



THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

**PARENTS AS EDUCATORS:
THE CAS PARENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE**

**RESPONSE TO:
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
INVESTING IN INNOVATION**

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THE CHILDREN’S AID SOCIETY

Parents As Educators: The CAS Community School Parent Leadership Institute

[Absolute Priority 6—Improving Parent and Family Engagement]

Table of Contents

A. SIGNIFICANCE	Page 1
Project Summary	Page 1
Organizational Background	Page 1
Significance: Strong Theory	Page 2
B. PROJECT DESIGN	Page 5
Components of Model	Page 6
Characteristics of Target Population and Schools	Page 8
Goals, Strategies, Objectives and Outcomes	Page 9
C. MANAGEMENT PLAN	Page 19
D. PERSONNEL	Page 24
E. PROJECT EVALUATION	Page 26

Parents As Educators: The CAS Parent Leadership Institute (PLI)

Absolute Priority 6 – Improving Parent and Family Engagement

Executive Summary. In *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Bryk, 2010), five intertwined strategies for school improvement were uncovered by the research: school leadership, curriculum alignment, professional staff, school climate and parent-community-school ties. The element of **strong parent-community-school ties** is the subject of this proposed project and evaluation. Evaluations have linked The Children's Aid Society's (CAS) full-service community schools approach, which contains all five of Bryk's necessary ingredients for school improvement, to higher rates of parental engagement and to student achievement. The link between parental participation and student achievement, however, could not be directly assessed using prior implementation procedures and evaluation designs. CAS proposes to bring the full set of parent engagement strategies piloted in one highly distressed NYC community (Washington Heights) to another, that of the South Bronx, to verify whether in-school parent resource centers – with parent coordinators trained in utilizing a specific set of parent communication, outreach, and organizing strategies, and adult education classes and leadership institutes – lead to increases in student achievement.

Organizational Background. With a long-standing mission to help children in poverty succeed and thrive, CAS is driven by a firm and widely-held belief that the surest path out of poverty for our youth is a college education (Day, Neuberger, 2002). The proven-effective CAS community school model exemplifies the agency's investment in improving educational outcomes for youth, and is an important tool in the CAS cradle-to-college pipeline. Launched in 1992 in a formal partnership with the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE), CAS augments the academic day with a range of supports and services for children and their families from health

and mental health services to after-school enrichment and parent programming. In addition to 16 community schools in NYC, CAS' National Center for Community Schools has provided technical assistance to more than 15,000 adaptations nationally and internationally. CAS and its NYC DOE colleagues have always viewed parents as key partners in the work of promoting children's learning and development, which is why a core component of the community school model is the **Parent Leadership Institute**, CAS' model for parent engagement.

A. SIGNIFICANCE: Initial Outcome Evaluations Suggest Strong Theory. This project will implement a highly-selective set of evidence-based and informed practices designed to improve academic achievement for high-need students:

- Encouraging parents to engage in a specific set of activities focused on supporting learning at home (e.g., reading to their child, helping with homework), and further influencing their aspirations for their children's educations;
- Promoting parent involvement in school events and governance, imparting additional information about their role in their children's education, and enhancing their abilities to support student learning and school improvement;
- Connecting parents to one another as key resources for navigating the school and educational system (e.g., create social capital and strong peer networks); and
- Providing, when necessary, the resources to promote family stability and growth.

Our i3 initiative provides the opportunity to evaluate the link between the parental participation strategies listed above and student achievement in the CAS Community School model, a component of our community schools work that has not yet been directly assessed. As such, the implementation and evaluation of this project will add vital information to the body of knowledge regarding parent-community-school connections and advance efforts to build a sense

of shared responsibility on the part of parents, schools and community organizations for student achievement.

The Parent Leadership Institute (PLI) is supported by strong theory; its effectiveness in increasing parent engagement and fostering a more positive environment has been demonstrated through rigorous evaluations conducted by the Fordham University Graduate School of Education and Social Service and ActKnowledge, a research firm within the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The Fordham study found that parents were significantly more involved (78% higher in a CAS elementary school and 147% higher in a CAS middle school), took more responsibility for their children's school work, felt welcome and were observed to be a presence in CAS schools more than in comparison schools.ⁱ In focus groups conducted by Actknowledge, parents reported that, among other factors, they were better able to manage stress and they felt more confident participating in and attending school/community events.

The evaluation will take this learning to the next level by connecting successful parent engagement to student achievement, contributing significantly to the advancement of theory, knowledge and practice in the field, particularly with regard to effective approaches for middle and high school students, for which effective family engagement models are limited.ⁱⁱ Also, PLI's systematic and integrated approach can serve to inform efforts to incorporate effective parent engagement strategies in broader education reform.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, as a leader in the field with a strong technical assistance operation, our National Center for Community Schools, CAS is well-positioned to ensure that the lessons learned from this project can be shared with practitioners and policymakers nationwide. Findings will be built into the CAS National Center for Community Schools technical assistance and training materials, shared at conferences and in publications.

A strong likelihood of success. This past year, more than 500 parent leaders graduated from the CAS Washington Heights PLI, which occurred across five Community Schools, offering promise that a similar level of activity can be achieved in Morrisania in the South Bronx. Based on substantial experience implementing its Community Schools model, research that demonstrates the effectiveness of the PLI approach on enhancing parent engagement (to be described below), as well as the systematic inclusion of evidence-based and best practices, CAS is confident that the PLI will be successful in having an impact on student achievement as measured by improved performance on NYC tests (grades 3-8), attendance (all grades), GPA (high school) and standardized test scores (high school). Our confidence is further bolstered by a recent case study conducted by The Finance Project and CAS, “Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools,” which demonstrates the social impact that community school services have on key beneficiaries in terms of improved outcomes (including family involvement in their children’s education and connection to support networks and services), revenues generated and costs avoided. Among the primary goals identified by the study were

