, regardless of background, educational level, or life circumstances.

Our college-preparatory schools partner with urban communities to offer K-8 or K-12 students welcoming educational settings that nurture academic, social, and emotional growth and respect for all. As students move on to high school, they remain vital members of the Catalyst community through our graduate support programs. We help all students and graduates discover a fruitful path to high school, to college, and to a citizenship that embraces peace, justice, and respect. We actively engage students' families and neighborhoods, striving to create strong connections between students' education and the communities they live in. Guided by this mission, we empower our students to become agents of change.

Vision

The Catalyst Schools vision is that all children – especially those in Chicago's most distressed neighborhoods – have access to the educational choices and resources that will enable them to become college-bound citizens of character and class who recognize their duty to advance American society toward the greater good.

Every scholar will experience the idea that they are college bound from their first day in kindergarten - and throughout their tenure as Catalyst students - and they will be moved forward first to high school and then to enrollment and acceptance to a college or university. Five years after eighth grade graduation, Catalyst Schools' graduates will be in college or have the required preparation for a satisfying and life-sustaining career.

Every scholar will experience adults who live lives of character, class, and service – and the adults will expect the same from their scholars. School is where scholars see in the adults a spirit of faith and zeal, and where both experience their most productive moments.

Mission and Vision speak to both questions of philosophy and identity – our core identity and what we are attempting to accomplish in the lives of young children, their families, and the communities in which they live. Our philosophy guides our behavior and is also a statement about the qualities we foster in our students' character as they grow with us.

Core components of the Catalyst program:

- 1) We are college-prep
- 2) We are values-based
- 3) We provide a structured, disciplined environment
- 4) We provide emotional supports for scholars
- 5) We provide support for graduates beyond 8th grade

Our Philosophy

- We show profound reverence for each scholar as a unique person
- We foster respectful relationships and build community

- We have high expectations of ourselves and each other, hold ourselves accountable, and deliver high results
- We treat each other the way we want to be treated
- We promote justice and peace
- We embrace the Catalyst Way as our own: We speak a common language and live a common set of values

Core Values

Relationship: The heart of the Catalyst Schools is the bond, both professional and personal, that we build with one another among staff and with our students and their parents. No teaching or learning will take place unless teachers are able to forge positive and appropriate relationships with their students and the parents who entrust their children to our care. Positive, healthy, and appropriate relationship is the source of change. The trust and love of a student for his or her teacher unleashes the behaviors that lead to success.

Rigor: All faculty and staff are called to dedication and commitment for the well-being of the children we serve. This includes high academic standards, a consistent and healthy culture of peace and calm throughout the school, a discipline code that is a teaching tool, and respect for each person's talents, skills, and unique gifts. Students are brought to higher levels of functioning and thinking through a no-nonsense academic program built on solid research.

Results: 100% of Catalyst elementary school graduates will be accepted by and enrolled in high schools with a proven track record of college placement and a mission that is compatible with Catalyst's vision. 100% of Catalyst—Maria High School graduates will be accepted to and enrolled in a college or university with a proven track record of graduating students from urban communities. Other desired outcomes include superior teaching evidenced by student outcomes; initial academic growth of 1.5 years each year as measured by the NWEA and once grade level is achieved consistent growth beyond grade level through eighth grade; a healthy, vibrant, and diverse school community; student understanding and adoption of the six pillars of character; a relationship with the larger community that emphasizes the school as a community asset; Catalyst school graduates will go on to college or receive the required preparation for a satisfying and life-sustaining career within five years of their eighth grade graduation.

Hope: Catalyst pushes students beyond their perceived capacity so they discover they are capable of much more than they thought. We raise expectations, set the bar high, and help our scholars succeed in their academic work, their personal socio-emotional development, and in what they come to believe they can be in life. Education is at the service of human dignity and the freedom every person desires. Catalyst is a vehicle through which those can be enhanced and attained. Every student can and will learn and become a productive and positive agent for change in Chicago neighborhoods traditionally impacted by economic poverty, the greater Chicago area, the State of Illinois and the larger world community.

Hallmark behaviors of our identity

- Superior teaching: There is a relentless pursuit to make every minute count; bell to bell teaching takes place in a structured, disciplined classroom.
- Student RESULTS determine success of the teacher.
- Every student is greeted with a smile, handshake, and eye-to-eye contact from an administrator as they enter the building.

- The socio-emotional development and needs of each student are taken seriously and are addressed by professional teachers and staff in the classroom and by a team of qualified, certified social work professionals.
- The need of every student, no matter the skill level or disability, is addressed in proactive ways led by a certified team of Special Education professionals when advised.
- Every classroom has two assigned “ambassadors” who are trained to greet visitors with a handshake, eye-to-eye contact and explain what they are learning.
- Teachers display their college diplomas, banners, and accomplishments for all to see.
- EVERYONE focuses on character: The six pillars of character (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship) are taught and lived by the adults and noted in students when they live them. Discipline is also built around these character traits and children, when acting inappropriately are called back to the six traits.
- The school is focused under the leadership of the principal who has responsibility and authority for teacher and staff performance and the human relationships required to make it all work.
- The grounds, facilities, classrooms are supremely clean and organized.
- We keep a positive mindset and professionalism governs our behaviors.

