

# CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOOD LEARNING NETWORK

## EVALUATION DESIGN

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chicago Neighborhood Learning Network (CNLN) project, supported by a Department of Education Technology Initiative Challenge Grant, is a five-year undertaking by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in partnership with the Chicago Urban League (CUL), the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and the Office of Catholic Education (OCE). The CNLN proposal describes a vision of innovative, technology-based teaching and learning that promotes active learning not only for teachers and students from kindergarten to grade 12, but also for parents and other neighborhood residents. Through collaborative partnerships of schools and local organizations, it seeks to foster learning communities. Three major elements comprised the CNLN project as originally envisioned. These were:

- *A technology infrastructure*, consisting of an intranet of computers in schools (in the proposal, these schools are referred to as “hubs”) and an extranet linking school computers to computers in community-based organizations (operationally, these organizations are referred to as “satellites”). Each hub is intended to host a central electronic file server to which community-based computer learning centers can dial up and access software stored in the hub computers. Each network will provide access to the Internet, e-mail, and other software applications for curriculum needs, teacher training, administrative management, and communication.

- *A professional development program*, to train teachers in technological basics and issues of educational reform and to equip them to use collaboration tools to generate curriculum content and participate in on-line interactions with students and parents.
- *A community network*, which extends learning beyond the classroom by involving parents, other community members, and neighborhood organizations in a variety of activities such as career and vocational training, mentoring programs, and building and maintaining a neighborhood web site.

## **2. BACKGROUND OF EVALUATION DESIGN**

The evaluation of CNLN was designed to begin in September, 1997 at the inception of the grant. With CNLN facing substantial start-up challenges, however, the evaluation subcontract was not awarded to Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) until late August, 1998, 11 months into the grant. In September, 1998, EDC convened a stakeholders' meeting intended as the first step in a process of empowerment evaluation, in which those most closely associated with the project would contribute to the development of the evaluation design. However, as reported in EDC's December, 1998 study *Chicago Neighborhood Learning Network: Status Report, Year One (September 29, 1997 to September 28, 1998)*, project participants shifted the discussion from evaluation design to other topics that had more urgency for them. As a result, during the fall months, EDC focused on collecting and reporting data that documented the challenges, achievements, and ongoing issues associated with the project. See the *Status Report* for the findings and recommendations.

The present design of the CNLN evaluation builds upon the original proposal, the *Status Report* just mentioned, and CNLN three strategic planning meetings held on January 7, 1999. The planning meetings were attended by representatives of the four partners, various agencies named in the grant proposal as hubs and satellites, interested members of the community, and technology vendors. The participants made suggestions about direction and priorities for Year Two of the project and beyond. Notes from those meetings, attended by an EDC observer, are presented in Appendix A.

A Year Two Operational Plan is expected to be completed by the partners at the end of February, 1999. As part of this planning process, EDC will continue to work with the partners to identify specific desired outcomes, benchmarks, and kinds of data to collect in order to measure the progress and achievements of the project operational plan. We recognize that the Challenge Grants were awarded to encourage innovation, and that innovative projects usually entail experimentation, risk-taking, and midcourse corrections. For these reasons, we will adjust our evaluation plan in accordance with any change in project objectives and plans. To support this process, this draft of a full-scale project-wide evaluation design is being submitted to project management. To illustrate the evaluation tools that may be used, sample instruments have been included as appendix B.