A rare opportunity to draw a direct link between parent activities that have shown promise and student achievement

school readiness, academic success, health and safety, and family and school engagement; 40 measurable outcomes to achieve these goals

were analyzed. Through use of social return on investment (SROI) as a measurement strategy, this case study demonstrated that every dollar invested in two NYC community schools produced a return in social value ranging from \$10.30 to \$14.80.^{iv}

CAS’ parent engagement work is supported by the work of Joyce Epstein, Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp, leaders in the field whose research indicates that students whose parents support, monitor and advocate for their education are more successful in school, with

documented benefits such as higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales, enrollment in more challenging academic programs, improved behavior at home and school and better attendance.^v Schools which foster caring and trusting relationships with parents, viewing them as critical partners in their children's educational progress, enhance parents' desire to be involved in their children's education.^{vi} Creating such relationships is an integral component of the CAS approach, and will be infused throughout the work of the PLI. This will be achieved through the strength of the partnerships already being developed with the target schools and their leadership, the on-site presence of well-trained, supported and supervised Parent Coordinators, the availability of welcoming, well-equipped Parent Resource Centers,^{vii} and the extensive connections to community resources that CAS has and will continue to build in the South Bronx. The use of the proven curricula, specifically that of EPIC,^{viii} PASOS^{ix} and Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program,^x as well as ensuring access to health, mental health and social services, which is critical to students' motivation and ability to learn^{xi} are also strong indicators that the project will have the anticipated impact.

B. QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN: A Model that Responds Directly to Absolute

Priority 6 – Improving Parent and Family Engagement. Epstein's research undergirds one of CAS' central beliefs and approaches – maximizing the power of the intersection between parents, schools and communities.¹ CAS developed its Parent Leadership Institute (PLI) in Washington Heights, a predominantly immigrant NYC community where parents had trepidation about entering the school building and did not feel adequate to support their children's education. The activities of the PLI are designed to break down barriers to school participation for families and to help parents support their children's learning at home. To understand the needs and

¹ Note: We use the term parent to describe parents and other caregivers.

concerns of parents, CAS regularly conducts surveys including a needs assessment conducted this spring with more than 1,000 parents. Of relevance, parents reported needing the most support with homework help and talking to teachers. Further, while parents reported on the types of beliefs that should lead to strong engagement and student success, such as attending Parent-Teacher Conferences and talking to their children about school, we have observed a disconnect in their actions. Thus, the PLI will help them to act on those beliefs and influence them in areas in which they may be ambivalent. Our **highly-replicable model** utilizes and enhances existing community resources to provide **cost-effective, comprehensive support** through four core components:

1. Parent Resource Centers will offer parents a safe and welcoming physical space in the school, fostering the connection that parents need to have with their children's school to be effective partners in education. In the Centers, parents will network with one another, participate in classes and workshops, support school events, build relationships with teachers thereby opening the pathways to stronger, more effective communication, and connect to community resources. This is especially important for immigrant parents, helping them to overcome social, cultural, financial and linguistic challenges while building a solid bridge with the school and community so they will be more likely to take the actions necessary to encourage and support their children's success.

2. Parent Coordinators will be trusted community members who coordinate closely with the school leadership and have extensive local knowledge and credibility. They will liaise between school staff and parents, develop relationships with local organizations, connect parents with support services, and create and oversee parent volunteer and leadership roles. Training and on-going professional development will focus on building their capacity to: engage parents and

leverage the diversity of the parent community; facilitate small and large group processes; lead needs assessments; carry out program planning, implementation and monitoring; and leverage school and community resources.

3. Adult Education Classes and Workshops will instill the skills and confidence parents need to act more regularly on their beliefs about their child's education and become educators of their children as well as active members of the community. Classes such as literacy, ESL, GED and technology will help parents improve their education and earning potential, which has the associated benefits of improved attitudes about their children's education and higher academic expectations.^{xii} For parents of middle and high school students, workshops will provide guidance on high school and college selection and application processes. Workshops on topics such as strategies for homework assistance, in-home educational activities, and youth development will help parents promote learning and support healthy development. For more recent arrivals, orientation sessions will guide parents through vital topics such as how schools are organized, special education and accessing community resources.

4. Parent Leadership Development activities will provide opportunities for parents to be active community participants through volunteer service, advocacy projects, events that celebrate diverse cultures, and leadership training that prepares parents to serve on School Leadership Teams and advocate for their children's education. Parent involvement in the life of the school, whether paid or unpaid, has multiple benefits from improving school climate and safety to contributing to community and economic development.^{xiii}

For i3, CAS will officially partner with six schools located in the South Bronx community of Morrisania, a high-need community characterized by startling levels of poverty, school failure, health disparities and crime. Eighty-three (83%) of Morrisania children are born into poverty,

and the 16th Congressional District, in which Morrisania lies, is the poorest in the nation.^{xiv} Figures from Morrisania's Community School District 12 provide a disturbing snapshot: a mere 28.9% of its elementary and middle school students passed the NYS English Language Arts exam, *18 percentage points lower* than the City average and ranking this district 30th out of 32; 42.6% of elementary and middle school students meet State & City math standards – *17.4 percentage points lower* than the City average; and 38.4% of its students graduate high school in four years, compared to the City average of 60.4%.^{xv} The district also has the fourth lowest attendance rate in the City at 88.8%.^{xvi} Spanning grades K to 12 and serving approximately 2,500 students and families (see Appendix G for letters of commitment from each school), our i3 schools include: C.S. 61, P.S. 314, Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, C.S. 211 and the Children's Aid College Prep Charter School (CACPC) (see Appendix J for a descriptive listing of schools including CAS' involvement with each). CAS currently partners with these schools at varying levels with on-site Community School Directors, linkages to CAS and other CBO support services, expanded learning opportunities and some parent programming. As such, these schools are considered CAS Community Schools, making them eligible to receive a range of resources and supports from CAS. Because these schools feature leaders dedicated to school improvement and resources that contribute to positive school climate, they are well positioned to enhance their family engagement strategies. Additionally, because these parent engagement components and their benefits will be fully interwoven into the fabric of each school's ongoing operation, they have strong potential for ongoing sustainability beyond the five-year grant term.

