

Cicero Neighborhood Network (CNN) Needs Assessment Report Summary & Recommendations

The purpose of the Cicero Neighborhood Network (CNN) Needs Assessment was to collect comprehensive, in-depth data on the strengths/assets and needs of Cicero residents in the areas of education, health, and employment. This report includes information gathered through 1:1 interviews, focus groups and surveys administered between June 2016 and October 2016 involving over 800 Cicero residents, youth, government, education, and social service providers.

The CNN Steering Committee and Data Collection Committee would like to thank all of the Cicero community members who took time to participate in the Listening Campaign and Needs Assessment. It would not have been possible to gain a better understanding of the Cicero community without the time, patience, and honest input they provided. It is our goal to ensure that this valuable information be used to improve the quality of education, health, and employment for current and future residents of Cicero. To request the full Needs Assessment document, contact Elidao@youthcrossroads.org

Cicero Neighborhood Network (CNN) Needs Assessment Report

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Cicero Needs Assessment Summary and Recommendations

Education Needs and Recommendations

Summary of Key Education Needs in Cicero

The educational needs of the residents in Cicero begin with access to and enrollment in early childhood education. The number of children 0--5 years old in Cicero has been around 8,000 each year since 2012. However, the number of childcare slots available has ranged from 1,236 to 1,347 each year. Thus, on average, about 6,700 children each year would not have a place to go for childcare. Despite having the need (i.e., number of children 0-5) exceed the number of slots available, many early childhood providers in Cicero have difficulty reaching capacity and do not have waitlists. Therefore, there is a need to increase enrollment in early childhood programs in Cicero. Increasing enrollment in early childhood programs is important because not only can children in need of social, educational, and/or medical supports be identified; children who attend early childhood programs have better academic performance in K-12 education. Some of the underperformance of students in K-12 in Cicero may be explained by the low enrollment of children in early childhood education.

In general, the percent of students performing on grade level in reading and math in District 99 is below expectation. Ideally, ~80% of students should be performing on grade level; however, the average percent of students performing on grade level in math is 29% (based on MAP data) and 34% in reading (based on MAP data). By the end of 8th grade, ~22% of 8th graders are on grade level in math (based on MAP data) and ~36% of 8th graders are on grade level in reading (based on MAP data). Therefore, ~78% of students are entering 9th grade performing below grade level in math, and 64% of students are entering 9th grade performing below grade level in reading. Across all academic indicators, students who have limited English proficiency are performing well below expectation. The pattern of performance is consistent across K-12th grades. This underperformance in reading and math can also be seen in the students' ACT performance. On average, students at Morton East are earning a score of 16.7 on the ACT. Students need to earn a score of 21 or higher in order to be deemed ready for college work. Only 5% of students at Morton East are meeting ACT benchmarks. Not meeting the ACT benchmarks increases the likelihood that a student will have to take remedial classes in college. In addition to the ACT scores, the graduation rate is also lower than the state average. The 4-year graduation rate for students in the state of IL is 85%. At Morton East, 73% of students graduated in 4 years. Students with limited English proficiency have the lowest graduation rate at ~50% for East and the District. The graduation rate for Black students at East is ~53%, the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups.

Therefore, the academic difficulties that manifest during early elementary continue to manifest throughout high school.

During the focus group interviews with parents, curriculum directors, and students; they all had members who mentioned the disparity in how students who have academic difficulties are supported vs. those students who are high performing. This divide was particularly salient at the high school level, but it seems to start at the elementary/middle school level. To explain, participants explained that students with academic difficulties may not be as aware of resources or have as many opportunities as students who are high-performing.

Curriculum directors noted how there are very few resources to support students who have academic difficulty in reading and math. In addition to this divide with supports and resources, some parents and students in the focus groups had difficulty identifying positive aspects of the educational system in Cicero while other parents and students had a lot of positive things to say about education. Furthermore, some parents feel very involved and heard while others feel marginalized and silenced in the educational system. Community organization members also noted that collaboration with the districts can be difficult and they sometimes feel that there is a lack of transparency when districts decide what agencies to work with thus creating inequity in how districts collaborate with community agencies. Taken together, there seems to be a divide in the community about the equity in quality of education. These data suggest that there is a divide in the resources and opportunities and there may also be a divide in how parents are treated in the educational system.

