

# Partnerships for College and Career Readiness

## Pathways Spotlight Brief

pathways  
resource center

Geoffrey Scott Chattin, with Collaborating Educator William Hook

### Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences

Grade Levels: 9-12  
Students: 565

Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences (CHSAS) opened its doors in 1985 as a magnet school in the Chicago Public Schools system. Located in south Chicago, CHSAS has a racially and ethnically diverse student body (38.9% African American, 31.7% White, 24.1% Hispanic, 4.2% Multi-Racial, 0.5% Asian, 0.4% American Indian, and 0.2% Pacific Islander). Approximately 49% of CHSAS students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. CHSAS enrolls students who are talented in math and science, studying within the agricultural sciences field. As a CPS magnet school, CHSAS students are selected through a lottery system. For additional information regarding CHSAS (e.g., student and educator demographics, student achievement, revenues, and expenditures), please visit <http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

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### Partnerships for College and Career Readiness

This brief describes Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences' practice of building a substantive constellation of partnerships that support college and career readiness for all students.

### Partnerships at Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences

Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences is committed to sustaining a broad spectrum of partnerships for its students. CHSAS forges partnerships well beyond financial commitments: members of local businesses, government, industry, and organizations that partner with the school serve on the school's advisory board and are deeply involved in the students' lives. Eli's Cheesecake Company, Hillshire Brands, Kraft Foods Inc., Quaker Oats, Jenner & Block, McDonald's, Cargill, Nufarm, and Brookfield Zoo are just a few of the local firms, organizations, and businesses that offer substantive job shadowing, internships, and paid employment opportunities for CHSAS students. Mr. Hook asserts that he is seeking "real time, and real experiences" from participating partners.

The range of Chicago High School for Agricultural Science's partnerships is not limited to local businesses. CHSAS maintains a host of postsecondary partnerships. Advisory Council members hail from such postsecondary institutions as the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wilbur Wright College, Purdue University, Northwestern University, Illinois State University, and Southern Illinois University. These partnerships directly lead to rich opportunities for CHSAS students. For example, CHSAS students have participated in the University of Illinois' Research Apprentice Program, Michigan State University's Vet Camp, and Iowa State University's Ag Career Day.

CHSAS maintains a 39-acre farming operation, which provides students real world learning opportunities through Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects related to their instructional pathway. This component of the school thrives in no small part based on its partnerships. For instance, the school's relationship with the Nebraska Lead Program (Group 33) prompted that organization's donation of four heads of cattle to the school, no trivial matter given today's fiscal realities. Students operate 45 beehives on site, and some of the honey yield is purchased by local businesses, notably Eli's Cheesecake Company. Recently, CHSAS began working with the Nature Conservancy's Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future program, with some students participating in paid internships. Every CHSAS student is a member of FFA, a career and technical student organization that is focused on agricultural education. In fact, CHSAS represents the largest FFA chapter in the state of Illinois and the fifth largest in the nation.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AT ILLINOIS

**Impact on students.** Each CHSAS student is required to select a program of study from one of five agricultural career pathways: Animal Science, Agricultural Mechanics, Food Science, Horticultural/Landscape Design, and Agricultural Finance (Agricultural Education will be added fall 2014 as a result of increased enrollment). Through the FFA opportunities, students participate in competitive Career Development Events related to their chosen career pathway. Students and chapters also have the ability to form partnerships through various programs offered through the Illinois FFA Association and the National FFA Organization. Embedded within these career pathways are a host of dedicated partnerships, which pay incredible dividends for the students. Promoting work readiness, all students must earn at least two certifications, and every student is required to obtain OSHA certification. For example, many students in the food science pathway obtain their food sanitation license; in some cases, this training has directly led to employment. Sara Lee and Beverly Bakery & Cafe, for instance, recently hired CHSAS students who had completed this training. These businesses derive a benefit, because they have sometimes struggled to find qualified, licensed workers. Teachers and partners assist students in finding internships and job shadowing opportunities, but students also take the initiative to establish new partnerships. To fulfill their portfolio requirements, students compose and send letters of interest to potential employers. Recently, students have secured meaningful internships at such organizations as the USDA, the Brookfield Zoo, and the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife. Mr. Hook cites a frequent pattern of student success at CHSAS: students move from job shadowing, to a high school internship, to a college internship, to a full-time job, all at the same business, firm, or organization.

*“The ideal partners for Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences are those individuals who are willing to provide their time, expertise, and real opportunities for our students.”*

~ Mr. William Hook, Principal

**Key points.** CHSAS recently formed a partnership with California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Cal Poly’s “learn by doing” educational philosophy speaks directly to CHSAS’s mission to produce technologically proficient graduates; that is, creating graduates who espouse the “learning to do, doing to learn” portion of CHSAS’ motto. CHSAS sent four students to the Engineering Possibilities in College 2013 summer camp at Cal Poly and will send eight students to the 2014 camp. Such opportunities for students work to enhance college and career readiness. Students also have built partnerships with local industry, restaurants, and Moraine Valley Community College to process and cook turkeys raised on CHSAS’s farm, providing Thanksgiving dinner to 350 elderly neighborhood residents.

**Advice from the field.** Mr. Hook notes that forging partnerships that are truly beneficial to students requires more than photo opportunities and cash donations. CHSAS Business Advisory Council members are committed to lending their time, expertise, and willingness to provide substantial opportunities for students. Key to supporting this whole process is hiring well. Teachers must be great advocates for the students, according to Mr. Hook. Also, Mr. Hook argues that successful partnerships are often more beneficial when the stakeholders know the school well. Many Advisory Council members have longstanding relationships with CHSAS. Currently, CHSAS has an 86% four-year graduation rate and a 93% five-year graduation rate. While their school serves a diverse population, Mr. Hook reports that CHSAS has no achievement gap, due in large part to committed partners providing real opportunities, real support, and high expectations for all students.

CHSAS website: <http://www.chicagoagr.org/index.jsp>

CHSAS career pathways webpage: [http://www.chicagoagr.org/apps/pages/?uREC\\_ID=38910&type=d](http://www.chicagoagr.org/apps/pages/?uREC_ID=38910&type=d)

CHSAS partners: [http://www.chicagoagr.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=63813&type=d](http://www.chicagoagr.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=63813&type=d)

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## PATHWAYS RESOURCE CENTER

[www.pathways.illinois.edu](http://www.pathways.illinois.edu)

The mission of the PRC is to provide resources and supports to secondary and postsecondary institutions, employers, communities, and other partners as they engage in successful and sustainable pathways for students from secondary, to postsecondary, to careers.