

REPORT

Community Health Worker Pipeline Pilot Program



Cook County DEPT. of
Public Health

A division of Cook County Health

**BUILDING
HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES**



This report was written by Xandria Hair, MPH, Associate Program Director, Community Engagement and Health Education Unit, Cook County Department of Public Health, and published in July 2026 and summarizes the 2025 Community Health Worker Pipeline Pilot Program.

[**Watch this video**](#)

featuring the 2025
Community Health Worker
Pipeline Program Cohort



Community Health Worker Pipeline Pilot Program

Program Overview

Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) launched the 2025 Community Health Worker (CHW) High School Pipeline Pilot Program during the 2024-25 school year with high school students from Bremen School District 228. Designed to diversify the public health workforce, the program provided primarily young people of color, with hands-on training, college credit, and exposure to public health and healthcare career pathways.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed long-standing gaps in trust between public health systems and minority communities in suburban Cook County. These gaps highlighted the need for a more representative public health workforce equipped to engage communities with cultural humility, credibility, and lived experience. The Pipeline Program was created to strengthen trust and improve health outcomes by preparing students of color to serve as future Community Health Workers and public health professionals within their own communities.

PROGRAM PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

Organization	Role
Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI)	Career and Technical Training Partner (CHW Core Skills Training)
South Suburban College (SSC)	Academic Training Partner
Orland Park Fire Department	Training Partner (First on the Scene)
Mental Health First Aid	Training Partner (Youth Mental Health First Aid)
Instituto del Progreso Latino	Training Partner (Financial Literacy)
CCDPH Community Behavioral Health Unit	Training Partner (Trauma Informed Care)
Centers for Disease Control (CDC)	Program Funder
Michael Reese Health Trust (MRHT)	Program Funder
Health Foundation of Cook County	Fiscal Intermediary
Family Christian Health Center (FCHC)	Internship Host Site
Bremen Township High School District #228	School District
Chestnut Health System	Program Evaluation Partner

The Pipeline Program directly advances CCDPH’s mission to promote health equity and strengthen community trust by building a diverse, culturally responsive public health workforce rooted in the communities it serves. By providing early exposure, credentialed training, college credit, and paid experiential learning, the program aligns with funder priorities focused on workforce development, equity-centered systems change, and sustainable career pipelines in public health and healthcare. The program is supported through a braided public–private funding structure that leverages government funding, philanthropic support, and public health resources to maximize impact. Funding is critical to providing essential wraparound supports, including training costs, salaries, college courses, technology, transportation assistance, professional development, and mentorship. This funding was essential to reducing barriers to participation and ensuring students could successfully complete the program and transition into higher education and employment pathways.

Program Design

The Pipeline Program was structured as a multi-phase training and experiential learning model that combined classroom instruction, workforce credentialing, and applied public health practice. During the 2024–2025 academic year, high school students participated in foundational training to build academic readiness, develop core public health competencies, and gain exposure to health career pathways.

The program began with a one-week, 40-hour Community Health Worker (CHW) Core Skills Training delivered by the Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI). This intensive training aligned with national CHW standards and focused on foundational competencies, including communication, advocacy, health systems navigation, cultural competency, and community engagement.

Students then had the option to enroll in two to three college-level CHW courses at South Suburban College, including CHW 101: Introduction to Community Health, CHW 115: Nutrition and Disease, and CHW 200: Case Management, strengthening their academic preparation while earning college credits and also furthering their understanding of public health practice.

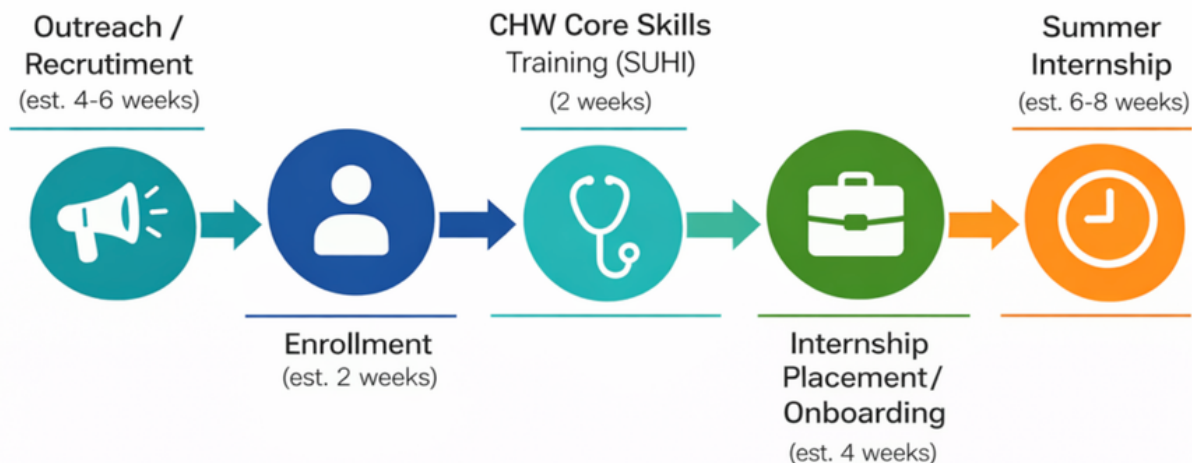
Following the academic year, students had the option of participating in an eight-week paid summer internship at the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), funded by the Michael Reese Health Trust. Interns were placed across multiple CCDPH divisions, including Community Engagement, Communications, Chronic Disease Prevention, Epidemiology, Nursing, Community Immunization, and Behavioral Health, where they shadowed CHWs and public health professionals, supported community engagement and health education activities, and gained exposure to county and community-based public health systems. The internship concluded with a peer-led service project delivered as part of a health education series.