### **3. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION**

This evaluation will serve several purposes. For project management, it will provide formative feedback to help improve implementation and outcomes. This feedback will be delivered in written reports at the end of each year of the project, interim reports, and face-to-face meetings at least twice each year. In addition to these formal occasions for reporting, feedback

will be delivered informally to project staff by members of the evaluation team in an ongoing basis over the course of the project through telephone calls and e-mail exchanges. For stakeholders (CNLN partners, other participants, and funders), the annual reports will provide accountability information, including details about what was accomplished and what outcomes were achieved. For other school districts across the country who want to implement a similar project, evaluation reports will provide useful information about challenges that were faced by CNLN, solutions that were developed, and outcomes that were accomplished.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

Our evaluation methodology will address formative (implementation) as well as summative (outcome) concerns, with increasing emphasis on the latter as the project nears the end of its term. To ensure that we obtain a thorough and balanced view, we will gather both qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources over the course of the entire project. In keeping with our empowerment approach to evaluation, we will invite project staff as well as administrators and other staff at schools and community organizations to participate in the data collection process and advise us on how to obtain high quality data.

##### **4.1 Collecting Baseline Data**

Our first step in this evaluation will be to collect baseline data on students and teachers in schools and at community organizations. We will use information already being collected as part of the partners' regular assessment (such as student grades and teacher certifications). Whenever necessary, we will also develop, adapt, and/or adopt existing instruments to identify baseline attitudes, skills, and knowledge in academic and vocational subject areas (for students) and professional development areas (for teachers) that are being targeted by CNLN efforts.

Subsequent re-administration of these instruments with the same samples will enable us to measure any changes that occur. See Appendix B for examples of the kinds of instruments being used for evaluating technology in schools and classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

## **4.2 Assessing Project Implementation**

A key piece for our evaluation of project implementation will be twice-yearly site visits, in the fall and in the spring. At these times, we will visit each of the five hubs designated in Year One, and at least five additional hubs designated in subsequent years. We will also visit at least once every year all of the satellite sites associated with the Year One sites and at least five others that are designated in each subsequent year. In addition, we will meet with representatives of each management partner organization (CUL, OCE, CHA, and CPS). The purpose of these visits will be to observe the status of the technology infrastructure, to interview key staff about implementation progress and issues, to talk with teachers and staff at community organizations about any training they have received, and to collect any documents describing components of the CNLN, such as the hardware and software that has been installed as a result of the Challenge Grant, and the content of any training programs that have been offered. In addition to these semi-annual site visits, we will conduct telephone surveys of each hub and active satellite in midwinter and midsummer to collect update data about project implementation. We will also monitor the neighborhood Web sites on a monthly basis to track their evolution.

These methods will enable us to document the implementation process in the original two sites over the entire project, as well as describe a small number of new NLNs as they are getting underway. Documentation of the newer NLNs will help to show whether anticipated improvements to the implementation process are effective.

### **4.3 Assessing Use of Provided Resources and Services**

The resources and services to be provided by CNLN include networked computers, instructional software and productivity tools (presently for high school students and adults, but presumably for all grades K-12), training programs for teachers and community agency staff, neighborhood Web sites, and a database of best practices. To assess the use of these resources and services, we will employ three data-collection strategies. These include twice-yearly observation of instructional and professional development programs during periods of use at selected schools and community organizations, periodic review of relevant administrative and Web documentation maintained by schools and community agencies, and interviews with key staff at schools and community-based organizations.

Data gathered in these ways will allow us to describe the manner and extent to which the hardware, software, Web pages, and professional training provided by the CNLN are used by its intended beneficiaries: students, teachers, community agency staff, parents, and other community members.

### **4.4 Assessing Outcomes**

We will measure outcomes in three arenas: student learning and achievement, teacher learning and performance, and community effects. Given the start-up difficulties experienced at the two pilot neighborhoods (West Town and Grand Boulevard-Kenwood-Oakwood), we plan to continue to focus on them on the assumption that other neighborhoods will also encounter start-up challenges that could delay their progress. As a consequence, the two pilot neighborhoods appear to stand the best chance of demonstrating measurable improvement in student, teacher,

and community outcomes. This does not mean that we will ignore sites that come on board during scale-up, but that our efforts will concentrate on the pilot sites.

