Background on Chicago's College-to-Careers Program

Reflections from a Learning Journey during April 23-24, 2013

City Colleges of Chicago’s exciting new College to Careers (C2C) program, launched by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chancellor Cheryl Hyman, attracted a visit by a group of 17 World Bank staff during April 23-24, 2013. The Bank team wanted to learn more about the program’s design and implementation experience in hopes of distilling lessons to enrich the Bank’s knowledge and dialogue with partner countries on the skills and jobs agenda.

Summary. The main benefit of the Learning Journey was the opportunity for direct interaction with policy practitioners who are responsible for a major, ongoing reform in education and training. The World Bank team was particularly keen to learn about fostering partnerships between schools and employers. Discussions during the visit helped us understand better the motivation for employers to be involved in the C2C initiative; we also learned about the specific ways that employer involvement is helping the City Colleges of Chicago, the host institution for C2C, to create scalable, job-relevant education and training programs as well as reliable pathways to good jobs and career progression through continuous learning and skills upgrading.

We reflect on the following about the C2C program:

- **Overview of Chicago’s C2C program**
- **Agenda for the Bank team’s visit**
- **Key observations and lessons learned**
  - Committed Leadership from the Top
  - Effective Partnership with Industry and Employers
  - Data for Shaping Strategy and Implementation
  - Key Measurable Performance Indicators

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1 This brief, dated May 23, 2013, incorporates inputs from the participants listed in footnote 2 and was prepared by Jee-Peng Tan (HDNED), leader of the learning journey, with support from Brent Parton and Viviana Gomez, both members of the HDNED team that designed and coordinated the implementation of the visit. We would like to thank our hosts in Chicago, led by Mayor Emanuel and Chancellor Hyman, with the support of their staff, for their warm hospitality and generosity in sharing their experience and knowledge with the Bank delegation.

2 Aside from the HDNED organizers, the Bank delegation comprised the following individuals financed by a Learning Grant from the Human Development (HD) Vice Presidency: Cristian Aedo (ECSH2), Elizabeth Ninan (AFTEE), Halil Dundar (SASED), Indhira Vanessa Santos (ECSH4), Iqbal Kaur (MNSSP), Maria Laura Sanchez Puerta (HDNSP), Nathalie Lahire (AFTEW), Pablo Ariel Acosta (LCSHS), Rafael E. De Hoyos Navarro (LCSHE), Shobhana Sosale (AFTEW), Ximena Del Carpio (EASHS), Xiaoyan Liang (EASHE), Yoonyoung Cho (HDNSP), all from the HD sector; Sandra Sargent (TWICT), from another network, participated on a self-financing basis. We wish to thank Elizabeth King (HDNED) and the education sector managers who nominated their staff for this event; and Arup Banerji (HDNSP) who nominated the Social Protection sector staff. We also wish to thank Veronica Gingera (HDNED) and Antony Thompson (HDNVP) for their support of our application for the learning grant.
Overview of Chicago's C2C program. Launched in December 2011 by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chancellor Cheryl Hyman, the C2C program is embedded in an ambitious effort to overhaul Chicago’s network of seven public City Colleges (i.e., “community colleges”) which currently serves some 115,000 students, many from disadvantaged backgrounds. Christened “Reinvention,” the reform aims to position the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), a century-old institution that has faced its share of challenges in recent decades, as a key instrument for simultaneously solving two present-day problems: raising workforce skills to meet skills gaps that Chicago's employers face; and increasing the Colleges’ ability to offer both “access and success” to the city’s youth and adults. The C2C program targets economic sectors with strong growth prospects in the next decade in the Chicago area, including: (i) healthcare; (ii) transportation, distribution and logistics; (iii) hospitality and culinary arts; (iv) high-tech manufacturing; (v) information technology; and (vi) business and professional services. Each of the colleges works with employers in one of these economic sectors, effectively becoming a center of excellence for that sector.

The strategic goal of C2C is for each college to co-design with employers job-relevant curricula for their designated sector. These redesigned curricula and pedagogical practices can then serve as a template to improve teaching and learning throughout the CCC system. A key feature of the new curricula is stackable credentials that are intended to expand learning pathways to jobs, for youth as well as for adults who need the skills to start new careers or progress in the one they are already in. If successful, C2C can serve as a prototype for replication throughout Illinois and beyond.

