18 Chicago Area Schools Turning School Improvement Plans into Student-Centered Learning Successes with LEAP Innovations

The long-running LEAP Innovations Pilot Network gets a new name to reflect the accelerated progress that school teams make on their teaching and learning goals.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, September 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- CHICAGO, IL – LEAP Innovations is pleased to announce the 18 schools participating in this year's LEAP Innovations Accelerator. The 18 schools join nearly 160 Chicago schools that have participated since the program's founding in 2014. Formerly known as Pilot Network, the professional learning program was renamed as the Accelerator this year to better reflect the purpose and impact of the yearlong design experience and does not signal any significant shifts in programming.

The 2026-2027 Accelerator cohorts include both returning schools and new partners, represent both elementary and secondary grades, and span neighborhood, magnet, and charter schools across Chicago.

Each school identified a design team to lead their participation in the yearlong program. The design teams include a school leader, two-to-four teachers, and an additional staff member such as a counselor or instructional coach. The design teams will engage in design thinking and professional learning throughout the school year, developing their capacity to lead instructional change that makes meaningful improvements in student learning and engagement, that can be scaled, and that lasts. They are grouped into two cohorts to support peer learning and developing best practices. The first cohort meetings of the 2026-2027 school year are scheduled for September 17 and September 24 at the LEAP Innovation offices.

"I am so excited to welcome this year's Accelerator schools," said Colleen Padgett, the program's director, "and begin this journey with educators that are putting students at the center of their vision for learning. There is tremendous energy and commitment across both cohorts. It is clear that these leaders and educators are deeply invested in creating personalized, meaningful educational experiences that meet the unique needs, strengths, and aspirations of every student. We are thrilled to learn alongside them and support the innovative work they will bring to life this year!"

As part of the Accelerator program and with facilitation provided by LEAP, design teams identify an opportunity of practice aligned to their school's priorities, Continuous Improvement Work

Plan (CIWP, for Chicago Public Schools), or School Improvement Plan. Shenethe Parks, the chief of schools for Network 12 in Chicago Public Schools, explained the value of this approach for a participating school in her network:

“School improvement happens when we create the conditions for educators to innovate while remaining deeply focused on the needs and experiences of students. The LEAP Accelerator provides Avalon Park Fine & Performing Arts School with an opportunity to turn its improvement priorities into meaningful, student-centered practices that strengthen instruction, deepen engagement, and improve outcomes. I’m excited to see educators build on the strengths of their school community, use evidence to refine their approach, and develop practices that can be sustained and scaled over time.”

Throughout the program, LEAP will provide expert support for school teams to design instructional prototypes that address their opportunity of practice, learn what works, and develop plans for scale. In addition teams will explore educational technology solutions and partners that match their opportunity of practice and may pilot one of those tools or approaches during the program.

The program is a nationally recognized model for helping schools design, test, and scale strategies for student-centered learning. Accelerator schools have reported, through independent research, significant gains in student engagement, deeper learning outcomes, and stronger teacher capacity to lead innovation. This success compels many schools to return for continued support, professional learning, and scaling effective student-centered learning practices.

“Whittier decided to join the LEAP Accelerator because we saw how much ownership students took in their learning last year when our first cohort of teachers went through it. Classrooms came alive with discussions, and anchor charts to support student learning went from teacher-created to student-created. What a transformation!” –Yadira Guzmán, Principal, Whittier Dual Language Magnet School

The 2026-2027 Chicago Accelerator Schools
Alexander Graham Elementary School
A. Philip Randolph Elementary School
Avalon Park Fine & Performing Arts School
Charles Evans Hughes Elementary School
CICS Longwood Elementary School
CICS Loomis
CICS Prairie
CICS West Belden
Edison Park Elementary School
Intrinsic Downtown
James R. Doolittle Academy

John Milton Gregory Math & Science Academy
Leif Ericson Scholastic Magnet Academy
Lincoln Park High School
Perkins Bass Elementary School
R.H. Lee Elementary School
Whittier Dual Language Magnet School
Wildwood IB World Magnet School

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