*Student learning:* Improving student learning and achievement is at the heart of all of the Challenge Grants, and will be a principal focus of this evaluation. For all students participating in classes that make regular use of the NLNs, we will collect baseline and follow-up aggregate data on grades and, where applicable to grade level and subject matter, standardized test scores. We will also examine records on student progress that are kept by the instructional software installed with CNLN funds as well as interview students about their perceptions and experience with respect to their CNLN-based instruction. Furthermore, we will seek out classrooms which use NLN resources to address new standards for learning and we will develop small case studies of innovative learning activities and outcomes. We expect that these studies will be particularly useful for communicating the ways in which NLNs and new approaches to instruction can have a powerful effect on student engagement and achievement.

*Teacher learning:* Surveys administered to teachers at the end of their training programs will be a principal source of data regarding what they have learned about using software for educational purposes. Additional surveys and interviews with a sample of teachers and subject area supervisors will allow us to explore this question in greater depth, and show how what teachers learn relates to new teaching and learning standards. Classroom observation will provide data to support teachers' self-reports. For the two pilot neighborhoods, baseline and follow-up data on teachers will reveal changes that may occur over a period of several years.

*Community effects:* The impact of the NLNs on their respective communities will be evaluated as we collect data associated with Project Goals 3 and 4 (see details in Section 5.2, below). On-site observation of community members accessing CNLN software and hardware,

and regular reviews of the neighborhood Web sites, as well as interviews with project management, teachers, technology coordinators, community agency staff, parents, and other community members will yield abundant qualitative data about these outcomes.

## **5. EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

### ***5.1 Guiding Questions***

Our evaluation is framed by Department of Education guidelines. During the course of the CNLN project, the following questions will guide our evaluation:

1. *Improvements in teacher learning and performance.* What do teachers in schools and community organizations learn as a result of participation in CNLN? How does the CNLN improve their knowledge, skill, and competence in using technology to increase and enhance student learning? What are the barriers that teachers face in using technology and how will the CNLN overcome these challenges? How does technology use improve collaboration among teachers within and across disciplines? How does it improve collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community working to improve student learning and achievement?
2. *Improvements in classroom instruction.* How do teachers' behavior and classroom instruction change as a result of participation in CNLN? How do curricula and pedagogy change? How do teachers integrate technology use into their instruction? How does the way that students participate in learning change and improve? How is the classroom expanded beyond school walls to improve teaching and learning?
3. *Improvements in student learning and achievement.* Improving student learning and achievement is at the heart of all of the Challenge Grants, and is a principal focus of this evaluation. How is technology used as a tool to improve overall student learning and

achievement? What do students learn specifically about computers and the Internet as a result of participation in CNLN? How do they use these and other technology resources to learn? What do they learn? What effect does the CNLN project have on student grades, test scores, and motivation to learn?

In addition, what is being done, specifically, to improve learning for parents and other community members at CNLN sites? How is this being implemented?

## **5.2 Questions Related to Project Goals**

In addition to the overarching questions, many focused questions address the various elements of the CNLN project. We have organized our remaining evaluation questions into sets based on the six project goals. Each of these goals is meant to be carried out through all five years of the project, in a process of scaling up that has citywide impact at the end of this period.

**Goal 1: Build an infrastructure in two high schools (hub sites), create steering committees to guide development of the infrastructure, prepare operations policies, inventory technology assets in neighborhood (satellite) sites, design network architecture, select vendors and suppliers, and install equipment.**

Some of the questions associated with this goal and listed in Table 1 (below) involve the creation of the technology infrastructure and the management of this process, from the selection of vendors to the installation of networked computers and software. Other questions relate to the ways in which the infrastructure is used, the extent to which it is used, and the lessons derived from its development and use. To address these questions, we will rely strongly on interviews with CNLN partners, network administrators at the hubs, teachers and key staff at community

organizations (both hubs and satellites). We will supplement data collected through interviews with observational data collected semi-annually during site visits and other data compiled from a review of relevant documents. These documents will include operations policies, inventories of technology assets, and records of computer usage kept at each site.

