

# Horace Greeley Elementary School

Chicago, Illinois



## BACKGROUND

Student-designed murals celebrating literacy and cultural diversity alert visitors that there is something special about the school before they even enter its doors. Situated in a rapidly changing neighborhood in the north side of Chicago near Lake Michigan and Wrigley Field, the school is home to 450 students in grades pre-K to 8. Most students who attend Greeley are of Hispanic or Latino background, about one third are English language learners, and more than 90 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch. Half of the student population resides in the neighborhood; the rest are drawn to Greeley from all over Chicago.



*The Horace Greeley School announces its commitment to the arts and diversity from the first glimpse.*

Greeley has always served a diverse student body and has always had strong roots in bilingual learning and multiculturalism. Today, the school's appeal for many lies in its strong arts program and academic programs for monolingual and bilingual students, including a bilingual gifted program for students in grades 3 to 8. Greeley's combined emphasis on arts, cultural learning, and academics enable an education focused on "the whole child" that makes everyone feel welcome, and gives all students the chance to succeed in some area.

## Student Demographics

Horace Greeley Elementary School  
Chicago, Illinois  
[www.greeley.cps.k12.il.us/](http://www.greeley.cps.k12.il.us/)  
480 students, preK-8

Hispanic	75%
Black	13%
White	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%
Students eligible for free/ reduced price meals	91%
Students with Limited English Proficiency	33%
Special Education Students	10%
Student/Teacher Ratio	23:1

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

### *Multiculturalism*

With its large number of English language learners, Greeley faces a challenge shared by an increasing number of schools: How do you build a student-centered instructional environment that would work for everyone? Greeley addresses this goal by offering three academic programs: monolingual, bilingual, and bilingual gifted.

Monolingual English-speaking students in grades pre-K-8 are taught separately from their bilingual peers in core subjects. In addition to the core subjects, they receive instruction in Spanish four times a week, and a heritage language program, featuring Polish and Russian, is also available.

Instruction for monolingual Spanish-speaking students is primarily in Spanish in the early grades, with an emphasis on first developing students' critical academic skills in their native language, while learning English language skills through social language and English as a Second Language (ESL). For students whose first language is not Spanish, Greeley uses a pull-out program to individualize instruction. All classroom teachers use ESL strategies, and work to transition students to English instruction as students become ready, usually by grade 4 or 5.

Many bilingual students attend Greeley through a city-wide lottery. For those students accepted into Greeley but not from Greeley's feeder neighborhood, parents must provide their own transportation. All non-English speaking Chicago students in grades 3 to 8 have the chance to test into Greeley's bilingual gifted program. Unlike students in the regular bilingual program, students accepted into the gifted program are provided transportation. Historically this program, created fourteen years ago, served Vietnamese, Russian, and Polish speakers. Now, most of the students speak Spanish or Polish and only a small number speak Russian. Instruction is advanced and teachers integrate real-world examples and subjects into lessons when possible. Because students entering the program have different levels of English skills and because their academic ability and spoken language skills often do not match, teachers use differentiated instruction to reach all students. The program's goal is to develop students' literacy, cognitive, and mathematical skills while transitioning them to English. In grades 3 and 4, classes are mostly self-contained, while older grades are de-compartmentalized.

"We want our students to excel educationally," said an administrator. "We place a high premium on multiculturalism and bilingualism. We strive to produce valid multicultural experiences. We want our students to thrive in their culture, not to abandon their culture. We also want our students to learn from each other cultures."

### *The Arts*

In addition to languages and multicultural experiences, Greeley places a strong emphasis on the arts. All students, regardless of program, are fully immersed in Greeley's ambitious arts curriculum. The results of this curriculum, supported by thriving partnerships with several Chicago arts organizations, can be seen throughout the school. Hallways double as galleries that show off student prints in the style of Andy Warhol, portraits of U.S. presidents, and

posters describing the origins of various ballroom dances the students have learned. Student work covers almost every inch of what would otherwise be unadorned cinderblock walls.

Although Greeley's administrators affirm that arts instruction is good for its own sake, they also appreciate what studying the arts can do for students in other areas. "Foundational skills are developed through the arts, regardless of whether the child wants to be an artist," an administrator explained, "Students learn discipline, their place in the world; it all helps them become a better student, a doctor, or a plumber."

