

# PROJECT PROFILE

**Application/Building Type:** Learning and Wellness Center

**Name:** projectChicago

**Location:** Chicago, IL

**Architect:** Gensler / Brandy Koch / USG Corporation /  
F.H. Paschen / Latent Design / Muller + Muller /exp

**Featured Products:** USG Radar™ Climaplust™ Illusion Ceiling  
Panels, USG Compositions™ Decorative Ceiling Clouds



## REMODELING FOR A BETTER FUTURE.

The transformation of a run-down, 30-year-old former school building into a bright, cheerful and modern daycare and early learning center for disadvantaged children, has filled a South Side Chicago community and its families with hope. A team of USG employees, working alongside AEC Cares, Metropolitan Family Services of Chicago, Reed Construction Data and Hanley Wood, devoted their time to a daylong “building blitz” which helped create a fresh, safe environment for hundreds of Chicago families.

The collaboration among partners was a success, completely transforming the school building in order to meet the needs of the infants, toddlers and preschoolers the center serves. Previously, the building was used for kindergarten through eighth graders, and is now serving six-week-olds to five-year-olds. The environment required a major makeover to ensure that the children flourish. From sensory rooms that enhance learning

to an indoor motor skills room where children can run and play, specific educational additions were key to the success of the renovation.

“Being able to rework all of these spaces to fit those different functions has been one of the most exciting challenges of the project,” said Brandy Koch, AIA member and architect at Interactive Design Architects.

The renovated facility will benefit the children and their families. The new learning and wellness center offers many services including a comprehensive early learning program as well as health services for adults and children. Services include dental care, nutritional education, financial literacy and domestic violence services.

“I think it’s a stark contrast from the world that they’re leaving behind, so when they come in our doors, it will be welcoming, and will let them know that this is here

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Jennifer Alexander,  
Metropolitan Family Services



for them -- it was built for them," Jennifer Alexander, program director for early childhood programs for Metropolitan Family Services, explained.

### CEILINGS CREATE A WARM, INVITING ATMOSPHERE

The former Chicago Public School building was described as "institutional" prior to the renovation. To achieve the project's goal of making the building more inviting and conducive to learning, the walls were splashed with color, brighter lighting fixtures created more welcoming atmospheres, and new ceilings were installed.

"The old ceiling tiles were the standard two-by-four institutional ceiling tiles that you see in old hospitals and schools," Koch described. "Being able to come in and do something simple like redoing the ceiling changes it from looking institutional to looking warmer and more inviting."

USG's Radar™ Climaplus™ Illusion Ceiling Panels provide the illusion of a smaller scaled ceiling system without compromising accessibility. Because the hallways inside the building are so long, the Illusion ceiling panels were selected to combat the institutional atmosphere by making the hallways appear shorter. USG Compositions™ Decorative Ceiling Clouds provide an aesthetic accent, and come in a variety of shapes and configurations, including rounded rectangles and squares. While they

can have ceiling tile, the clouds chosen for this project were left open as an accent pattern for the space. The 16 clouds in the facility are intended to make the space more fun and visually inviting.

The USG ceiling products provide acoustic benefits as well.

"The acoustics in this space are considerably better than it was with the old ceiling tile," said Rik Master, senior manager of sustainability at USG. "The ceiling tile was a lot denser. It had endured a lot of water damage over the years and there was a lot of dirt on it. So it wasn't absorbing the sound the way it should have."

Alexander agrees and says, "The ceiling panels are going to cushion some of the sound, and sound is a big part of our program. As much as we want our children to be themselves, it gets loud here."

USG's Radar™ Climaplus™ Illusion Ceiling Panels and Compositions™ Decorative Ceiling Clouds helped to give the learning and wellness center a productive atmosphere for learning visually and acoustically. The transformation achieved through the "building blitz" has given hope for a better future to a South Side Chicago community.

Master said, "We're giving the next generation a chance to build their world."

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