

## Answers to **Frequently Asked Questions**

For families and staff at CICS Bucktown, Prairie and West Belden

### **What changes are taking place in our schools?**

American Quality Schools (AQS), the organization that currently manages Chicago International Charter School (CICS) Bucktown, Prairie, and West Belden, will no longer be working with CICS effective July 2011. **This decision does not affect the enrollment status of any child in these schools –a spot is being held for each current student at this school; there is no need to reapply on behalf of your child.**

The Chicago International board of directors has identified Distinctive Schools as the new partners to assume management of these three campuses. CICS requested proposals from a number of organizations and, based on the strength of its application, selected Distinctive Schools to lead the three schools to the next level of educational excellence. Academic achievement, safety, and overall well-being of students remain the top priority at all three schools. Both CICS and Distinctive Schools are committed to ensuring the highest quality education for all students.

### **When will the new management take effect?**

The official start date is July 1, 2011. However, Distinctive Schools will begin engaging the three school communities immediately, including introductory meetings with families and staff. The next several months will be a transition period to shift management responsibility from American Quality Schools to Distinctive Schools.

### **What is Distinctive Schools?**

Distinctive Schools is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving student performance to close achievement gaps and ensure college readiness. Distinctive Schools specializes in helping existing charter schools achieve at higher levels. The organization is led by Joseph Wise and Mary Stafford, both experienced educators who have worked in both traditional public and charter school settings.

Distinctive Schools adheres to six core commitments among all students, parents, and staff to ensure a safe, high-performing school climate and culture:

- **Social Justice:** Our students and staff embrace, study, and promote social justice and protect the rights of others.
- **Optimism:** Our students and staff embrace the power of optimism – for themselves and for those affected by their efforts.
- **Ethics and Integrity:** Integrity is at our core; it is the essence of who we are and what we stand for. Our students and staff study hard and maintain high levels of ethics and integrity all the time.
- **Literacy:** Literacy is recognized as central to academic pursuit and success in life. Our students don't just learn to read; they read to learn.

- **Diversity:** Our students and staff understand and live diversity. We study and celebrate differences, and embrace the vital importance of respect, tolerance, and acceptance of all.
- **Academic Excellence:** Our students and staff embrace rigor in all academics, and connect their hard work to learning and success every day.

For more information, visit [www.distinctiveschools.org](http://www.distinctiveschools.org).

### **How will the change in management affect day-to-day operation of the schools?**

None of the schools will undergo immediate changes in hours, schedules, policies or procedures as a result of this change. The first priority for Distinctive Schools is to conduct in-depth school reviews, working closely with teachers and families, to determine needs and priorities moving forward. During that period, schools will continue to operate as they are now.

### **Does this change affect summer school?**

Information about summer school is forthcoming.

### **Will the change in management result in changes in staff?**

Distinctive Schools is eager to assemble top-notch teams of educators who are best equipped to take these three schools to the next level. The schools are fortunate to have a strong cadre of teachers and other staff already in place with the skills and expertise to deliver high-quality instruction. Distinctive Schools is interested in hiring those who demonstrate their ability to contribute to the school's continued academic growth. Teachers have the right to reapply for their position, and will be given specific instructions about that application process.

### **How will Distinctive Schools select the faculty for the coming school year?**

Distinctive Schools will meet individually with every teacher from the three schools to learn about his/her experience. Every teacher is invited to submit a letter of interest, a resume and evidence of his or her impact on student achievement.

### **Will staff continue to receive the same employee benefits through the new management?**

Distinctive Schools is working to ensure that all employee benefits continue without interruption.

### **What about the School Directors?**

Distinctive Schools officials are meeting with each of the three Directors to assess their willingness and ability to lead the schools to the next level.

### **Where can I get more information?**

If you have additional questions about this transition, please contact Mary Stafford at [mas@distinctiveschools.org](mailto:mas@distinctiveschools.org) or 218-565-1456.