Table 1

Data Sources for Assessing the Technology Infrastructure

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Site Visits</b>	<b>Document/Product Review</b>
What is being accomplished in building an infrastructure?	√	√	√
What are the key features of this infrastructure?	√	√	√
Do the steering committees function effectively?	√		
Are the operations policies well prepared?	√		√
Have the technology assets been inventoried?	√		√
How is this information used?	√		
What problems are faced, and how are these dealt with?	√		
What are the lessons for CNLN and others about this process?	√		
What are its consequences for the different stakeholders?	√		
How are the computers, LAN, and software being used at the hub and satellite sites?	√	√	√
When, how often, and how are the computers being used?	√	√	√
What is the function of lab versus non-lab computers?	√	√	√
Are the computers and equipment being used to capacity?	√	√	√
Is the equipment used for internal organizational programming?	√	√	
How are the networks tied to the project vision?	√	√	√
What are the issues and implications of investing technology into these five hubs for the sites and for the project?	√	√	√
Is there an extranet built at each community?	√	√	√

What is the role of a hub site? What distinguishes hubs from independent learning labs housed in schools and community organizations? What is the role of a satellite site? How do satellites relate to hubs?	√	√	√
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<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Site Visits</b>	<b>Document/Product Review</b>
How is the investment in the 5 labs leveraged to increase the function of the extranets?	√	√	√
Is the CNLN a successful low-cost, high technology strategy?	√	√	√
How does the extranet model work in the pilot communities?	√	√	√
Is the model replicated in Chicago?	√	√	√
What are the lessons for national dissemination?	√	√	√

**Goal 2. Begin professional development by selecting teachers to train on the CNLN and begin developing instructional materials, organize cross-sector teams to select content, design a graphical user interface, define competencies and skill standards, share successful strategies, assign site coordinators and resource staff, and establish a recognition program.**

Professional development for CNLN encompasses not only practical training on how to use the new hardware and software, but also support for selecting and developing new instructional materials and sharing successful strategies. Our evaluation will collect data about the implementation of professional development activities and its impact on teachers’ learning and practice. Interviews with CNLN management and resource staff will inform us about the amount and type of training that will be offered over the course of the project and the progress of other related activities detailed in the Goal 2 statement. Through surveys of all participants in trainings (teachers, administrators, community agency staff, etc.) we will obtain data about what was learned and the levels of satisfaction with the training felt by those who attended.

Observations during instructional time and interviews with selected classroom teachers and their supervisors will further inform us about the impact of the training and other support strategies.

Table 2

## Data Sources for Assessing Professional Development

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Participant Surveys</b>	<b>Observation</b>	<b>Document/Product Review</b>
What is done to begin professional development?	√			√
What models and needs assessments are these based on?	√			√
Who participates in these activities?	√			
What happens at these activities?	√	√	√	√
What are the responses to these activities?		√		√
How are they perceived by participants and relevant stakeholders?	√	√		
What are the results of these activities?	√	√	√	√
How do they alter teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior?	√	√		√
What happens at the five hubs established in Year One?	√			
How are community resources leveraged and used?	√	√		√
How is the training tied to teaching and learning standards and not just technological how-to?	√	√	√	√
What standards are used to measure the effectiveness of the training?	√			
What do teachers learn as a result of participation in CNLN?		√		√
How do teachers' behavior and classroom instruction change as a result of participation in CNLN?		√	√	√
Do teachers use computers more often, in different ways, and for different purposes than before?		√	√	√

**Goal 3. Train community in effective use of CNLN, do outreach to inform neighborhood residents, identify critical education needs, conduct technology conferences and demos, and develop programmatic initiatives such as software lending, collaborative projects, peer tutoring, and mentoring.**

This goal addresses the “neighborhood” aspect of CNLN and details some of the ways in which community members will be informed about the new resources available to them and invited to participate in its programs. We will gather data about the outreach and training offered to the community primarily through stakeholder interviews and a review of documents that inform the community about this project. Where possible, we will directly observe any conferences, demos, or other programmatic initiatives related to this goal.

