

Logan Square, Chicago



THE ENTRY POINT

A neighborhood association working with parents to build a comprehensive set of programs to create opportunities for parents to support their neighborhood schools in a broad set of roles, including classroom tutoring, community organizing, school council membership, community learning center employment, and training to be bilingual educators

THE CHALLENGE

In a predominantly immigrant community, how can parents be meaningfully engaged in the educational lives of their children, be treated as valued partners in school and community improvement, and help students succeed in school?

THE PARTNERS

Logan Square Neighborhood Association
Chicago Public Schools
Chicago State University
Social services and arts agencies

The Story

Logan Square is a mixed-income community on Chicago's northwest side that is home to about 85,000 people, two-thirds of whom are Latino. Built in response to the urgent need for affordable housing after the Chicago fire of 1861, Logan Square has acquired a long and rich tradition of diversity, as successive waves of immigrant populations have called it home.

Today, more than 90 percent of the students in the neighborhood's public schools come from low-income, primarily Latino and immigrant families. However, gentrification increasingly strains the immigrant, working-class families of Logan Square, who struggle to afford the soaring housing costs. (Chicago, as a whole, has experienced a significant reduction in affordable housing; as part of its "Plan for Transformation," the city demolished nearly 20,000 public housing units but built fewer than 2,000 new affordable housing units.) One

What happens when parents are involved as leaders as well as learners? Expanded facilities that better meet students' needs during the day and turn into community centers at night. An organized Latino community has created a quiet revolution, Chicago-style, and is sending a signal to families and community members that "you are welcome here."

— *From Jeanne Jehl et al., Education and Community Building: Connecting Two Worlds*

Working collaboratively with principals, teachers, and parents . . . our common goal is to make schools centers of their communities to build family-centered learning communities. . . . [Public schools] are the perfect sites for integrating immigrants into the society and giving both students and families the support they need to move forward. . . . We have developed a holistic set of programs step by step, organically, with parents. . . . In this model, parents help create the programs, run them, and mentor each other. Schools need organized parents, and parents need their own support base.

— *Testimony by Logan Square Neighborhood Association to the Illinois Joint Legislative Task Force on Immigrants and Refugees*

Logan Square resident, a Latina mother of elementary-age students, put the reality of the situation best: “My personal goal is to become a bilingual teacher and teach in my community, but I am worried that by the time I graduate there will be no children left for me to teach.” This deep concern for supporting Logan Square’s Latino community is further amplified by the inspired words of another Latina resident, who owns a home in Logan Square with her sister: “We could say, ‘We have ours, why do we care about everyone else?’ But that is against our values, our religion, our culture. We are blessed that we could come to this country as immigrants, work hard, and be able to stay together and live together as a family. We want others to have the same opportunity.”

A History of Effective Community Organizing and Development: Entry Point for Education Reform

For forty-five years, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) has emphasized the connection between community organizing and community development. In efforts to improve access to affordable housing, neighborhood safety, and economic development, LSNA has utilized organizing and training methods to build and support strong neighborhood-based leadership. LSNA membership – which includes community members, educators, community-based organizations, local businesses, and religious and political leaders – develops “holistic” action plans because of its fundamental belief that single issues, however important, do not exist in a vacuum, just as the story above reveals the important connections between immigration, affordable housing, and education.

One observer describes the work of LSNA this way: “The organization is intentional about the value of employing citizens from the community: staff with all levels of formal education work together closely in teams and inform groups, sharing roles and responsibilities.”

Its track record of authentic and successful community organizing provided the entry point for LSNA’s education work, which began in the early 1990s as Chicago transitioned to local school council governance of its public schools. With the continued immigration of Latino families, the school-age population increased sharply, and many neighborhood schools ended up severely overcrowded. LSNA organized a campaign to get the city to fund school construction in Logan Square and achieved impressive results: two new middle schools were built and annexes were added to five elementary schools.

A Series of Successful Strategies

The funding “win” was a tremendous victory by itself, but in the long run, the byproduct was equally important: through the school construction campaign work, LSNA’s organizers began to build *relationships of trust* with school principals, teachers, parents, and community members. According to one Logan Square middle school principal, “LSNA got the opportunity as a community organization to learn more about the culture of the schools. Likewise, the schools got the opportunity to learn more about the culture of the community. This really helped us work together on other issues as well.”