Agenda for the Visit. The Mayor welcomed the Bank delegation graciously at the start of our visit (see http://my.chicagotribune.com/#section/1/gallery/p2p-75598936/). Over the course of two days, Chancellor Cheryl Hyman, a member of the Mayor’s cabinet, and her team hosted us to a rich program that included presentations on key elements of CCC Reinvention and C2C’s conceptual and operational strategy. We also visited with several industry partners (e.g., Accenture, Coyote Logistics, Freedman Seating, Jimmy Bannos, etc.) and with the leaders, faculty and students at Richard J. Daley College, Harold Washington College, and the French Pastry School associated with Kennedy-King College.
Key observations and lessons learned. The visits offered a fruitful context for discussion with practitioners associated with CCC Reinvention and C2C. The Bank team found the following elements particularly striking:

(a) Committed Leadership from the Top

The Mayor provides personal leadership for CCC Reinvention and the C2C initiative. He communicates a visionary yet practical message about skills and jobs that is meaningful to multiple stakeholders, including students. In implementing his vision, he has put into practice what James Collins advised in his book “Good to Great:” get the right people on the bus and get them into the right seats on the bus. His decision to retain Chancellor Hyman from the previous administration in her leadership position at CCC is strategic: she is a product of CCC herself who has acquired additional post-secondary training at a prestigious business school and has achieved notable success in the business world. She therefore speaks with conviction, authenticity and authority.

The clarity of the Mayor's vision for CCC and its expected contribution to Chicago's economic future has enabled CCC’s leadership team to rally key stakeholders and partners around it. The Bank team was impressed by the enthusiasm, cohesion and professionalism of the players we met—from college faculty and administrators, to industry partners, to students. One striking detail we noted was that some of the college presidents were recruited directly from industry. Their background means that besides having a good understanding of the skills needs of industry they also have useful networks and can speak the same “language” as employers, all of which improves the potential for effective and productive partnerships with industry.

(b) Effective Partnership with Industry and Employers

Chancellor Hyman and her management team identified four main stakeholder groups that they see as critical partners for CCC Reinvention and C2C. These groups are: industry and employers; education institutions; government and elected officials; and community-based organizations and partners. Our agenda focused on the first group and our visits and interactions with various of C2C’s industry partners yielded the following insights:

- Employer participation is at the heart of the C2C initiative. An impressive array of employers and firms—a total of more than 100 to date—participate in multiple roles: (i) as providers of labor market information; (ii) as providers of information on occupational standards; (iii) as collaborators with faculty in creating new curricula, in validating or fine-tuning existing programs, and in defining program sequencing and learning pathways through the device of “stackable credentials;” (iii) as guides in the identification of industry certificates with high economic value as reviewers; (iv) as
hosts of internships for students and faculty; (v) as sources of practitioner-experts to co-teach C2C courses; and (vi) as customers of C2C training programs for their workers. These multiple roles strengthen employers’ voice in the C2C initiative and enable it to benefit from timely advice to enhance the market relevance of C2C training programs and to inform strategic policy development based on analysis and exchange of good practice. Three elements are important to highlight: (i) sustainability of employers’ involvement; (ii) private sector experience; and (iii) globalization and the pressure on firms to upgrade skills as a part of their strategy for competitiveness. C2C’s industry partners have all committed to giving graduates from the C2C programs a chance to be interviewed for a job. Interestingly, C2C does not seek financial contributions from its industry partners. The reason is to avoid diluting the focus on what employers are best placed to provide, namely timely labor market intelligence on job trends and developments in various economic sectors and importantly, expertise on job-relevant competencies and the implications for curriculum design.

- **Chicago area employers participate in the C2C initiative for specific reasons.** Learning about employers’ motivation to participate is of interest to Bank staff because most of the Bank’s partner countries find it very challenging to attract employers to partner with training institutions. Two factors account for C2C’s success in this regard: (a) Chicago area employers are experiencing severe shortages of skilled workers (because many of their existing workers are retiring and because technological upgrading is the key to remaining competitive in the new global business landscape). They see their cooperation with the colleges as perhaps the only sustainable long-term solution to skills shortages; and (b) US firms tend to practise corporate social responsibility as part of their institutional culture and are thus often responsive to education-related requests for support, especially those sponsored by the Mayor’s office, even when the direct benefits are intangible. The Bank team noted that partnering with employers is fully mainstreamed within existing structures in the colleges.