To address these needs, the following recommendations are provided.

Education Recommendations Recommendation I. Early Childhood Education

- **Recommendation I-A. Conduct a multi-agency, early childhood education campaign to increase awareness of and knowledge about early childhood education in Cicero.** The purpose of this campaign will be to increase enrollment in early childhood programs.
 - Campaign should involve collaboration hospitals, clinics, community agencies, schools, employers, and government agencies who can disseminate information on early childhood education.
 - Campaign should include information on social and educational benefits of early childhood education (e.g., data on academic performance of students who attend early childhood centers)
 - Campaign should include information on child find (i.e., opportunity for educators to identify any social, medical, or academic needs children may have that parents do not recognize)
 - Campaign should include information on logistics of enrolling child in early childhood education (e.g., contact information, costs, transportation, and requirements if you have undocumented status)

- **Recommendation I-B. Provide cultural competency development training to all early childhood providers, especially regarding the use of center-based, early childhood programs among Latino families.** The purpose of this training will be to improve providers' knowledge and understanding of Latino families and their views on center-based, early childhood programs so that they can better serve families.

- Training should also include information on rights, resources, and supports for families who are immigrants and are undocumented or living in mixed-status families.
- **Recommendation I-C. Provide transportation for families to bring their children to early childhood centers.** Providers explained that transportation is a significant barrier to parents enrolling their children in early childhood education. Providing support for transportation or expanding transportation options will help to address this need.

Recommendation II. K-12 Education and College Preparation

- **Recommendation II-A. Increase the percent of students performing on grade level in reading and math, especially by 4th and 8th grade.** The 4th and 8th grade are critical grade levels because by 4th grade, students are expected to know how to read. Therefore, instruction on “how to read” is reduced by 4th grade and it becomes increasingly difficult for students to receive instruction on how to read. Students also need to be on grade level by the end of 8th grade because basic reading and writing skills are not taught at the high school level; therefore, it is very difficult for students to remediate basic reading and math skills at the high school level.
 - While working to increase the percent of students performing on grade level in reading and math, it is also recommended that more academic supports for students with academic difficulties be put in place. These academic supports can be provided before, during, and after school.
 - It is recommended that educators collaborate with parents, mental health providers, and community agencies to identify ways to improve performance in reading and math for K-12 students.
- **Recommendation II-B. Increase the number of students meeting ACT benchmarks.** The benchmarks are: reading is 21, ACT English is 18, ACT Math is 22, and ACT Science is 24. In examining Morton East, ~5% are meeting the ACT benchmarks. By increasing the number of students meeting these benchmarks, fewer students will have to take remedial courses when they enter college.
 - Students reported inconsistencies in their awareness of the ACT prep programs in the school. They also noted that they often learned about the prep programs later in their high school years and preferred to learn about them earlier. Therefore, it is recommended that more prep programs be offered during school and students learn about the programs as early as 9th grade.
 - In addition, it is recommended that students be offered bilingual ACT and/or SAT prep courses to ensure that students with limited English proficiency can benefit from the prep.

- **Recommendation II-C. Offer course and/or workshop series for parents and students on selecting and entering college.** Many students in District 201 will be first-generation college students. Therefore, they and their parents may have a limited understanding of how to select a college, enroll in a college, and staying in college. Therefore, it is recommended that a course and/or workshop series be offered to parents and students to increase their understanding of the college enrollment process. This course and/or workshop could be offered to parents and students as early as junior high.
 - The course and/or workshop should also include information on college enrollment and related issues for students who are undocumented.

