

CINCINNATI COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

*A Leading Model Grounded in Structure and District Support,
and Growing in Scale and Student Achievement*

Like many communities facing desegregation, East Price Hill, a neighborhood on Cincinnati's west side, experienced massive white flight to private schools, leaving the local public school to African-American families moving into the area's subsidized housing.

However, about seven years ago, the neighborhood began to diversify. Hispanic and other immigrants started moving into local apartments, while a community and housing redevelopment effort was getting underway. Once these new residents were becoming established enough to purchase homes, however, they would move to the suburbs. Advocates at Cincinnati's Community Learning Center (CLC) saw this challenge as an opportunity to match the needs and character of a neighborhood with its local school, Roberts Academy.



"Part of what we do is establish the school in the context of the community," says Darlene Kamine, the executive director of Cincinnati's Community Learning Center Institute (CLCI) and a leading figure in the growth of the CLCs in the city. "The question was how do we create a destination that will bring the whole community together."

Working with Santa Maria Community Services, a social service agency and a partner with other CLCs in the Price Hill area, Roberts Academy has become home to an International Welcome Center, which is housed in a section of the school's library and provides language classes, financial education, computer classes, employment assis-

Awardee At-A-Glance

- **Location:** Cincinnati, OH
- **School District:** Cincinnati Public Schools
- **Website:** www.clcinstitute.org
- **Elementary Schools:** 26
- **High Schools:** 8
- **Number of Students:** 16,000
- **Race/Ethnicity**
 - American Indian – 1%
 - Asian/Pacific Islander – 1%
 - Black/African American – 67%
 - Hispanic/Latino – 3%
 - White/Caucasian – 24%
 - Other – 5%
- **Economically Disadvantaged:** 70%
- **Limited English Proficiency:** 4%
- **Students with Disabilities:** 21%

About the Initiative

Cincinnati Community Learning Centers leads the engagement of the community in the development of all schools as community learning centers, each with financially self-sustaining, co-located community partnerships responsive to the vision and needs of each school and its neighborhood.

tance, and other services. Spanish is the first language for more than 240 of the school's 700 students—up from only 17 students in 2006. La Viña Cincinnati, a multi-ethnic, bilingual community church, meets at the school twice a week; a family health center stays open until the evening hours; and, Cincinnati's Findlay Market—a historic farmer's market—is establishing a satellite location at Roberts. The school's 22-acre campus has also become a draw for several nature-oriented partners, including

some that will provide funds to reclaim a watershed area and start a storm water demonstration project. Through the welcome center, parents and other residents also work together to maintain a large community garden.

“I have personally seen how families have been impacted by the community school approach. I would even go as far as saying that it will be the most important and influential approach to community building here in this city,” says Daniel Minera, the Hispanic outreach director for Gospel City Mission in Cincinnati, and the leader of La Viña. He also tutors and mentors students at Roberts. He added that the school “has become a prime spot for service providers to feel welcome and to be part of the community” and that he sees students “excited about coming to school.”



graduation rates have increased from 51 percent in 2000 to over 80 percent, and the achievement gap between white and African-American students has narrowed from 14.5 percent in 2003 to around 1.2 percent in 2010.

Rebuilding Schools as CLCs

CPS, as well as many districts across Ohio, were forced to begin replacing and renovating worn-

down school buildings in 1997, after the Ohio Supreme Court declared that the state’s reliance on property taxes to fund education was unconstitutional. Voters initially rejected the district’s \$1 billion Facilities Master Plan but later approved it after language was added saying that every school would be built as a CLC.

The CPS School Board further embraced CLCs as an important part of its mission when it passed a policy in 2010, stating that “each school should be a community learning center” and “center of activity” within its neighborhood. The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers also strongly supports the CLC model, viewing it as a support system for teachers. Resource coordinators and community partners focus on meeting important needs for families and resolving problems that might interfere with a child succeeding in school, allowing teachers to focus

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Roberts Academy is just one example of how Cincinnati’s neighborhoods are being revitalized in part because of CLCs—which are so embedded across the district that Kamine describes them as “just like having a teacher in the classroom.”

While student enrollment continues to drop in many urban school districts, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) are not only stable, but are also growing at a rate faster than the state predicted. While the district was estimated to have 28,000 students this year, it actually had 34,000—a result that is due in large part to remaking schools into CLCs and engaging community members in deciding what they want in their public schools. In addition to enrollment growth, all school levies have passed since the CLC initiative began, further evidence that Cincinnati residents have regained confidence in their schools and want to be a part of seeing them succeed. Such renewal is also translating into improved student performance – CPS is the highest-rated urban school district in the state,

Results

- High school graduation rates have climbed from 51% in 2000 to 81.9% in 2010
- The achievement gap between African American students and white students narrowed from 14.5% in 2003 to 1.2% in 2010
- Enrollment declines have been reversed with almost 5,000 more students than projected
- Cincinnati was the first urban school district in Ohio to receive an effective rating and is the highest rated urban school district in Ohio

on teaching.

