

Express

CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NORTH LAWNSDALE
HELP COMMUNITY GROW



The West Side community of North Lawndale has the largest number of charter campuses and the highest percentage of public school students in charters of any community area in the city. Last year the four elementary and three high school charter campuses enrolled more than 18% of public schools students in North Lawndale, compared to just 7% of CPS students in charters city wide. When existing Lawndale charters reach full enrollment, they will account for nearly a quarter of public school students in the community.

The charter schools in North Lawndale are North Lawndale College Prep (NLCP), LEARN Charter School, KIPP Ascend Charter School, Legacy Charter School, Catalyst Howland School, and Power House High, which is part of Henry Ford Academies. On average 85% of Lawndale charter students come from the same neighborhood where each school is located. When Catalyst Howland opened, according to former community outreach agent Sharon Morgan, their recruitment efforts were resisted by families disheartened by the Howland closing. But today 91% of Catalyst students come from blocks surrounding the school, nearly the same percentage as for regular attendance area schools.

According to Patt Kroll, the current Outreach Coordinator at Catalyst, what attracts most parents is the schools' promise of order, discipline and demanding instruction. Dina Green-Rhea, who had two children finish KIPP and go on

to west side charter high schools, added positive attention to parent interests and input as factors attracting her family. She points to positive school culture as the essential condition for higher test scores and other objective measures of school quality.

Last year, 68% of elementary students tested in Lawndale charter schools met or exceeded standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, compared to 58% of students in the other Lawndale public schools. NLCP has twice the percentage of high school students meeting or exceeding state standards and 100% of its graduates accepted by at least one college. School President John Horan expects that each year NLCP alone will add 180 Lawndale youth to the ranks of the college bound, with significant impact on the level of education of North Lawndale residents.

Students meeting or exceeding standards in all the Lawndale elementary schools combined increased by six percentage points in the past two years, due mainly to larger score improvements in ten out of 21 of the other Lawndale schools. As charters have grown in Lawndale and nearby communities, their waiting lists are also growing. The opportunities are spreading and competition among all the schools is increasing. North Lawndale is the Chicago community where charter schools—in significant number—may first prove their value to the improvement of a community at large.