- **Clarity about specific areas where the private sector can most usefully contribute is critical.** This insight is among the lessons learned on how to engage employers and keep them engaged. CCC leaders identified partners of distinct profiles and gave them concrete roles in the reform process. By being clear about what the partners were expected to do, they are able to articulate how the collaboration is helping to make the
C2C program a potential success. The lesson is: stay away from vague requests with unclear roles and even less clear expectations. Also, by making the conversation with employers about a specific area, for instance shaping the curricula to align with industry needs, time spent by all sides was more productively used. This was clearly reflected in the conversation with the employers themselves who came across as being very clear about their role in the C2C initiative. The clarity of roles was also evident from the table conversation with the CCC team charged with seeking and harnessing partnerships with the private sector.

- **C2C initiative is recent and so far the private sector involvement has been remarkable.** Unlike the experience in many of the Bank’s client countries, most of the people leading the C2C have substantive experience in the private sector and can draw on their extensive network of contacts. These assets make it possible to envision and implement innovative ways of involving employers to increase the market relevance of the programs. It is crucial to monitor the C2C experience over time to assess its sustainability and the rotation of its main policy makers out of and back into the private sector. In addition, the fact that many of the private sector partners are global players provides a very rich set of experiences to better shape the C2C programs. However, as time goes by, this enthusiasm could wane unless both local and global firms feel that they are continuing to receive something in exchange for their involvement.

**Data for Shaping Strategy and Implementation**

Data are central to diagnosing problems, identifying solutions and defining Reinvention’s strategic focus and accountability for results. A new Strategy Unit, headed by a Vice Chancellor, has now been set up to consolidate CCC’s work on strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. By replacing parallel units at the college-level, the new arrangement is more efficient than having each college do its own strategic planning. It also elevates attention on strategic planning for CCC as a whole. One of the most important products of the Strategy Unit is the C2C initiative, a signature feature of CCC Reinvention.

The Strategy Unit mobilizes data from multiple sources, analyzes trends at the national and regional level, and identifies, with the help of direct industry inputs, high-growth economic sectors as a basis for deciding on C2C’s strategic priorities. The Unit is also responsible for collecting information required to track performance in relation to the four core objectives of CCC Reinvention (see next item below). Accordingly, careful work is being done to collect detailed data on enrollment, drop-out, and completion in order to measure and monitor performance and to identify areas for improvement. Two aspects of the Unit’s work where the Bank team felt could be enhanced in the future: (i) use of graduates’ employment and earnings as outcome measures; and (ii) use of rigorous impact evaluation to assess program impacts.

**Key Measurable Performance Indicators**

CCC Reinvention has four explicit objectives: (i) increase the number of students earning degrees with economic value; (ii) increase transfers to bachelor’s degree programs; (iii)
improve outcomes for students requiring remediation; and (iv) increase the number of adult students and those learning English in preparation for transitioning into college-level courses. These four objectives shape CCC’s operational plans in many ways. For example, to meet the first objective, CCC management has focused its energy on forming highly productive partnerships with employers in priority economic sectors, to ensure that training programs are relevant and that the CCC credentials are valued in the labor markets. Another example is the design of class schedules and advisory services to create efficient learning programs so that students can earn their credentials as quickly as possible. A final example is the use of case management techniques to support the students at greatest risk of dropping out.

(e) Strong Information Systems to Support the Reforms

A thoughtful information strategy underpins the implementation of CCC Reinvention and C2C. Its three key components are: (i) labor market intelligence (LMI), (ii) options guidance (OG), and (iii) reach out strategy (ROS). On LMI, CCC’s Strategy Unit synthesizes information from multiple sources (e.g., government agencies, industry sector reports, various databases) and uses the information to evaluate employment growth potential by sector. Quantitative assessments are produced on sectors (and for occupations within sectors) with high future employment potential. This quantitative information is complemented with structured interviews with industry or sector representatives to assess issues regarding the quality of graduates and potential mismatches. On OG, CCC has produced an innovative web-based information system which provides information on the potential economic value of CCC’s degrees and credentials. Currently this information is based on surveys but a discussion with state and federal representatives is now underway on mobilizing institutional data to monitor the employment and earnings of CCC graduates. The OG also includes an innovative section that provides students with information on potential pathways that they can continue on to earn their associate’s degree. With regard to ROS, CCC uses a variety of electronic platforms as well as direct partnership with community-based organizations. Anecdotal evidence gathered during the visit suggests that “word of mouth” is still among the best ways to raise public awareness of CCC’s programs.