Students in grades K-5 receive exposure to the four art disciplines: dance, drama, music, and the visual arts; those in grades 6-8 participate in a 30-week visual arts program with an artist in residence and also receive music instruction. The artist in residence program weaves arts learning with academic themes from social studies, history, and literature, each year focusing on a



*Student art work covers nearly all the available wall space.*

different artist. The current year's artist is Andy Warhol. "You shouldn't have to justify spending on the arts," said an administrator, but unfortunately, the district only provides funds for one half-time arts position. The challenge for Greeley, therefore, becomes making the most use of its discretionary funds, applying for grants, and forging partnerships, which the school does in abundance. Currently, Greeley is using a grant from the Illinois Arts Council to fund a dance teacher from Chicago's Hubbard Street Dance, and employs its visual artist-in-residence through a partnership with Urban Gateways. Music instruction is provided by a full-time teacher whose salary is paid for by a combination of the district's part-time funding and discretionary funds. Classroom teachers in grades K-5 provide visual arts instruction using a commercial curriculum. Professional development, provided by the school, enables teachers to become comfortable and confident with the curriculum.

Finding new sources of funding is always work but, said Principal Carlos Azcoitia, "We see the value in what [art] brings, how it enriches student experiences." So do Greeley's students and their parents. "This is the best school for the arts," a parent asserted, explaining that her daughter never wants to miss a day of school because she would miss dance or drama or whatever was on the day's schedule. Another parent recounted how Greeley's music program helped his son earn admission to one of Chicago's competitive high schools. "He wants to be a music teacher because of Greeley."

But the arts do more at Greeley than inflame student interest. They reinforce Greeley's cultural diversity, bringing monolingual and bilingual students together for a common project, and enrich the vocabularies of all students—monolingual, bilingual, and special education. As the dance teacher worked on choreography with a 1st-grade class, students learned not just the moves but their names—"Is that a locomotor move or a non-locomotor move? Who can give an example of each?" the teacher asked.

Student grades in the arts are based on engagement and drive to improve. In May, the year's arts study is capped off with a fine arts festival. For one week, each day is dedicated to a different discipline. Students get to show off their talent, and the school offers band music, face painting, and sidewalk chalk drawing. All the artists who work with the school participate in an event for the entire community.

## VISION

### *Leadership*

Greeley follows a distributive leadership model, headed by the principal, vice principal, curriculum and arts coordinator, and counselor, with teachers assuming leadership roles where needed. Each member of the leadership team has specific roles in the school, but all described their leadership philosophy as collaborative.

Both Principal Azcoitia and the vice principal are new this year, but faculty and parents describe the leadership transition as smooth and credit the former principal Haydee Alvarez with foresight for making it so. A former high school special education teacher, Azcoitia was hired by the former principal four years ago to serve as her vice principal with the goal of having him take the reigns from her when she retired. The transition also drew support from the curriculum coordinator, who has 25 years experience with the school. The result, according to staff, was an easy transition and confidence in the future. "He has vision," says one specialist. "He gets us excited and I've been here a long time." Perhaps it is no wonder—Azcoitia has education in his blood. Both his parents were Chicago Public Schools (CPS) principals.



*Principal Carlos Azcoitia celebrates Dr. Seuss with Greeley students.*

Azcoitia's theory is that everyone at Greeley is going to be a leader. CPS has lots of mandates for teachers, says a teacher, but so long as are students are successful, the leadership supports teachers' methods for fulfilling the mandates. "Greeley has a lot of talent. Its teachers are highly professional and everyone has taken a leadership position in something," said a resource teacher.



It is a philosophy mirrored in the CPS system, which has historically been a leader in school-based decision-making with its Local School Councils (LSC). The LSCs comprise the principal, two elected parent leaders, five to six elected parents, and two community members. The councils are charged with oversight of the discretionary budget, the school improvement plan, and the principal selection process. LSC members come to the table informed by district-supported training sessions.

### *Professional Development and Planning*

“Professional development must be job embedded,” said Azcoitia, “and follow-up is a must.” In a school where all teachers work with bilingual students, and teachers of all backgrounds are expected to teach the visual arts and collaborate with artists, professional development must also be all-encompassing. As a result, all teachers receive professional development in ESL strategies so they can better teach bilingual students. Teachers are trained in teaching the arts via one of Greeley’s many partnerships.

