

YOU THINK REAL CHICAGO VOICES

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Help CPS students overcome barriers to learning

The Sun-Times series about the impact of violence on children in the Chicago Public Schools system put the spotlight on an issue that we encounter every day. Communities in Schools of Chicago works with CPS to identify and address social and emotional barriers to learning. Last year, 90 percent of our more than 150 partner schools prioritized violence prevention, conflict resolution and healthy decision-making as services they most need in their schools. This is not restricted to specific neighborhoods or to students who have personally experienced gun violence — our schools are in 59 of Chicago's 77 communities.

The stories rightly discussed the importance of nonacademic programming as part of the solution: "The school has to be the village for these kids."

By connecting existing community resources with schools, we are building that village. There are nonprofits, government agencies, cultural institutions and other community-based organizations eager to provide free programming in schools. Communities in Schools of Chicago links them with the students who most need their help and trains all partners to build sustainable relationships. During the 2007-2008 school year, we connected more than 20,000 children with arts enrichment and more than 15,000 with violence-prevention education. With this Sun-Times series, we hope more people will become aware of the challenges facing our public school system and work with us to serve even more students.

Jane Mentzinger,
executive director,
Communities in Schools
of Chicago



Chicago Police cars line up outside a Chicago public school in April. | SCOTT STEWART/SUN-TIMES