Throughout the program and internship, students participated in weekly professional development workshops led by a Senior CHW and a public health professional. These sessions emphasized health equity, advocacy, communication, cultural competency, self-efficacy, and career readiness, equipping students with the skills and confidence needed to pursue careers in public health, healthcare, and social services.



Additionally, the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) partnered with Family Christian Health Center (FCHC) to serve as an internship host site. FCHC hosted four additional student interns who were embedded across various departments within the health center, supporting operational activities, outreach initiatives, and community engagement efforts that benefited both FCHC and CCDPH. Throughout the internship, all students successfully completed training offered through the Pipeline Program, further strengthening their practical skills, professional readiness, and understanding of community-based healthcare delivery.

PROGRAM TIMELINE



“

Through this program, I was able to learn a lot about myself and where I want to study. I now hope to minor in health administration or public health.

STUDENT 5

”

Outcomes and Impact

Recruitment & Enrollment

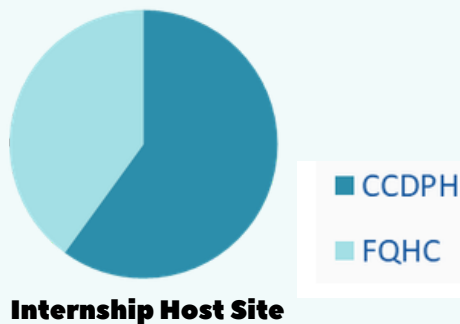
Recruitment for the Pipeline Program was conducted at the district level through a collaborative partnership between Bremen School District #228 and the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH). CCDPH supported outreach efforts by participating in parent nights and other school and community-based events, providing education to students, families, and school staff about public health careers, the Community Health Worker workforce, and available training pathways. Recruitment strategies included a combination of virtual and in-person engagement opportunities designed to increase awareness, build trust, and encourage student participation.

ACADEMIC EDUCATION AND CAREER TECHNICAL TRAINING (SUHI/SSC)

Metric	# of Students
Students who enrolled in CHW Core Skills Training (SUHI)	13
Students who completed CHW Core Skills Training and received Basic Certificate	9
Students who enrolled and completed College Courses (SSC)	9
Average College Credits Earned per Student	6 credit hours



INTERNSHIP PLACEMENT SITES



Unit Placement of Interns	# of Students
Community Engagement and Health Education	1
Chronic Disease Prevention	1
Epidemiology	1
Community Behavioral Health	1
Community Immunization	1
Public Health Nursing	1
Family Christian Health Center	4

TECHNICAL TRAINING DURING INTERNSHIP

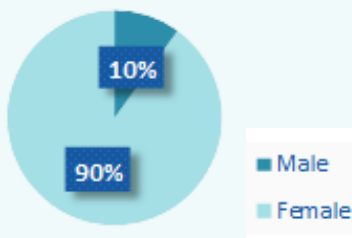
Name of Training Session	Name of Training Session
CHW Learning Collaborative	6
First on the Scene	10
Youth Mental Health First Aid	6
Financial Literacy	10
Trauma Informed Care	10

“
I learned a lot of new knowledge with new perspectives that I guess I never considered.
 ”

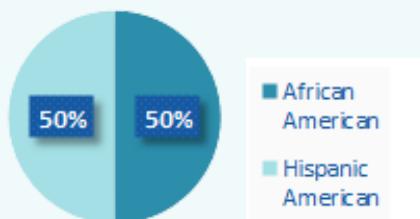
CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION/PROGRESSION

Metric	# of Students
Students Transitioned to Employment	1
Students Employed in Health-Related Fields	1
Students Matriculated to Post-Secondary Education	6
Students in Health-Related Post-Secondary Education	6

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS*



Sex/Gender



Race/Gender

Suburban Cook County Neighborhoods	# of Students
Midlothian	3
Posen	3
Oak Forest	1
Homewood	1
Flossmoor	1
Chicago	1

*This data represents only the 10 students who participated in the internship

COST PER STUDENT CATEGORY

Cost is presented on a per-student basis, as not all students participated in every component of the program. This approach reflects a braided funding structure supported by CDC and the MRHT.