Table 3

## Data Sources for Assessing Community Training

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Site Visits</b>	<b>Document/Product Review</b>
What community training activities are offered?	√		√
How are these developed?	√		
What needs identification and outreach are these activities based on?	√		√
What initiatives are developed?	√	√	√
What happens at these activities?		√	√
What are the responses to these activities?	√	√	√
How are they perceived by participants and relevant stakeholders?	√	√	
What results do these activities have?	√		√
How do they alter community residents' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior?	√	√	√
Are the schools opened for community people?	√	√	√
Are community sites opened for teachers and students?	√	√	√
What kinds of targeted outreach to users are done?	√		√
What support and training are available to users?	√	√	√
What are the learning content? How is it developed?	√		√
How much co-development is there?	√		√
What is the bridge between school, parents, and community?	√		√
What is the impact on student learning?	√	√	√
What are the access points for students and community people? How are they used?	√	√	

**Goal 4. Create neighborhood Web sites, provide key information to support teacher-community interaction, and begin developing a national database on community learning center experiences.**

Neighborhood Web sites can play a central role in connecting schools, community organizations, students, teachers, parents, and other interested parties, and have great potential for involving them in innovative educational activities. As part of our data collection process, we will rely heavily on monthly visits to these sites (electronically) to monitor their development, usage, and content by examining the documents on display. Also, we will inquire about Web use in interviews with stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, community agency staff).

Table 4

Data Sources for Assessing Web Sites

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Web Site Visits</b>
What is the current status of these sites?	√	√
What is being accomplished?	√	√
What information is provided, and how?	√	√
What is the reaction of potential and actual users?	√	
How is technology used to improve project communication?	√	√
How are the sites created?	√	
Do the partners leverage existing resources?	√	√
How is technology used to communicate with other projects to share learning?	√	√

What are the linkages that these sites build?	√	√
What are the learning content and approach?	√	√

**Goal 5. Identify partnerships to scale up the network, and disseminate results of first year.**

According to a new plan of work approved in August, 1998, the scaling up of Neighborhood Learning Network (NLN) to new neighborhoods will be postponed from Year Two to Year Three when, as indicated in the proposal, 10 additional neighborhoods will be recruited to replicate the model established in Year One. In Years Four and Five, still more NLNs will be created to meet citywide demand. To support and sustain these NLNs, new partnerships with businesses and philanthropic organizations will be developed. The evaluation will document this growth through stakeholder interviews and a review of documents, including responses to RFPs for new NLNs and public communications about the existing NLNs that identify partnerships.

Table 5

Data Sources for Assessing Scale-up

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Document/Product Review</b>
How are new NLNs created?	√	√
How are new partners found to support and sustain each new NLN?	√	√
What are some of the ways in which business and philanthropic partners support an NLN?	√	√

What are effective ways of attracting new partners?	√	√
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**Goal 6. Set up a repository of evaluation and best practices materials, define goals, benchmarks, and measures of performance, conduct pre-project data acquisition and surveys, design data collection instruments, collect data and provide feedback to NLN participants.**

Although several of the tasks within this goal (particularly designing data collection instruments, collecting data, and providing feedback) are being addressed by the evaluation team, CNLN project staff may be conducting their own assessments as part of their project design and implementation. Thus, some of our evaluation questions will explore pre-project data acquisition activities conducted by CNLN staff. Other questions will address the content of the materials in the repository of best practices. We will rate the extent to which these materials are consistent with state standards for learning. Another aspect of our evaluation will be to assist project staff in identifying and defining goals, benchmarks, and measures of performance, and progress in these areas will be documented. If CNLN project management so requests, the evaluation team will also contribute to the third component of Goal 6, a Web-based repository of evaluation and best practices materials and in any case, will document the establishment, contents, and use of that resource.