Understanding that education and a college-going culture must begin in the earliest years, early childhood programming is a critical facet of CAS' work. Therefore, parents of children

from two CAS early childhood centers in Morrisania will be included in the PLI: the Bronx Early Childhood Center, which feeds into 13 partner schools CACPCS, C.S. 61 and P.S. 314; and C.S. 211, another 13 partner school, where CAS operates a NYC-funded early learning program. The location of these centers, either inside of or close to a CAS community school, will foster a seamless transition into kindergarten for families.

Outreach and recruitment will be facilitated by several mechanisms. While offering activities that respond to the needs and interests of parents is a critical strategy, we know a concerted effort will be required to broaden our reach and engage the highest need parents. As indicated in the attached timeline (see Appendix J), we will begin organizing events to generate awareness and interest beginning in the spring and continuing through the summer. We will also coordinate with school events, such as Open Houses, in which the program will be marketed. As mentioned, CAS' existing presence in the schools provides a ready audience from which to build. We will also work with school leadership and staff to identify students especially in need and strategize outreach to their parents. In addition to written materials including flyers and letters that will be distributed, we have found word of mouth to be one of the most effective recruitment strategies. Our Parent Coordinators will work with CAS Community School staff, school staff and the PTAs to identify parent leaders who can take an active role in outreach.

Goals, Strategies, Objectives and Outcomes: The purpose of the PLI is to improve student achievement by supporting parents in their role as the primary life-long educators of their children through the following interrelated goals: **1) Improve parents' skill and efficacy; 2) Strengthen home-school connections; and 3) Increase access to community resources** (see Logic Model in Appendix J). It is our experience that high parent participation stems from a school culture in which parents are viewed as full partners and a climate that is created by a

cluster of activities, rather than a single element. Positive school climate will result from a set of parents engaging in high commitment activities while others are engaged through moderate commitment activities. Each goal listed above and detailed below ensures that parents engage at whatever level they can. Some will complete the full Leadership Institute, attending at least 24 classes/workshops per year, while others will attend selected workshops and/or use Parent Resource Rooms. We do not seek to compare the two levels of engagement, but rather test the hypothesis that a school with increased parent partnership – with both a significant level of intensive parent engagement for some parents, as well as more modest engagement in core activities among others – will yield better results for students.^{xvii}

Goal 1: Improve parents' skill and efficacy to monitor and advocate for their child's education and consistently act on the aspirations they have for their children's education.

Research shows that efforts to engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.^{xviii} As such, the PLI seeks to improve parents' skill and efficacy to monitor and advocate for their children's education by: 1) Increasing their skills and earning potential, and building confidence; 2) Stressing the importance of education and improving their capacity to support their children's school achievement in the home; 3) Giving parents the tools and information needed to create a college-going culture at home; and 4) Increasing understanding and use of education system data to monitor children's progress.

Goal 1 Strategies: Adult Education and Training. The PLI will provide adult education and training. Leadership parents will participate in a minimum number of workshops, classes and activities over the course of 12 weeks per semester, with sessions lasting between two-four hours, for a total of 48 hours of programming across two semesters (courses described below, sample curricula and schedules in Appendix J). Other parents will be encouraged to participate

in two workshop sessions on the Home Study Environment and College Preparation, and a one workshop on School System Data and School Choice. Courses and workshops include:

- **Literacy, GED, ESL & Technology** education will be offered in 12 weekly sessions using professionally developed, standards-based curricula as well as CAS-developed curricula including “We Are New York,” in which participants learn about resources supporting English language development, locate useful City services and learn to problem-solve and communicate using English phrases.
- Workshops on **Supporting Academic Achievement at Home** through homework assistance and other activities will be provided using curricula and materials developed by **EPIC**-Every Person Influences Children, including EPIC’s *Ready, Set, Read* program, which consists of seven sessions. CAS staff will also provide a two-session workshop on how to improve the home study environment.^{xix} In addition, parents will be provided with a series of materials, websites and guides aimed at helping them understand the Common Core Standards through CAS’ “Common Core Parent Tool Kit K-5” and “Common Core Parent Tool Kit 6-8.”
- **College Preparation and Planning** workshops will provide information and exposure to increase comfort and familiarity with higher education. The **PASOS** program, developed by the Boys and Girls Club of America and the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, will offer nine 1.5 hour sessions for parents covering the importance of a college education and how parents can facilitate college attendance for their children. Information will be provided on financial aid

240 parents each year will participate at the Leadership level and 500 will participate in less intensive services for a total of 2,870 unduplicated participants over 5 years (see Parent Activity Table in Appendix J).

planning and savings programs to make college more affordable, as well as assistance with college preparation and the application process.

- **Executive Functioning and Child Development** training will be provided using the Families and Work Institute's *Mind in the Making* program, which provides the equivalent of three full-day sessions covering the seven essential life skills and teaching parents how to improve the executive functioning and study skills of their children.
- Training on **School System Data** will be provided using a two session course developed by DOE. This introduction to the NYC DOE's Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) or any school-based parent information system will teach parents how to access, understand and use data maintained in these systems to guide an understanding of their children's progress, work towards improvement and inform discussions with school staff. Helping families use tools that engage them in tracking their children's progress is a critical component of improving student achievement.^{xx}
- **School Choice and Transitions** will be addressed in workshops offered throughout the year, as well as one-to-one sessions provided by school staff and Parent Coordinators. Attention to transitions from early childhood programs to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to college are important for helping students and families deliberately pursue the best school fits that will lead to the best school matches at each transition.
- A two session workshop on **Advocacy Practices** will be offered to Leadership Parents to provide opportunities for involvement in empowering activities such as meeting with legislators at the State Capitol, rallying at City Hall, and organizing community-based rallies to advocate for public support of education and other critical services.

