

YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL OF CHICAGO
Annual Report: 2008-2009 Academic Year

The lessons I've learned at Young Women's Leadership Charter School are everlasting. Young Women's has taught me if you can imagine it, you can achieve it. Great things come to those who not only believe in the beauty of their dreams, but to those who also plan and act. In the fall, I'll be a student at Spelman College, but Young Women's will always be home.

Shaquita Webster, YWLCS Class of 2009

Excerpt from speech given at the 2009 YWLCS Girl Power Luncheon.

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Young Women's Leadership Charter School of Chicago (YWLCS) is a small single-sex public school that educates ordinary Chicago public school girls, but achieves extraordinary results. In 2008-2009, YWLCS was a teaching and learning community consisting of 350 students (chosen by lottery) and 50 teachers and staff – allowing for a 1:10 teacher to student ratio.

YWLCS uses a lottery admission system instead of a merit based admission system; so, our students are representative of students in the Chicago Public School (CPS) system as a whole. Nearly 2/3s of our girls arrive performing at least one grade level behind, while 80% of our students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, indicating that they came from households with a low family income. Seventy seven percent of our students were African American, 15% were Latina, 6% were Caucasian, 1% were Asian, and 1% were mixed race or other. We are able to admit students from across the city and in 2008-2009, students came from 29 different zip codes within the city.

There is much to celebrate about this year, our ninth year as an innovative and effective urban public school. Here are some highlights from the 2008-09 school year:

- We are proud to announce that 96% of our 2009 Senior Class graduated in June and 89% of those have been accepted to attend college! This Fall, our recent graduates will attend colleges and universities such as Spelman College, DePaul University, University of Illinois at Chicago and at Urbana-Champaign, as well as Michigan State University.
- YWLCS has remained in the top 20% of ALL Chicago public schools (both selective and non-selective) in both percentage of students graduating high school and in percentage of students going on to post-secondary education.
- At our First Annual Girl Power Benefit Luncheon in April 2009, the school raised \$310,000, with students playing a major role during the event program. Our students introduced each of our five honorees and keynote speaker Penny Pritzker, gave speeches about their experience at YWLCS, and showcased some of their school projects to our 600 guests.
- In January 2009, YWLCS received the "Educator of the Year" Award from one of our program partners, Friends of the Chicago River, for our "excellence in river education and enthusiastic ventures into watershed improvement."

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Progress on 2008-09 Strategic Goals

In order to educate the young women at YWLCS, our learning and teaching community stands on four pillars: (1) academic achievement; (2) career and college preparation; (3) leadership development, and (4) personal and social development.

At YWLCS, responsibility for designing, implementing and evaluating activities in support of these goals is delegated to teams. Leadership for the planning and implementation of activities in support of our strategic goals is distributed to teacher-led academy and content area teams. There are three academies with corresponding leadership teams: the Middle School Academy (7th and 8th grades); the Junior Academy (9th and 10th grades); and the Senior Academy (11th and 12th grades). There are three primary content areas with corresponding leadership teams: Humanities, Math, and Science.

Rather than describe the full programming for each grade level, highlights of new and/or expanded programming is given in this report.

Academic Achievement

Strategic Goal:

Enhance learning environments to foster higher order thinking and to authentically engage students in order to increase their academic growth.

Every teacher at Young Women's showed us how their subjects connects to ourselves, and how knowing about Physics, Women's History, Mathematics, and every other curriculum can influence our lives and future careers.

Jasmine Perry, Class of 2009 Salutatorian
Incoming freshman at Lake Forest College

Highlights of 2008-2009:

Fostering Authentic Engagement through Cross-Curricular Integration

During the 2008-09 academic year, there was a continued emphasis on cross-curricular integration in every grade, providing our students with a richer academic experience by broadening the context and applicability of information and skills that they learned.

For instance, the 9th grade art curriculum integrated topics from other content areas, such as the social justice focus in humanities, as well as symmetry systems linked with math tessellations. By combining these content areas, the 9th grade students chose an issue of importance to them, and created Social Justice Posters using collage, painting, and drawing skills. Additionally, this year's 10th grade students built upon these skills they learned in 9th grade and used vector drawing tools in Photoshop to illustrate their thoughts and ideas on what Social Justice means to them. Students worked to find an interesting angle on their topic, often using powerful and complex visual metaphors and phrases to point out and question their issues. The Social Justice Posters were displayed prominently in the school and raised awareness about important and meaningful issues including drunk driving, teen pregnancy, abortion, the environment, domestic violence, poverty, and gang violence. As a result of the Social Justice Poster

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Display, our middle school students and teachers were inspired to create their own posters in MS Word. The focus of their social justice posters was water conservation, which related directly to the middle school students' Science Fair and Chicago River Trip.