(f) Sustainable Financing for Implementing the Reforms

CCC is financed by a combination of federal, state and local funds, tuition fees and revenues from CCC’s income-generating activities. Fees at CCC average about $3,000 per student per year, which is among the lowest in the area for comparable programs. A brochure advertises CCC programs as “Education that works without all of the debt.” Interestingly, CCC Reinvention has required no additional funding beyond the institution’s routine recurrent budget allocation. This budgetary restraint has been made possible through a careful evaluation of opportunities for shifting spending toward priority areas from non-essential ones and by making savings where possible (e.g., consolidation of the procurement of goods and services for all the colleges). In order to improve the effectiveness of teaching CCC has introduced a performance pay model for instructors, under which a portion of salaries/bonuses is linked directly to student performance and results. More broadly, the Chancellor’s team has managed to mobilize sufficient funds for investing in two brand new facilities that will be centers of excellence
for training for the healthcare industry and for the transportation, distribution and
logistics industry.

(g) Articulation with Higher Education and with Chicago Public Schools

The US does not have a federal framework of articulation between community colleges
and universities. The general practice is for each local community college system to
negotiate and secure its own arrangement with interested four-year degree institutions.
Illinois has taken a slightly different approach. Its Board of Higher Education launched
the Illinois State Articulation Initiative 15 years ago to facilitate articulation among post-
secondary public institutions. CCC has articulation agreements with 20 four-year
institutions (e.g., Illinois Institute of Technology and the Northern Illinois University).
The Chancellor and her team plan to expand the institution’s articulation agreement with
more universities.

With regard to CCC’s connection to Chicago area public schools, the Bank team learnt
that nearly 90% of the entering students lack the proficiency in math and English. Most
of them must therefore take remedial courses before starting their chosen programs.
Students who want to build remedial skills while learning skills relevant to a career and
earning a marketable credential can enter one of City Colleges’ bridge programs in
healthcare, manufacturing or TDL.

CCC’s remedial strategies are understood as short term measures. To ensure that
incoming students arrive with minimal thresholds of math and language skills, the Mayor
has initiated the development of a common core curriculum for Chicago public schools
and has taken steps to strengthen teaching and learning in the school system. The core
curriculum for the upper grades, for example, now puts more emphasis on non-
fictional readings. The Mayor has also announced a plan to develop five public STEM high
schools, each sponsored by a major technology company (e.g., IBM and CISCO), which
coordinate their program offerings with C2C’s programs in information technology. An
effort to bring math teachers from India and China to teach in Chicago area schools has
been launched, but it is encountering problems having to do with visas and other
constraints.

(h) Career Guidance for Students an Important Feature

CCC administrators and teachers share a common concern that students lack a basic
understanding of the world around them and understand little about their career
options. Few students know, for example, how Coca Cola drinks are distributed from
factories to the vending machines at their own schools. Many are also unaware that
manufacturing jobs today are vastly different from those of the past and that such jobs
often offer highly competitive wages compared to jobs in the service sector. To provide
better career guidance, CCC has been partnering actively with industry partners to
organize career fairs, student internships, and other events to reach out to potential
students and adults. During the study visit, the Bank team noticed the ubiquitous
advertisements at bus stops and other places that draw attention to CCC’s “Get the Skills,
Get the Job” message.
(i) **Attention to the Needs of Adult Students**

The scope and size of Chicago's adult education programs have grown over the past few years. These programs currently enroll a combined total of about 30,000 students in courses offered all over the Chicago area, including courses on English as a Second Language and courses leading to certification of high school completion (i.e., GED programs). The retention rate of these programs is around 80%. One of their key objectives is to help students make a successful transition to college-level programs, including those offered at CCC. To begin the process, prospective students take a grade-equivalency test to establish their initial level of skills.

Innovative features of Chicago's adult education programs include the following: (i) a portion of the instructors’ pay is tied to some measure of performance; (ii) the programs use pedagogical approaches tailored to adult students and their content is developed with specialists input; (iii) the programs are connected to others in New York, Texas and Minnesota, through a network that facilitates interaction among innovators in workforce development; (iv) the programs focus not just on English (reading and writing) and math but, very importantly, also on soft skills; and (v) the programs include a career exploration phase to inform students about the earnings profiles of various career paths.

**Feedback from the participants.** The feedback has been highly positive, testifying to the value of opportunities for interaction with practitioners who are in the midst of implementing challenging reforms.