Other workshop will cover topics such as: nutrition, time and stress management, and setting personal goals. Understanding that some parents are more likely to participate in the academically-oriented work if they also have opportunities to engage in their own interests, recreational activities such as parent book or dance clubs will also be available. Specific attention will be made to tailor training, supports and activities to the needs and interests of fathers, such as peer groups and assistance with child support issues. In addition, the PLI will use the Positive Deviance approach, in which parents whose children are succeeding in school demonstrate what they do at home to foster student success with other parents. This helps parents of struggling students while reinforcing the work of the parent leaders.^{xxi}

School assessments will guide programming. The exact offerings at each school will be developed based on family and school needs and interests as determined by needs assessments. CAS will use materials developed by its National Center for Community Schools (NCCS) to conduct comprehensive assessments for each school. Assessments will include administering a parent survey, conducting parent focus groups, completing a mapping of current parent engagement efforts and conducting a root cause assessment of parent involvement. Assessment materials were developed by Dr. Edward Fergus, currently Deputy Director of the NYU Metropolitan Center for Urban Education.

Goal 1 Annual Objectives:

- 240 parents each year will become Leadership Parents, completing at least two full courses, as well as core workshops.
- 320 parents each year will participate in the workshops on Home Study Environment, College Preparation, School System Data and/or School Choice.

Goal 1 Outcomes: The primary outcomes to be measured are student achievement and attendance, with parent activity level as the intermediate goal. As such, Goal 1 parent engagement outcomes are:

- 75% of parents sampled who attend related workshops will increase the amount of time dedicated to helping their children with homework and other in-home learning activities.
- 75% of parents sampled will report being more prepared to assist their children with college readiness and access.
- 65% of parents will use the DOE ARIS system.

Goal 2: Strengthen Home-School Connections. The PLI will strengthen home-school connections by: 1) Increasing understanding of the importance of parent/teacher conferences and other strategies to work collaboratively with teachers; 2) Improving communication and relationships between parents and teachers/school staff; 3) Breaking down barriers between parents and schools; and 4) Increasing understanding of and preparing parents for participation in governance teams such as the School Leadership Team and Parent Teacher Association.

Goal 2 Strategies: The CAS PLI will build comfort and rapport between parents and teachers through the Parent Resource Centers and by providing parent leadership development, training and information on the following topics: the importance of parent/teacher conferences and how to make the most of them; strategies to improve parent/teacher communications, including opportunities for shared professional development; and how to get involved in school leadership and volunteer activities. To encourage participation in parent/teacher conferences, CAS staff will take every in-person opportunity to stress upcoming conferences, letters will be sent home, calls to homes will be made and flyers will be distributed at dismissal. At the conferences, CAS will staff a booth at each school to support parents, providing suggestions for the types of questions

to ask, offering a staff person to attend conferences with parents and providing translators. Targeted outreach will be done for parents who may be less inclined to participate, as well as those whose children are struggling. Parents of children who have successfully completed this stage of their education will be invited to serve as role models and resources to other parents by describing their challenges and how they overcame them. Parents struggling with similar challenges or interested in similar discussion topics will be brought together to serve as networks of support, building their social capital in support of their children's educations.

Creating a culture of mutual respect: Building on effective CAS Community School practices that respect the needs and desires of families, Parent Coordinators will serve as liaisons between parents and school staff to break down social, cultural, financial and linguistic barriers, and create a welcoming and inclusive school environment. Teachers will be encouraged to engage in parent outreach through face-to-face meetings, sending home materials that encourage and guide homework assistance, and frequent phone and email contact – activities that have been linked to improved student test scores.^{xxii}

Additionally, the Parent Resource Centers will offer a welcoming environment and a dedicated space for parents, a critical element for strengthening parent engagement.^{xxiii} Parent Resource Centers will serve as locations where parents and staff can come together, and where joint events will create a sense of partnership. The Coordinators will also work with the School Leadership Teams at each participating school to ensure they are apprised of the goals and activities of the PLI and are poised to promote them.

Goal 2 Annual Objectives:

- 240 parents will make 1,200 visits to CAS Parent Resource Centers to build their connections

to school staff and other parents, sign up for education and training activities and obtain information regarding community resources.

- 100% of teachers in each school will have made at least 1 visit to the Parent Resource Center for a meeting or event throughout the year.
- 250 parents will participate in significant school events and volunteer opportunities.
- 75% of staff will report understanding the purpose of the Parent Resource Center and will see it as a valuable resource to support their work with parents.

Goal 2 Outcomes:

- 70% of parents of elementary students and 40% of parents of middle school students will participate in parent-teacher conferences.
- An increase of 20% of parents sampled will demonstrate elevated perception of connection to their children's schools.

Goal 3: Increase Access to Community Resources to Remove Barriers to Learning.^{xxiv}

Access to health, mental health and social services is critical to students' ability to learn.^{xxv} Low-income youth are disproportionately affected by "educationally relevant health disparities" such as poor vision, asthma, teen pregnancy, aggression and violence, and (untreated) inattention/hyperactivity. Further, research demonstrates the impact of health disparities on educational achievement.^{xxvi} That the South Bronx has the *highest* rate of avoidable hospitalizations in NYC indicates an extreme need for greater access to *preventive* health care.^{xxvii}

Building on the CAS Community School model that ensures access to comprehensive services, the PLI will work to increase access to and connections with community resources to remove barriers to learning that impact student achievement. The CAS framework of connecting students to services, often by bringing services directly to the school site, will provide the

organizing principal for integrating needed supports. Parent Coordinators will identify providers whose services respond to the needs of the community, many of whom are already well known to CAS. The Parent Resource Centers will house a wealth of information on how to access services in the community and the Coordinators will facilitate these connections. Additionally, Parent Coordinators will join CAS' Bronx Services Cabinet, which serves as a resource for identifying local services and linking parents to them. The Bronx Services Cabinet consists of directors from each CAS Bronx service and program (e.g., early childhood, child welfare, health, educational enrichment) who convene monthly to coordinate and strengthen their efforts.