Fostering Higher Order Thinking through Co-Curricular Opportunities:

This past year, we continued for the third year our successful partnership with Northwestern University (NU) to create a hands-on Saturday science program in the reproductive sciences called the Oncofertility Saturday Academy (OSA). Led by Dr. Teresa Woodruff, Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, the program empowers 30 YWLCS juniors and seniors by engaging them in science and medical experiences that are relevant to their lives. This collaboration has resulted in 25% of our juniors and seniors having high impact, hands-on science experiences such as impregnating sea urchins. The partnership has been so successful that Northwestern expanded the program to include the Cardiology Summer Academy this past Summer, and will also include an Infectious Disease Academy next summer. Because of the uniqueness of the program, Northwestern University (NU) commissioned a documentary called OSA: Sisters in Science, which explores the students' hopes, dreams, and motivations to be the best they can be. YWLCS is currently working with NU to determine the best distribution method for the documentary.

Fostering Higher Order Thinking through Math POWs

YWLCS uses the Connected Mathematics Program (CMP) in the 7th and 8th grades and the Interactive Mathematics Program (IMP) in the high school. These programs are distinguished from traditional mathematics curricula in that they are problem-centered, integrated, and includes a broader variety of contemporary mathematical topics. This investigative approach to mathematics is especially fitting for our diverse community of learners.

As a part of our whole school initiative to increase the higher order thinking capacity of our students, the YWLCS math team decided to put a greater emphasis this past year on Problems of the Week (POWs). POWs are problems that are designed so that students must think deeply and synthesize information that they've learned in a unit to come to a conclusion. Often times students must collect, organize and analyze data, as well as come to generalize in the form of some equation. In addition to completing this work, students must complete a write up explaining their thought process, assumptions, misunderstandings, and conclusions. The implementation of POWs this past year led to increased confidence and more productivity in math class. This year's emphasis on POWs in all math classes was seen by YWLCS math teachers as a great building block to continue to improve our students' capacity to think at a higher level.

In May 2009, Young Women's Leadership Charter School was recognized by The Motorola Foundation with an Innovation Generation Grant of \$10,000 for implementing its innovative math curriculum. Motorola's Innovation Generation program provides funding to organizations around the U.S. that have innovative approaches to develop minority girls' interest and skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

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Career and College Preparation

Strategic Goal:

Maintain school-wide infusion of programming from grades 7-12 and develop a coherent programming sequence to introduce the young women to a range of college and post-secondary options and opportunities.

At YWLCS, I discovered my passion for midwifery thanks to the career and college preparation that was provided to me. I always knew I wanted to be a nurse, but as a sophomore as an intern at the Center for Research on Women and Gender, I was given the opportunity to visit a midwifery clinic in Pilsen. This allowed me to realize that I not only wanted to become a nurse, but that I also wanted to become a midwife.

Daisy Jimenez, YWLCS Class of 2009 Valedictorian
Incoming freshman at University of Illinois at Chicago.

Highlights in 2008-2009

As soon as students arrive at YWLCS in 7th grade, our teachers waste no time in introducing career and college possibilities to them. Many incoming students have little, if any, exposure to, knowledge of, and connections with college-educated career women. Many of our students will be the first in their families to go to college. Given the realities about many of our students and their lives, YWLCS promotes a culture in which all girls are encouraged to open themselves up to many different career possibilities, as well as the idea that they can go to college and succeed. Below are some of the activities that took place this past year in order to get our youngest students to start thinking about different career choices and that going to college is well within their reach.

Preparing Our 7th, 8th and 9th Graders To Think about their College Choices

For the third year, YWLCS took 150 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students to visit the campus of University of Illinois at Chicago. Since many of the students had never been on a college campus before, they took the opportunity to ask the tour guide many questions about the campus and college in general. Students rotated through different activities on the tour including a hands-on engineering session; an informational "scavenger hunt" where they learned about the college application process; and a recreation session where they went to the campus bowling alley to see how exercise elevates their heart rates. Though many students complained beforehand that the trip would be boring, afterward they all said it was a lot of fun. One student commented, "I would recommend this college tour day to my friends because it was very hands-on, and you got very little time to let your brain stop working. It was a great experience." Overall, it was a successful way to get the girls to start considering their future college options. After the trip, many of the girls expressed their interests in different colleges and what they would potentially like to major in or get a degree in.