In the mid-1990s, LSNA parent mentors conducted *door-to-door surveys* in their children's school-attendance zones to plan *community learning centers* (CLCs) in their own neighborhood schools. A large majority of residents – about 80 percent – said that they would like to see adult education programs in the schools. These survey results guided the programs offered at the first CLC, which opened in 1996 with youth tutoring, as well as GED and ESL programs for adults, along with evening and weekend options, child care, security, and other supports.

In school-based work, LSNA saw parents as the main resident constituency to be engaged. Latina mothers took primary responsibility for their children's education. Yet many were new to the social and political life of this country and isolated in their homes. LSNA organizers looked for a strategy that could bring them into initial involvement in the schools, a starting point for leadership development so that they could become active participants and decision-makers in schools.

– Mark Warren, Harvard Graduate School of Education

There are currently six CLCs in Logan Square serving over 1,000 families per week. The community schools program includes after-school tutoring, summer camp, and recreation and arts courses for students. LSNA runs the CLCs and partners with other well-established local organizations to provide after-school and evening programs for youth and adults. Community residents work in the centers as teachers, aides, security guards, and child care providers. Each center has a governing board composed primarily of local residents and, as has been the case from the beginning, the programs are developed and modified based upon community input.

LSNA launched the *parent mentor program* in 1995, which places 130 parents as tutors in classrooms each year at nine schools. The program has many goals at its core: increasing student achievement, improving school climate, helping teachers, and encouraging each parent's personal growth. Most are mothers who have been relatively isolated in their homes raising their children, so developing goals for their *own* futures – not just their children's – is usually a new experience and challenge. It is the first time in a long time that many of these mothers have been encouraged to think of themselves and their own personal and professional development.

Each parent spends two hours each day in the school and is paid a stipend for her efforts. A program director at each school (parent mentor graduates and mothers at the school) facilitates weekly sessions for the parent mentors to learn from each other, build skills, and set goals for themselves. Once each month, the entire cohort of parent mentors meets together around a specific topic (recent topics have included strategies for special education and English-language learner classrooms). So, in addition to their personal goals, the parents also identify goals they hope to accomplish for the school and community; parent mentors have founded youth sports programs, school-uniform policies, lending libraries, and school-safety initiatives.

Most of the 1,200 alumni of the parent mentor program have used the program as an opportunity to continue their own education, seek full-time jobs in the schools or jobs with

Timeline of LSNA's Education Initiatives

Early 1990s	Trains parents to run for seats on their local school councils
1992–1996	Organizes parents, teachers, principals, and community leaders in response to school overcrowding
1994	Parent organizing, the parent mentor program, and community learning centers become core aspects of LSNA's holistic plan
1995	Launches parent mentor program
2003	Launches literacy ambassadors program
2004	Launches parent tutors program Begins collaboration with the new Kelvyn Park High School Social Justice Academy
2005	LSNA's education work wins the Chicago Community Organizing Award and the Ford Foundation's Leadership for a Changing World Award
2006	Illinois legislature approves multiyear funding to replicate LSNA's teacher certification program, named "Grow Your Own Illinois"

increased skill demands, and move into leadership roles in LSNA. Because of the success of the parent mentor program, LSNA soon confronted the question of how to engage parents who do not have enough time to be parent mentors. The result of this deliberation was a new program called *literacy ambassadors*, which brings a two-person team (one teacher and one parent mentor) into students' homes to build literacy skills and personal relationships. Last year, forty teams from six schools visited 360 homes.

Another program developed more recently is the *parent tutor program*, which provides individualized tutoring to students who are struggling and need the most help, particularly in literacy. Each tutor is paid to work twenty hours per week, working one-on-one with the students in Logan

Square schools that need the most help. This individualized literacy support is critical to students as they transition out of bilingual programs.

Supply and Demand: "Growing Your Own" Bilingual Educators

As more and more parents successfully completed the parent mentor program, their goals continued to grow. According to Joanna Brown, director of LSNA's education organizing, "They were doing a great job in the classroom and brought a lot of understanding of the issues of bilingualism. [They were saying], 'I don't want to go back to the factory or to cleaning floors. I want to stay in the schools.'" In response, LSNA joined forces with Chicago State University's bilingual education department and won a grant to start *Nueva Generación*, an evening and weekend post-secondary program for parents and paraprofessionals to obtain a bachelor's degree, teacher certification, and a bilingual education certificate.