Addressing health care needs. A key goal will be to ensure that the primary health needs of participating families are met. Parent Coordinators will help families access health insurance through referrals to facilitated enrollment sites, establish medical homes and strongly encourage and facilitate routine preventive health and dental care. They will also help families with special needs children obtain evaluations, and advocate for and access services. CAS' own licensed medical clinic in Morrisania that is within walking distance of the i3 schools will be a primary resource. In addition, CAS will work with Montefiore Medical Center's School Health Program, which currently reaches more than 20,000 Bronx children with preventive and primary care.

Addressing the barrier of teen pregnancy. Also supporting the health and youth development of students and families will be the CAS Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program's **Adult Family Life and Sexual Education** curriculum. This 24-session course is designed to increase parents' knowledge and comfort level in communicating holistically with their children about sexuality. A highly experienced trainer from the Carrera program will conduct this training. **The Carrera program has been proven effective at reducing pregnancies and births to teens and increasing graduation rates** by an independent evaluator,

and is one of only two adolescent pregnancy prevention programs *nationwide* found to meet Top Tier evidence of effectiveness standards.^{xxviii}

Bolstering student stability through housing and emergency assistance. Housing instability has been cited as one of the leading causes of early chronic school absenteeism.^{xxix} Parent Coordinators will refer families with immediate housing crises to CAS' Housing Stability Resource Center (HSRC), which helps approximately 500 families annually avert eviction and avoid homelessness, and to CAS' Office of Client Advocacy, which distributes an average of \$1 million annually in emergency food, clothing, shelter and scholarships.

Goal 3 Activities:

- Connect families to the CAS Bronx Family Health Center for medical and dental needs.
- Catalogue available community resources.
- Develop collaborative relationships with community service providers.
- Provide information, supports and referrals to meet parent and family needs.
- Provide Family Life and Sexuality training.

Goal 3 Annual Objectives:

- 300 parents will receive information on and 180 will successfully be connected to community resources.
- 75% of students will have a medical home and receive preventive health care services.

Goal 3 Outcomes:

- 180 parents will report receiving a service through referrals that bolstered family stability.

Potential Risks to Project Success and Strategies to Mitigate Risks: Parental engagement has historically come with challenges, especially in low-income communities where multiple factors can impede involvement: scheduling conflicts due to multiple jobs or child care

obligations; a parent's own negative experience or limited level of education that may inhibit their understanding of the importance of such involvement and/or their comfort level in the school; a perception that principals and teachers are ambivalent about their participation; and for parents of English Language Learners, language and cultural barriers, and an unfamiliarity with the school system. CAS' PLI employs several strategies, outlined above, to mitigate these challenges. First, we bring an existing partnership with each principal and a shared goal of improving parent engagement with mutually agreed upon activities. Principals support our efforts with key ingredients such as program design, parent outreach and the availability of space. CAS' presence in the schools means that we are already familiar to and trusted by parents, perhaps through their children's participation in after-school and summer programming, or through the administration of concrete assistance and advocacy. Through Parent Resource Centers, we create a dedicated space within each school where parents feel included and supported. We also employ bi-lingual, bicultural staff who ensure appropriate and respectful communication with parents and our model is designed with a range of classes and activities that respond to the specific needs and interests of parents.

C. QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT PLAN: A Proven Capacity for Managing Complex,

Large-Scale Projects. The Children's Aid Society was founded expressly to improve the outcomes of NYC's most vulnerable children. Throughout our 160-year history, we have continually evolved our programs and administrative functions to meet the complex needs of children and families living in poverty. Our Community School model, which includes family engagement, speaks to our approach and capacity to foster school-community partnerships. Today, CAS is a \$110 million multi-service organization operating programs spanning early childhood centers, out-of-school time enrichment through community centers and community

The Children's Aid Society: Program Narrative

schools, leadership development, college and career readiness, licensed health services, foster care and adoption, preventive services and family support. Through more than 40 sites, we reach approximately 70,000 children and families in NYC's most impoverished neighborhoods. CAS has a solid infrastructure, strong fiscal controls, proven track record and trusted presence in the communities we serve, enabling us to effectively manage the scope of services in this proposal, meet the goals of the project and stay on budget.

A strong management structure with qualified personnel and well-defined roles: The initiative will be managed and supervised within CAS' School-Age Programs division and will receive support and technical assistance from the CAS National Center for Community Schools (NCCS). Drema Brown, Vice President for School-Age Programs, brings vision and strategic leadership to developing and implementing agency-wide strategies for meeting the highest educational outcomes for children. Prior to joining CAS, Ms. Brown worked at New Leaders for New Schools where she led the design, development, and delivery of leadership curriculum for the program's nationwide principal training program. She is also a former principal of P.S. 230X in the Bronx where she implemented a successful comprehensive plan to dramatically improve student achievement, removing the school from the state's SURR list. The NCCS, led by Jane Quinn, has provided assistance to more than 15,000 adaptation sites both nationally and internationally. Ms. Quinn's work focuses on advancing the national Community Schools strategy as a preferred education reform approach and involves extensive speaking engagements and presentations to support wide-scale replication. Janice Chu-Zhu, the NCCS Senior Director of National Capacity Building, will also bring particular expertise on parent involvement to this initiative. Ms. Chu-Zhu's responsibilities include training and consultation on topics such as partnerships, program quality, parent involvement, organizational capacity, funding and

sustainability. She has conducted numerous trainings and workshops with CAS Parent Coordinators to build their capacity for engaging and empowering parents.