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Preparing Our Students for Careers in Math, Science and Engineering

Thirty 8th and 11th grade YWLCS students who expressed an interest in fields related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) took a trip to the Google office in Chicago this past year during its "Women in Engineering Week" event. During the visit, the students interacted with the Google staff in various ways. The girls listened to a short presentation to learn about the company and its history and current ventures. They also took a tour of the facility and met other staff working on specific projects, as well as participated in a Q&A session with staff from other Google sites via video conferencing. They heard stories from engineers who switched careers and others who joined the Google family as part of one of its acquisitions. The students asked questions about what type of education or degree was required to do the work at Google and what special connections, if any, did they need to find employment at the company. Our students were impressed with the number of women engineers working at Google. The Google visit created a bridge for our students to see themselves in that type of career. The field trip also helped the girls see that their goals and interests in careers related to STEM subjects were attainable and for some, it lit a fire to strive even harder for excellence.

American Medical Women's Association visits YWLCS

Our 7th and 8th grade students got the opportunity to learn from members of the University of Illinois (UIC) Chapter of the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) about medical careers. The AMWA taught three sessions including Medical Career Q&A; Working with Medical Equipment; and Making Healthy Choices. Our students learned about different medical careers and some were surprised to learn that there's more to medicine than doctors and dentists. After the sessions, several students commented that they now wanted to have a career that they had never heard of before. One student enthusiastically proclaimed, "I want to be a—how do you say it? An obstetrician!" They also had a great time playing with stethoscopes and learning about involuntary reflexes, such as the dilation and contraction of your pupil. It was the perfect combination of learning and fun for our 7th and 8th graders.

YWLCS Third Annual Career Day

YWLCS 7th and 8th grade students participated in the Career Day, in which students rotated among different rooms that featured a pediatric nurse who talked about her job, a fashion designer that allowed students to create their own fashion outfits, and an artist who showed her art to the students, just to name a few. We also had on hand a Chicago Fire Department commander, a Pediatric therapist, a Homicide detective, and a lawyer. Before the Career Day, our students prepared for listening to these different professions by compiling a series of questions they would want to ask each professional.

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Leadership Development

Strategic Goal:

Increase leadership opportunities for all students in classrooms, school wide and in the community through coaching and mentoring to empower students to achieve a model of ethical and collaborative leadership.

At YWLCS, I have learned that if I take initiative and demonstrate leadership, then I can make things happen.

Courtney Wareyko, Class of 2009
Incoming freshman at University of Illinois - Chicago

Highlights in 2008-2009

Performing Arts Night and Student Art Auction

When one 11th grade student had the idea to have a “student arts showcase,” she rallied 10th and 11th grade students to organize YWLCS’ first “Arts Coffee House” fundraiser at the school in Spring 2009. The event showcased 8th–12th grade students’ and staff artwork, poetry, and singing. To prepare for the event, student volunteers worked to secure donated food, recruit student performers, host auditions, and decorate the room where the event was held. Guests, including parents, grandparents, friends, faculty, staff members and other students, sat at candle-lit tables and enjoyed snacks and coffee at the event. Going forward, the 11th grade student who originally had the idea for a student arts showcase is already planning with some other students to initiate a Student Arts Committee for next year. The Committee will involve other students in leadership roles to ensure that the “Arts Coffee House” will be led and directed by the next generation of students and will become a YWLCS tradition.

Student-Led Mathematics Carnival

The seventh grade students hosted the first ever YWLCS Math Carnival this year. During the last week of math class, students worked together to create booths with an assortment of math-related games, including the Y-Dub Travel Agency, where customers planned vacations to cities around the world, calculating mileage and the cost of their trips; the Memory booth, where visitors had to not only find matches amongst the face-down cards, but also figure out which decimals and fractions were equivalent; and the Y-Dub Café, where students used coupons that they won at other booths to get 10% off on purchases of chips and candy, with the proceeds going to the Student Voice Committee. The reviews were unanimous: the Math Carnival was a huge hit! Students showed their leadership skills as they planned and hosted their booths, and many said that the fair was the most fun math activity they’d done all year. Students, teachers, and board members who patronized the fair were all impressed and pleased with the mathematics and the creativity involved in the booths. According to the feedback forms, 100% of the students said that they enjoyed reviewing a mathematics concept by creating a game and playing a game that others created as well. Students expressed that they would like to hold a mathematics carnival next year as well.

