

GROW47

In order to keep families from fleeing to the suburbs and to attract new residents to the 47th ward, neighborhood school options must improve. The suburbs offer families complete K-12 school systems and communities where economic development and property values are connected to the school system. In Chicago we have disconnected the importance of what makes communities great: great school systems. And after two years of talking to residents, here is what I know:

- Why you move to the ward → Family friendly, pedestrian oriented, and great services
- Why you stay → Cluster of great elementary schools
- When you leave → 7th grade being the drop dead exit point
- Where you move → Suburbs with good school districts
- What you get in suburbs → A complete neighborhood K-12 school system

What is happening? When you couple tax rates with a tier system and entrance exams, the suburbs look more attractive each grade your child advances. Less than 25% of 47th ward eighth graders attend neighborhood schools. Some are testing into selective enrollment while others attend private school. Most leave the City.

What can we do? The answer is not more selective enrollment seats. Demand for these seats will always outpace supply. The only sustainable solution is replicating what the suburbs offer: a complete neighborhood school system.

Why? Simply put - “We’re all in this together” and that means parents, seniors, renters, and business owners all benefit when schools do well: increased property values, a well-educated community, stabilized tax base, increased demand for rental housing, increased traffic in business districts, etc. As a result, a city ward becomes a community.

How? Replicate what already works. There are four elementary schools in the 47th Ward that have successfully partnered with parents and community members. Now we can scale that effort up to all public schools in the ward. And this effort will be catalyzed by the mobilization of 47th Ward TIF dollars to improve schools.

What’s next? We take ownership of our schools and make them all viable options for our families. When schools win, we all win.

What can I do? Get involved with → **GROW47**

For more information, email grow@chicago47.org

Grow 47 – How it works

What happened at Bell, Coonley, Audubon and Waters Elementary cannot simply be viewed in a ‘if this – then that’ lens. The key ingredients were parents and community. Everything else was organic and involved four key levers working simultaneously.

Here are the four levers:

1. Parental/community involvement → e.g. Friends of Bell, Friends of Audubon, etc.
2. Perception change → Parent led organizing efforts boosted community confidence and enrollment
3. Outside fundraising → Non-CPS money supplemented school programming
4. Cultivating school leadership → Community partners with school leaders to meet benchmarks

Note: All four levers must be moving simultaneously in order to be successful.

With these levers working simultaneously, the four schools were able to fully connect all aspects of a quality education: parental and community involvement, proper funding, good teachers, arts/music programs, playgrounds, science labs, etc. If we can identify these levers, then we can replicate and scale up efforts to all other public schools in the 47th Ward. But please note that each school’s mobilization will look different. This process must be organic and this plan is merely the conceptual action plan.

Some schools have already begun work – now, I am going to use the 47th Ward Office to propel these efforts ward wide. The catalyst is TIF and the solution is to use 47th Ward TIF dollars as an incentive to engage residents (renters and homeowners), residential and commercial property owners with our schools.

Three key groups must mobilize and work in concert. Here are the three groups and a brief overview of how they would work together -

- Aldermanic office: My office will work with CPS to identify school enhancements (academic or bricks and mortar) and then direct 47th Ward TIF money to fund projects. I will setup a series of enhancements funded by TIF that will be triggered by community involvement. This program will look like a match program. Each time a community or community group reaches a milestone, a TIF trigger will be activated and money will be released to schools.
- School Improvement Committee: My office will work with the committee to develop ‘Friends of...’ for each public school in the 47th ward. Where a ‘Friends of’ exists, my office will help identify TIF trigger points. The committee will be tasked with identifying key nodes in the footprint of each school to help organize parents, community leaders,

landlords and businesses. This committee will be chaired by Dan Hynes and Paul Rosenfeld. Both are Bell parents, ward residents and community leaders.

- Chamber Committee: The Chamber Committee will work with their constituencies to identify school sponsors, fundraising opportunities and connect the business owners to schools in their footprint. Additionally, my office will work with the School Improvement Committee and leaders from the chambers of commerce to brand the 47th Ward – ex. ‘The 47th Ward – Live, Work & Play.’ By branding the ward, we can continue to attract new residents and businesses to the 47th ward.

Next steps:

1. Alderman Pawar’s office will be working with CPS to identify capital improvements and academic enhancements thru TIF.
2. Dan Hynes and Paul Rosenfeld will be creating a School Improvement Committee.
3. Alderman Pawar will be meeting with chamber leaders to brand the ward. This effort will require assistance from community members experienced in advertising, brand creation/management and marketing.

Remember, when schools win, we all win!

To contact the School Improvement Committee, please email them at: grow@chicago47.org.