Table 6

Data Sources to Assess Data and Materials Collections

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Document/Product Review</b>
What is done to create the repository?	√		√
What does it contain?			√
What are the plans for its development?	√		√
How is it used and by whom?	√		
How are project goals, benchmarks, and measures of performance identified?	√	√	√
What pre-project data acquisition activities have been carried out by CNLN staff?	√		√
How do these activities affect project implementation?	√		√

## 6. TIMELINE







## 7. KEY PERSONNEL

**Clifton M. Chow** is a research assistant at EDC, and his professional interest is in evaluation, particularly of programs involving non-traditional education formats. Prior to joining EDC, he coordinated focus group research at Harvard in the area of patient education. Since joining EDC he has contributed to a quantitative study of the impact of Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) in providing technology access to underserved populations, and is currently working on a long term case study measuring the impact of four computer technology centers over a period of 3 years. He also does volunteer work with the Breaking Barrier's Project, a comprehensive community-based approach to empower women in the Latino community of Boston, housed in EDC's Center for Education, Employment and Community (CEEC). His personal interest includes economics, in which he has written about the effect of intensive federal funding on the curriculum as taught at Harvard and MIT. He took his A.B. at the University of California in Classics and History, and his Ed.M. at Harvard with a concentration in Administration, Planning and Social Policy.

**Jan Ellis, Ed.D.**, Senior Research/Development Associate, has participated in projects at EDC for over a decade as both a curriculum designer and an evaluator. Her professional interests center on applying interactive technologies to educational purposes and examining processes of teaching and learning in both formal and informal settings. Dr. Ellis has contributed to the design of a wide variety of educational products and programs, especially in the field of K-8 mathematics, science, and technology education. Recent evaluation assignments have involved measuring the impact of the Community Technology Centers Network (CTCNet) in providing technology access to underserved populations; the Woodrow Wilson Environmental Science Leadership Program for Teachers in promoting teachers' professional growth and achievement;

and the Girls' ACTION Initiative in providing informal programs that address the needs of girls. At Beaver College, Jan earned a B.S. in computer science; at Harvard University, an Ed.M. with a concentration in interactive technology, and an Ed.D. in the Department of Human Development.

**Joseph A. Maxwell, Ph.D.** is Associate Professor at George Mason University, where he teaches research and evaluation methods. For ten years he was a member of the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has also been a research associate at Michael Reese Hospital and Medical Center in Chicago, where he conducted evaluations of medical education programs and curricula, and a senior research associate at the Education Development Center, where he worked collaboratively with Federally-funded gender equity programs to develop evaluation strategies. He holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Chicago, is the author of numerous articles on research and evaluation methods, and has written a book on qualitative research design published in 1996 by Sage Publications.

**John H. Wong, Ph.D.**, Senior Project Director at EDC and team leader, conducts evaluation studies of educational programs and systems; provides technical assistance to homeless agencies; produces a training software using artificial intelligence technology to tutor displaced workers in a manufacturing process domain; consults with schools and state agencies on educational technology, school-to-work, and educational reform. He recently worked on a 4-year study of Project SMART in Cleveland, which included formative and summative techniques using qualitative as well as quantitative approaches; an evaluation of staff development needs in New Hampshire's School-to-Work System; and a study on the School-to-Work system in southwestern New Hampshire. He assessed the homelessness plan of Miami and Dade County and helped design and write Washington State's One -Stop Career Center System and School-to-

Work plans and successful federal proposals to implement the plans. Dr. Wong recently co-authored an article on the integration of academic and technical education, published by the People's Educational Press, Beijing, China. He received a B.A. from Harvard University and a Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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**Appendix A. Sample Questionnaires**

**Appendix B. Strategic Planning Meeting Notes**

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## **Appendix A. Sample Questionnaires**

**Appendix B. Strategic Planning Meeting Notes**