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Student Voice Committee in Middle School

The Student Voice Committee (SVC) was created this past year in order to give 7th and 8th grade students a forum not only to air their complaints, but also to actively contribute something to their school community. Rather than being driven by teachers' goals, students worked on their leadership skills by creating their own goals and agendas based on their peers' feedback. During the meetings, each committee member practiced taking notes; learned how to facilitate fair, inclusive, and on-task meetings; learned how to be a liaison between the committee and her advisory; and developed a sense of herself as a leader who could make a positive difference in her school. Two teachers were at the meetings to support the students and offer guidance when they were uncertain with how to move forward, but the teachers were very mindful of the students' leadership and decision-making authority. The SVC organized and facilitated the following activities:

- Middle School Spirit Week: This included theme days for dressing up and a final MSA Dance
- Fundraisers: Students realized that they could not have activities without money and dedicated their time to planning and running after school fundraisers. These included bake sales and a nacho and candy stand. The fundraisers were completely run by student workers and organizers. They dedicated the money they raised to the 8th grade end-of-the-year trip.

Overall, the confidence and leadership skills of students who participated in SVC developed immensely. At the final meeting of the year, students expressed their appreciation of SVC and the opportunities it gave them to be leaders of the middle school.

Personal and Social Development

Strategic Goal:

Provide systems and models for the desired behaviors of the Community Contract, the YWLCS 5 qualities (respectful, responsible, scholarly, creative, hard-working) and the foundation for living healthy and fit lives.

Young Women's has a list of rights and responsibilities and as a member of the YWLCS family, everyone is expected to abide by them and know that while they have rights, they also have responsibilities to uphold. YWLCS teaches you that you have to develop the proper personal and social communication and realize that everything you do has a consequence.

Jasmine Williams, Class of 2009

Incoming freshman at University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana

Highlights in 2008-2009

Strive for Five

At the time of the school's founding, the entire community worked together to define the "YWLCS Girl." They agreed that she would exhibit 5 Qualities -- respectful, responsible, creative, hardworking and scholarly. During the 2008-09 school year, the 9th grade

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students participated in a program called Strive for Five. The program is a student-run contest that awards students in six categories: Responsible, Hardworking, Scholarly, Creative, Respectful, plus an All-Star who demonstrated all 5 qualities. Students received letters containing peer commentary about themselves, a YWLCS t-shirt and a flower. The winning students of these categories took pride in their award and felt glad that their peers recognized that they have these great qualities.

Math Pride Award

The Math Pride Award (MPA) is a peer-nominated award program that the math department implemented to motivate students in their math classes. At the end of each month, the students nominated one of their peers in their math class who exhibited the qualities of Math **PRIDE** – **P**erseverance, **R**espectful, **I**nquisitive, **D**aring, **E**nthusiastic. Many students who did not feel confident in math or who were not strong in math won this award and felt proud that their peers recognized their efforts in the classroom. Math teachers noticed a change in attitude in those girls who won the award for the month. Said one teacher, "It was exciting to watch their faces as they were surprised to earn this recognition from their peers and the other students were always very quick to congratulate the winner and encourage them in their math work. It helped create an encouraging, welcome environment where all students felt they were capable of winning this award, no matter at what level they came into the class."

Fitness Festival: Give Girls Game event with The Chicago Sky

YWLCS students participated in a fitness festival sponsored by Chicago's WNBA team, The Chicago Sky. Joined by 600 other girls from other schools and youth organizations, YWLCS 7th-11th grade students were exposed to many different types of exercise activities such as martial arts, kickboxing, volleyball, basketball and football. This event was important for YWLCS students for several reasons. It promoted exercise and a healthy lifestyle and it provided students with an opportunity to be active and to promote community within the school. After the fitness festival, students attended a Chicago Sky basketball game. The students enjoyed being exposed to so many different sports in one festival, and being able to enjoy a basketball game afterward.

Service Day with Chicago Cares

The volunteer organization Chicago Cares was helpful in setting up a day of service learning for our 7th and 8th grade students. Students were split into four groups and disbursed to different service projects, such as serving breakfast at a senior citizen center, packing care packages for families in need, sorting donated clothing, and volunteering at the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Students enjoyed giving back to various organizations and took pride in knowing that they were helping others. This allowed our middle school students to experience the importance of giving back to their community and to understand that they can make a difference. Based on feedback forms given after the event, students enjoyed the day and expressed an interest in volunteering again. A few students even wrote "we should do this every year." The Middle School Academy would like to make this a regular event at the beginning of every year and allow students to build and reflect on their volunteer experiences throughout the year.