A detailed timeline with monthly and annual performance targets will ensure goal attainment: The timeline (see Appendix J) delineates the activities and milestones for implementing and operating the PLI over the five-year grant period. Planning and development will begin immediately upon contract start date, with recruitment, hiring and training of key staff, orientations for school staff and school leadership, parent outreach and assessment, resource identification and the development of a directory of referral providers, and the creation of class and workshop schedules. Full-year programming will begin in September 2014 with a Parent Kick-Off event, additional outreach and enrollment, and classes, workshops and activities scheduled across sites. Classes and workshops will run from October - May throughout the grant period, and will be adjusted based on the emerging needs and interests of the community. In Years 2-4, our independent evaluator, Policy Studies Associates (PSA), will maintain and fine-tune data collection and reporting, conduct a comparative analysis of student outcomes and deliver a final report in Year 5. In Years 3-4, CAS will develop a sustainability plan to continue the PLI beyond Year 5.

The metrics to assess progress will span a) *implementation*, as measured by staff hired, planning activities achieved, the number of classes and events that are scheduled at each location, and participant awareness of offerings and satisfaction as measured by surveys and staff observations; b) *participation*, as measured by enrollment and attendance; and c) *progress*, as measured by parent engagement (e.g., frequency of monitoring or assisting with home learning activities, attendance at Parent-Teacher Conferences) and student achievement (e.g., attendance and grade promotion). CAS uses a database called CSIS, the Community Schools Information

System, which was developed by CitySpan Technologies specifically for our Community School programs. CSIS captures basic student demographics, as well as enrollment and utilization, and is used to generate a host of management and data analysis reports. As we implement the PLI in Morrisania, CSIS will be used to track adult involvement.

Commitment of key partners and stakeholders: The principals of our participating schools are critical to the success of this initiative and as evidenced by the attached letters, each have indicated their support for the implementation of the PLI. Their commitment to this partnership is further evidenced by the office and classroom space they have allocated to CAS for current programming, their appointment of CAS staff to School Leadership and Pupil Personnel Teams, and their collaboration in the design and execution of programs including after-school enrichment and summer camps.

Procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement: CAS will rely on both formal and informal protocols in order to garner feedback about the initiative and make mid-course adjustments when necessary:

- **Supervision:** The Project Director will schedule a weekly supervision with each Parent Coordinator during which time they will assess the program and address any issues that may arise. The Project Director will also have weekly supervision with the Vice President for School-Age Programs who will provide guidance and support.
- **Meetings:** The Project Director will convene regular meetings, at least monthly, with the Parent Coordinators to come together as a group, share ideas and observations and troubleshoot problem areas. The Project Director will also participate in the monthly Community School Directors meetings to strategize the logistics of parent outreach and engagement, inform

community school staff of the program's progress, hear their perspectives and troubleshoot any problem areas.

- Surveys and Focus Groups: We will conduct surveys and focus groups among participants to inform the menu of offerings, solicit their feedback as the program evolves and gauge the quality of their experience. This will include workshop surveys to ensure quality implementation and assess what worked well or not well, and annual surveys administered to: a) parents, to assess their level of awareness regarding available resources and the impact of their behavior in support of their children's education; and b) staff, to assess their awareness of offerings and perceived impact of the work.
- Data Collection and Review: The Program Director will utilize data to assess the program both in terms of offerings (e.g., number and types of activities delivered) and participation (as indicated by attendance and yearly parent and staff survey results).
- Reporting: The Project Director will prepare a monthly report that delineates the work and synthesizes overall progress and obstacles, to be reviewed with and supported by the Vice President for School-Age Programs. In addition, CAS has a formal Outcomes Tracking Process in which each CAS program develops a set of goals and priorities for the upcoming year. At minimum, quarterly reports are submitted to the Executive Office and are followed up by meetings of division, program and executive staff where the progress towards meeting the designated goals is discussed. Any barriers to meeting the goals are identified and strategies are developed to address and overcome them.
- Ongoing Communication with School Personnel and Participants: By nature of the community school program, CAS staff, school personnel and participants are in constant

communication, offering ongoing informal opportunities to bring up issues that may arise, share new ideas or discuss the program in general.

D. PERSONNEL: Qualified Staff with Experience in the Field and Community. Upon award, a Project Director will be hired and sited either at CAS' Bronx Family Center, which is centrally located among the six partner schools, or one of the schools. He/she will have at minimum, a bachelor's degree in a relevant field and at least six years' experience in education and/or social services, community organizing and working in school-based settings. The Project Director will coordinate and oversee all activities associated with the PLI, including reporting and other requirements for the U.S. DOE. The Project Director will collaborate with the CAS Community School Director and principal of each partner school to recruit, hire and supervise four Parent Coordinators (two Parent Coordinators will work across two schools each – C.S. 211 and the CACPCS, and Fannie Lou Hamer Middle and High Schools – that share a building or campus). CAS Parent Coordinators will become members of CAS on-site teams, and will be responsible for coordinating parent education, training and activities, building community connections, developing and staffing Parent Resource Centers, liaising with school staff, and working directly with parents to provide support, referrals and other services as needed. Together with the Community School Directors, principals and Parent Coordinators, the Project Director will develop a schedule of classes and activities. The Project Director will have the support of CAS' Deputy Director for the Bronx, Robin Fleshman, who is instrumental in coordinating our range of services and partnerships in the Bronx region, and CAS' Deputy Director for Washington Heights, Myrna Torres, who has played a key role in developing and running CAS' Washington Heights Parent Leadership Institute. As mentioned, Drema Brown, Vice President for School-Age Programs will directly supervise the Project Director. Ms. Brown reports to the

CAS Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Dr. William Weisberg (see resumes in Appendix F). In the case that key positions are not filled according to our timeline, most notably that of the Parent Coordinator, the Project Director and Ms. Fleshman will work with on-site CAS staff to carry out planning activities such as identifying dedicated space for Parent Resource Centers, conducting needs assessments and developing marketing materials. A timeline with an ambitious yet reasonable built-in planning period combined with CAS' existing infrastructure at each school ensures that critical work will proceed.

