



Chicago Quest

Overview

Chicago Quest schools are sixth- through 12th-grade schools designed to prepare students for college, career, and sophisticated participation in our digitized world. They are campuses of the Chicago International Charter School.

Chicago Quest schools are a replication of the Quest to Learn school in New York City. Like that school, Chicago Quest offers a rigorous, engaging, and interactive curriculum that is organized around systems thinking and game design. This curriculum is content rich and aligned with both the Illinois State and College Readiness standards.

Chicago Quest will measure its success by graduates' abilities to design creative solutions to complex problems, think critically and independently, collaborate effectively and productively, and use technology purposefully and wisely — all while exploring, engaging, and expressing their interests and talents using multiple platforms and media. Effectiveness will be gauged by students' abilities to excel on state and national assessments that determine access to selective post-secondary options.

In addition to future families and communities, Chicago Quest has many partners committed to ensuring the students' success as well as helping to share effective practices in ways that reach students and educators outside of the Chicago Quest and Chicago International Charter School organizations. Joining in this effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of this new model for teaching and learning are Quest to Learn (NY), the MacArthur Foundation, DePaul University, YOUmedia at the Chicago Public Library, the Digital Youth Network, the Institute for Play (NY), and the newly formed Chicago Learning Network.

Rationale: Why Create Schools Like Quest?

The development of knowledge and skills has never been confined to the four walls of a school. However, unlike

generations before them, today's students have an exponentially richer array of content, knowledge, and experiences available to them through digital media and platforms. Yet, American schools, in large part, have failed to capitalize on and organize around the natural and varied ways that kids are engaging with each other and the world.

Quest to Learn, which opened its doors in 2009 in New York City, was designed with the knowledge of how kids are learning outside of school in today's increasingly networked age. An increasingly digital world will need creative thinkers who can access and analyze resources, flexibly use prior and learned knowledge, work collaboratively with others toward a goal, and develop new and unique solutions to increasingly complex problems.

Quest to Learn develops these critical competencies using a standards-based curriculum that creates game-like learning. Units of study are organized around "missions" that are presented to students, creating in them a need to know, understand, and create. These content-rich, inquiry-based missions add to students' understanding — organized, purposeful structures comprising components that are interconnected and accomplish a goal.

Systems are everywhere. From ant colonies to galaxies, our world is made up of simple and complex systems: large, meta-systems and multiple sub-systems. Helping students identify systems, understand their structures and components, and how they function is an advanced method of teaching them how to think critically about knowledge, content, and their world.

Games are systems. They have specific parts (or internal structures) that work together in predictable and complex ways to create specific experiences and accomplish specific goals. And they are a big part of kids' natural lives — from Duck, Duck, Goose to Candyland to games young people play on handheld devices, online, and with home video consoles.

Quest to Learn uses game design to teach students how to become systems thinkers. They learn content in

game-like missions, they analyze and build games to deepen and express their understanding of what they are learning, and they play games that serve as interactive learning tools. This learning model facilitates students' critical (systems) thinking about specific content knowledge, using a platform (games/game design) that is inherently familiar, interactive, and engaging, and at the same time open-ended, complex, and challenging.

This innovative learning model will develop traditional competencies like critical thinking and problem solving, as well as competencies that are critically essential in today's connected world, like collaboration, ingenuity, and media literacy.

Commitment to Sharing Work and Learning

Chicago Quest schools will be the first in Chicago to be based on the principles of systems thinking and game design. This new learning model has the potential to radically change how young people are taught, how and what they learn, and how they make connections between their in-school learning and their out-of-school learning.

Chicago Quest is committed to sharing effective practices and lessons learned as it engages in its mission to demonstrate the power of this innovative learning model. There are three clear avenues for sharing the work:

> **SHARING CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY WITHIN THE CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL**

Prior to the 2011 opening, Chicago Quest teachers will attend a summer academy in which they will learn core components of the Quest to Learn model, including systems thinking, game design, and the use of digital media to support learning. This space for adult learning will be unique in that it will bring together educators, game designers, and media/technology integrationists to "learn by doing" together and to develop curriculum, learning experiences (quests and missions), and tools for learning and assessment. Chicago International Charter School leaders will support the development of the summer academy model and by year two (Summer 2012), Chicago International Charter School leaders, teachers, and staff will participate in summer learning that supports their application of the model components to their curriculum design and instructional practice. As this professional learning community develops, Chicago Quest and Chicago International Charter School teachers will continue the collaboration during the school year through targeted cross-school observation and open-sourcing of curriculum among the campuses.

> **SHARING CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY WITH A BROAD COMMUNITY OF EDUCATORS**

Other educators will be invited to participate in summer academy sessions. The academy model has the potential to develop into an annual summer learning opportunity that is distinct and different from Chicago Quest's internal summer planning. A summer Quest Academy will be a space where Chicago Quest, Chicago International Charter School, and CPS educators can present, share, and develop curriculum, discuss and disseminate effective practices, and develop a broad (citywide) community of practice around the use of game design and systems thinking in instructional design and delivery.

> **INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCONNECTED, INTEREST-DRIVEN YOUTH PROGRAMMING WITHIN AND BEYOND THE CHICAGO LEARNING NETWORK**

The Chicago Learning Network is a new collaboration of the city's cultural institutions and youth-serving organizations with a shared goal to create interest-driven, media-rich, interconnected learning experiences for Chicago's youth. Chicago Quest will be a member of the Chicago Learning Network and a demonstration of how to intentionally and effectively connect in-school and out-of-school learning. Chicago Quest will partner with Network members so that students can extend and enhance their school-time learning and explore their unique interests and talents. Over time, these relationships will afford students opportunities to develop expertise in specific areas, serve as youth mentors in Network program offerings, and apprentice with adult mentors in an array of roles, fields of study, and institutions. The lessons learned as Chicago Quest works closely with Network colleagues to develop a system that supports youth engagement and learning will be shared within the Network and with the Chicago community's youth-serving organizations, as well as with sister networks in New York and other cities.

In many ways, Chicago presents the opportunity to create a national model for how city institutions and agencies can organize themselves to better serve and support young people's learning and development.