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Sustaining a Community of Respect and Responsibility

The 2008-09 professional development committee of teachers organized a framework for addressing one of YWLCS' strategic goals of sustaining a community of respect and responsibility. Throughout the year, we have focused on the framework provided by the book, *Courageous Conversations About Race*, during professional development to the entire staff. *Courageous Conversations about Race* engages teachers in discussions about personal agendas, multiple racial perspectives, closing the racial achievement gap, reflecting on their practice and discussing the relationship between race and achievement. We envision a three-year process where teachers first engage in *Courageous Conversations about Race*, then develop culturally relevant pedagogy and finally conduct action research to address classroom communities lacking respect and responsibility.

Measures of Our Success

Because YWLCS was created to empower young women to overcome barriers to leading productive and fulfilling lives, YWLCS has committed itself to developing a school where urban girls graduate from high school and go on to college. Therefore, we measure our success in terms of promotion, drop-out, and high school graduation rates, as well as college application, acceptance and enrollment rates.

Promotion, Drop-Out, and High School Graduation Rates

- At the end of the 2008-09 academic year, the promotion rate at YWLCS across all grades was 82%. While more than half of all Chicago public high school students drop out of high school, YWLCS students average less than a 25% drop-out rate.
- YWLCS ranks in the top 20% of Chicago public high schools – including selective admission magnet schools -- in percentage of students graduating from high school within five years.
- According to the most recent CPS school report card for YWLCS, 82% of YWLCS students graduated within 5 years of entry, while only 56% did at the composite comparison school.

Application, Enrollment and Graduation in Post-Secondary Education

- 85% of YWLCS graduates start college or other post-secondary education in the fall following graduation, far exceeding average CPS rates.
- As of June 2009, 36% of the YWLCS Class of 2004 had received an associate's or bachelor's degree, while 26% of the YWLCS Class of 2005 had received an associate's or bachelor's degree.
- The majority of YWLCS students who entered college in 2004 and 2005 are continuing in school and expect a degree within the next year. By stark contrast,

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the most recent research indicates that only 8% of Chicago public school graduates will obtain a college degree by the age of 25.

All of these statistics demonstrate that YWLCS is achieving its goals and is an agent of transformation for the girls who attend the school. Although the girls who enter here are the "typical" student in the Chicago public school system – under-prepared, of color, and from low-income homes – at YWLCS, they learn, graduate from high school and go on to college, and are well-prepared to become a productive and contributing member of our community.

Beyond the above statistics are the stories of the individual lives transformed by the YWLCS education. Each year, YWLCS asks seniors to reflect on their time at the school and what it has meant to them. Below is an excerpt from Jathia Macklin, a Class of 2009 graduate and incoming freshman at Northern Illinois University:

With a strong support system at Young Women's, I have overcome many of the obstacles that come along with growing up in an environment of poverty, drugs, domestic violence, rape, and murder. YWLCS became a home and a safe place to me. I was surrounded by positive people who were great influencers like my teachers and peers. As a result, I made it my goal to improve my life and stay active in school. I am proud to say that I will be the first in my family to go to college.

Organizational Developments

Toward the end of the 2008-09 school year, one of the school's founding co-directors, Dr. Margaret Small, stepped down as School Director after serving in that capacity at YWLCS for nine years. In April 2009, the YWLCS Board of Directors selected Michelle Russell and Chandra Sledge as Co-Directors for the 2009-2010 school year.

Michelle served as Assistant Director of YWLCS from 2005 to 2008. This past year, she was selected to participate in New Leaders for New Schools, a strong program designed to prepare outstanding leaders for urban public schools. During her training, Michelle served as Resident Principal at the Social Justice High School on the Little Village Lawndale Campus.

Chandra did an outstanding job as Assistant Director at YWLCS during the 2008-2009 academic year. She has her Masters Degree in School Administration and is working toward her Ed.D in Educational Leadership, Administration and Supervision at Loyola in Chicago.

Financial Reporting

YWLCS closed its books for the 2008-2009 year on June 30, 2008. An unaudited statement of revenues and expenses is enclosed. Also, enclosed is a list of 2008-09 donors. The annual audit begins in August and a final audit report will be delivered to YWLCS in November.

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