



SAFE PASSAGE

The desire to create meaningful change fuels **JADINE CHOU**'s efforts to ensure student safety and security at Chicago's public schools.

Many people talk about making a difference, but Chicago Public Schools Chief Safety and Security Officer Jadine Chou ('86) is actually doing it. For more than six years, she and her team have dedicated themselves to ensuring the safety of more than 370,000 students on CPS campuses.

"I can't think of anything more important than the safety of children," Chou says. "I finally have the opportunity to do the best I can to make a difference."

The desire to improve the lives of others is a powerfully motivating force, Chou says. For her, the desire came after she earned an MBA and built a promising career in executive and management roles with Fortune 500 companies such as Kraft Foods, Motorola, and AT&T. Despite feeling comfortable in the corporate world, she sensed something was missing.

While researching ways to help the disadvantaged, Chou saw a job opening for the Chicago Housing Authority and felt it was just the kind of work she wanted to do. She joined the CHA in 2007 as a properties portfolio executive and quickly worked her way up to senior vice president.

While overseeing 17,000 public housing units, security was a large part of Chou's job. She realized community involvement was key, so she engaged CHA residents in her initiatives with the Chicago Police Department, resulting in an overall 20 percent reduction in serious crimes across the properties. "It was one of the most important parts of my job. If families aren't safe, what else matters?" she asks.

Chou enjoyed her work with the CHA and had no intention to leave when CPS contacted her in 2011. Still, she found the prospect of helping even more people through the school system compelling and accepted the offer.

Today, she approaches her job from an engineering perspective, as she has throughout her career. "Northwestern trained me to define the problem I'm trying to solve, rather than jumping to the solution," she explains. "When we have consensus on what the problem is, we can sit down and work on how to solve it and get to the root of the issue."

Instead of focusing on punishment in instances of misbehavior, Chou's team considers what may be causing the problem, or what factors in students' lives contribute to their behavior. This active, supportive approach has shifted the perspective of safety in schools.

"It takes more effort to do it this way," Chou says. "Many might want to take the approach to just suspend the student, but that doesn't solve anything—certainly not for the child, and long-term, not for the school."

Chou's major initiative is the Safe Passage program, which provides supervised routes to 159 schools, serving more than 75,000 students. The program has reduced criminal incidents along the way by more than 30 percent in five years. It's an example of the difference that Chou wanted to make in the city. "I find it extremely rewarding that we can help students navigate through challenges, hoping that we've played a role in helping to make a difference in their lives."

SARA LANGEN