

Small Schools: Frequently Asked Questions

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1. **What advantages can a small school offer my child?**

Research shows that small schools have fewer incidents of violence, fewer suspensions, better attendance, fewer dropouts and higher achievement. They also generally have higher parent, teacher and student satisfaction (Cotton 2001). Because of their size, small schools are able to create environments where teachers, parents, students, administrators and community members are all able to contribute to shaping the school to meet student needs.

"In this school teachers all know you, and they care about how you're doing. I could have gone to any school in the city, but nobody would have known my name." -Student, Best Practice High School (Small Schools = Safe Schools)

Small schools offer a school community where your child will be known well throughout the school. Therefore, your child will receive a more personalized education than he or she generally would in a large school. Instead of walking into a building and being one of two thousand students, s/he is one in four hundred.

The teachers in a small school meet on a regular basis to discuss student progress, design curriculum and make changes to the school to benefit the students. When you select a small school for your child, you are choosing a group of teachers for them to work with over a series of years. These teachers will try to foster as much communication with you as possible, in order to help your child get the best education.

For more information, visit [Advantages of Small Schools](#).

2. **How do I enroll my child in a small school?**

Each small school has its own processes and procedures for selecting students. Some small schools enroll students from across the city, while others enroll only students who live within their neighborhood attendance area. Small schools which draw students city-wide have an application process. Most small schools draw students

randomly from all applicants, or accept all students who live within their attendance boundaries. Some small schools are Options for Knowledge schools and some have selective enrollment. For specific information on a particular school's application process, please contact the school directly. For a list of small schools and contact information, please [click here for the directory](#). In general, students are selected in late winter/early spring for the following fall. We suggest that if you are interested in a school, you contact them as soon as possible.

3. **I will be in high school next year, how do I apply to a small school? How do I know which small school I should apply to?**

You apply to a small high school in the same way you apply to large high schools. Some small schools have a separate application, some are Options for Knowledge schools and some are neighborhood only. You should contact each school directly to find out how to apply. We suggest that first you look through the [directory](#) and see which small schools have a focus that interests you. You may already know that you want to study business, in which case you should look for a small school with a business focus. If you are not sure what kind of career you would like to have, you may want to choose a small school with a focus that is not vocational. All of the small schools, no matter what focus they have, will offer a curriculum that will prepare you to go to college. Or, you may decide that the type of small school is not as important to you as the location, in which case you should search the database by region.

4. **What kinds of extra-curricular activities (clubs, music groups, sports teams) are offered by small schools?**

Small schools offer a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. In fact, students in small schools are more likely to participate in extra-curricular activities than students in large schools. Because there are fewer students, it is easier to join in or start your own group. Some small schools may not offer all of the same teams the large schools have, but they will all offer team sports of some kind. If participating in a large band or sports team is important to you, you should focus on choosing a school-within-a-school, where your academic classes will be in your small school but extra-curricular activities draw from the entire building.

"...there is enough room for everybody to participate in all programs...we are involved more than we would be at our big schools." -Student, Young Women's Leadership Charter School

"I especially like that my child participates in extra activities around the school." -Parent of Nash Elementary student (Small Schools = Safe Schools)

5. **Do small schools have smaller class sizes?**

Not necessarily. Small schools offer a more personalized environment because they have a cohesive faculty that works together with students, parents and community members to create an intimate learning environment. In many cases, this is done without a reduction in class size. Some small schools may choose to use discretionary funds to reduce class size, but CPS funds small schools in the same way that they fund larger schools.

6. **Is there research that supports small schools?**

A body of research has focused on small schools for over twenty years. In general, this research has found that small schools, in comparison with comparable larger schools produced ...

- increased graduation
- increased attendance
- greater safety and order
- less truancy
- fewer dropouts

- higher levels of extracurricular participation,
- higher levels of parent and community involvement and greater satisfaction
- increased student affiliation with their school community
- higher achievement
- more positive teacher attitudes and satisfaction
- comparable core curricula
- lower costs per student graduated

For specific references, please visit our [research page](#).

7. What is a parent's role in a small school?

Because of their focus on community and manageable size, small schools are often able to foster close relationships with parents, and parents tend to be actively involved in small school communities. Some small schools ask parents to commit to specific levels of involvement, while others simply offer parents a variety of ways to participate so that they can choose which opportunities best fit their needs and desires for involvement. As well, small schools tend to focus on fostering close communication with parents. For example, in a small high school, the teachers often have a common meeting time. During this time, parents can meet with all of their child's teachers at once to discuss their son or daughter's progress.