- **Recommendation II-D. Increase the high school graduation rate.** The 4-year graduation rate for students in the state of IL is 85%. At Morton East, 73% of students graduated in 4 years. Students with limited English proficiency have the lowest graduation rate at ~50% for East and the District. The graduation rate for Black students at east is ~53%, the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups.

- **Recommendation II-E. Expand Evidence-Based Bilingual Training.** This recommendation is based on data indicating that students with limited English proficiency have significantly lower academic performance across all domains compared to students who do not have limited English proficiency. The curriculum directors explained how their greatest challenge is trying to meet the needs of students with limited English proficiency. To meet this need, they are trying to move to a system of helping students become bilingual rather than proficient in English only. The goal would be to start develop proficiency in Spanish and English from birth so that by the time students get to Kindergarten they are already becoming bilingual. Thus, by 3rd grade, they will have much higher levels of proficiency in both languages.
 - It is recommended that a partnership among early childhood centers, school districts, and community agencies be created to provide bilingual training to parents and children. The purpose of this partnership would be to ensure that there is language supports provided to children and adults to learn English and Spanish starting from birth. In order to do that, parents must also be proficient in English and Spanish.
 - It is recommended that bilingual training be provided to students year-round. Therefore, summer programs that teach English and Spanish should be provided to students as well as adults.
 - It is recommended that a dual language program be implemented across the K-8th grade levels.
 - It is recommended that bilingual training and supports be provided to students who exit the formal bilingual program provided to students.

- **Recommendation II-F. Improve Home-School-Community Collaboration.** Given the tensions among parents, students, and administrators about the inclusion of parents in decision-making, concerns about the school personnel's transparency in decision-making, and revelations about the imbalance in supports for students who have academic difficulties

vs. those students who are high-performing; there is a need to enhance the communication and relationships among parents, educators, and community service providers in Cicero.

- It is recommended that parent representatives be included in the educational decision-making process at the district and/or school levels
- It is recommended that formal process for communication among educators, parents, and community agencies be formed such that decision-making processes can be made clearer.
- It is recommended that community service providers who provide supports to students have formal communication with teachers to create wrap-around support for students.

Health Needs and Recommendations

Summary of Key Health Needs

In analyzing all of the health data, one of the key needs is more doctors and clinics that can be accessed for free or low-cost. Residents and providers explained that accessing services in the community can be very challenging either due to lack of available doctors or clinics in the community. Further hindering this access is the fact that ~28% of residents are undocumented, and adults who are undocumented oftentimes do not have any health insurance. Moreover, even if their children have health insurance, parents who are undocumented may be reluctant to seek out health services due to fears of being discovered. Improving access to health care is a central issue because coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death among Cicero residents. Data from the Needs Assessment also revealed that obesity and cardio health were major concerns among providers in Cicero. Relatedly, participants in the Needs Assessment reported the need for more education on nutrition, exercise, and health living.

In addition to the need for more doctors and affordable care, the need for mental health service providers and clinics in Cicero is especially acute. To explain, there are limited mental health services available in the community and schools. This limitation creates community-wide challenges such as individuals with mental health needs entering public spaces such as the public library or the police station. For children, most of the mental health referrals originate from the schools; however, providers noted the need to form better partnerships with school personnel to effectively provide those services. Not only is there a need for more mental health doctors and clinics, there is a specific need for bilingual psychiatrists who can work with children and adults.

Another key need in health is access to prenatal care for expectant mothers and campaign to reduce teen pregnancy birth rate. Based on the results of this analysis, only about 24% of expectant mothers in Cicero receive adequate prenatal care; therefore, there is a need to close this gap. In addition to ensuring expectant mothers receive adequate prenatal care, there is a need to reduce the teen pregnancy birthrate, which is significantly higher than that of Suburban Cook County.

A final key need in health is staff training on rights, resources, and supports for children and adults who are undocumented. Health providers noted that they have limited understanding of immigrant rights, in general, but rights and resources for individuals who are undocumented, more specifically.

To address these needs, the following recommendations are provided.