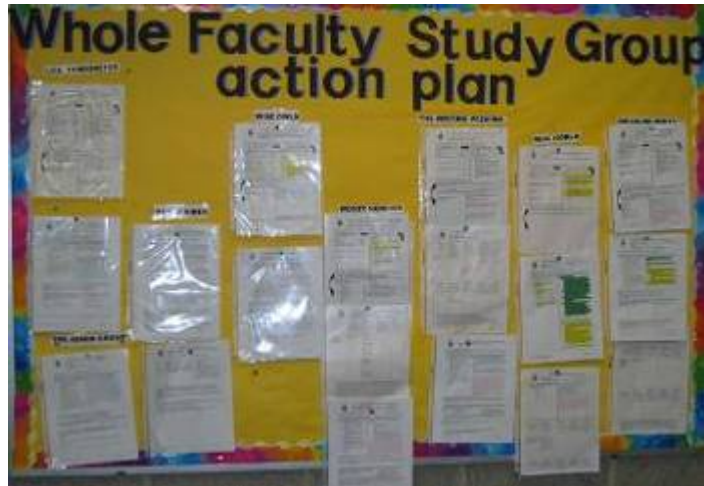
In all, teachers at Greeley have four preparation periods a week. In the upper grades, where teachers share students, the preps are held in common. In the lower grades, sharing among teachers comes in the form of teacher study groups. These groups were the result of staff members’ wanting to take control of their own learning, a goal Azcoitia supported. Staff members spent a year studying how other schools implemented such groups, and began their own study groups at Greeley this past year. Teachers analyzed where they needed to improve, created a list of topics, and divided themselves into seven groups. Each group crosses grade levels and meets for 30 minutes biweekly, although some groups choose to meet after school, as well. Azcoitia is adamant, however, that groups meet during school time to show that the model is valued. He provides direction to the groups when necessary, but groups are self-driven. Teachers conduct their own action research, share strategies, try new ideas, and use data to determine success. Groups post progress reports on a bulletin board in the teachers’ lounge.

Group discussions are directed by specific student and teacher needs. For example, one group dedicated to language arts instruction spent a morning discussing students’ relative weaknesses in decoding and the pros and cons of adopting a multi-sensory phonics program for their monolingual and bilingual students. At the same time, another language arts group conferred over a student who was having difficulty reading in Spanish. The teacher described some interventions she had used, explained the student’s progress, and discussed with a special education teacher whether the child should be evaluated for services.

### *New Teacher Mentoring*

Greeley is dedicated to providing its new teachers with every chance to succeed. In conjunction with CPS, Greeley offers first-year teachers a formal mentoring program. CPS trains mentors, who then work with new teachers to provide support, help them set realistic goals, reflect on the progress they are making, and expand their instructional strategies.

"It has never been like I have everything resting just on my shoulders," a first-year teacher said. "I always know who to go to when I have questions or problems." Mentors meet with teachers during the first in-service days of the year, provide samples of materials, and review expectations. They then meet weekly with new teachers for support and to discuss obstacles and needs. Mentors also spend time observing the new teachers, and new teachers are given the opportunity to observe their mentors.



*Teacher study groups post their action plans in the teachers' lounge.*

"Because I am able to get in and observe other teachers, I am learning so much," said another first-year teacher. "And when I'm observed, it is a helpful experience. My ideas are validated."

As part of the CPS program, mentors are required to attend three in-service programs a year, keep logs, and document their contact with mentees. Despite the extra effort, it is obvious that they, like the first-year teachers, believe the program is valuable. "I learn so much from them," said a mentor, "They have all these new ideas." That's part of what makes Greeley so special to first-year teachers. "You're not treated like novices but like your own ideas have value," said a first-year teacher. "That positive energy keeps you from crashing; the school highlights the positive." Another first-year teacher agreed, "We're allowed to voice our concerns. It's not intimidating." Both noted that their experiences at Greeley were very different from what they hear from so many first-year teachers. "As a teacher, you want to be here; the energy transfers to the kids."

## **STUDENT-FOCUSED LEARNING**

### *Student Supports*

Greeley operates as a "lights-on," 7 to 7 community beacon for its students and families. Its after-school program serves 100 to 150 students through the 21st Century Community Schools program. The program provides academic remediation and enrichment in math, reading, and science every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, and arts enrichment—ballroom and folk dancing, band, drama, and media arts—Wednesdays and Fridays, so that students can participate in everything. Sports clinics are also offered. The before-school program targets early literacy development for students in grades K-3, and offers early morning sessions in visual arts, drama, dance, and music with activities designed to enrich vocabulary, reading skills, and language arts development.

Greeley has a well-articulated system to identify and support learners who fall behind. Teachers monitor student progress and modify instruction to re-teach content to students who are struggling. When in-classroom

remediation is not sufficient, the school-based problem-solving process is activated. This district-wide approach brings the teacher, counselor, case manager, and instruction resource personnel together to focus on finding effective interventions, such as short-term pull-outs with intensive reading instruction and before- and after-school remediation. As one reading resource teacher observed, “We need to get help in early. We don’t over-identify students, but we do use reading interventions along with solid classroom instruction as soon as we identify a struggling student.”

