



My CHI My Future is an initiative by the mayoral office and the city of Chicago to create a community network that connects young people and local organizations through a variety of youth programs. MCMF programs provide young people with opportunities to participate in activities related to academic advancement, professional and personal development, art, wellness, and leisure. For the data science project course at Northwestern (STAT 390), we looked at a dataset of MCMF programs between 2020 and 2022 with an aim to improve accessibility, especially in several priority areas identified by our community partner, and to use the MCMF initiative to supplement existing city infrastructure that support youth.

Through review of the literature on youth out of school time (OST) programs and extensive exploratory data analysis, we identify three topics around which to focus MCMF expansion: improving accessibility, strengthening community ties, and contributing to academic and career advancement. The research on OST programs shows that they reinforce social and work-related skills, and among middle to high school students in particular, participation in these programs is associated with higher graduation rates, lower delinquency rates, and academic achievement.

We see the big challenges to engagement with these programs as physical accessibility - including transport and cost of attendance - and alignment with youth interests. On the transport front, we see an opportunity to partner with existing networks, such as the reduced fare Ventra pass for students - if the MCMF app or specific events made it easier to obtain a student pass more students could use transit to attend events, and the card could also be scanned at in person events to collect data on participation. Other cities have used transit cards and library cards for this purpose. We also looked at the CPS data on the proportion of students who qualify for free and reduced rate lunches in comparison to MCMF programs that provide food - the majority of programs in priority areas have higher than median free and reduced fare lunches, but most are less likely than the median to offer free food. We think MCMF could offer to subsidize the cost of running events if organizers provide meals in priority community areas. We looked at online programs as a more accessible alternative to in-person events, but several of the identified priority areas have a significant proportion of the student population that do not have access to computers or the internet. We think leveraging the public library as a resource to either loan out technology, or for participants to call in from the library in groups, could help bridge this gap. Ensuring alignment with youth interests is a data collection question - primarily participation data, but also could be expanded to include suggestions from participants either through the MCMF app or on the initiative of an event organizer.

We think MCMF programs should seek to connect youth to community and mentorship opportunities. Especially in urban areas, spaces for young people to gather and hangout are diminishing, and research suggests these spaces are important to keep young people out of possible delinquency and trouble. Mentors

from within their community are integral to the process of making sure young people are safe and connected to social and educational opportunities. We do see in the data that priority areas have more events focused around community service, including the “Helping Your Community” category. We think placing focus as well on the professional development of organizing staff would help keep people in the the MCMF organizing space. One possibility is staff professional development programs offered for-credit through existing university partners Northwestern and DePaul, which would help staff obtain the credentials to work with children and young people and could be progress towards a degree. Encouraging youth to be involved in program management, starting by soliciting feedback, could also tap them into these channels in the future if they find community. Finally, we highlight the opportunity for MCMF programs to supplement the existing infrastructure for academic success, especially CPS data and programs. We found that graduation rates as represented in the CPS Annual Regional Analysis are significantly lower in priority areas - focusing on or subsidizing academic programs in these areas, especially in STEM fields, could help young people pursuing careers in this fields.

Historically marginalized neighborhoods in Chicago often struggle with limited investment, inadequate public services, and insufficient job opportunities. Such disparities hinder social mobility and perpetuate systemic inequities, ultimately impacting the overall well-being and opportunities available to residents. Chicago remains one of the most segregated metropolitan area in America. Racial disparities in socio-economic indicators persist, with African American and Hispanic communities often experiencing disproportionately high poverty rates, limited access to quality education, and limited economic opportunities. According to recent Census data, the city’s population is approximately 33% non-Hispanic white, 29% African American, 29% Hispanic, and 7% Asian American. Chicago also faces significant challenges in terms of high levels of gun violence and homicide. Although not all communities in Chicago experience the same level of violence, certain neighborhoods, primarily located on the city’s South and West sides, face disproportionately high rates of gun violence. These areas are often characterized by high poverty rates, limited access to quality healthcare, inadequate educational resources, and limited economic investment. These communities have endured long-standing disinvestment resulting in concentrated poverty. These areas, largely inhabited by African American residents, bear the brunt of the consequences, experiencing higher rates of gun violence and its associated challenges. The prevalence of gun violence in these communities further exacerbates existing disparities and creates a cycle of lack of resources and economic decline. Operating in Chicago, a city with widespread income and racial inequality, MCMF has unique opportunities to provide youth with support and a safe space that helps them socially and academically. Placing emphasis on accessibility, through decreasing transit costs and costs of attendance, will help these programs perform academic and community support.

Additional Data Resources

Chicago Public Schools’ Annual Regional Analysis (ARA) The ARA data provides valuable insights into the academic performance of students in the Chicago Public School (CPS) system and helps identify areas where additional support or interventions may be needed. Its purpose is to support CPS’s goal of providing every student with high-quality education in every neighborhood by giving stakeholders a consistent array of information regarding school quality, enrollment patterns, school choice, and program offerings by region. The goal is to ensure that every student in Chicago has access to quality public schools and a variety of schools and programs. The report includes information on all CPS schools, including traditional neighborhood, Selective Enrollment, Magnet, Charter, Special Education Specialty, and other alternative high schools. 3