



# Namaste Charter School

Chicago, IL | Allison Slade, Founder

Grades Served: K-8 ■ Enrollment: 485 ■ Year Opened: 2004-2005

Instructional Strategies: Holistic education

Student Demographics: 75% Latino; 10% mixed; 10% White; 5% African American; 85% FRL eligible; 18% Special Education

## A Mission to Serve

Namaste Charter School was founded on the belief that healthy children are better learners. Its vision—to change the trajectory of underserved children’s lives—is enacted through holistic education for the children of Chicago’s South Side. Namaste’s daily health and wellness programs include 60 minutes of physical education and 20 minutes of recess, a ten-minute “Morning Movement” stretching and exercise routine set to music, and healthy breakfasts and lunches. Additionally, a peaceful school culture, collaborative practice, and respect of other languages and cultures are among the school’s core values. The public charter school operates on an extended school day and year, offers half of its classes as bilingual education (English and Spanish), and provides support for families through its Parent Center, so that teachers, staff, parents, and neighborhood leaders can work together to provide an exceptional academic environment.

## From Vision to Reality: How CSP Funds Enabled Namaste to Open

The state of Illinois received a federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) State Education Agency (SEA) Grant in 2003. In December 2003, Illinois allocated funds from its CSP SEA Grant to award a pre-planning grant to Namaste Charter School prior to its authorization. Namaste used these funds to plan for the curriculum and structure of the school, as well as research the implementation of best practices.

Namaste opened in 2004 with just a kindergarten and first grade class, and has grown by one grade level each year to now serve K-8. For the first eight years of the school’s operation, Namaste had fixed asset costs for desks, furniture, books, computers, teacher professional development, and “everything under the sun” as founder Allison Slade described it. In addition, the school’s original building needed about \$100,000 of renovations to the infrastructure—including building a kitchen, which was essential to provide the healthy meals that are a central part of the school model.

In 2006 Namaste received a second CSP grant, which was crucial to helping the charter school grow. The CSP funds were used to cover start-up costs, as well as seed money for the school library. The library resource center has been crucial for providing high-quality literacy instruction and increasing access to text for students and their families during the school day and on weekends. After three years of operation, Namaste outgrew its original building and needed to renovate a larger school space.

## STATEWIDE IMPACT

- Namaste founder and Executive Director, Allison Slade, received the 2014 Illinois Charter School Innovator Award
- HealthierUS School Challenge: Gold Award of Distinction
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation: Gold Healthy School Award
- Namaste Dual Language Kindergarten teacher, Joel Carlovsky, named a 2015 finalist for the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching, and was the only Illinois charter school educator to receive this prestigious honor

*“Seeing students just happy to come to school is a very rewarding thing. Parents come to us and say ‘we’re so lucky we found you. We are so happy that we got a lottery spot for Namaste.’”*

— Veronica Acuna,  
Special Education Manager



For its future, Namaste has invested in circulating its best practices nationwide instead of replicating the school. It received a \$192,000 two-year CSP Dissemination Grant in 2012 from the U.S. Department of Education that helped launch the Learning the Namaste Way Institute, which has trained more than 80 school leaders during two- to three- day seminars that share holistic education best practices and provide ongoing support for implementing them in their own schools. For the future of all public charter schools, Ms. Slade believes that Congress can best support high-quality growth through access to facilities funding and protecting the autonomy that allows a charter school to nimbly allocate its resources to serve student needs.

### Principal's Office

During her career as a teacher, as a Teach for America corps member in Houston and then in the Chicago inner-city and suburbs, Ms. Slade never felt that she really found a place that matched her beliefs about education and had all of the elements in place to propel teachers, students, and families to their highest possible achievement. She was on a volleyball team with fellow educators, and they would discuss what the perfect school would look like. At the same time, Illinois raised the cap on the number of public charter schools allowed in Chicago. So Ms. Slade decided to pull together everything she had talked about with fellow educators, health professionals, and other experts, into a proposal for an innovative public charter school.

As Ms. Slade describes the resulting Namaste Charter School, "We pride ourselves on having this rigorous academic curricula that is tied together with health and wellness and a peaceful school culture. We not only implement that in our school, but now with the CSP funding, we also disseminate those best practices to other schools across the country."

### Heard in the Halls



"What I enjoy teaching most at Namaste is that beyond our health and wellness initiative, I truly think that students, staff, parents are all pushed to be our best selves."

—Veronica Acuna, Special Education Manager



"I am proud to work at Namaste because I have the freedom to choose a curriculum that fits my students' lives."

—Milli Salguero, middle school Social Studies



"I truly believe that charter schools are houses of innovation that can try things differently and teach public schools, and other schools, ways to do things more efficiently to get better results quicker. And really and truly here at Namaste, that's what we're trying to do."

—Allison Slade, Founder

## IN THE COMMUNITY

- Namaste has partnerships with the Ashoka Changemaker network, Kids for Peace and Great Kindness network, and the Schools That Can network to promote a peaceful school environment
- The Parent Center gives families access to the school library and computer lab, helps them find volunteer opportunities at the school, and offers yoga and Zumba classes for parents six times per week.
- The Learning the Namaste Way Institute has trained more than 80 leaders across the country on healthy and peaceful school practices