Additionally, reading and vocabulary building are stressed throughout the disciplines at Greeley, and can be seen in action from science classes to dance class. One 3rd-grade teacher explained how she incorporates writing across every content area: “Science, social studies, math—I work extended responses into everything. In math, we solve something, we explain it in words, tell the story.” Parents also appreciate how the arts transform instruction. “Learning is reinforced through arts,” said one parent. “Kids learn how to express themselves.”

Principal Azcoitia credited part of the school’s success to the three instructional programs offered, saying they build a student-centered environment, a place where students can find where they fit best in. Naturally, the before- and after-school programs are linked to school programs, providing a continuous reinforcement of learning.

Students report that teachers are always willing to find time to help them when they are struggling. They can come in 15 minutes early, stay late, or even give up a recess for one-on-one help. “All of the teachers go an extra mile for the kids,” a bilingual teacher said. “Sometimes that extra 15 minutes in the morning makes all the difference.” Teachers also keep parents informed of student work. “If students miss an assignment, you can count on the teachers calling you to find out why,” said a parent.

For those in the upper grades, Greeley works hard to prepare students for high school. “I see my role as making sure my students are ready for high school,” explained a math and science teacher. “I talk to parents at the beginning of the year so that they know what the kids have to learn—keeping track of assignments and having real deadlines. My students know that they have to have a homework buddy, somebody that they can call and get assignments if they miss.”

Most Greeley students matriculate into their local neighborhood high schools, although the 8th-grade teachers and counselor works with students who plan to apply to regional, competitive schools, and Greeley has had its share of successes. The administration knows their students will be successful at whichever high school they attend. “We get feedback on our graduates from the region,” said an administrator. “We track Greeley students in math and know that less than 10% have to take double math in high school. None fail Algebra I.”

### *Nurturing and High Expectations*

Asked to sum up what makes Greeley so successful, everyone from administrators to parents cited the same factors: respect for the arts and for multiculturalism, a nurturing environment *and* high expectations for students and teachers. The strong sense of community among administrators, teachers, students, and their families creates a positive

atmosphere that sets Greeley apart, said one teacher. "I've taught brothers and sisters, parents, uncles and aunts—the good feelings get passed along."

Parents can get involved at Greeley in many ways, through the morning Parent Patrol that supports student safety, by volunteering on the Title I Parent Advisory Council or the Parent-Teacher Organization, or simply by helping out in classrooms. The school reported a good response to events such as open houses and report card meetings, and parents know they are welcome. "This school put my sons on the right track," a father said. "One teacher told him, 'we are a team here, the parents and the teachers.'"

Older students are quick to guide visitors and answer to questions. Each year, student surveys give the school high ratings: school is a safe place, learning is fun, and they feel happy at school. "It doesn't matter if they are from the neighborhood or they come on busses," a 3rd grade teacher said. "We are all family here."

A retired guidance counselor who was at Greeley for 34 years said, "We always had good kids and nice teachers. How you teach the kids in the beginning affects how they end up." Teachers agree that behavioral problems are rare, and their students are frequently complimented. "We don't have the discipline problems here," said a reading specialist. "We nurture them and have high expectations, and the kids know it." Staff members communicate those high expectations and increasing levels of responsibility "early and often." The former guidance counselor elaborates: Some schools think there's nothing you can do so they accept the behavior, but at Greeley the pre-K and Kindergarten teachers expect respect and demand a lot, so students learn that's what they have to do.



*Dance classes also help students learn new vocabulary, such as locomotor.*

Students remarked on how teachers were warm and nice to them, always willing to help them catch up on their work. All agreed that grades matter at Greeley and the standards are high. But students have learned from their friends, now in high school, that Greeley really prepares students well. In fact, they report that Greeley students might get A's when they go on to high school, even if they got B's and C's at Greeley. "We have real deadlines here," one student said. "We have to do our assignments and work hard for good grades," remarked another.



## Motivation

You need to balance the high expectations, which can be stressful, with the fun– the arts, the multiculturalism, Azcoitia maintains. Students in all grades and programs demonstrate high and consistent levels of engagement. They learn to stay focused on their work and these skills are reinforced and strengthened through academic and arts programming. “It’s the little things that keep them involved,” said a bilingual teacher who herself came to Greeley in 3rd grade with no English. She now arrives early to help students, and described how she spent some of her own money to buy foods for an ESL tasting lesson. “The kids loved it,” and that’s what matters. As another teacher put it, “Engagement is really the key here. We have to work hard to find that right level of instruction so that engagement is there. But we know that when students are engaged, they will be interested and on task”.