The program also provides tutoring for participating students who need extra help with math and learning English. Many classes are held nearby in Logan Square's CLCs or the public library. LSNA staff and the students themselves underscore the fact that mutual support is a key ingredient in the success of the program because most of the participants are mothers and many of them are also juggling part-time or full-time employment. Of the fifty individuals

that made up the first cohort, twenty-five are still in the program after six and a half years, two have graduated, and four work as full-time staff at LSNA.

Clear pathways of individual development exist for parents (parent mentor graduates continue on as parent tutors, literacy ambassadors, Nueva Generación students, and/or LSNA organizers), but what also makes the programs unique is the degree to which the parents learn from each other. LSNA and Chicago State University welcomed Maestros Sin Fronteras (Teachers without Borders), their second cohort of teacher licensure candidates, in the fall of 2006. Several of the Nueva Generación students, many of whom are completing their student-teaching practicum and nearing graduation, are tutoring the new cohort. Figure 1 depicts some examples of parents' pathways for professional and personal growth.

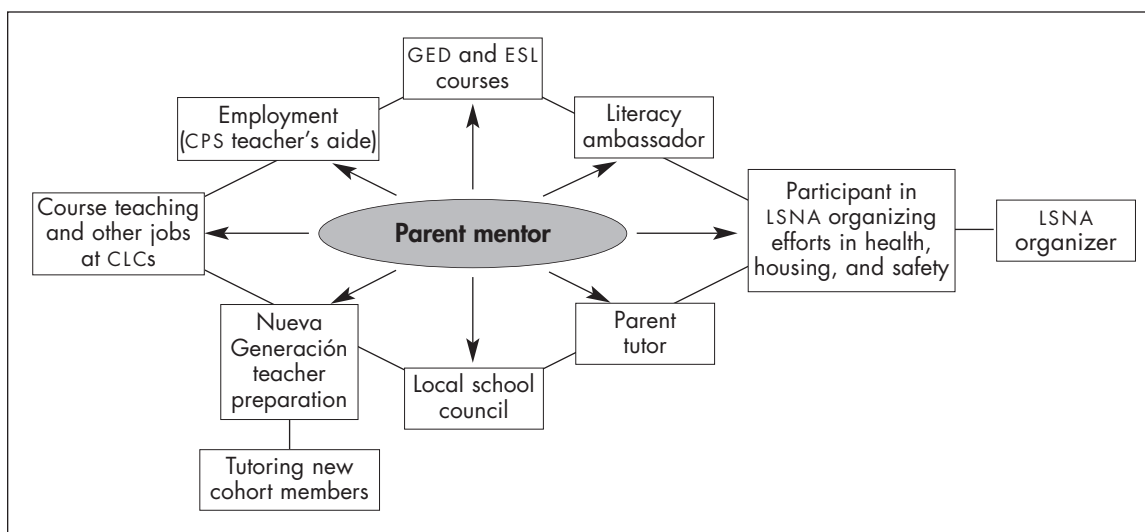


Figure 1. Examples of parents' pathways for professional and personal growth

Measuring the Impact on Students and Families

LSNA's efforts have a proven track record of success. Test scores have doubled over the past nine years in the schools that are impacted by LSNA's programs. More than one hundred adults earn their GED credentials each year at the CLCs.

LSNA is in the early stages of an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of each parent tutor in terms of the achievement levels of the student being tutored. This data on program effectiveness will inform the program but will also be useful to existing and potential funders, the school system, and other partners.

Sustainability and Scale

Nueva Generación is the model for the new statewide Grow Your Own Illinois initiative, an effort to develop teachers of color in low-income communities. This year's state budget includes \$3 million for Grow Your Own programs in a ten-year effort to add 1,000 teachers in low-income, high-minority schools. Recently, two other community organizations in Chicago have started parent mentor programs.

Transitioning to High School Work

Because of the gains made in student achievement across the elementary schools and because parents' students are getting older, LSNA and the Logan Square parents are becoming increasingly involved in high school work. This transition brings opportunities, but also technical challenges, because LSNA's expertise and experience to date has been primarily aimed at the elementary and middle school grades.