Now, 35 of the district's 52 schools are fully implemented CLCs, meaning they have a resource coordinator to develop, oversee and implement partnerships with community providers. The remaining 17 schools are at various stages of implementation and have some partnerships in place. Next year, the number of school-based health centers will grow from 12 to 20, and Kamine says another four are in the works. The Oyler K-12 school opened the country's first school-based vision clinic, and will host dental services at its site soon as well.

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Pleasant Ridge Elementary School provides another example of how CLCs are responding to the desires of the community and bringing a diverse mix of middle-class families back into the school district. Before 2006, enrollment in the school had fallen to 330. But through the action and advocacy of local parents, the school was remade into Pleasant Ridge Montessori, offering a preschool, along with additional services typically provided at CLCs, including a mental health therapist, a weekend meal program, and a technology initiative that provides refurbished computers to families within the school. Now enrollment is over 500 and the percentage of students on free and reduced-price lunches has dropped from 99 percent to 70 percent by increasing the enrollment and not displacing any families. While some feared that white families who came for the Montessori program would leave after kindergarten, that hasn't been the case.

In other neighborhoods, turning schools into K-12 buildings has been the foundation of the effort to reverse a trend in which many eighth graders from urban Appalachian families would simply quit school rather than leave their neighborhoods to attend high school.

But CLCs are not only seen as a service for families in low-income areas. Hyde Park is one of the city's most affluent neighborhoods. But, as in many urban areas, parents either sent their children to parochial school or moved to the suburbs. So a coalition of parents lobbied the district for their own neighborhood school, which opened last year as a K-1 and will continue to add grade levels. A preschool is also on the site.

"The staying power has created a strength and provided a kind of foundation that just continues to blossom new growth," Kamine says.

The district and CLC partners have also collaborated in recent years to provide a summer learning initiative for students in low-performing elementary schools, often providing academics in the morning and an array of enrichment opportunities in the afternoon, including art, music, science experiments, and visits from zoo animals.



At Roberts, for example, partners from the construction industry will work with students this summer to build a shed for the tiller used in the community garden. Other providers will offer a day camp.

The CLC Structure

While the needs and priorities of each school community differ, there are essential elements common to CLCs, including an ongoing commitment to engaging the community and a site-based governance structure, which over-



sees the selection of community partners and evaluates their performance. At each CLC, this group is the Local School Decision-Making Committee (LSDMC), which is responsible for approving a school improvement plan addressing how the comprehensive needs of students will be addressed. LSDMCs work with each school's resource coordinator to identify which partners and services best fit the needs of that school's population.

The CLC's funding structure is self-sustainable largely thanks to diverse, committed funding streams. This diversity ensures that no one entity owns CLCs in any way,



overall picture of how a school is performing. A project of CPS, with support of business and nonprofit partners, the dashboard is a shared space, which allows partners to enter information on which students they are serving, and, because it is integrated with academic data, it allows educators to view whether those services or interventions are having a positive impact. The tool allows the CLCs to better monitor whether the right services are being provided to students who need them the most.

CLCs are more a part of how schools, parents and community partners interact than ever before, Kamine says. A colorful CLC logo now appears throughout the school district's newly redesigned website, and neighborhood residents, partners and school leaders regularly organize planning meetings to discuss next steps for their schools.

"Because we've had this kind of track record—and it's pretty clear that this is just the way it is now—it is much easier for us to continue to build on what exists," Kamine says. "The infrastructure exists and people trust it."



but that they remain a reflection of the community. The resource coordinators at each site are then hired by a lead agency, such as the YMCA, a mental health provider or another agency that provides services at the schools.

Service providers across the city are organized into networks of agencies and nonprofit groups that have a similar mission. For example, there is a college access network, a network of health care providers, an after-school network and a recently-added early-childhood network, which is focusing on making schools a hub for 0-5 services and providers in the community. Resource coordinators turn to the providers in these networks when trying to match services or programs to the needs of their schools.

The Cross-Boundary Leadership Team, consisting of leaders of the networks of agencies, is another important body. It ties all of the networks together, focuses on issues that might affect all of the providers—such as changes in federal or state funding—and helps to set priorities for the CLCs.

Using Data to Track Success

The impact that CLCs are having on students is monitored through a sophisticated database called the Learning Partner Dashboard, which is considered part of the

Partners

- Adopt a Class Foundation • Beech Acres • Boys and Girls Club • Central Clinic • Cincinnati Art Museum • Cincinnati Federation of Teachers • Cincinnati Oral Health Network • College Access Alliance • Community Arts Initiative • Community Learning Center Institute • Early Childhood Network • Families Forward • Greater Cincinnati Foundation • Growing Well Cincinnati • Haille Foundation • Imani • Leave No Child Behind • MindPeace • Parents for Public Schools • Robert and Adele Schiff Foundation • St. Aloysius • United Way of Greater Cincinnati • Urban League • YMCA • Grad Cincinnati