For many students the arts are a great motivator. “My child loves the before school drama classes. We can’t miss a day,” a parent said. And for those students who may be struggling academically, exposure to the arts opens up a whole new world where they can feel successful. One teacher described a student who bloomed after he began to experience success in portraiture. “It was like he said, ‘Yes! Finally, something for me!’” One of Greeley’s arts partners cautioned that teachers should never tell students they aren’t ready for an idea. “Maybe they won’t grasp it right away,” he said, “but if you don’t try you’ll never know.”

## POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

For a school like Greeley with limited funding and an unlimited desire to bring students new opportunities, building and nourishing partnerships is critical. The key, Azcoitia said, is to find partners with a real interest in improving kids’ lives and with sufficient expertise to bring in what the school lacks. To that end, Greeley has forged two types of partnerships: those designed to improve the fundamentals of education, and those that enable the school to enrich students’ lives through the arts.

Greeley partners with several local universities with the aim of improving the quality of education throughout the city. It’s a mutually beneficial relationship, said Principal Azcoitia. Greeley’s faculty members are often invited as guest lecturers in the education departments, and the school serves as a sought-after placement for student teachers. In return, staff members at Greeley get to tap into the university’s expertise for professional development, and the school has the first chance to hire the best of the student teachers they receive.

When it comes to the arts, Greeley is equally fortunate in its ability to partner with institutions across Chicago. As one Greeley administrator put it, “Our city is full of wonderful art and dance and theater and music. Most of our students come from low-income homes. Unless we make a bridge to get to these many resources, much of what Chicago has to offer would be out of their reach. We are that bridge. We offer the programs that parents can’t always offer.”

One partnership, with Urban Gateways, a nonprofit arts education center, has lasted for ten years. Currently, the partnership is supported, in part, by a 21st Century Grant. Besides collaborating on the before- and after-school programs, Urban Gateways supports Greeley's vision of bringing the arts into the school through its artist in residence program. For grades 6-8, a teaching artist works with the school for 30 weeks, collaborating with classroom teachers to bring out "the artist in the teacher and the teacher in the artist." In order to deepen the curriculum, 6th- through 8th-grade teachers and the teaching artists integrate art into language arts and social studies. For example, for this year's focus on Andy Warhol and commercial art, the teacher and teaching artist worked with students to connect Warhol to the civil rights movement and immigration issues.

To support the partnership, Urban Gateways provides Greeley teachers with a full day of professional development to get them to feel comfortable with art in class. Planning for the new school year begins during the summer's in-service days, then recurs three times per year.

Although Urban Gateways works with around 250 schools through residency programs, touring, matinees, and community school work (like with Greeley), they consider Greeley one of their flagship schools. "They really get it," said a representative from Urban Gateways. Every principal, she added, has gotten it for the past 10 years. The partnership is like a family; the kids work with same artists over time.

"It takes a while to build something special like this," Azcoitia warned. "You can't just start full steam ahead." For the school, building partnerships requires figuring out the moment's unique needs and finding the right artist to work with students. A representative from Urban Gateways agrees: everything evolves and expands. The personal relationships develop over time and are continuously strengthened.

If schools want to build these relationships, they should start small, recommended Azcoitia, but make a serious investment of time and interest. Because partnerships always rest on personal relationships, schools must plan for continuity in leadership, and as new people come in, they have to be exposed to excellence in arts. They will need to develop relationships with community partners and understand the benefits of working with arts professionals.

Schools like Greeley are also challenged to come up with funds to continue supporting the partnerships. The Urban Gateways representative admitted that can be difficult. "The school has to get creative with the funds to support the program. Not all schools have the knowledge or the will to do it, but Greeley wants it." That, she suggested, is one of the ways Greeley sets itself apart. Greeley has an impressive track record of competing for funds or matching available grants dedicated to arts education at a level over and above Chicago Public Schools funding. Long-term financial supporters have included the Chicago Community Trust and the Illinois Arts Council.

## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

With the arts program now so well established, Greeley’s administration is aiming for new partnerships: this time in technology. Nor is Greeley, like any school of excellence, content to rest on its laurels. The arts program is always expanding, and Azcoitia hopes to bring it to a new level for students in the upper grades by allowing them to specialize in a particular discipline and study it in greater depth.

With our commitment to excellence in arts education, said an administrator, “we are about providing equitable access for every child. Kids must be engaged to learn, and we have learned that all kids can be engaged.”

<b>Horace Greeley Elementary School Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) % proficient and above: 8th grade Reading</b>				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All	64	78	95	90
Limited English Proficient	53	73	80	
State Scores				82
<b>% proficient and above: 8th grade Math</b>				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All	53	68	95	91
Limited English Proficient	25	33	70	
State Scores				81