Full-Service Community Schools address barriers to student learning by providing school-based academic and social interventions. Operating beyond traditional school hours, community schools erect supports for positive student development and provide wrap-around academic and social services to students and their parents, as well as members of the community. Launched in 1993, as part of our Comer School Development Program, Youth Guidance currently operates 17 Full-Service Community Schools, serving more than 2,422 elementary and high school youth in under-resourced Chicago communities.

A Center for Community Learning

Full-Service Community Schools redefine the school as the home base for extended learning experiences for students, families, and communities. Expanded learning creates deeper school-community connections and results in a stronger infrastructure for afterschool programming. Educational opportunities for community members range from service learning to academic enrichment to financial literacy. We also partner directly with families to create the role-modeling and accessible support each student needs to succeed in school and life. Youth Guidance values relationships. Schools, families and communities are invited into our culture of learning in order to bring education to life and help students explore their passions and potential career options. Our strategic outreach and impact touches many of the most socioeconomically challenged neighborhoods in Chicago. Our collaborative work with community colleges, churches and grassroots organizations lends strength to our efforts to build resilience within our students, as well as the adult members of our communities.

A Tool for School Improvement

Full-Service Community Schools provide academic enrichment opportunities for students in low-performing, high poverty schools, with the goal of improving performance in state academic achievement standards. Our Resource Coordinators create youth-centered environments that extend beyond the classroom and emphasize inclusion, respectful communication and an appreciation for cultural differences. Restorative practices, rituals and celebrations are used to encourage student leadership and bolster academic achievement, while also cultivating a sense of community within the school culture.

Youth Guidance Resource Coordinators expand a school’s capacity for improvements that might otherwise be limited by budgetary constraints. Through school-wide event management, they create new opportunities for student engagement. In many schools, they also provide oversight for teacher and student-led clubs. Other tangible skills include grant-writing and the management of data, facilities, and external partners.

Resource Coordinators are integrated into the fabric of the school, working full-days and maintaining a consistent presence throughout the school year and summer. As such, they are expected to be a collaborative member of their school’s leadership team and participate in a shared decision-making culture.
A Map for the Future

Our Full-Service Community Schools support middle and high school youth through activities designed to encourage an academic mindset. Programming, special events and experiential projects help students uncover their unique strengths, find their voice and use it to make intentional, strategic choices about their future. Students become self-advocates in overcoming their own social and emotional barriers to success.

High School Resource Coordinators develop student-centered programming, work to improve the school climate and support adolescent development in areas essential to post-secondary success, including:

- Resilience
- Goal-setting
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation
- Critical thinking
- Collaboration
- Responsible decision-making

A large part of realizing these competencies is the ability to integrate youth voice into programming. Older youth engage in a democratic, feedback-driven process where their interests and passions help determine projects. In some schools, projects evolve into concrete proposals for student-led initiatives. With the help of caring Resource Coordinators, middle school students gain the skills and confidence needed to successfully transition to high school.

Cultivation of these key factors results in decreased disciplinary issues and increased student attendance, academic achievement, graduation, and ultimately, career and/or college retention.

A Multi–Tiered System of Support

A Full-Service Community School prepares students to be college, career and community ready, which requires both academic and social emotional learning. Youth and adults are taught to be self and socially aware, make responsible decisions and build trusting relationships in order to maximum their true potential and achieve future success. Youth Guidance Full-Service Community Schools work collaboratively with our Clinicians and Behavioral Health Specialists to deliver social-emotional alternatives predicated on school and community needs. With careful assessment and evaluation, we can identify when students need increased academic and behavioral interventions, and leverage a Full-Service Community School model to deliver services and solutions. Trauma-informed supports happen throughout the school day and are also extended to families.

“When I came here as principal, one of my main goals was to change the culture of the school. Because, for so many years, my school went through a different administration year after year, resulting in a lack of consistency, cohesiveness, and leadership. I knew I had to work really hard to change the cultural climate of our school. Youth Guidance had an important role in reaching this goal. I worked closely with them to give our students the right, positive learning environment for them to be successful and to have a great experience in school. All members that come to school through Youth Guidance know the vision and their role. Every one of them works towards that vision, reaching that goal.”
Gilberto Piedrahita, Principal - Jordan Elementary Community School