

Importance of education

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



I wasn't entirely sure what I was getting myself into this summer when I chose to pack up my stuff and fly across the country to Illinois to work with students on the south side of Chicago. To be honest, I don't know what I was looking for either. I had been substitute teaching for the past couple of months in Career and Technical classrooms — specifically in Media Production and Computer Programming — I didn't really have a plan for the summer and this opportunity came it up so I figured, why not? I always figured I would end up teaching, so getting any kind of classroom experience seemed like a good idea. What I got was Higgins Community Academy. I would love to tell you my experience was 100% positive. It wasn't. But it wasn't 100% negative either. It was more or less somewhere in the middle. But, before I continue, I do want to say that, good or bad, it will go down as one of my favorite summer jobs. I hope it doesn't sound like I'm complaining. I'm not. I am reporting observations in the hopes that maybe it'll get better or be different for the next person. This is my opinion on what I experienced. The two other VISTA associates at this school probably have completely different things to say.. Although, Tess and I shared most of the following situations and thoughts. Now, I have a problem with authority when it gets to the point when I think I can do a better job than my superior. In my opinion management should be one, two, or even three steps ahead of everyone else. In this case I felt like we were all on the same page. The same unorganized page. I didn't know what to expect even after the first week let alone the second or third. To me, this seems to be a disservice. A disservice to the staff, students, and the community. The other issue I had with management was the lack of interest in the staff. We are only working here a

short time, but I still feel like you could take the time to know what are my strengths and weakness so that you know where I can be placed to better serve the students. In my experience as a manager of a program that served a community of kids and parents over the summer, I got to know my staff. I knew where they were coming from, what their talents were, and I made sure they were placed at the best site for them. I checked up on them, I wanted them to have a great experience and wanted to make sure they were doing the best they could do. I don't feel like I did the best I could do. Why? For starters, upon introducing myself to some of the staff at Higgins, I explained that I had been a substitute teacher for a few months, that I liked reading, that I was a writer, and wouldn't mind working with middle schoolers. The following week at the staff meeting I was introduced as " Kyle, the Math guy for the summer". What? When did I ever mention I was good at math? I corrected it, but it was already established. I was the new Math guy. I didn't fight it much after that because I figured the Math these kids were doing wasn't all that difficult. And it was something different and a challenge. I like a challenge and all, but I still feel like my contribution could have been greater if I was in a subject I was most passionate about. It just felt weird having these people welcome me into their school, but not want to use me where I would thrive the most. Also, I was always a C, D Math student — not sure if I was the best role model/mentor for these kids already struggling at Math. The final incident I want to bring up is a scheduling issue. Before I dive into this, I want to point out that these students really need structure, discipline, and teachers that really want to help get these kids through to the next grade. I feel like the kids got 2/3 of those. What was missing was

structure. Right away I felt — and had some discussions with a few of the teachers — that the material that was given to us wasn't gonna help the kids that needed to pass the ISAT test. Sure, it contained some basic fundamentals, but if you have a bunch of kids that need to retake a state-wide test, I would expect to have been a little more structured around that. Structure AND practice. But more importantly, I don't think it's a good idea to take two of the best teachers away from these kids the second week of summer school. The second week. So, all that discipline and boundaries that were established the first went right out the window. This is the best part, we — myself and Tess — were expected to cover for our respected teachers when they were gone on these teaching conferences or whatever they were.. "Expected" might be the wrong word for it. Really it was just a slight vague mention that we could handle the classroom by ourselves and it was always last-minute or on the day of so there really wasn't any discussion about it. It was just.. well, expected that we could handle it. We couldn't. Luckily, it worked itself out. The reading teacher came in during the morning, introduced the lessons, and then we had to help them out with it, while another teacher sat in the room. We weren't completely alone. Not until Thursday July 5th. This was the day that I lost a good deal of respect. Early that day, we — Tess and I - were told that both of our teachers were going to be in and out of the classroom helping with interviews for the new assistant principal. Ok, I thought. Makes sense having some teachers pop in and ask questions here and there. I figured that they would go while the other one was teaching, you know, the choice that would make the MOST sense. But nope. 5-10 minutes later I overheard an administrator say that she wanted

both teachers all day and that we could handle the room, " just send security in there to help out if it gets too out of control". Awesome. Good choice. So, the third week of school when these kids need to wrap up and prepare for freshmen year of high school we send in two unlicensed teachers, that haven't really been discipline figures, into the lion's den for a full day of doing what you ask? Watching movies. I was a film major, sure, and of course I love watching, talking about movies, and teaching about film production, but it was a little inappropriate. We ended up watching three movies — originally we were only planning on one then doing a compare and contrast assignment with the movie and the book we were reading - the movies were relevant regarding what we were reading about — the Civil Rights movement — but it seemed like a huge waste of the day. Plus without a regular teacher the kids were not focused and very disruptive. Anyway, those were all the things that rubbed me wrong and left a distasteful impression of certain staff members at Higgins. Now, this is summer school, therefore giving them the benefit of the doubt is in order. Having not worked with them during a regular school year, I really cannot judge my time here within a 4 week window. But if my experience and treatment is anything to go off of, I would think twice about accepting a job here. Since that's all off my chest I can get to the good stuff. This trip across state lines was completely 110% worth it because I got to work with Ms. Pearson and Mrs. Lake in 8th grade AND Ms. Allen in 6th grade. They are all phenomenal teachers and I learned an incredible amount of lessons from them. They are fun, patient, knowledgeable, and overall nice people who do not take any attitude from students. They had complete control over the room at all

times. If I have any new goal in life regarding my career as a teacher, it's to become just as good as them. But if I turn out only half as good as them, I would be happy. Also, we're totally planning a trip to a Six Flags theme park shortly after Summer Bridge ends. Pretty pumped about that! Other than the teachers I got to work with, the support staff at the school were extremely welcoming and easy to talk to if I had questions about where stuff was available on school grounds. Having told my family and friends where I would be spending 4 weeks this summer, they were all a little worried about my safety. While that might be a reasonable concern, I have never felt unsafe in or around Higgins. Well, that about wraps it up for my experience. If you're reading this sentence thanks for sticking with this lengthy post (although you could have easily skipped down to this point, but I appreciate you reading my conclusion). What about all of you readers? How does my experience compare to yours? If you didn't spend the summer working as a VISTA, what are your thoughts about what you already know about Chicago Public Schools in comparison to what I talked about?