



CPS Connect

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Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the third largest school in the district in the United States, has trouble connecting students to the variety of resources offered by the public. There are 400,000 saplings that could grow but need access to nutrients in order to do so. These “nutrients,” are educational and vocational programs offered by public and city-sponsored events ranging from Chicago Public Library’s to the Chicago Park District. The following events are available on separate websites but that can get messy. There is no central location where parents and students can discover the best opportunities for their growth.

The solution is to aggregate this data on one website: CPS Connect. Students and parents will be able to log in to the website to see the local events, which can be filtered by age range, location, dates, and interests. If a student is interested in attending an event, they can add it to their calendar. Parents can also see their children’s events, or if their child is younger they can search events for them. Access to this website will be granted based on CPS IDs and emails. Parent accounts can be linked to student IDs. This can then be used to collect data based on neighborhoods and school districts determining where demand programs lie.

Based on a study by Irving Spergel from University of Chicago, juvenile offenders were most likely to participate in gang incidents between 12-8pm. Spergel stated that broad community involvement is essential in dealing with youth gang problems. One strategy that a community could use is providing recreational and community development activities. Providing easy access to community events information will increase participation within Chicago’s youth.

While assembling this data is not a new idea, the model we hope to build is. The minimum viable product (MVP) for this solution is a common platform across city services for youth. To be sure that this information is accessible to families of all backgrounds, we will offer the information in different languages. This solution is quick and easy to implement as the data will be scraped from public websites and the only server space needed is that which stores student and parent logins. As this is heavily focused on public programs, we hope to partner closely with the City of Chicago to create the MVP, including school sponsors and endorsements. Similar to other public programs, this will be free for all CPS families.

In order to begin the implementation of this website, we will assemble a team of student ambassadors to endorse the website. Community building cannot come from outside organizations but must be started from within, which will make these ambassadors key to the success of this website. We’re confident that students will be interested in this because of the laments of two local Chicagoans, Karolina and Alexis, from their experience in the CPS system. After the community accepts this civic technology, we hope Chicago businesses will get involved and host and promote events for CPS high schoolers to get professional training and experience. This will foster growth in local businesses, as well as retain talent in the city rather than export it.

The MVP would provide the community the resources to address current needs but also encourage avenues for future scaling of this model. For example, we could create incentives for schools and families to use the website. Which could lead to mentorship programs between students and local businesses. With this growth, the 400,000 saplings can become a forest of talent.