8. What are the advantages of teaching in a small school?

"Here you have a sense of ownership as a teacher. You have to come in in the morning and create something and keep working at it...it's a tremendous experience." -Small School Teacher (Small Schools = Great Leaders)

The small schools movement was started by teachers and at its core is about empowering teachers. Small schools foster an environment where teachers are able to make and implement decisions that affect the day-to-day operation of the school. Because of this, teachers in small schools generally have a higher level of satisfaction than teachers in large schools. Cotton (2001) notes:

"School-size research, the older and newer, usually finds that teachers in small learning environments feel in a better position to make a real difference in students' learning and general quality of life than do teachers in large schools. They have closer relationships with students and other staff, experience fewer discipline problems, and are better able to adapt instruction to students' individual needs. Add to this the fact that teachers in most of the recently established small schools are there by choice and have more decision making authority, and it is not surprising that one finds markedly higher morale among them." (p. 17)

9. As a teacher, how do I apply for positions in small schools?

As with all CPS positions, you will apply directly to the school. In the case of a school-within-a-school, sometimes you will send your resume to the lead teacher of the SWS and sometimes it will go to the building principal. To find out, call the school directly. Please feel free to call the Office of Small Schools or CPS Human Resources to find out if we know of any small school openings. In addition, there are several electronic job boards you check. [Yahogroups hosts two listservs for small schools](#) one that is national and one that is focused on CPS. Open positions are sometimes posted on these list serves and administrators will sometimes look on these list serves for potential candidates. As well, the Small Schools Workshop has an online job board at <http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/>.

10. Are small schools bound by regular CPS rules?

Except for small charter schools, all small schools follow the same rules and regulations as other CPS schools. However, because small school faculties often have greater control over their budgets, they are able to make decisions about how to spend funds in order to most benefit their students. Some small schools may decide to use discretionary monies for extra positions, while others may decide to use extra funds on extended-day pay for curriculum planning or extra art supplies for their school's visual art focus.

11. Do Small Schools have LSCs?

Yes. Autonomous small schools fully participate and believe in the LSC structure. Some small schools have elected LSCs and others have established alternative LSC structures. The law supports these two options, and both are used in small schools in Chicago Public Schools. Schools-within-schools establish positive relationships with their LSCs, which are often formalized in a written document.

12. As a teacher, can I start a small school?

To start a small school, all you need are a group of committed, like-minded teachers, a vision for how to improve the lives of your students, and students and parents who support your school. This, of course, is an oversimplification, but it is in fact how most small schools in CPS began. If you have an idea that you believe strongly in, and have piqued the interest of several of your colleagues or your community leaders, you are well on your way. At this point, [contact the Office of Small Schools](#) and we can send you materials, as well as offer support and guidance to create a viable development plan. There is no one way to start a small school, and there are several different models to choose from.

Also see [Getting Involved](#)

13. As a parent or community member, can I start a small school?

Yes. If you have an idea that you believe in strongly and have gained the support of like-minded community members, parents, and teachers, you are on your way. The Office of Small Schools can send you materials, as well as offer support and guidance to create a viable development plan. There is no one way to start a small school, and there are several different models to choose from.

Also see [Getting Involved](#)

14. I would like to partner with or volunteer in a small school. How do I do that?

Whether you have a specific small school in mind, or are interested in getting involved in any small school, please contact the school directly or the Office of Small Schools at 773-553-2198. As well, the Office of External Resources and Partnerships (773-553-1540) offers volunteer training programs and partnership support. Our offices work together to foster productive relationships between organizations or individuals and small schools.

Also see [Getting Involved](#)

15. What are the advantages of getting involved with a small school as a partner?

Many different types of entities partner with small schools: individuals, businesses, non-profit organizations, community groups, block clubs, professional associations, museums and galleries, just to name a few. Because small schools are a manageable size, partners are often able to have a more effective impact. There are many ways for partners to be involved, from donating goods and services, to volunteering, to acting as members of curricular advisory councils. A small school faculty and administration

will work closely with you to develop a relationship that is mutually beneficial and satisfying.