Educational Philosophy

Our philosophy is not complex nor is it abstract. We embrace the Catalyst Way as our own: We speak a common language and live a common set of values.

We show profound reverence for each student as a unique person.

We believe that education is not impersonal but significantly connected to the hopes, dreams, talents, skills and abilities of each individual student. Teaching and learning take place when a teacher is able to really know and understand each student and to tap into the person. At the Catalyst Schools we teach human beings and are attuned to the needs of each one. Education is differentiated so that every student can reach and exceed his or her perceived capacity.

We foster respectful relationships and build community.

Trust is a significant key to the educational process. Students learn when they trust the adults in their school and believe that they are truly concerned for their well-being. Trust is built upon the respect that is given each person simply because they are a person. When trust built on respect is established, relationships grow and potential is unleashed. The network of relationships both within the classroom and throughout the school creates a community of care where each person welcomes challenge, mentoring, coaching, and is affirmed for their gifts.

We have high expectations of ourselves and each other, hold ourselves accountable, and deliver high results.

Administrators, teachers, staff, students and parents are held to high standards. Clear metrics define desired results and everyone is measured by the agreed upon metrics for student success, teacher and staff proficiency, cultural integrity, and institutional advancement. There are no mystery speed limits. We know that meeting expected outcomes determines our success.

We treat each other the way we want to be treated.

The Golden Rule is the Gold Standard for human relationships. Every religion possesses some formulation of that proscribed recipe for good human community. Atheists, humanists, believers, and all people have fundamental agreement that we should treat each other as we wish to be treated. This is the fundamental spiritual base out of which the Catalyst Schools have grown. Formation in the six pillars of character (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship) is the vehicle through which we teach children to live the Golden Rule. This is the basis of the Catalyst Schools culture.

We promote justice and peace.

Justice demands that we respect, value, and serve our fellow human beings. Human dignity is what the Catalyst Schools nurtures, values, and safeguards. The Campaign for Human Development says, "If you want peace, work for justice". Education at Catalyst is a work of justice because children are made aware of their unique gifts, awakened to their own dignity, offered opportunity to join the cultural mainstream by being prepared for the future, taught to negotiate differences, and to become change agents in the world.

We understand curriculum as a blend of cultural expectations and academic programs

When we speak of our "school curriculum", we are speaking about the deliberate and intentional manner in which we educate and form the children entrusted to our care. The school curriculum refers to the message and intent of every touch point with our scholars – from the second they walk into the building to the second they leave it, to how we engage and interact with parents and what we expect of each other as we form a learning community. The curriculum is the school's comprehensive "agenda" as it goes about its responsibility to form productive citizens.

At Catalyst, that agenda is summed up in these non-negotiable principles: we expect our scholars to graduate from college, we are values-based, and we set high expectations around acquiring certain character traits. We are rigorous in our pursuit of academic excellence and we focus on producing tangible results from our work. We are in a long-term relationship with our students that goes beyond 8th grade, and we are intentional about building a hopeful disposition about the possibilities and opportunities that life presents.

Every word uttered, every action taken by a teacher, IA, social worker, secretary, janitor, principal - any adult in the building – is deliberately chosen so that they reinforce these non-negotiable principles. This gets lived out in various ways throughout the building and the day. The curriculum is lived out when the principal greets every child upon entrance into the school; it gets lived out by adults insisting on eye contact and a firm handshake from students. It gets lived out by teachers insisting on order and discipline in the classroom, by living the character traits they are teaching, and by insisting that students show evidence that they are striving to live the values they are being taught. The curriculum gets lived out by how teachers and the Dean of Students correct behavior and implement behavior management, and how social workers and counselors address emotional issues that demand attention. It gets lived out when the graduate support team mentors our graduates and visits them at their high schools. The curriculum gets lived out in every routine, practice and procedure utilized by the adults in the building as they carry out their work. It gets lived out when every adult in the building treats young people with the tenderness of a mother and the firmness of a father.

The school curriculum gets lived out in the specific educational strategies and content that the school chooses to teach a particular body of knowledge. It gets lived out when teachers set student-specific goals for the reading and math program, when every teacher reinforces principles of balanced literacy when teaching language arts, or using the inquiry method when teaching science. It gets lived out by teachers using the Socratic method and pushing themselves and their students to capture all elements of Bloom's taxonomy in the process. The school curriculum gets lived out in the intentional message we deliver about the holocaust, the civil rights movement, the historical understanding of how our nation and world arrived at the current moment in time, and the responsibilities and duties of a young man or woman to advance American society toward the greater good.

A school's curriculum is often understood apart from a school's culture. At Catalyst, culture and the traditional understanding of curriculum are one and the same. At the end of the day, the school's curriculum is embodied in the young man or woman we graduate and send forth into the community: a young person of character and class, equipped with academic skills needed to succeed in high school, animated by a vision of college graduation and productive citizenship, possessing the character traits and disposition to feel hopeful about life's possibilities and be a beacon of hope and possibility to others.