In 2005, a group of parent mentors began the Parent-to-Parent Attendance Program at Kelvyn Park High School. The six parent mentors work closely with the high school's attendance coordinator; they make phone calls in Spanish, visit homes, and invite families to the school for a meeting (which often feels less formal and intimidating than visiting a principal or administrator). Kelvyn Park's assistant principal said, "It makes a big difference to have parents contacting other parents." The success of the parent mentors increased average daily attendance at the school from 78 percent to 88 percent, helping the school win Chicago's most improved attendance record last fall.

Also at Kelvyn Park, LSNA partnered with the new Social Justice Academy to work with ninth- and tenth-grade students on community history projects and issues of gentrification, immigration, and school safety. Together, they developed the Logan Square Parent Mentor Stories Project, in which ninth-grade students mastered narrative writing while conducting firsthand research by interviewing parent mentors.

These interviews were both educational and inspirational. The resulting bilingual publication was researched, written, designed, and assembled by the students in the Kelvyn Park Social Justice Academy. The project's purpose was to create a publication of parent mentor stories that can be used in schools and community spaces to promote literacy and serve as a catalyst for discussions about community issues.

Sustainability and Funding

Logan Square's educational programs receive planning grants and seed funding from various sources – but long-term funding is more difficult. Because of its community-engagement model and technical expertise, the Logan Square educational programs often function as an incubator to create and refine programs and practices for Chicago Public Schools (and in the case of the Grow Your Own program, for Illinois as a whole). However, the school system and the city do not provide adequate or consistent funding to sustain this model of "best practices

incubator” and the response from the school system is that it lacks the capacity to expand LSNA’s programs (or a subset of the programs) citywide.

The CLCs in Logan Square were initially designed with the support of a planning grant from Project Success, a grant from the Polk Brothers Foundation, and discretionary funds from the neighborhood’s state legislators, and were later funded through the Chicago Public Schools by a 21st Century Learning Community grant. Now the funds are approved by the state through a five-year grant that declines in the third year (which will be 2008). It is also unclear whether LSNA can continue to receive funding as schools improve. Therefore, there is a clear need for LSNA, as a community-based organization with a track record of success, to enter into the policy debate around the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind.

Questions for Forum Participants from the Logan Square, Chicago Site Team

- LSNA is expanding its focus to include more organizing and programs in secondary schools. What experiences and lessons do you have to share to support this transition in terms of capacity, relationship building, and other issues that are critical to successful outcomes?
- What types of data and evaluation would be most effective in demonstrating the impact of LSNA’s programs on students to funders (existing and potential), school and municipal leaders, and community partners?
- While LSNA has succeeded in funding its expanding work to date, it is operating mostly on a year-to-year basis, and fund-raising is more than a full-time job. In what ways do you think this pilot idea of a “community-centered school” and set of parent opportunities could be institutionalized on a broader basis with its own funding sources?
- How can LSNA use its successes to help change the paradigm of schooling from one that defines education as what goes on only in the classroom, with parent and community support as an add-on, to one that uses family and neighborhood assets (from culture and language to parent academic support) as building blocks for student success?

Site Team Members

Joanna Brown is director of education organizing at LSNA. Before joining LSNA in 1993, she worked as a journalist, a college teacher, and a community activist.

Olga La Luz is an area instructional coordinator for Chicago Public Schools. She works closely with principals, school staff, local school councils, and parents to improve instruction in twenty-eight schools in and around Logan Square. She is a former Chicago elementary school administrator.

Ofelia Sanchez is parent tutor coordinator for LSNA. She has worked as an LSNA parent mentor, parent tutor, and literacy ambassador, and she is a student in LSNA’s inaugural Grow

Your Own teacher-preparation program. A parent at Monroe Elementary School, she is an elected parent representative on the local school council, which is currently in the process of hiring a replacement for the retiring principal.

Claudia Solano is bilingual coordinator at Darwin Elementary School and a lead teacher (liaison) for LSNA parent programs at the school. She has worked in LSNA's literacy ambassador program and places Grow Your Own students as student teachers in Darwin dual-language classrooms.

For More Information

- Logan Square Neighborhood Association: <www.lsna.net>
- Chicago Public Schools: <www.cps.k12.il.us>
- Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. *Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: The Indicators Project on Education Organizing*. LSNA Case Study. Available at <www.lsna.net>