A highly experienced evaluator will conduct the evaluation. The project will be evaluated by Policy Studies Associates (PSA), a Washington, D.C.-based firm that has conducted research in education and youth development since 1982. PSA's clients include federal, state, and local government agencies, foundations, and other organizations that use high-quality data to inform policy decisions. PSA's researchers integrate information from multiple sources to examine the operations and effects of programs to improve services for children, youth and families. Several past and current PSA evaluations have used NYC DOE administrative records in the analysis of program effects on students' achievement, attendance and college readiness. For example, PSA worked closely with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development as evaluator of its Out of School Time programs, using students' school records as a key data source. Jeanine Hildreth, a PSA managing director will serve as the lead evaluator. Dr. Hildreth is an experienced research manager who has overseen past evaluations of parent engagement programs. She received her Ph.D. in Education Policy and Research from the University of Maryland. In addition to over 10 years' experience at PSA, Dr. Hildreth held the position of Director of Research Services for the Baltimore City Public Schools.

E. PROJECT EVALUATION: A rigorous evaluation by an independent organization, Policy Studies Associates (PSA), will systematically collect and weigh the evidence of the PLI's results while informing continuous improvement. The evaluation will provide:

1. Evidence of the promise of the PLI for improving student outcomes. The research design provides quasi-experimental comparisons between the outcomes of participating parents' children (attendance, achievement, and progress toward graduation) and those of students matched on baseline achievement and demographic characteristics in matched schools that do not have similar programming for parents.
2. **Information on key elements of the PLI for use in this project and subsequent efforts.** By assessing fidelity in implementing key program elements, the level of parent participation and the intermediate outcomes attained, the evaluation will provide formative feedback for continuous improvement and refinement of the model. The measures of fidelity will focus on the incidence and prevalence of the delivery of proposed program services, the quality and relevance of those services, the characteristics and training of the staff delivering the services, and the level of participation for each of the parents. This will allow analysis of the relationship between overall participation and outcomes, as well as the role of individual program components.

Logic Model will guide the evaluation plan. The evaluation will test the following proposition: through the coordinated efforts of Parent Resource Centers, Parent Coordinators, adult education, and leadership development, parents will develop home environments that promote learning and will forge stronger connections with their children's schools, resulting in student achievement and progress toward graduation that exceed those of matched students in matched schools.

The Logic Model (see Appendix J) depicts pathways through which key program elements are expected to affect intermediate and ultimate outcomes. The **proximal and intermediate outcomes** highlighted in the Logic Model include improvements in children's home learning opportunities and in parents' engagement with schools. The Logic Model suggests that these intermediate outcomes set the stage for the **ultimate outcomes**: improved student performance as measured by New York City's established measures for performance on state tests (grades 3-8), attendance (all grades) and progress toward graduation (high school).

How the evaluation will examine the Logic Model. The evaluators' collection of detailed data on program inputs and activities, outputs, and short and long-term outcomes described within the textboxes will confirm the existence of these elements of the logic model (see Evaluation of the PLI Measurement Plan in Appendix J). The research design permits analysis of the links between the elements of the logic model and allows rigorous comparisons between participating and nonparticipating schools.

Evaluators will measure implementation of all key elements of the PLI, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the enactment of the intended design, and feeding back this information to CAS. PSA will measure outcomes in relation to the level of implementation of each element as well as the pattern of participation among parents. The evaluation will answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of fidelity of the implementation of the key elements of the PLI (inputs and activities) in each school and overall, and what specific program activities are gaining expected (or higher) levels of parent participation?
2. To what extent do participating parents demonstrate engagement in their children's learning and partnership with the school?

3. Does the PLI, when implemented with fidelity, result in higher achievement and graduation rates for students whose parents have participated, in comparison with similar students in similar schools that do not offer this programming?

Methods. To address the question of the relationship between the implementation of the PLI and student academic performance, the evaluation will use a **quasi-experimental design** and will compare academic performance of the students whose parents have participated in the PLI with a comparison group of similar students attending other similar schools, selected using propensity matching on baseline characteristics. A statistical **power analysis** using Raudenbush's Optimal Design method indicates that with student-level data from 500 participants and 1,000 comparison group members, the minimum detectable effect size will be .160, meeting the What Works Clearinghouse standard. The program anticipates higher rates of participation, and thus even with expected attrition, the sample size will be sufficient for the planned analyses.

Parental consent will be obtained from all participating parents. To identify the children of participating parents, parents attending any PLI activity will be asked to provide active parental consent for the release of data for their children to the evaluators. In addition to the standard informed consent information, parents will be asked for their own name, their child's name and enough identifying information (e.g., grade, teacher, school, OSIS ID number) to allow linking of data on parent participation and student administrative data. Because data for students in the comparison groups will be de-identified secondary administrative data, neither PSA's IRB nor the NYC DOE Proposal Review Committee requires parental consent for release of those students' data. Once the children of participating parents are flagged, anonymous student level data for all other students in the six host schools and 12 matched comparison schools (see below) will be accessed for the evaluation.

Study design. PSA proposes a quasi-experimental design, using a matched group of comparison students who are similar to the children of parents participating in the PLI. PSA will identify the comparison group through propensity matching, a procedure used in many past PSA evaluations in New York City schools, as well as in other school districts across the country. For this evaluation, two stages of propensity matching will be used. First, comparison schools similar to the PLI schools will be identified, matched on grade levels served, demographic characteristics of students, and the proportion of students scoring proficient or higher on State end-of-year tests. Information from CAS needs assessments describing the existence of programs for families in each school will be considered in the identification process. At least two matches will be identified for each participating school. Second, from among the students enrolled at the comparison schools, propensity matching will be used to identify a comparison group of students who are similar to PLI participants' children on baseline characteristics, including demographics, grade level, eligibility for programs such as special education, school attendance, and prior performance on State end-of-year tests (where available). Two comparison students will be identified for each participant to allow for attrition. Each year of the study, the student-level matching procedure will be repeated for the children of parents who participate in the PLI for the first time. Once a student is identified as a member of the participant or comparison group, the student will remain part of the study population for purposes of the extraction of student-level administrative data from the NYC DOE, so that outcomes associated with parent participation can be tracked over time and across grade levels.