Category	Cost Per Student
College Credit (\$152 per credit hour)	\$912.00
SUHI CHW Core Skills Training Program	\$1,500.00
CCHF Administration Fee	\$545.70
Internship Salary	\$3,494.37
Transportation Stipend (Internship)	\$1,292.36
Trainings/Supplies	\$1,656.51
Technology	\$778.99
Professional Development	\$800.00
Completion Luncheon	\$248.27



Participant Feedback

Participant Satisfaction Summary

Through an evaluation conducted by Chestnut Health System, student interns reported on the various components of the program. Below are direct quotes from the student interns base on various components of the program.

SUHI CHW CORE SKILLS TRAINING

SUHI's one-week CHW Core Skills training was generally well received. Students appreciated the informative content, hands-on learning, and supportive instructors.

- "I really liked the engagement that the instructor had, and I appreciated that she would add videos within each module." (Student 4).
- "She [educational staff] always kept in contact with our high school supervisor... always made sure to ask, do they need anything, is the material too difficult or are they good? It felt nice to have her there just in case we needed something." (Student 1).

Participant Success Stories

Story 1

One student, a first-generation college student, successfully completed all components of the High School Pipeline Program, including CHW Core Skills Training resulting in a CHW Basic Skills Certificate, college-level coursework, and a summer internship with the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), and is now thriving academically in college. During a winter check-in, she shared a meaningful interaction with one of her professors following an essay she authored on health equity. The essay, which examined the disproportionate impacts of current policies and immigration enforcement on Hispanic communities, particularly the disruption caused by ICE received a perfect score. Her professor highlighted not only the academic strength of the essay, but also the depth of passion and clarity with which she articulated the urgency of achieving health equity in today's climate, noting the potential impact her voice could have on future generations. The student intern credits this experience as transformative, ultimately influencing her decision to declare a major in Healthcare Administration with a minor in Public Health.

Story 2

Family Christian Health Center (FCHC), a partner site, hosted four student interns during the summer. A student intern excelled during her placement at the health center and continues to actively engage in health equity-focused initiatives and activities in collaboration with the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH). Following the completion of her internship, she was retained by FCHC and is currently employed at the health center. Her continued employment demonstrates the Pipeline Program's workforce development impact by creating a direct pathway from training and experiential learning to long-term employment within community-based healthcare settings.

Partner Feedback

Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI) facilitator Kim Jay noted that many students demonstrated strong growth and engagement throughout both the Community Health Worker (CHW) Core Skills training and community engagement components of the program. She emphasized the effectiveness of early exposure to public health concepts, highlighting how students quickly developed an understanding of CHW roles, community-centered approaches, and the practical application of health equity principles. Kim Jay underscored the importance of reinforcing for students that this training leads to an industry-recognized certification, serves as an accessible and meaningful entry point into public health careers, and equips them with the skills to support their communities in ways that create lasting, life-changing impact.

I've been able to apply skills like recognizing traumas, informing people on vaping.

STUDENT

Sustainability and Next Steps

Future Plans

School District #288 has recognized the value of the Pipeline Program and has committed funding to support 20 students within the district to complete the Community Health Worker (CHW) Core Skills training program through Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI). Interest in the program continues to grow, as demonstrated by the fall open house, which drew more than 60 students from four of the district's five schools to learn about the pipeline. Building on this momentum, future plans include expanding the program to additional school districts across Cook County, as CCDPH has received requests from multiple districts seeking to adopt or participate in the Pipeline Program as part of broader workforce development efforts.

Data Utilization

Insights and outcomes from this initial cohort will inform continuous improvement of the Pipeline Program by identifying effective recruitment strategies, training components, and support structures that most effectively promote student engagement, retention, and workforce readiness. Participant feedback, academic performance, internship outcomes, and post-program education or employment pathways will be used to refine curriculum sequencing, strengthen partnerships, and enhance professional development offerings. In addition, evaluation findings will support the exploration and pursuit of diverse funding opportunities, including school district investments, philanthropic support, and public health workforce grants to sustain, scale, and integrate the program into broader public health and healthcare workforce development pipelines.





CERTIFICATE
OF RECOGNITION

Cook County
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Ava Blakes
Dependability Award
2025 Youth Internship Program

Being reliable, punctual and consistent during the

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