Health Recommendations

- **Recommendation III-A. Create free and/or low-cost mobile mental & physical health clinics.** Providers noted that it is difficult to provide services to residents because there are not enough providers and/or clinics in the communities. Moreover, there is a need for providers to be more mobile so that they can respond to crisis situations that occur in the community. Therefore, having free and/or low-cost mobile mental and physical health services can address this need. These clinics could also address the health education needs in the community.
- **Recommendation III-B. Create school-based mental health centers or create a system for community mental health professionals to collaborate with school-based professionals to provide mental health services to students.** Mental health providers stated that the most common mental health difficulties among children and adolescents in Cicero are anxiety, depression, and other trauma-related symptoms. They also explained that students are often suffering from these conditions because of fears about deportation, concerns about immigration status, or exposure to community/domestic violence. They explained that it is most effective when they can provide mental health services in the schools in collaboration with school-based mental health professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, and social workers.
 - It is also recommended that providers collect data from students on their mental health and well-being so that there is a clearer understanding of the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students. It seems that collecting data on trauma, poverty-related stress, and coping would be important for this population.
- **Recommendation III-C. Increase access to prenatal care and increase programming to reduce teen birth rates.**
- **Recommendation III-D. Provide staff training on rights, resources and supports for children and adults who are immigrants and undocumented and/or living in mixed-status families.**
- **Recommendation III-E. Conduct multi-agency training on how to recognize mental health difficulties and how to respond when you encounter a person with mental health difficulties.** Agencies included in this training can be community service providers, police, government officials, public service providers such as libraries, and businesses.

Employment Needs and Recommendations

Summary of Key Employment Needs

The fundamental need in the area of employment is more jobs that pay higher wages for adults and adolescents in Cicero. One of the major contributors to the need for more jobs that have higher pay is the need for more industry/businesses in Cicero. In addition, there are a significant number of residents who are undocumented and therefore cannot be employed. Thus, even if there are jobs, some residents are not eligible to take them.

Moreover, most residents in Cicero do not have a college-level education; therefore, they do not have the training/educational level for many of the higher paying jobs that are available. The lack of high paying jobs is evident in the fact that the median income for Cicero residents is lower than the surrounding towns. Furthermore, the percent of families living in poverty and also rent-burdened is also higher. Residents also reported that parents have to work many hours or more than one job thus impacting their ability to attend their children's school activities or become involved in school-related activities. Therefore, the need for more higher pay jobs is significant in Cicero.

In addition to the need for more higher paying jobs, there is a need for more job training opportunities. As stated earlier, most residents do not have a college level education; therefore, more residents will need training in order to be prepared for jobs that required advanced skill sets.

Finally, there is a need for more structured, continual government support for business creation in Cicero. Participants in the Needs Assessment explained that there was no sustained government-business collaboration that could support job creation. Furthermore, there are limited connections between schools and businesses that could create a pipeline for job opportunities in Cicero.

To address these needs, the following recommendations are provided.

Employment Recommendations

- **Recommendation IV-A. Create small business innovation program that would be designed to stimulate ideas for small businesses in Cicero, provide seed money or grants to start the business, and support to start the business in Cicero.**
- **Recommendation IV-B. Create a “grow your own program” by providing incentives to high school and college graduates to work and live in Cicero.** Incentives such as paying-off student loans, providing seed money to buy a home or start a business could be used to attract high school and college graduates to live and work in Cicero. These incentives would be especially useful for individuals who wanted to work in industries where it is difficult to attract people to come to Cicero (e.g., healthcare).

- **Recommendation IV-C. Create an employment pipeline in areas where it has been difficult to attract high school graduates.** Participants in the Needs Assessment explained that it can be difficult to attract people to the jobs that are more manual in nature. Therefore, creating internships, apprenticeships, and externships can be used to create opportunities for students to learn about and work in these positions where they can ultimately find employment after they graduate.
- **Recommendation IV-D. Provide transportation support or expanded transportation services so that individuals can get to and from work.**
- **Recommendation IV-D. Increase employment opportunities for adolescents in Cicero.**