Monitoring treatment implementation. In collaboration with CAS, PSA will build a "fidelity rubric" for the PLI, identifying its key elements--such as the hiring of school-based staff, whether each of the courses and workshops planned is offered, and the level of parental

participation-- for data-based examination. Detailed records kept by project staff, following templates developed by the evaluation team, and CAS surveys of participants will provide the data for ratings on this index. Records will show the activities offered for parents at each school and, at the individual level, the frequency of participation and the content of activities in which each parent participates. An initial draft of a system for computing an index for the fidelity of implementation, with specific proposed indicators, is included in Appendix J. The system will be tested and refined during the first year of the grant to ensure that it accurately reflects the desired characteristics of PLI and that it captures the critical information without overburdening staff and participants with data collection requirements.

Monitoring the experience of the comparison group. Evaluators will routinely check public records of the comparison schools to determine if any have launched a similar parent engagement program. The results of CAS periodic needs assessment efforts conducted among the neighborhoods and schools in which it has or is considering relationships will provide further data for this purpose. In the event that a comparison school has implemented similar programming, it may have to be removed from the comparison group. The initial designation of more than one matching school for each participating school makes this a feasible option.

Measures for critical components and pathways of the Logic Model. Delivery of each activity shown in the Logic Model will be a component of the fidelity index as will parent participation rates in relation to program expectations. Evaluators will also interview Parent Coordinators annually about project implementation. Their perceptions will be useful for formative evaluation and may also point to additions needed in the other measures.

Scales for **parent engagement** in their children's learning will be composed of survey items regarding: 1) frequency of monitoring or assisting with learning activities (homework for school-

age children, developmental and school-readiness activities for younger children); 2) attendance at parent-teacher conferences; 3) frequency of communication with teachers, the school, or early childhood center about their child's progress and ways they can help; 4) parents' emphasis on the importance of education; 5) parental endorsement of and confidence in children's schools. In addition, teachers will be asked to use simple roster checklists to record the names of parents attending parent-teacher conferences.

Measures of student outcomes will include: attendance, achievement, and progress toward graduation. We will compare the number of days attended and attendance rates between participants and comparison students, and the proportion of students in each group categorized by NYC DOE as having excessive absenteeism (e.g., missing 20 or more days over a school year). Because baseline school attendance is one of the factors on which students will be matched, analysis of differences between the groups will provide an estimate of program impact. The magnitude of the change in attendance measures over time will also be compared. For students in grades 3 to 8, performance on the NYS English/Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics tests will be a key indicator of academic performance. For students in grade 4 or higher, participants and comparison group members will be matched on their performance on the ELA and mathematics tests in the prior year. Performance will be compared using two measures: the proportion of students scoring proficient or above on each test; and performance over time using a standardized scale score, computed using the statewide mean and standard deviation to convert each student's performance into a z score (a score that can be analyzed and compared across grade levels and across years of test completion). For students in grades 9 to 12, academic performance will be measured in terms of the number of course credits completed each school year. The two groups will be compared on the number of credits earned each year, and on the

proportion of each group completing 10 credits (the NYC measure of progress toward graduation).

Surveys of students, parents, and teachers will be administered to collect self-reports of parental engagement with the learning activities of their child, as well as interactions with teachers. The surveys will also track changes in attitudes over time. The surveys will be composed of existing scales with proven records of reliability and validity. The core components will be extracted from the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (PTIQ) created for the study of the Fast Track Program by project staff from Pennsylvania State University^{xxx}; the survey scales developed by the National Network of Partnership Schools and Johns Hopkins University^{xxxi} for students, parents, and teachers; and the Harvard Family Research Project surveys created under “A New Tool for Understanding Family-School Relationships.”^{xxxii}

Analysis plan. The initial approach to the analysis is the comparison of academic performance at the end of each year using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the distributions of the two student groups on the key measures. To further control for any differences between participants and comparison students, and to compensate for any differential attrition, multivariate regression and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) will be applied to provide statistical adjustments. A fixed-effects model to control for observed differences in the participating schools will also be considered. In addition to analyzing results among all children of participants, the evaluation team will use multivariate analyses to explore the possible association between parent dosage and student results. For all of these analyses, student test scores, school attendance rates, and demographic characteristics from the year before the PLI was implemented (or the year before new students first enrolled in a PLI host school) will be

used as baseline measures to be controlled for by both the propensity matching procedure and later statistical adjustments to the analysis models.

Analyses will also be conducted that focus on changes over time among participating families. A basic assumption is that greater exposure to PLI activities will be associated with greater changes in parental participation in their children's education and ultimately in children's academic performance. Greater participation is used to mean not only more contact during a single school year, but participation in PLI activities over multiple years.

Reporting plans. The PSA team will write concise, user-friendly semi-annual reports for PLI administrators and staff. After delivery of each report, an in-person virtual meeting with the evaluators will enable discussion of the new findings and their implications. Reports on impact will provide detail on key elements of the PLI to inform replication. The evaluation team will develop a summative technical report identifying ways in which the outcomes among children of participating parents did or did not exceed those of the comparison students. Dissemination of findings will include distribution of a nontechnical summary for district decision makers and for partner organizations in community schools nationally. All results will be broadly shared with researchers and practitioners. The evaluation team pledges to cooperate with technical assistance from the Department or contractors.

Conclusion. Research indicates that family participation in education is far more predictive of a students' academic success than family socioeconomic status.^{xxxiii} Regardless of income, it is the parents' expectations of their child's academic attainment and participation in their children's schooling that is the most consistent predictor of achievement.^{xxxiv} Parental involvement is particularly important for those children who need it most – those growing up in poverty and highly-stressed families.^{xxxv} What CAS presents is a viable approach to engaging

low-income and immigrant parents, whose participation has not always been encouraged by some schools in the past, in structured and thoughtful activities that reach far beyond traditional PTA meetings. We have confidence that the results will further support the research and provide a replicable model for advancing the work and its impact.

End Notes

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